Chapter III

EXTENT OF AWARENESS OF CONSUMER MOVEMENT

3.1 Introduction
3.2 Analytical Framework
3.3 Component-wise Analysis
3.4 Extent of overall Awareness
3.5 Variation in Overall Awareness
3.6 Summary
3.1 INTRODUCTION

The historical perspective of the consumer movement both in India and abroad, the efforts of the consumer co-operative movement to protect the consumers, the legislative measures taken by the government, and the contribution of the voluntary consumer organizations were discussed in the previous chapter.

However the presences of all these alone cannot ensure consumer protection unless and until consumers are made aware of their rights. A basic knowledge of these rights is essential for an average Indian consumer to exercise his rights and to get relief. The question whether the consumers possess the required level of awareness needs to be examined taking into consideration factors like illiteracy, ignorance, apathetic nature, and other socio-economic factors. Therefore an earnest attempt has been made in this study to make an objective assessment of the level of awareness of consumers’ rights among the woman consumers in Kanniyakumari District.

3.2 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The awareness of consumers is qualitative in character and it cannot be measured directly with any fixed value or scale. But it can be measured indirectly with the help of a scale titled the ‘Consumer Awareness Scale’. The researcher has identified four components such as awareness of consumer rights, consumer co-operatives, voluntary consumer organizations and consumer court for measuring the level of awareness. For measuring each component 84 statements were prepared at the rate of 20 statements each for consumer cooperatives, voluntary consumer organizations and consumer court. For the component “consumer rights” 24 statements were prepared.
each statement the responses were elicited with a five point scale, viz., five scores for "strongly agree", four for "agree", three for "neither agree nor disagree", two for "disagree" and one for "strongly disagree" for positive statements. All the 84 statements were presented in the positive forms.

The scoring technique has been used to differentiate the level of awareness under the low, medium and high categories. Respondents were awarded awareness scores on the basis of their exposure to consumer rights, consumer co-operatives, voluntary consumer organizations and consumer court.

The level of awareness has been categorized as 'low', 'medium' and 'high' on the basis of the scores obtained by the respondent for these 84 statements. The respondents whose scores fall below the 'mean minus standard deviation' have been categorized under the low level of awareness, while respondents with scores in between the mean minus standard deviation and the mean plus standard deviation have been brought under the category of the 'medium' level. The respondent who secured scores greater than the mean plus standard deviation have been assigned a 'high level of awareness'.

3.3 COMPONENT-WISE ANALYSIS

For the purpose of assessing the awareness of consumers, as set out in the scope of the study, four components have been chosen.

i. Awareness of Consumer Rights

ii. Awareness of Consumer Co-operatives

iii. Awareness of Voluntary Consumer Organizations and
iv. Awareness of Consumer court

3.3.1 CONSUMER RIGHTS

The American experience became the foundation for other nations to think of consumer rights. It was John F. Kennedy the former President of America who spelled out the four consumer rights on 15th March 1962.

The Right to Safety

The Right to be Informed

The Right to Choose

The Right to be Heard

The rights were subsequently incorporated in the U.N. Charter of Human Rights. Every year March 15th is observed as “The World Consumer Rights Day”.

Following the four rights another U.S. President, Mr. Gerald Ford, added a fifth right, the Right to Consumer Education without which the other four rights, in his view, made no sense.

The International Organization of Consumer Unions (IOCU) was instrumental in introducing the following three rights.

i. The Right to Seek Redressal

ii. The Right to Healthy Environment and

iii. The Right to Basic Needs and Services
Meanwhile, the U.N. General Assembly in 1985 laid down guidelines covering the eight rights and also introduced one more right: the Rights to form Consumer Organizations and their views represented in the decision-making process.

The CUTS, a leading consumer protection body in India, in its executive meeting on 15th August 1988, the 41st Independence Day, declared the Right to Boycott as the tenth consumer right which is yet to be recognized by the Government of India and the United Nations. When all the remedies fail, the ultimate weapon in the hands of the consumer is boycott.

For the purpose of assessing the awareness of the consumer of the six rights they are categorized under six heads on the subject matter and treated as dependent variables as given below.

i. Awareness of the Right to Safety

ii. Awareness of the Right to be Informed

iii. Awareness of the Right to Choose

iv. Awareness of the Right to be Heard

v. Awareness of the Right to Seek Redressal and

vi. Awareness of the Right to Consumer Education
3.3.1.1 Right to Safety

A consumer has the right to be protected against the marketing of goods which are hazardous to life and property. There are a good many products that are likely to cause physical danger to consumers' health, life and property. They contain potentially harmful substances that are dangerous from the stand point of consumers. The best examples of such kind are food additives, colours, preservatives, toys for the innocent kids, appliances for the house-wife, containers of plastics and other metals in which consumers store their daily needs, man-made fabrics so close to the bodies of consumers, and chemicals and drugs. The health hazards that are likely to arise are to be eradicated or reduced considerably.

Manufacturers and sellers must ensure that the goods are safe for the intended use. The consumers should be instructed regarding the purpose of the goods, the mode of using the goods, the risk involved in the intended use and vital safety measures to be followed.

