

CHAPTER - IV

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter aims at summarising the various salient aspects of the study and also to describe the findings and provide suggestions for the protection of consumers interests in respect of postal services in Prakasam District. Though many of the respondents in the survey were sceptical about giving suggestions and views on the ground that research studies are of no avail to their problems. Yet they came forward with their views so that their voice may reach the concerned for appropriate and timely action for the improvement and better working of post offices.

While apprising and reviewing postal services in Prakasam district one must have a basic idea about what we

have now at present, how it can be streamlined, and what things that are needed and to be planned. There are two kinds of plans one can make - one is to make arrangement to see that one goes on getting the most important things one needs; the second kind of plan is to aim at something better than one has today. One may not be able to get it straight away, but one can make plans so that one does have it some time later. How long one has to wait depends on how far one is from what one wants, how hard one is willing to work for it, how much help one gets in his efforts, what one is prepared to give up for the sake of things one wants.

The various findings relating to the work are lacunal in nature with possible remedial solutions as given under.

Postal services are universal

Postal services are public utility services extended by the government through post offices spreading from metropolitan city to the hamlets. All citizens of the nation are either addressed or do address - thus they are entitled to avail of these services irrespective of their caste, colour, custom or creed. The services of the post office may be available either directly or through a messenger. A person who does not visit a post office may also become a beneficiary by delivery of mail.

Consumer apathy must go

Satisfaction occurs when one gets what one needs, desire, expects, deserves or deems to be one's entitlement. The other end of customer satisfaction is helpless and feeble reaction of the illiterate, outburst of complaints from the intelligentsia. It goes without saying that the customer goes down the drain state of apathy when his repeated complaints for redressal went in vain. A review of Indian history suggests us that Indians have great patience. It is not in their nature to be in a hurry. They can wait longer, suffer more and work harder than many other people. They are extremely hospitable and would willingly go through much trouble and hardship. These qualities have been of help to India, but in some ways this tendency to make things as they come has also harmed her.

So long as consumers do not agitate or express dissatisfaction about the quality of service/ produce be it of private sector or public sector, quality suffers. Hence people (consumers) must know their rights and be assertive and demanding in nature for better quality services from postal department.

The postal department has got a commitment to people in pursuit of excellence. The quality of pursuit of excellence in the services rendered by postal authorities must be realised when they come in contact with customers.

Official outlook must change

The rules and procedural formalities are kept in a language hardly people understand. The indifferent and feeling of isolation on the part of officials, 'not within reach redressal machinery' for consumer grievances - all form part of the parameters of customer satisfaction. The working of the public administration has come to such a pass that no body feels possessed of great power and they feel that authority is pluralised.

It is learnt on contacting officials of the department that they think of regulatory character which includes rules, regulations, formalities and procedures to be followed, their limitations, their problems in upkeeping of the public relations, issues to be sorted with their staff, unions and the inborn inhibitions. They expect the customers to be more submissive, more obedient, more tolerable whether they are given or not the required information. Instead, the officials concerned must be innovative, be able to direct and take the customers into confidence in case of their complaining.

'Service at door steps' - How true it is: While expecting customers making use of the services available in the post office, they must be accessible and long distances are not to

be travelled; otherwise the very purpose is defeated. It becomes one of the factors while finding customer satisfaction. Government often says 'service at your door step.' Service with a smile should not be restricted to papers only. A customer expects certain amenities like furniture, writing desk, stamp damper and gum, etc. This type of amenities go a long way in satisfying customers.

Formalities to be simplified We are aware that majority of rural Indians are illiterates and thus they are constrained to understand the complex rules, regulations and formalities to be followed during postal transactions. Even educated feel perplexed and cumbersome about rules under postal services. Therefore, the department must wake up and make up its procedures more simplified. Postal officials must be cordial, co-operative, willing to explain and help the illiterates and the needy.

Banks preferred to postal department : A clear cut preference is being given by prospective customers to banks instead of post offices. On verification whether customers prefer post offices or commercial banks for monetary transactions, people showed overwhelming preference to banking services because of simplicity in rules and the staff's willingness to cooperate with the illiterates, rural artisans, semi-literates, among other things.

As the rules and formalities to be filled at the time of making deposits are stringent and certain rules are not self explanatory, people from rural areas are not supposed to learn all the legal intricacies.

Photographs suggested on pass books: The specific complaint on postal authorities is on difficulties encountered by customers at the time of withdrawal of deposits on the ground of variation in specimen signatures. If the department insist on producing 'photograph' of the customer, probably the problem of variation in specimen signature can be slightly overcome.

Public relations to be strengthened: There is wide communication gap between the authorities and the consumers which acts as a hindrance to customer satisfaction. The 'no admission' syndrome must be given a goodbye, instead a free and frank interaction with customers is need of the hour. Officials behaviour with customers, their attitudes and aptitudes for dealing with consumers in face to face situation needs a radical change. Officials should learn that 'service with a smile' would solve many problems even before they arise.

