CHAPTER IV
SUMMARY, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter summarises the whole concept of consumer education and the methods of involvement of the commerce faculties in the direction of consumer protection and offers some suggestions.

Education is a public service. And the consumer of the public service is entitled to the minimum standards of service prescribed in the C.F. Act. The word Consumer encompasses here not only the student community but also the society at large since universities are obligated to society in a varied manner.

A countrywide consumer education programme can be launched on the lines of work plan for commerce faculties suggested in the previous chapter. Thus, commerce education and research can be moulded as an instrument of socio-economic change in the direction of consumer protection.

Universities which are on the forefront of imparting professional education have to take cognizance of the social problems for which they have to research and develop academic antidotes. Consumer education and research is one such antidote which can be a panacea to consumers' apathy and their ignorance.
All learned professions in India have today become an occupation, business or industry. It might seem at first sight to be as over generalisation; but from the point of view of victims of the services of the learned profession, it is clear that most of these professions operate as a seller's market, and are not organised, as learned professions should be, on the principle of highest standards of professional ethics. Self-regulation mechanism, so proudly proclaimed in charters of professional ethics for all learned professions in India have been eroded by power politics which marks the functioning of professional bodies mandated to monitor standards of professional conduct and services of consumers. In such a milieu, when the consumer rights and interests are sought to be protected, learned professionals suddenly recall their character as learned professions. In this act of magnificent recall of a role, the professions are nowhere near initiating a movement for social responsibility for professional services. Rather, the metaphor or learned profession is used as a source of power to demobilize disorganize and disvalue this spectacular emergence of consumer justice as an aspect of social justice in India.

Educational services in India must collectively acknowledge that we have, broadly, failed to achieve a
system in which education will function as an everlasting foundation for ethically in the pursuit of professions for which the system equipped every year thousands of young men and women. A good educational system is one which instills a sense of fairness and an ethic of social responsibility among its consumers; instead, what we have is system which encourages learning a stepping stone to career paths which is not wholly devoid of notions of ethics and are also not fully committed to these notions. These educational systems are considered by the nation as article for notional cohesion and development and not just at rhetorical levels; the professions will continue to glow cancerously, costing the Indian nation a great deal in the years to come.

It is the social obligation of each learned profession in India to learn alphabet the social accountability rather than to act as lobbies and pressure groups for complete immunity and impunity for injuries, damage and even destruction of the life-plants of those citizens who have to depend on them for their existence and well-being. And they must, in doing so, recognize that every member of the learned profession is at the same time a consumer of the services of other
learned professions. It is only within this framework of interdependence and accountability to each other than any genuine difficulties which the learned profession might experience in submitting themselves to just regimes of liability, should be carefully examined.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF UNIVERSITIES MUST BE REALISED

Considering the social responsibility embodies in the merging consumer movement and consumer being the object of commerce studies, commerce faculties in various universities may offer a few more specialisations pertinent to consumer interest would become relevant to the national needs and conditions.

Centres for consumer studies and services at Universities' level can be setup to strengthen the research, teaching and grievances handling in the area of consumerism with the help of a few senior and junior faculty members, research personnels secretarial assistants, research tools, and other facilities or by creating such positions and facilities so that it can effectively function.

Such centres (Commerce departments being modal points) in the universities would have a few cells which
may develop specialised skills in different areas. Some of such cells are:

1. **Consumer Advice and Complaints Cell**

Redressal of complaints of the individual consumers is the primary function of any consumer protection organisation. This is the best service that may be offered to consumers. This will bring committed support as the consumer-beneficiaries. Redressal of complaints may be supplemented by providing facility to consumers to seek advice. Seeking advice before one goes for a purchase transaction helps to guard against exploitation and unfair trade practices.

2. **Consumer Education Cell**

Knowledge is power. Dissemination of knowledge to the consumers equip them with the best payer. Educational programmes suitable to the different sections of the consumers should be developed. It requires special skills. A small library-collection of essential reference books and materials is a necessity. Such cells in the colleges should strive to become full-pledged organisations. They should be equipped to take legal measures as well as mass action for the redressal
of consumer grievances. They should maintain independence and individuality in their relation with the upper bodies like the district or state level organisations.

3. **Consumer Vigilance Cell**

Eternal vigilance is the best guarantee for consumer protection. Consumers need to be trained to exercise vigilance. Hence the need for a separate cell. This cell to be operated by the faculty will have to develop training programmes to train the consumers. Various sub-committees can be set up by involving students of the concerned faculty. For example sub-committees on adulteration, price hikes, public distribution system, duplication of products, warranty-guaranty violations, student-consumer problems, black-marketing, banking and insurance services, telephone and electricity services etc. If a faculty consists of with an intake of 8 teachers 40 students eight sub-committees can be constituted under the leadership of each faculty member thus each guiding five students in respect of investigating a particular consumer problems. Students may be given some special assignments and some marks may be allotted for such practical work.
CONSUMER EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES SHALL BE LAUNCHED

Consumer Educational Programmes should include:

- motivating consumers to lead simple living and do wise buying.

- educating consumers on safety methods of storing goods; and

- motivating them to be united in boycotting and making complaints such products priced excessively or offered at low quality.