The following statements are used to assess the level of awareness of the Right to Safety.

i. Precautions to be taken while purchasing

ii. Knowledge of I.S.I. and Agmark Symbols

iii. Knowledge of unsafe products and

iv. Verification of the date of manufacturing and the date of expiry while buying
3.3.1.2 Right to be Informed

The right to information means the right to be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods so as to protect the consumer against unfair practices.

This implies that manufacturers and sellers are expected to disclose all the material facts that are going to affect the economic and social interests of consumers. The supply of information means that it should be adequate, accurate, up-to-date, verifiable and legal as to quality, quantity, performance and other product characteristics. This information gives wide choice to the consumers for the better selection of products. Knowledge of all such information is of help to the consumer to take intelligent decisions. Such information, when acquired, takes the consumer to a new world of awareness. That is why the product package is to give the full details about the name of the product, composition, dosages, date of manufacture and date of expiry, batch number, warnings, antidote, the name of the manufacturer and price with or without tax. Such information saves the consumers from possible deceit. If a seller tempts a customer by giving wrong information to buy a product, it is infringement of this right.

The following statements are used to assess the level of awareness of the right to be informed.

i. Information given voluntarily by the sellers

ii. Asking for all the required information by consumers

iii. Display of price list of different products and
iv. Information given through advertising and labeling

3.3.1.3 Right to Choose

The right to choose means the right to be assured wherever possible of access to a variety of goods and services at competitive prices. The consumer should be given the right to evaluate the alternative products and to accept the one which he chooses.

Consumer satisfaction is the final aim of the modern marketing concept. Consumer satisfaction can be increased by giving to the consumer the widest choice, which means the widest range of products in quality, and brand varieties at reasonable prices. The right to choose is very fundamental to consumer satisfaction. Monopoly is the chief force which acts against this right. Fair and effective competition assures consumers the right to choose. Armed with this right the consumers want to buy a product on their free will, or to decide as to what product they want, of what quality, in what quantity and within what price range. The consumer should not at all be made the victim of high pressure and aggressive salesmanship.

The following statements are used to assess the level of awareness of the right to choose.

i. Offering of variety of products

ii. Options to choose any brand

iii. Display of the variety of goods in stores and

iv. High pressure for selling a particular brand by seller
3.3.1.4 Right to be Heard

The consumer has the right to register his dissatisfaction and get his complaint heard. This right includes the right to protest. The consumer can exercise this right either by himself or through consumers’ associations or through letters to newspapers.

In the absence of this right, the earlier three rights are meaningless. Business houses turn a deaf ear to the genuine complaints of the consumers.

Whenever a seller sells some goods to a buyer, the seller is duty bound to give attention to the problems, if any, caused to the buyer of the goods. In the case of small vendors, they themselves may be in a position to give personal attention to the problems of consumers. As the size of the business concern increases, it is duty bound to set up separate cells or departments to attend the consumers who inform them of their problems. Many business firms are utterly indifferent to consumers’ grievances and protests.

The right to be heard implies the existence of a legal framework and Government intervention to safeguard the consumers’ interests. In the formulation of economic policies and their implementation, consumer unions must have their representation and voice.

To assess the extent of the awareness of consumers’ right to be heard the following statements are identified

i. Demand for a cash bill/receipt
ii. Complaining about the defects in product
iii. Attitude of businessmen if complaints are lodged against them and
iv. Attitude of the buyers to the statement “goods once sold cannot be taken back”

3.3.1.5 Right to Seek Redressal

Redressal is the natural follow-up of the hearing of complaints. The complaints and protests are not just to be heard; the aggrieved consumer should get his complaints redressed either by compensation, repair, replacement or taking the item back by the seller. There should be fair and just settlement of deserving claims.

Warranties such as money back guarantee if dissatisfied must be meaningful only then consumers will have confidence in the seller. The right to redress will reduce cognitive dissonance or post-purchase doubts and grievances. If the business firms have a Consumer Affairs Department for receiving consumer complaints and for the settlement of their grievances, consumer relations with the business will be very cordial and harmonious.

The following statements are used to assess the extent of awareness of the right to seek redressal.

i. Consumer’s attitudes towards redressal
ii. Trader’s behaviour towards redressal
iii. Establishment of Consumer Affairs Department by business firms and
iv. Laziness caused to avoid redressal through laws
3.3.1.6 Right to Consumer Education

The right to consumer education means that the consumers have the right to acquire knowledge of consumers’ products and services throughout their life. The ignorance of consumers is mainly responsible for their exploitation. It is the right of every consumer to receive general education regarding consumer rights, laws relating to consumer protection, the philosophy of consumer protection and the like. Consumers should know their rights and must exercise them. Only then real consumer protection can be achieved. The right to consumer education is distinct and has greater significance and wide implications.

It helps the consumer to become a better buyer, so he can protect himself considerably against fraudulent and unfair practices and also exercise his right of getting information, ventilating grievances and securing redress.