Staff behaviour must be refined : Consumers quite frequently complain that people in the counter do often get irritated and not behave properly, sometimes irresponsibly and give evasive answers. Necessary inservice training on the behavioural aspects with customers must be given to staff now and then.

Punctuality, sincerity to duty, integrity, maintenance of cordial public relations are expected and humanitarian approach towards consumers must be adopted. Qualitative change in the behaviour of the employees at contact points and in counters is sought.

'Customer Meets' may be conducted frequently so that grievances of the consumers may be settled early, positively and speedily.

Incentives to talented employees : Hard working, talented and people good at dealing with customers, down to earth policy of administrators and the like be identified, recognised and honoured in a better manner.

Better employment conditions : Different research studies on the functioning of public utility services under the aegis of the government in general and post office in particular show the customer satisfaction is a far cry though the field staff, who are face to face with the customers, are really turning out a good and honest work. They feel a thankless job to be rotated round the clock with underemployment and bad working conditions. Better pay structure, job security, regularisation of a vast number of Extra Departmental Employees in a phased manner are some of the suggestions to boost employee morale so that they can render better services. The special committee viz. Talwar Committee which was appointed to look into the

affairs of extra departmental employees should expedite submission its report to the government and the recommendations of the committee be implemented in toto and regularise the employees who have been working for long with meagre remuneration.

Payment on maturity to be expedited: Postal officials may be instructed to pay the consumers punctually the amount invested in various savings schemes on their maturity as a number of ;complaints are coming from consumers. The problems of non-realisation of the amount on maturity, however, is not solely due to any negligence on the part of postal authorities; the study reveals that most of the savings schemes are launched by National Savings Organisation while the post office acts as an agent and any delay in the processing of documents/ adjustments of funds will result in such difficulties.

Courier service opposed: The postal authorities feel that public will be at disadvantage if postal services are privatised. These days courier services* have become quite popular and are able to compete with postal department. In order to meet this competition, speed post is introduced and fortunately the study reveals no single complaint on speed post services at Ongole

* Courier services are flourishing because of the ambiguity in Sec.14 of the Indian Post Office Act. Infact such parallel system is not allowed as per the Act. Although the Act empowers the postal department to have monopoly over the delivery of letters, the private services are making a quick buck by running
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and Chirala in Prakasam district. Speed post system may be extended to more number of commercial townships, cities, etc. to face competition from courier services.

One way it is not constructive to oppose courier services since they are able to render quick services and more over the new economic policy facilitates such competition. Competition has to be promoted for better services be it from public sector or private sector. The feeling of happiness or satisfaction with a given product, clientele or service makes the customer visit the place time and again to have a similar opinion or else he would like to go for a change hence giving room to private parties. Therefore, what is required is developing a competitive edge by postal department over courier services run by private agencies.

There is a suggestion that the Post Office Act be amended in such a way that post offices could have monopoly over carriage of documents, in addition to carriage of letters

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organisation parallel to the postal department in the name of 'delivery of documents.' As delivery of documents did not figure on the legal definition of the term 'letter,' the department remains a mere spectator over the happenings. Collection and delivery of letters by other than postal department, deemed to be an offence has proved to be a mockery.

in order to have an edge rather than private courier agencies from such business. But if this suggestion is given a sanction, it will only create further inefficiency in postal services.

Lack of availability of postal stationery : Proper measures may be taken to see that postal stationery like cards, inland letters, envelopes, stamps of different denominations, Indira Vikas Patras, Postal orders of all denominations, etc are maintained in sufficient quantities at all post offices.

Incidence of missing deliveries : Every effort must be made to see that all the postal articles reach the desired destination, including acknowledgement cards as countless number of complaints poured to the researchers' desk and to the various consumer councils in and around Ongole. For this 'grievance cells' at the division level maybe streamlined. Enough publicity has to be given about its existence, their modus operandi, etc. so that consumers could contact in case of any grievance.

More publicity on Savings Scheme needed: It is observed that proper publicity is not given regarding different saving schemes and mobilisation of savings could not be possible to its real extent. Schemes which are within the reach of middle income groups also could not be tapped to their full potential for want of sufficient publicity. PPF scheme was introduced more than a decade ago but could not attract several

though the scheme is quite good and within the reach of many people. Similarly, as revealed by the study, the Monthly Income Scheme for retired employees has not attracted, as it should have, to many retired employees.

Machinery for Redressal to be strengthened: It is the duty of postal department to deliver the goods and being a public utility services, people by and large come in contact with the department either directly or indirectly. When they find that services provided are not upto their expectation and the behaviour in the counters is much to be improved, they will be looking forward for some machinery to be looked into such lapses. Some people complained that their grievances often go unheard and decisions are neither taken nor informed to the complainants. Generally when the customers feel irritated to the maximum extent he would like to approach redressal machinery. