CHAPTER III
ROLE OF CONSUMER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN CONSUMER PROTECTION

PART - A

MAKING EDUCATION MORE RELEVANT

The major problem of higher education is that it has ossified within a framework of objectives, values, methods and procedures which were evolved in the 19th century to suit the conditions and needs of that era. Since then, the world has changed very radically. During the last 100 years, in most countries, the share of agriculture in national product and also in employment, has decreased very substantially. On the other hand, the importance of the territory sector has increased beyond all expectations and innovative products based on new technologies are rapidly overtaking the place of conventional products based on natural resources.

In the rapidly changing scenario, the 19th century model of Indian education is unable to cope with the demands of present and the coming decades. This does not mean that all products of higher education are useless. Surprisingly, a substantial number of people capable of handling contemporary problems do emerge from it.
However, these people are only a fraction of the total output of higher education and their development is often the combined result of an enlightened home environment, an inborn innovativeness and the influence of an unusually live and forward looking faculty.

Notwithstanding these exceptions, whose absolute number may be substantial, the fact remains that with the fossilization of education, most of the inputs going into higher education are yielding poor results. There is a general feeling among parents, students, teachers and the employers, that most of the pupils in the system of higher education do not need or deserve to be there and also that the preponderant majority of graduates do not do anything of lasting value in our colleges and universities.

At one time, it was expected that any graduate would be able to express himself, verbally and in writing, with some clarity and precision, at least in the language of instruction. Now, one cannot be sure even of this. On the other hand, what is being taught in most of the courses has little value in later life because it is being imparted mainly as 'information' for the limited purpose of memory based examinations. There is no emphasis on enabling the students to think for
themselves or use their initiative in raising and answering unanticipated questions or to relate the information provided through course curricula to the real life around them. Actually, our system of higher education is thwarting rather than encouraging the very attributes on which the country will have to rely for its success in the 21st century.

The unwillingness of the politicians or entrepreneurs to provide adequate funds for education is essentially a reflection of the general perception about moribundity of education in general and higher education in particular. The system is being kept alive with minimum expenditure largely because, in the absence of an alternative, colleges and universities serve a useful purpose either to disguise unemployment or to provide degrees which define eligibility for employment. However, even for determining eligibility, the degrees of most of the institutions of higher education have become suspect. That is why, people are talking of delinking degrees and jobs and prestigious technical institutions as well as well-established private and public sector employers are going in increasingly for their own tests to assess the capabilities of degree holders. It is significant that today, for preparing students aspiring either for prestigious jobs or
securing admission in technical institutions, private coaching colleges enjoy better credibility than recognized public-funded institutions.

Perhaps the abysmally low fees collected for colleges and universities are both the cause as well as the reason for the devaluation of these institutions. If the fees charged were commensurate with real costs, parents and students would demand much more from the teachers and institutions. This pressure would inevitably result in a thorough overhaul of the course-curricula as well as the quality of teaching and curriculum.

Considering the challenges facing us, it is imperative that we should judge our colleges and universities from the viewpoint of value addition to the capabilities of students entering their portals. Once this approach is adopted, every thing will undergo a radical change. Parents and students paying realistic fees would assess higher education in the context of individual needs, individual costs and the value addition in terms of the capability of individual students to think, articulate, perform their day to day functions with competence and dexterity, and also get
jobs commensurate with the expenditure. Similarly, the funding agencies such as the government, private endowments and entrepreneurs would also start evaluating higher education in terms of social needs, social costs and value addition in terms of the acquisition of socially desirable values, civilized and democratic patterns of behaviour and knowledge and skills relevant to the economic and socio-cultural development of society.

It is possible that the approach suggested above will result in the closure of many colleges and universities. No one needs lament this possibility. Many documents of the Education Ministry, the report of the National Commission on Teachers and recent study conducted by well known academicians have shown that many universities and colleges, particularly in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, have been non-functional for years.

Undoubtedly, we need to spend much more per capita and per institution on higher education. We also want these institutions to become catalytic centers not only for general development but also for the benefit of the disadvantaged groups, specially in the backward areas. It is, however, time we recognize that neither the goals of rapid economic development nor of equity can be
served by non-functional institutions imparting an education which has neither any intrinsic value nor any relevance to the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Against this background of the present scenario of educational irrelevance to the societal needs an attempt has been made through this study to choose an important area of public concern i.e., consumer protection by involving rather invoking the potentials of commerce faculties in the universities to fulfill the avowed cause of consumerism through research and extension programmes.

EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR CONSUMER PROTECTION

Consumers are the largest economic group in any country. They are the central point of all our economic activities. But the very same consumers are the most voiceless group in most countries of the world. The consumer of today has no power to order what he desires. He dreams of a buyers’ market where he can make his purchase at will. But wherever he turns he sees only a seller’s market. The seller’s attitude towards the consumers also is: "take it or leave it". Before the machine age, though his voice was limited, he could contact the producer and specify what he wanted. In his
foreword to the book "Consumer Economics", Francis Rollock of Columbia University wrote: "If indeed we are illiterates when it comes to consumer issues, the schools, colleges and universities must accept much of the blame. Educating young people to be savvy consumers has never enjoyed a high priority in these educational institutions. Indeed they have been more concerned with teaching people how to be successful producers, marketeers, business executives, doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, accountants, auditors and so on".

There are educational institutions at school, college and university levels besides being special academies. They impart and promote education of all descriptions. There are organisations and programmes to train personnel for all sorts of jobs and occupations. And fortunately now there are teachers to say something about consumerism. A course of study on consumerism is offered in many of our educational institutions like Marketing Management in Consumer Movement which is taught at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and such similar courses are also being taught at XLRI Jamshedpur, SNDT University, Bombay, Administrative Staff College of India at Hyderabad etc.
What will happen when consumers decide not to buy a particular product? It has not happened in India, because we have been forced to live in shortages. But it did happen here in the near past and had a telling effect.

Selling has an important place in the spectrum of social life and living; so too, production in the national arena. Salesmanship has come to be considered as a hi-tech subject with its accompaniments of exhibitions, demonstrations, showmanship, festivals, etc. All these are designed to boost sales but not to serve or counsel or educate the consumers. Whoever talks of a "purchase turnover"? The emphasis is always on sales turnover and the success in the market is always equated with this term. Consumers are just a mass of nothing.

It may appear a hypothetical question; but still it is worth asking. What will happen when consumers decide not to buy a particular product? It has not happened in India, because we have been forced to live in shortages. But it did happen here in the near past and had a telling effect. During the freedom struggle, Gandhiji's call to "boycott" foreign goods as an offense on the British Rule, shook the mighty empire.
Now that the consumer is educated enough in the art of buymanship (i.e., consumerism), salesmanship as earlier inflicted on the consumers, will have to be recast and should remould itself into a new pattern with more consideration for the buyers. So, too, production. With the advent of consumer education, the procurement—distribution—consumption table will be turned topsy-turvy; the retailer compelled to sell what the consumer wants, the wholesalers obliged to do what the retailer can push, and the manufacturer to produce only what the wholesaler is willing to stock and distribute to the retailers the ultimate aim of consumer education is to set the "goods train" in the reverse order.

Consumers at present do not have even the kindergarten level of consumer education. Unless the Indian consumer is educated on a national priority basis like Family Planning, his protection will a far cry, however forceful the enactment of laws may be. To quote Pt. Nehru, "Laws and constitutions, do not by themselves make a country great. It is the enthusiasm, energy and constant effort of the people that make it a great nation".

But unfortunately no worthwhile exercise was done in this regard so far. Consumer Education should be as
continuing as the commercial activities of production and sale. It must be taken up as a mass movement, as a "literacy drive", in public interest. Regular lessons on consumerism at appropriate levels in appropriate measures must be introduced in the educational stream. We often speak of socially relevant courses of education. But seldom do we come out with implementation. Newspapers and journals can allot more space and Radio and TV more time for consumer issues and education. Non-formal and adult education programmes can also include consumer problems in their lessons. As in Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapally, where the "Basics of Consumerism" is introduced as an extra disciplinary optional subject at the undergraduate level, consumer education should find place in regular academic curricula. The Consumer Welfare Council, Thanjavur, was mainly responsible for inclusion of this consumer education in the said university curriculum. At the request of its first Vice Chancellor, Prof. P.S. Mani Sundaram, CWC, Thanjavur, prepared the syllabus for the subject.

Education gives knowledge. And knowledge is power. Once consumers become powerful, they can easily resist any anti-consumer move besides being wise and prudent in their money management.
NEED FOR RESEARCH ON CONSUMERISM

The emphasis so far has been on better production of articles or goods in anticipation of future market demand and selling the production conveniently in the market with a backup of trained salesman and superplous advertising media. While the marketing research helps to understand investigate, analyse and interpret the market conditions only with a motto boosting up of sales without much concern about defects or deficiency of services in the products purchased thereafter by the consumers. Marketing Research concentrates on the studying of the problems relating to buying decisions in the market and also relating to the profit making of the business.

Though the meaning of marketing research encompasses people as buyers/sellers and consumers, examining their attitudes, preferences, habits and purchasing power, the orientation of marketing mainly centred on profits, sales maximisation with least concern for ethical and scrupulous means to satisfying consumers.

Because of the non-realisation of marketing concept in practice the need for evolving new methods of research in the area of consumer protection has become a
far more necessity than it was earlier. Thus research in consumerism has to be designed with a new orientation to embrace on research activities carried on in connection with the management of consumer problems. The academic bodies and research institutions thus, have to develop and explore the new area of research to discover and analyse the type of deficiency of service and defects in goods suffered by consumers in the post purchase period mainly as an aid to the mitigation of consumer sufferings at the hands of profit mongering business people and their highly trained salesmen and advertising gimmicks.
Business in different products and services is growing day by day. However, the ethical commitment on the part of the business community is being given a good-bye. The so called 'marketing concept', i.e., consumer orientation of production and selling emphasising the be-all and end-all of the business, that should be of consumer interest has become far from reality. The commerce faculties in various universities have so far confined themselves to the mere production of graduates and even the research conducted has not made any dent in the fulfillment of socially oriented/beneficial research.

Consumers' welfare means people well-being. The well-being of people hinges upon the quality of life (health-wise) which again directly or indirectly hinges on the maintenance of standards of consumable. Reasonability of prices, availability of products on demand, absence of practices like black-marketing,
adulteration, black labeling, non-observance of requisite quality, etc., all these speak of the standards of business supposed to be adhered to by the trading community. The consumer, who said to be the king of the market, has been reduced to the plight of a defeated one (king) surrounded by enemies as a result of unscrupulous line of defence. The business community/industry and its allied sectors which are supposed to defend the long-run perspectives of social interest have become aliens in the very environment in which they are partners since everyone in society is a consumer.

Therefore, it should be realised by the Universities and other academic institutions that they have an important role to play in by making use of their academic inputs with a view to safeguarding the consumers' interest in society. There has been no awareness among faculties as to what should be done and how best they can mould themselves to serve society through their expertise. The present project mainly aims at equipping the commerce faculties, in the selected universities to be visited with the necessary inputs and training or exchange of experience so that they can act as Helping Cells to the consumers.
The need of the hour is establishment of such Consumer Protection Cells as Extension Service Wings of Commerce Faculties in the various universities in the developing countries like India where consumer education is lacking. These Cells can render instant services to the effected consumers in the form of GUIDANCE, EDUCATION AND PROMOTION in respect of the various purchases (goods & services) done by people.

Faculty Specialisation - A means to many solutions

Under this, the extension service work relating to consumer guidance, education and protection can be divided amongst the faculty on a specialisation basis (see Exhibit 1 model already in operation as initiated by the Faculty) in the areas of essential products, insurance & banking, transport and passenger services, finance & share market, public distribution system, telephone & electricity, electricals 'electronics, housing' plots and rural & sanitation, etc. Besides these, services can be rendered to the very alma mater (university). This needs a special mention as follows:

Internal Services & General Grievances This part of work can be specialised by one of the members of faculty. This is mostly a public relations job. A university itself is a public body largely dealing with
the various aspects of educational interests of society. A large number of complaints are being filed against various educational institutions including universities in the consumer courts for their lapses while rendering services to the student-consumers. Universities are paying heavy penalties on account of court verdicts owing to some lapses on their part. However, it is possible to mitigate such losses by educating the various sectional heads about the likely repercussions if a complaint is filed against a university in the Forum (consumer court) - thus making the machinery to expedite solutions. The Consumer Protection Cell can negotiate the problem amicably by acting as a liason between the complainant and the sectional heads concerned and can ultimately win the appreciation of the Public when the problem is solved. Thus in the course of its functioning, the Cell may receive complaints against its own university/institution which can, thus, be tackled tactfully.

**Faculty Meets** The Faculty can meet once in every fortnight or week to sort out the complaints for a combined action. The number of grievances reported may appear small in the beginning but as the faculty gears up its commitment for the said cause and after its activities are widely recognised by the people, there
would be overwhelming response leading to round the
clock work in the department. Then it may become
necessary to create a separate establishment within the
university by widening the scope for the participation
by other faculties on the campus. The university can
seek funds from other sources like various funding
agencies and philanthropists to strengthen the Cell
financially.

Inter-disciplinary Approach to Consumerism The
already available human and non-human resources in the
form of Faculty expertise and materials respectively can
be together put to use without much further financial
commitment on the part of the university for the cause
of consumer protection. For instance, certain
grievances in respect of adulteration of commodities can
be put to test in the labs of the Chemistry department.
Electrical and electronic items (TVs, radios, bulbs,
high voltage and low voltage problems, etc.) can be
examined by the departments of Instrumentation and
Physics. In the case of housing, consumers’ problems
(low quality cement, construction defects in the flats
purchased and other housing materials) can be studied by
the Engineering Faculties on representations from the
public.
Similarly services can be rendered to the agricultural consumers in respect of the type of seeds they have to use, replantation, type of fertilisers and pesticides to be chosen, timely advice regarding crops during rainy season, spurious drugs, live stock maintenance, etc. These things can be together looked after by the departments of Botany and Zoology. During the interaction with the rural consumers/agriculturists, cattle/sheep rearers, if any grievances come to the notice of these faculties in respect of purchases (fertilisers, seeds, pesticides, feeding material to the cattle etc.) done, they can be brought to the notice of the Consumer Protection Cell in the Commerce Faculty for initiating necessary action against the manufacturers/dealers/retailers of such products. It is appropriate to mention here large number of complaints are heard in the countryside about the outdated seeds, ineffective fertilisers/pesticides and low standard feeding materials purchased for the livestock. The ignorant rural consumers are the helpless victims since they are not educated about standard marks like ISI, the PACKAGE Act and price gimmicks and other malpractices by the traders. Necessary role can be created for other departments gradually.
Therefore, a great task lies ahead for the faculties in the universities in protecting the interests of the ignorant and illiterate rural consumers in our country.

The Law department in the university can come to the aid ultimately if a complaint is to be registered in the Consumer Court against the respondent in case out-of-court negotiations fail. The department of Commerce can be the nodal agency for spear-heading the consumer protection with the participative strengths of other faculties. In the case of consumer cases, a consumer-complainant can argue it by himself without the need of a lawyer; however, in the case of consumers who reside in other than headquarters and have to come all the way from distant places in the district by spending a lot of money and time, the Cell can engage the Law faculty members to represent such consumers. Only in abnormal cases does the presence of consumer-complainants become necessary. Moreover, there is a provision in the C.P. Act, 1986 that if the consumer-complainant becomes a member of a registered consumer organisation, the organisation can file the complaint and its secretary or legal adviser can appear on the date of adjournment. Therefore, this provision can be fully exploited by the Consumer Protection Cell (duly registered) in order to
help consumers residing away from district headquarters of the consumer courts. Another point that needs to be stressed here is money-worth involved in the case. Sometimes, consumers may not come forward to give a complaint in case only a meager amount—say Rs. 50 or Rs. 100 is involved in respect of their purchases even though they might have suffered a defect in the product or a deficiency in service. It is in such cases the Protection Cell should stand by and infuse confidence in the consumers and should also appear on their behalf in the court, thus mitigating the expenses and loss of time. It must be remembered that the complaint made by a consumer may be small in nature, but its effect on society may be very large.

COMPLAINT HANDLING - MODUS OPERANDI

Soon after a grievance is reported to the Cell, it will be studied carefully and after satisfying itself with the Prima facie grievance, a notice with an advisory note in the name of the council/cell will be issued to the opposite party with a view to setting the problem out of court through a unique communication and negotiation process. The communication touches the socio-economic and legal aspects of the problem under reference. The communication also enlightens the
opposite party that every one in society is a consumer including the respondent party, thus enlisting his support too in the form of compliance with the grievance communicated.

The advisory notice which seeks compliance from the opposite party within 15/20 days also enlightens them the need for avoiding loss of time and money involved in attending the consumer court which is the ultimate resort for the consumers under C.P.Act. However, the Faculty Cell for Consumer Grievances will explore all possibilities for the settlement of the grievance without resorting to litigation. For this purpose, the faculty member in charge of such grievances should keep himself in touch with the authorities concerned (respondent parties) with all the means of communication available and if necessary they visit/meet the offices of the concerned for the purpose of negotiating out the problem.
CONSUMER RESEARCH COUNCIL (CRC) AND ITS SERVICE-LINKED RESEARCH ENDEAVOUR

This Council (see model Exhibit enclosed) will act as a fact-finding rather advisory, and helps the Consumer Protection Cell in the faculty to realise the fruits of 'service-linked research endeavour'.

Under the envisaged area of research, the various topics of consumer concern relating to black-marketing, adulteration, duplicate products, overcharging of commodities, lapses in the public distribution system, warranty/guaranty problems, cheating in lottery/benefit schemes, false advertisements, spurious drugs, time-barred articles, woman-consumer problems, customer satisfaction in various public utility services like postal, telegraph, telecommunications, insurance, banking, housing, etc., and investor problems both in public and private sector companies, transport services etc., and many more areas concerning the public at large will be chosen for research study.

The CRC of the faculty concerned would convey the findings of research periodically to the agencies concerned with a caution that unless the lapses as revealed through research are corrected immediately people will be constrained to seek the help of the
Consumer Research Council is an advisory and fact finding body associated with Anantapur Consumer Protection Council (ACPC Regd. 130/91) - an Extension Service Wing of Commerce Faculty.
Consumer Protection Act, 1986, to get their grievances redressed by the District/State or National Forums and in such cases the service rendering agencies will have to pay compensation to the effected parties.

Another unique feature of the research activity of the CRC is while the questionnaire is being administered among the consumers, they participate in discussions with the investigator about how they suffered or the suffering from the deficiency of service and deliberate malpractices of the traders or an agency. In the process, the scholar investigators will be exposed to various other problems of the consumer-public besides the problem under investigation. Thus an opportunity will arise for the research scholars to come into contact with new problems besides finding solutions to the earlier ones and to explain to the ignorant consumers the cost-free legal recourse available through consumer forums and also the Faculty's consultancy services through the Consumer Protection Cell (CPC) for the redressal of their grievances.

In other words, the research activity will be of practical nature by involving the scholars in gathering problems and finding solutions so that the public instantaneously feel the effect of research on consumer
related issues. It is also envisioned the findings of the research could become an affidavit or constitute the evidence necessary for seeking general directions from the State/National Forums in case of similar/common grievances largely suffered by the public. Through this service-linked research endeavour, the Faculty's expertise can be brought to the door-steps of the consumer-public who are mostly illiterate and ignorant in our country.

The ultimate aim of the whole effort is expected to enable the unorganised and ignorant consumers in society to become self-helping and self-reliant and confident individuals by inculcating the quality of voluntary initiative in the public in the long run. People's voluntary initiative is the life blood of democracy. Government only supplements the voluntary efforts. Hence the need for involvement of the highest academic bodies like universities to play an important role regarding the availability, purity and pricing of essential commodities and services. Since the vast majority of consumers in India have to keep a balance between income and expenditure, the need to protect the interests of the consumers has now assumed greater significance.
On the lines suggested above, work commenced in the Faculty of Commerce, S.K. University under the initiation and supervision of the senior faculty member Prof. H. Lajipathi Rai in March 1991, and a consumer protection cell was established in the name of Anantapur Consumer Protection Council and registered as an extension service wing of the faculty.

HISTORY OF CONSUMER PROTECTION COUNCIL, S.K. UNIVERSITY

Institutional activities without relevance to social needs cannot be termed constructive. In order to extent the Faculty Expertise to the needy in society, especially the consumer community, the Department of Commerce decided to provide extension services through a registered council as per the norms and guidelines laid down in the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. The consumer is one of the primary objects of Commerce Studies. The problems of consumer exploitation, therefore, mainly centers around business and commerce. Hence the obligation* of the Commerce Faculty to come to the aid of consumers and work for the redressal of their grievances.

* One of the faculty members, Prof. H. Lajipathi Rai, took initiative, with the active support given by other faculty members to start Anantapur Consumer Protection Council in March 1991. This Council was later
OBJECTIVES OF ANANTAPUR CONSUMER PROTECTION COUNCIL

The objectives for which the Council is formed are:

1. To promote and protect consumer interests particularly to concretise the following, inter alia, consumer rights and remedies;

   a) the right to be protected against marketing of goods and services which are hazardous to life and property;

   b) the right to be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of

registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 in order to acquire legal entity so that it can take legal course in the defence of rights and lawful interests of an individual consumer or class of consumers. The Council consisted not only of members of the Commerce Faculty but also some ex-officio members viz., Project Director, DRDA, Regional Manager, Andhra Bank, Divisional Manager, United India Insurance Company, Branch Manager, Oriental Insurance Company, Joint Director, Agriculture; Chief Executive Officer, ANSET; and General Manager, ADCC Bank. All these ex-officio members give their valuable support and advice by participating in the deliberations of the Council's meeting. Prof. K.Venkata Reddy, during his tenure as Vice Chancellor consented to be the President of the Council later, upon the suggestion given by the successive Vice Chancellor Prof. M.J.Kesava Murthy the Principal of the University College was made the ex-officio President of the Council. Prof. M.L.Kantha Rao, was the first President followed by Prof. C.G.Parakash Rao, the present principal of the University College.
goods and services to protect the consumer against unfair trade practices;

c) the right to be assured access to variety of goods and services at competitive prices;

d) the right to be heard and to be assured that consumer's grievances will receive due consideration at appropriate forums;

e) the right to seek redressal against unfair trade practice or unscrupulous exploitation of consumer;

f) the right to consumer education;

2) To provide a common platform to the consumers of the area for highlighting common consumer problems to the people;

3) To facilitate, organise enable activities of the nature of seminars, conferences and lecture meetings for discussing such common problems;

4) To undertake research in fields of consumer education, programmes on advocacy and campaigns relating to problems of consumers and to set up study circles and groups in such fields;
5) To publish a journal/news-letters for dissemination of information and for providing a forum for discussion of such problems;

6) To receive donations, contributions and financial assistance from persons and organisations who would like to assist the Council for propagation of its work and activities.

7) To take legal recourse in the defence of rights and lawful interests of any consumer or class of consumers;

**A Tremendous Response:** There has been a tremendous response from all sections of society to the functioning of the Council in the service of consumers and its efforts were appreciated by one and all. Even people in remote villages of the districts in the University area (Kurnool and Anantapur) are thronging in large numbers to the department with a variety of grievances for settlement. The activity commenced in the Department by the Faculty members has won applause of and credibility in the consumer public in this areas. The appreciation report given by the District Collector, Anantapur and the Republic Day Award conferred by the District Administration stand testimony to it.
The manufacturing/business/trading communities both in the private and public sectors have also expressed happiness with the liaison efforts of the Faculty Cell for consumer protection since it benefited them in the form of avoidance of litigation, loss of goodwill and loss of money and time. Above all, the trading community is educated in the various aspects of Consumer Protection Act and its applicability. Government institutions especially commended the Council's unique method of handling grievances without resorting to court. It can be construed that the Council's method of handling grievances has long-run perspectives leaving a leading impression on the suppliers of services/products that the days of compromising tendency of consumers have gone and there would be no room for second quality. The Council has created a lot of quality awareness among consumers to develop a sort of 'buymanship' as an antedote to salesmanship. The Council strives to prove that gimmicks of salesmen camouflaging the quality of the product will no longer have their day and the survival of the fittest is the order of the day.

It is hoped that this study would throw enough light on sister faculties in other universities and induces them practically establishing such consumer protection cells in order to utilise faculties'
expertise in finding solutions to many consumer problems within the area of universities concerned. These Cells can be termed Extension Service Wings of the Consumer Faculties and can be established on a time-bound programme in some selected universities to being with.

CONSUMER EDUCATION IS UNDER SERIOUS CONSIDERATION

The need for training education and creation of awareness amongst the consumers is very much felt by the various consumer organisations and consumer activists as revealed from the report of the Working Group (constituted by Ministry of Civil Supplies, consumer affairs and Public Distribution Cell, New Delhi) constituted on the 9th December, 1993. The Working Group under the chairmanship of Mr. M.M. Buch identifies three important points of which consumer training education and awareness is an important one. The Working Group noted with concern the delay in setting up of National Institute of Consumer Affairs.

Even though it may be difficult at this point of time to introduce consumer education as a separate subject in schools, the need to create awareness in the students at a very early stage will be readily accepted. The broad area of consumer education should be Consumer
Behaviour, Consumer Choice, Marketing, Money Consumer Protection, Health and Environment. The elements of consumer education will have to be introduced as part of an existing subject at different class levels. This should be done at all levels of education starting from the primary level, by those in charge of setting/preparing text books. The Ministry of Human Resources Development (Department of Education) should take the lead in this by issuing suitable instructions in this regard to the NCERT (for schools following separate State syllabi) and the UGC (for colleges). The NCERT could act as the model agency for this. It should nevertheless be emphasised that the State Education departments with their enormous coverage would be the most important agency responsible for achieving this.

What should be introduced in the syllabus should not be mere generalities but also specific issues like short weightment, over pricing, quality control, how to get remedies, etc. The representatives of the Ministry of Civil Supplies and the NCERT should get together and work out the details. Once this is done for the NCERT syllabus schools, the State Government can also be advised to follow suit.
The National Services Scheme should also be activated to propagate the message of consumer movement.

The Working Group noted with concern that the Government of India appears to have shelved the idea of Government of India itself promoting the setting up of a National Institute of Consumer Affairs (NICA). The Group feels that the NICA is the need of the hour and that the Government of India themselves should take the lead in setting this up. It will not be difficult for the Government of India to set apart the seed money, which can very well come from the plan funds. All State Governments and the industry should contribute generously in setting up the institute. In the same manner as the Administrative Staff College, the Indian Institute of Management and Indian Institute of Technology are tapping non-Governmental funds, the proposed NICA should also be able to run without any large outflow from the Government of India.