To assess the extent of the awareness of the right to consumer education the following statements were identified.

i. Education is essential to create awareness

ii. Ignorance encourages exploitation

iii. Education is self-insurance and

iv. Education to develop buy- manship

3.3.1.7 EXTENT OF AWARENESS OF CONSUMER RIGHTS

The extent of awareness of woman consumers of consumer rights has been studied with the help of 24 statements at the rate of four statements for each right. The
validity and reliability of the statements have been tested by following the test and retest method.

The statements have been administered on a five-point scale. All the statements are positive statements and hence the scores are in the order of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The maximum scores a sample respondent could get are 120 and the minimum, 24. The extent of scores secured by an individual respondent would show the awareness of consumer rights. Table 3.1 shows the extent of awareness of the sample woman consumers of consumer rights.

**TABLE 3.1**

**Extent of Awareness of Consumer Rights**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Level of Awareness</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 shows that out of the total 150 respondents 35 (23 per cent), 46 (31 per cent) 69(46 per cent) have low, medium and high levels of awareness
respectively. It is evident that consumers are well aware of their rights as consumers. The respondents with a low level of awareness are only 35 (23 per cent), which is only negligible.

3.3.2 CONSUMER COOPERATIVES

Consumers face many forms of exploitation like adulteration, high price, hoarding and black marketing of essential commodities. In this context, Consumers' Co-operatives have a great role in consumer protection by ensuring a steady supply of quality commodities at fair price.

Consumers' Co-operative Stores which are the people's own organization play an important role when there is an acute scarcity of goods. They are the only distributing agency of essential commodities which are in short supply and they are given the monopoly rights of distribution. They cater to the needs of various consumers belonging to villages, towns and cities. There are stores for industrial workers, government servants, and for college and school students. These stores are of a special category, meeting the needs of an organization whereas stores for the common public both in urban and rural areas are meant to meet their daily requirements. Apart from the consumer cooperative stores organized by consumers themselves, the government has also promoted the organization of such stores for the employees of public utility services like railways, posts and telegraphs, mining units and the like.
The basic aims of consumers’ cooperatives are:

i. To supply quality goods

ii. To provide accurate information on the goods so that the consumers could judge whether they would satisfy them

iii. To ensure correct weighment of goods

iv. To make available quality goods at reasonable prices

v. To protect the interest of consumers by every possible means and

vi. To tone down the monopoly of private trade.

Five variables which influence the awareness of consumers of consumer cooperatives have been identified. For each variable, four statements were prepared. Each statement was administered on a five-point scale by following Likert’s scale. The five variables identified for the study are the following:

i. The General nature of consumer co-operatives

ii. Pricing of the products

iii. Product Attributes

iv. Distribution network and

v. Settlement of Complaints

The five variables which influence the awareness of consumers have been analysed one by one in the following paragraphs.
3.3.2.1 General Nature of Consumer Co-operatives

Consumer co-operatives provide satisfactory sales and services not only to members but also to the whole people of the locality. Sales to non-members are an effective means of publicity yielding high turnover, reduction in expenses and the general development of the co-operatives. In the words of Charles Gide, “Selling to the public is a means of making the society known to the public. Every purchaser should be if not actually a member, at least a candidate for membership”. It is the solution for all consumer problems and so the consumers very much support the establishment of consumer cooperatives. It is expected to check the exploitation of the consumers by private business.

3.3.2.2 Pricing Policy

Consumer Co-operatives aim at reducing the prices of the products and sell the goods as cheap as possible for this purpose. They follow the active price policy, which envisages that the Co-operative stores should sell their goods to the public at prices which are slightly lower than the prevailing market price. In scarcity conditions the price of the products increases due to black-marketing and hoarding. The consumer co-operative stores are considered the best means to stabilize the prices during scarcity conditions and also under normal circumstances.

The display of goods with marked price facilitates the free and fair selection of goods without waste of time and also avoids overcharging and suspicion.
3.3.2.3 Product Attributes

Cooperative stores have to ensure that all goods purchased and sold by them are of pure and good quality. Through centralized purchasing it is possible for the primaries to get all their requirements from the wholesalers at a competitive price. With a view to securing price advantages and quality, consumer cooperatives also undertake production and processing either by themselves or in association with other societies. It facilitates the supply of fresh products at reduced cost but also more particularly to protect the consumers in respect of quality, weights and measures and to ensure that the consumers are not pressurized to buy adulterated or unreliable goods.

Some unscrupulous manufacturers and distributors make deceptive claims with regard to the nutritional value or other qualities of their products and consumers are induced by advertisements to buy products which may not give the best value for their money. But consumer cooperatives by undertaking some of the productive activities safeguard the consumers from all forms of exploitation.

Consumer cooperatives follow an intelligent purchase policy which gives the first consideration to the needs of the members. The needs are moulded by the income level, occupation, size of the families and the like and an accurate idea of commodities which a community needs is formed in course of time. This helps to avoid overstocking and under stocking and also other evils.

3.3.2.4 Role of Co-operatives in Distribution

Consumers cooperatives were plunged into mass distribution of essential commodities in war times. It was the Food Grains Committee of the Government of
India which first recommended the introduction of rationing and the employment of co-operative stores for the distribution of food grains both to members and to non-members on an equal basis. The Government of India established the Department of Civil Supplies and Cooperation in Oct. 1974 to ensure satisfactory and adequate arrangement for the distribution of food and other essential commodities of mass consumption to the common man and to develop a viable consumer cooperative movement as an integral part of a consumer-oriented distribution system. The consumer cooperatives have a significant role to play in the effective implementation of Government policy relating to the streamlining of the distribution of essential commodities.

Retail distribution of consumer products is the main work of the primary stores. Primary stores also open depots to cater to the needs of as large a population as possible. Consumer cooperatives purchase goods in bulk from the production centres at competitive rates directly by avoiding agents and intermediaries.

3.3.2.5. Handling Complaints

Retail traders are generally hesitant to entertain consumers’ complaints once the goods are purchased, received and paid for by the consumers. But it is of extreme importance to listen to the customers’ complaints and redress their grievances. A cooperative store has to take all possible steps to avoid situations which give room for complaints from the customers. There is very keen competition among private retailers and so cooperative stores must deal promptly with matters relating to consumers’ complaints. Otherwise they would be thrown out of the competitive market as quickly as possible.
All the goods and services marketed through the consumer cooperatives are not free from complaints. Many problems are raised by the consumers in the form of delivery of wrong goods, shortage in goods delivered, deficiencies in quality, overcharges, wrong change given, claims that goods can be bought cheaper elsewhere and service complaints. The consumer cooperatives are expected to show much enthusiasm in working with consumer complaints. The manager himself should deal with matters relating to consumers' complaints.

3.3.2.6 Extent of Awareness of Consumer Cooperatives

For measuring the extent of awareness of consumers of the consumer cooperatives 20 statements at the rate of four statements for each variable have been prepared. The validity and reliability of the statements have been tested by following the test and retest method.

The statements have been administered in a five-point scale ranging from 1 to 5. As all the statements are positive statements, the scores are in the order of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The maximum scores a sample respondent could get are 100 and the minimum, 20. The extent of scores secured by any individual respondent would reveal her awareness of consumer cooperatives. Table 3.2 shows the extent of the awareness of the sample woman consumers of consumer co-operatives.
TABLE 3.2
Extent of Awareness of Consumer Co-operatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Level of awareness</th>
<th>Numbers of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 indicates that among the total 150 respondents 33 (22 per cent), 49 (33 per cent) and 68 (45 per cent) woman consumers have low, medium and high levels of awareness respectively.

3.3.3 VOLUNTARY CONSUMER ORGANIZATION

A voluntary consumer organization is an association of consumer activists who work for the protection of consumers’ interests and the society as a whole.

From the Memorandum of Association of various consumer organizations, it is observed that they pursue various objectives such as information and education, and organization of consumers so as to enable them to secure, protect and preserve their interests and to assert their rights as consumers of goods and services and to guide consumers to seek redressal from the appropriate authority.

Voluntary consumer organizations play a significant role in providing protection to the consumers against the nefarious activities of businessmen. The VCOs
have made history in the consumer movement not only in developed countries like the
U.S.A. and the U.K. but also in developing countries like India. It is largely due to the
contribution of these organizations that today consumers freely talk about their rights and
demand their implementation. Many times laws have been modified and framed under
their pressure. Consumer organizations have the following objectives:

i. To create awareness among the people of their rights, strengths and
   responsibilities as consumers

ii. To educate consumers to protect and promote their interests

iii. To take up consumer grievances with the appropriate bodies, private and
government

iv. To ensure correct weights and measures and required standards in the quality
   of merchandise

v. To provide consumer guidance and to check adulteration, hoarding and black
   marketing

vi. To undertake, initiate and aid investigation, research and scientific testing of
   all consumer products

vii. To ensure standards of safety and a healthy environment free from pollution

viii. To collect and disseminate knowledge and information useful to consumers
and to print and publish studies, periodicals, reports on all such literature that
may be of interest and relevance to the consumers and to the consumer
movement

ix. To initiate public discussion on subjects of public interest and make the
authorities realize people's thinking
x. To provide a public forum for individuals who are otherwise unorganized

xi. To participate and promote consumer protection activities through lectures, seminars, training programmes, public meetings, and by organizing exhibitions and demonstrations and by writing articles and publishing reports

xii. To develop consumer resistance through mass demonstration, picketing and other action programmes

xiii. To provide relief in case of natural calamities

xiv. To pursue affirmative action for consumer action through litigation, assembly and advocacy before administration

xv. To study analytically and to research on the working of public utility services and natural monopolies

xvi. To carry out academic/training programmes for workers and leaders of consumer protection

xvii. To help people to take things in their hands and to seek redressal against acts involving arbitration, discrimination, aberrations, anomalies and distortions, whether they emanate from the functionaries of the government or from municipal bodies or banks, insurance companies, airlines or any other authorities entrusted with responsibilities towards the public

xviii. To represent to the government, semi-government and public authorities on matters relating to the rights of individuals and to society as a whole

xix. To apprise, undertake, aid and promote testing and evaluation of consumer products and services

xx. To take actions on the complaints of members regarding goods and services
xxi. To apprise manufacturers and producers of consumer goods of the need and methods of improving the quality and utility of these goods and services

xxii. To organize Consumer Forum to report and give opinion, and assist the society in the evaluation of quality, performance and stability of consumer products and services

xxiii. To encourage, promote and foster a strong independent consumer movement in India by bringing together all consumer associations

xxiv. To provide a forum in which national and regional bodies working for the consumer may discuss their problems and work out possible solutions

xxv. To maintain effective links with government, semi-government and autonomous bodies and international organizations

xxvi. To create awareness by disseminating information on the consumer’s movement in India and abroad and

xxvii. To take efforts to introduce consumer protection educational programmes in schools, colleges and in clubs and women’s organizations

A considerable number of VCOs are functioning in various parts of India. They offer their services both in urban and in rural areas of the country.

These organizations have been taking a keen interest in solving consumer problems. They are specialists in various fields. They conduct seminars, exhibitions, demonstrations and workshops educating consumers in protecting their rights. Though there is not much encouragement from governmental agencies for their functioning, the
promoters and activists of the VCOs spend a lot of money out of their own pockets to keep the units alive.

Four variables which influence the awareness of consumers of voluntary consumer organizations were identified. For each variable, 5 statements were prepared. Each statement was administered on a five point scale following Likert’s scale. The four variables identified for the study are:

(i) The general nature of voluntary consumer organization
(ii) Consumer awareness/educational programme
(iii) Assistance provided for handling complaints and
(iv) Other functions like product testing and representation to government.

The four variables which influence the awareness of consumers have been analysed one by one in the following paragraphs.

3.3.3.1 The General Nature of VCOs

A voluntary consumer organization is a social force designed to protect consumer interests by organizing consumer pressure on business. Consumer organizations could provide united and organized efforts to fight against unfair marketing practices and to secure consumer protection. These organizations are independent, non-political and non-commercial organizations. They provide better services to the consumers because members of these organizations are experts in different fields. They extend support to the government and local authorities in bringing out adulteration, sale of hazardous products, hoarding and black marketing and other malpractices.
The following components are identified to assess the general nature of the VCOs.

i. VCOs are non-political organizations

ii. VCOs safeguard consumer rights

iii. VCOs are associations of experts to provide better service

iv. VCOs are organizations of consumers and

v. VCOs assist the government in bringing out malpractices

3.3.3.2 Consumer Awareness and Education

Consumers are to be educated on what to buy, where to buy, when to buy and how to buy and how to make the best use of what they buy in order to get the greatest value for their money. Educating a consumer enables him to make intelligent purchase decisions and to be aware of his rights and responsibilities. The VCOs in Kanniyakumari District educate consumers, through seminars, workshops, meetings / discussions, demonstrations, conducting exhibitions and distributing of materials like handbills, posters published through news papers and the like.

3.3.3.3 Reception and Settlement of Consumer Complaints

Consumers are ignorant of the redressal mechanism and they are not confident in litigation. So handling of consumer complaints is an important function of the VCOs in Kanniyakumari District. Some consumers approach the VCOs for getting their grievances redressed. These consumers treat the VCOs as agents for the settlement of their complaints. The VCOs provide the service of experts like lawyers and the guidance offered by the VCOs has legal backing. The decisions taken by the VCOs in
settlement of complaints are widely accepted both by the consumers and the business community to avoid future confusion and problems. In many cases the VCOs take much pain and efforts to settle the complaints informally. They try to make a compromise between the complainants and traders.

3.3.3.4 Other Functions

Voluntary consumer organizations undertake a variety of functions such as product testing, organizing price rise resistance, many efforts for the smooth functioning of consumer courts, representing consumers’ interests before the government and pressurizing the government to enact new legislations favorable to the consumers.

The VCOs undertake tests of different products and inform their findings to consumers and business organization. Some of the VCOs in India have their own laboratories for carrying out the analysis of any goods with a view to determining whether such goods suffer from any defect.

Representation in state legislature and local bodies to the VCOs will help them to act as spokesmen of consumers while enacting rules and laws for protecting the interests of the consumer and the general public at large.

3.3.3.5 EXTENT OF AWARENESS OF VOLUNTARY CONSUMER ORGANIZATION

For measuring the extent of awareness of woman consumers of the voluntary consumer organization 20 statements were formulated at the rate of five
statements for each variable. The validity and reliability of the statements have been tested by following the test and retest method.

The statements have been administered against a five-point scale ranging from 1 to 5. All the statements are positive statements and hence the scores are in the order of

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The maximum scores a sample respondent could get are 100 and the minimum, 20. The extent of scores secured by an individual respondent would reveal the awareness of voluntary consumer organizations. Table 3.3 shows the extent of awareness of the sample consumers of voluntary consumer organizations.
TABLE 3.3

Extent of Awareness of Voluntary Consumer Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Level of Awareness</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>24.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3 indicates that out of the total 150 respondents 38 (25.33 per cent), 37 (24.67 per cent) and 75(50 per cent) have low, medium and high levels of awareness respectively.

3.3.4 CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL AGENCY

The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 is a socio-economic legislation enacted in order to provide adequate scope for the consumer to voice his grievances and also to get them redressed. The Act is really a boon to the people of India. Once the consumers become fully aware of the privileges and powers they have acquired through this Act, they will start asserting their rights. The COPRA intends to provide simple, speedy and inexpensive redressal of genuine consumer grievances. It relieves the complainants from the time-consuming and expensive process of civil litigation.
3.3.4.1 Grievance Redressal Agencies

Section 9 of the Act provides for the establishment of a three-tier grievance redressal agency at District, State and National levels.

The district level agency is the Consumer Disputes Redressal Forum known as the District Forum and also popularly called District Consumer Court. The state level agency is the Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission known as the State Commission. The national level agency is the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission known as the “National Commission”.

District Forum

As per the provisions of the COPRA the Government of Tamilnadu has established separate and full time consumer courts in the district head quarters on the basis of the number of complaints filed. Hence in Chennai an additional forum has been established. In Kanniyakumari district, separate full time fora have been established from October 1990.

The District Forum consists of a President and two other members. All of them are appointed by the State government on the recommendations of a selection committee. The committee consists of the President of the State Commission (Chairman), Secretary, Law Department of the State (Member) and the Secretary in charge of the department dealing with consumer affairs in the State (Member).
Qualification of the Members

Section 10 (1) of the COPRA deals with the qualification of the members of the District Forum. The President is required to be a person who is, or has been, or is qualified to be, a District judge. The two other members are non-judicial persons from the society. They should be persons of ability, integrity and standing and should have adequate knowledge or experience in the fields of Economics, Law, Commerce, Accountancy, Industry, Public Affairs or Administration. Among the two members, one shall be a woman according to Section 10(b) of the Consumer Protection (Amendment) Act 1993. The two other members must (i) be not less than thirty-five years of age, (ii) possess a bachelor's degree from a recognized University, according to section 10 (b) of the Consumer Protection (Amendment) Act 2002.

Every member of the District Forum shall hold office for a term of five years or up to the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier, and shall not be eligible for reappointment.

Jurisdiction of the District Forum

Section 11 provides that the district forum shall have jurisdiction to entertain complaints where the value of goods and services and the compensation if any claimed is less than Rupees twenty lakhs.

Procedure for making a complaint

Section 12 of the COPRA describes the procedure for filing a complaint before the District Forum. A consumer can file a complaint with the District Forum in
relation to any goods sold or delivered or any service provided. Such a complaint can be
filed by (a) the consumer to whom such goods are sold or delivered or such services
provided, (b) the registered voluntary consumer organization or (c) the Central or State
government. The Consumer Protection (Amendment) Act, 2002 provides that on receipt
of the complaint, the District forum shall be empowered to either allow the complaint to
be proceeded with or to reject it. However, before rejecting the complaint, the District
Forum should give an opportunity of being heard to the complainant. It is also proposed
that the admissibility of the complaint shall ordinarily be decided within 21 days from the
date on which the complaint was received. After admission of a complaint, the district
forum sends a copy of the complaint to the opposite party directing him to give his
version of the case within thirty days or such extended period of fifteen days may be
granted by the District Forum.

The District Forum has the power to summon any defendant or witness
and to examine the witness on oath; to discover and produce any document or other
material produced as evidence; to receive evidence or affidavits; to request the report of
the laboratory test analysis; to appoint any commission for the examination of any
witness, and the like.

If the district forum is convinced that the complaint is genuine, it shall
issue an order to the opposite party to take any one or more of the remedies.

i. To remove from the goods the defect pointed out by the appropriate laboratory

ii. To replace the goods with new ones free from any defect

iii. To return the price paid by the complainant
iv. To pay such amount as may be awarded by it as compensation for any loss or injury suffered by the complainant due to the negligence of the opposite party
v. To remove the defects or deficiencies in the services supplied
vi. To discontinue the unfair trade practices or the restrictive trade practices and not to repeat them
vii. Not to offer hazardous goods for sale
viii. To withdraw the hazardous goods from the market and
ix. To provide for adequate costs to parties

Appeal

Appeal against the decision of a District Forum can be filed before the State Commission within a period of thirty days. To discourage the parties to the case from prolonging the final disposal of the case by filing non-serious and unnecessary appeals against the order of the District Forum, the amendment act provides that an appeal will be admitted only after the appellant deposits either 50 per cent of the amount of compensation awarded or Rs.25,000/- whichever is less.

The awareness of the woman consumers of the working of the District Forum in Kanniyakumari District was studied on the basis of the following selected variables.

i. General nature and infrastructure facilities

ii. Simple procedure
iii. Trial in the court and
iv. Judgment

3.3.4.2 General Nature

The Act has brought justice within the reach of the consumers. For the enforcement of the rights of the consumers the Act has created special consumer courts. The Act provides for a three-tier consumer grievance and redressal machinery with the District Forum at the base, the State Commission at the middle level and the National Commission at the apex level. The cost of goods or services and the compensation asked for are the criteria for filing the complaint with the above redressal forum. They constitute a quasi-judicial machinery which helps the consumers to get justice. These special consumer courts are satisfying a long-felt need of the consumers for creating an extraordinary jurisdiction to redress their complaints.

Every consumer must know how the provisions of the Act arm him with weapons to fight his every day battles in the market place.

Sufficient infrastructure facility is highly essential for the smooth and speedy functioning of the District Forum, a spacious building is necessary for office accommodation and the court hall. Sufficient furniture, up-to-date office equipment for filing, computing, recording, copying and despatching are also necessary for the efficient working of the District Forum. The infrastructure facilities for the District Forum are provided by the Government of Tamilnadu through the Civil Supplies Department.
3.3.4.3 Simple Procedure

The District forum is a quasi-judicial agency established under the provisions of the COPRA. It provides simple, cheap and speedy redressal to the consumers. The redressal forum is not trammeled with any technicalities or rules of complicated or elaborate procedure. They are merely to observe the basic rules of natural justice. A nominal fee is to be paid in respect of any complaint or petition of appeal. The usual formalities that discourage a litigant are not applicable to a complaint under this Act. The complainant need only set out the grievances in the simplest form and furnish the name and address of the opposite party against whom the complaint is made. It may even be in the form of a letter and no formalities of any type would be insisted upon. The proceedings herein are not contemplated for the determinations of complicated issues of facts involving elaborate oral evidence and its cross examination and adducing voluminous documentary evidence.

The hallmark of the Act is that it has set a time frame for the disposal of cases. Too much delay in the disposal of a complaint is an important problem in the ordinary Indian courts. Justice delayed is justice denied. Many people are reluctant to approach the courts for justice because of the inordinate delay and the time consuming processes. But the Act offers a time-bound settlement of the consumer complaints. It ensures the speedy disposal of consumer grievances. The Redressal Forum are required to settle a complaint within a period of three months from the date of notice to the opposite party where the complaint does not require analysis or testing the commodities and within five months if it requires analysis or testing of the commodities. It is not
obligatory to engage any advocate. Appearance may be by the complainant himself in person or by his agent duly authorized by him. But however lawyers are permitted in the proceedings. It is not possible to debar them completely in view of the constitutional freedom given to them to practices their profession. But the opposite party may be allowed a lawyer only if the complainant has engaged a lawyer, with the consent of the complainant.

Redressal agencies provide a safeguard to the consumers against different types of exploitations relating to unfair trade practices. Thus a consumer can directly protest to the District Forum against food adulteration, short weighing and over charging. The consumer can pick up a food sample from a shop, get it analysed by a chemist and file a complaint on that basis.

To prove the defect in the goods, which cannot be determined without proper analysis or testing of the goods, the Forum should obtain more than one sample of the goods from the complainant. A lot of legal formalities are required to be followed for providing the sample.

After the trial conducted as per the Act, the District Forum, if satisfied that the goods complained against suffer from any of the defects specified in the complaint, or that any of the allegations contained in the complaint about the services are proved, it may direct any one or more of the following – to remove the defect, to replace the goods, to return the price, to pay compensation for loss or injury, to remove the defects or deficiencies, to withdraw the hazardous goods from being offered for sale and to provide adequate costs to parties.
The government has accorded the least possible priority to the redressal agencies because it does not yield any revenue to the ex-chequer. In addition the decisions of the District Forum can be challenged in the State Commission and the National Commission. Again the decisions of the National Commission can be challenged in the Supreme Court. The individual consumer can seldom afford to challenge the decision given in the various courts because of his financial incapacity. As against the individual consumer the manufacturing agencies are financially sound can go with an appeal to the State Commission and the National Commission, even to the Supreme Court. All these contribute to delay in getting a final award. The consumer may withdraw from the dispute at any stage. This leads to consumer apathy towards the legal provisions.

The District Forum, before sending the sample to the appropriate laboratory, may require the complainant to deposit such fees as may have to be paid for payment to the laboratory. Further more the charges of the appropriate laboratory for quality testing of even ordinary goods are prohibitively high. For example such charges for chocolates are Rs. 1350/-, milk powder Rs. 1650/-, and biscuits Rs. 375/- This apparently acts as a deterrent on consumers to go in for these tests to substantiate their cases before consumer courts.

In addition one of the issues which has hampered the effective functioning of the consumer courts is the appointment of members to the three tier court which is based on political whims and fancies. At present the appointment of members has become purely a political issue. Besides, non-judicial members of these courts are not
properly trained on the legal aspects, and this has affected the quality of the functioning of the forum.

Interim order is a temporary or mid-term order issued by a competent judicial authority before the proclamation of the final order. In the final settlement of a consumer complaint is delayed, it may cause heavy damage to the complainant or even to the public. Such damages can be avoided if the District Forums are given the power to issue interim orders. The Consumer Protection (Amendment) Act 2002 provides interim relief to the aggrieved party by passing an interim order, pending the final disposal of the case. This is a welcome amendment.

3.3.4.4 EXTENT OF AWARENESS OF CONSUMER COURT

The extent of the awareness of the woman consumers of the consumer court has been studied with the help of 20 statements at the rate of five statements for each variable. The validity and reliability of the statements have been tested by following the test and retest method.

The statements have been administered on a five-point scale ranging from 1 to 5. All the statements are positive statements and hence the scores are in the order of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The maximum scores a sample respondent could get are 100 and the minimum 20. The extent of the scores secured by any individual respondent would show the awareness of the consumer court. Table 3.4 shows the extent of awareness of the sample woman consumers of the consumer court.

**TABLE 3.4**

Extent of Awareness Regarding Consumer Court

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Level of Awareness</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 shows that among the 150 sample respondents 40 (27 per cent), 48 (32 per cent) and 62 (41 per cent) have low, medium and high levels of awareness respectively. It also discloses that the low level is only 27 per cent, which is a negligible one, and that 73 per cent of the respondents possess medium and high levels of awareness of the consumer court.

3.4 EXTENT OF OVERALL AWARENESS

For measuring the extent of overall awareness of the woman consumers of the consumer movement eighty-four statements have been identified.
The maximum scores one could get for overall awareness would be 420. The minimum scores would be 84.

After ascertaining the total scores of each respondent the average scores have been computed by adding the individual scores of all respondents and by dividing these by the number of respondents (FX /N).

The standard deviation has been computed. With the help of the Average and the Standard deviations the low, medium and high levels of overall awareness have been categorized on the basis of the average and standard deviations.

- Low level of overall awareness: Average – Standard Deviation
- Medium level of overall awareness: Average ± Standard Deviation
- High level of overall awareness: Average + Standard Deviation

Table 3.5 shows the overall awareness of woman consumers of the consumer movement.

**TABLE 3.5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Awareness of the Woman Consumers Regarding the Consumer Movement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sl. No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.5 shows that among the 150 sample respondents 35 (23 per cent), 45 (30 per cent) and 70 (47 per cent) have low, medium and high level of overall awareness respectively. It also discloses that the low level is only 23 per cent, which is only negligible, but 47 per cent of the respondents possess a high level of overall awareness of the consumer movement.

3.5 VARIATION IN OVERALL AWARENESS

The levels of awareness of respondents of the components differ widely. This has been analysed with the help of the percentage analysis. The levels of awareness of different components is presented in Table 3.6

TABLE 3.6

Variation in the Level of Awareness of Different Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No</th>
<th>Level of Awareness</th>
<th>Consumer Rights</th>
<th>Consumer Cooperatives</th>
<th>Voluntary Consumer Organizations</th>
<th>Consumer Court</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>35 (23)</td>
<td>33 (22)</td>
<td>38 (25.33)</td>
<td>40 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>46 (31)</td>
<td>49 (33)</td>
<td>37 (24.67)</td>
<td>48 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>69 (46)</td>
<td>68 (45)</td>
<td>75 (50.00)</td>
<td>62 (41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>150 (100)</td>
<td>150 (100)</td>
<td>150 (100.00)</td>
<td>150 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.6 shows that out of the 150 respondents surveyed 35 (23 per cent), 46 (31 per cent) and 69 (46 per cent) respondents are found to possess low, medium and high levels of awareness respectively in respect of consumer rights. Out of the 150
sample consumers, 33 (22 per cent), 49 (33 per cent) and 68 (45 per cent) possess low, medium and high levels of awareness respectively in respect of consumer cooperatives. So far as the awareness of voluntary consumer organizations is concerned, out of the 150 respondents, 38 (25.33 per cent), 37 (24.67 per cent) and 75 (50 per cent) respondents have low, medium and high levels of awareness respectively. In respect of consumer court, out of the 150 respondents, 40 (27 per cent), 48 (32 per cent) and 62 (41 per cent) respondents possess low, medium and high levels of awareness.

3.6 SUMMARY

This chapter is devoted to an analysis of the extent of awareness of the consumer movement among the woman consumers in Kanniyakumari district, on the basis of the four selected components – Consumer Rights, Consumer Co-operatives, VCOs and Consumer Court.

Eighty-four statements grouped under the four components have been used to collect data regarding the awareness level. The scoring technique has been used to differentiate the levels of awareness under the low, medium and high categories.

The maximum high level scores 75 (50 per cent) was secured by the component voluntary consumer organization followed by 69 (46 per cent) by Consumer Rights, 68 (45 per cent) by Consumer Co-operatives and 62 (41 per cent) by Consumer Court. Out of the 150 respondents 70 (47 per cent) respondents have a high level of overall awareness of the consumer movement, and 45 (30 per cent) respondents fall in the medium level, followed by 35 (23 per cent) respondents with a low level of over-all awareness.