At college level (within the affiliated area every University) Consumer Service and Guidance Cells may be set up by the voluntary involvement of the respective teaching faculty and students of commerce. These Cells can work in coordination with the main centre at the University concerned. The Consumer Guidance Cells at colleges give enough feedback of information which can be used for conducting some investigative and research studies pertinent to consumer interest.
Activities Envisaged under Consumer Education Programme at University Level

The centre of Consumer Studies and Services to be set up in the universities can take up the following activities under the heads viz., Research and Consultancy, Human Resource Development, Training Programmes, Conduct of certificate courses of short duration etc.

RESEARCH: i. To carry on research in consumerism leading to M.Phil and Ph.D. degrees.

ii. To conduct seminars, symposia and discussions drawing close the people concerned with business and industry and disseminating and practical knowledge acquired in the process of consumerism.

This will help in enlightening the business and industry about the problems of consumers for various products.

CONSULTANCY: To offer consultancy/advisory services to businessmen and industrialists and government departments by conducting special studies and thus identify and
communicate the specific problems of the consumer groups.

This helps in acting as a catalyst between the industry and the consumer groups and thus paying way to nip the problems in the bud itself.

**HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

i) To conduct special courses for development of consumerism.

ii) To conduct short term orientation courses to the managers, officers, and all those concerned with consumer services.

iii) To frame and revise the syllabus from time to time for the introduction in curricula of different courses.

The centre can also help in imparting training, *inter alia*, to train teachers and lecturers required to handle the consumer protection syllabus in schools and colleges respectively.
TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

1. To offer one year P.G.Diploma in 'Consumerism and Buymanship'.

2. To offer special programmes with 3 months duration in each of the below mentioned special categories:
   a) Rural Consumers
   b) Business Communities
   c) College and University Students
   d) Child Consumers

   In the above, the emphasis would be on how to make a 'Good Buy'? Consumer awareness programmes for rural youth, buymanship development programmes for middle income groups, consumer movement and messages for college and school students, etc.

3. To conduct Short Duration Courses (one week to 4 week duration) in the following areas:
   a) Advertising and Consumer Protection
   b) Basics of Consumerism
   c) Consumer (social) Orientation in Marketing Management
d) Quality Campaign through Consumer Movement
e) Management of Consumer Organisation
f) Testing Adulteration (Testing Through Quality Labs)
h) Duplicate Product Identification

The functional areas can be selected and course content can be framed and course-duration can be altered depending upon the need of the hour.

4. Conduct of Conferences, Seminars and Workshops
   (the Number to be conducted varies depending upon the need)

4. Research, consultancy, counselling and redressal of consumer grievances through communication and negotiation will be carried on throughout the year. For this, services of the research assistants, and research scholars registered in the department can be made use of. If necessary special projects can be proposed.

A Great Impact is Foreseen

Every year thousands of students are passing out of the colleges affiliated to Universities. Proper orientation and guidance rendered to them in
Adult Education Vis a vis Consumer Education

Most of the consumers are villagers in India, they are very ignorant about the products, and they are not able to read even the product name. Hence Government should make the people literates at first. Now the programmes of National Literacy Mission are going on (Adult Education, Non-formal Education etc). Lessons on consumerism should be included in the syllabus. Consumer Education Centres should be included in the syllabus. Consumer Education Centres should be established in every village as that of adult education ones.

Required knowledge (like techniques of finding the adulteration with low cost) should be propagated among people and more institutions should be established for this. Testing Laboratories and necessary equipment to test the quality of the products should be established in the science labs of schools colleges and universities. If such labs are established by making use of the existing infrastructurer in the educational institutions people at all levels (village, mandal and urban) will have access to such facilities and become educated about the types of cheating they are subjected to by the unscrupulous traders. Meetings should be
frequently arranged between consumers and traders to
know causes for conflicts between them, and thereby
remedies to such problems.

Government should encourage the seminars, workshops
meetings, conferences and research studies on
consumerism. Projects also should be sanctioned on this
subject. Priority must be given by the UGC, ICSSR and
other agencies to the research projects related to
consumerism.
CONCLUSION

The foregone discussions on various aspects of consumer education would reveal that consumer should be enlightened mainly on:

- free commodities
- misleading advertisement
- insisting of receipts before buying the goods
- ingredients in the commodity
- expiry date
- maximum retail price
- techniques to find out adulteration
- how to face the problems of unscrupulous trading activities
- consumer rights, etc.

Consumers should recognise the right to education and they must utilise their right, otherwise they themselves will become responsible for being exploited. Though the complaint may be small in value, but its impact on the society may be very large. So every consumer should utilise his rights so that others in the society will be enlightened. The main motto of the research works in the universities is to trace out the problems facing the society and finding solutions to them. Now the people in the society are facing a lot of
problems mainly because of unfair trade practices. So it is necessary to gear up the research potentials in the direction of consumer protection.

Most of the people, even though, are literates, they are facing the problems with unfair trade practices; but they do not know about how to overcome these problems. Therefore, the consumer organisations should evolve such steps like organising street meetings, distribution of pamphlets etc., so that the consumer movement can be taken to the door steps of millions of our citizens both in urban and rural areas.