The Working Group discussed with FICCI etc., the possibilities of the trade and industry sharing a portion of these expenses involved in setting up the National Institute. They have agreed in principle to participate financially and otherwise in setting up the Institute. The agency involved in setting up the
The NICA should be a separate organisation with a core academic faculty. The scope of the Institute should be Training, Research, Development and Extension. It could have testing laboratories for academic purposes. Being a research and training oriented institution, it will naturally have an effective data collecting machinery.

As regards location, the following general principles were accepted:

i. It should not be set up in or near a State capital or a metropolitan city.

ii. It should however, be easily accessible.

iii. If there are other similar institutions located nearby, that will be an added advantage.

iv. The institute shall be set up only in a State where the State Government has a good track record in promoting the consumer movement.

v. The extent to which the State Government can participate financially and otherwise in setting up the Institute will also be relevant.
It shall be the responsibility of the NICA to provide specialised training aimed at equipping the quasi-judicial machinery of the Consumer Disputes Redressal Fora. The training infrastructure of the institute should therefore be strong. The training provided should sensitize the trainees appropriately.

Various training institutes in the country are running large number of training programmes. These programmes can include one module on consumer protection.

While the primary responsibility for nurturing the consumer movement is with the Government, the industry must also be made a partner. Government could be helped in this regard by consumer organisations, educational institutions and even some of the development departments like the Rural Development Department. The Anganwadi workers and school and college students could provide a ready working force for the spreading of consumer awareness.

The large body of school teachers could be associated with the consumer movement for which appropriate training and orientation should be organised.
The Food & Civil Supplies Department of each State should play an important role in the consumer movement. This department which was originally conceived (and still continues to be, in most States) as a regulatory one has to shift their outlook to that of an extension department. The transition from mere rationing to PDS and then on to the larger role of consumer protection is necessary and very well possible. Their large network is a great asset. The officers of the Department will have to be given appropriate training to change their orientation.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SECOND WORKING GROUP ON NEED FOR TRAINING EDUCATION AND CREATION OF AWARENESS AMONGST THE CONSUMERS

I. Recommendations on training

It is recommended that the Government in coordination with voluntary consumer organisations should draw up a national level plan for various levels of training which have to taken care of namely:

1. Training of trainers.

2. Training of women workers.
3. Management and professional training of consumer activists.

4. Introduction of consumer training programme in the syllabi of management institutes.

5. Training of non-judicial member.

6. Training of public sector employees.

7. Training of traders on matters relating to consumer protection.

The group extends its total support to the Government's initiative of setting up a National Institute of Consumer Affairs.

II. Recommendations on Education

On the assumption that there is no substitute to an educated consumer, the entire group unanimously recommended adoption of consumer protection into the syllabi of schools and colleges.

1. The group recommends that Consumer Education be incorporated in the National Educational Policy.

2. The group recommends that at the time of constitution of the syllabi by NCERT a committee
should be constituted and all members in the convention and outside who have the expertise in the field of education be invited by NCERT to send in their suggestions and recommendations. A meeting inviting these interested parties be organised by NCERT and the syllabi accordingly worked out.

3. NCERT may use existing material on consumer protection which is being utilised by NCERT in various colleges and by CBSE in some schools and tailor them in such a fashion that it meets the needs of pre-primary, and secondary level students.

4. The University Grants Commission should be approached to give a directive to all colleges to incorporate consumer education in the college syllabi.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the foregone analysis that there has been a serious concern about the growing irrelevance of present day education, offered through various educational institutions, to the needs of society. Hence the need has been felt to develop linkages between
the faculties and the society where the concerned universities can play their potential in the mitigation of economic and social sufferings of the people. In order to prevail upon the business community in the realisation of marketing concept by either lobbying/liasoning with them or by educating the consumers of their rights as consumers so that they themselves take care of consumer guidance, vigilance and protection cells have to be set up as extension service wings of the commerce faculties in various universities. It could also be noticed that many working groups appointed by the Government have recommended for the inclusion of consumerism as a subject to be taught from school to collegiate level.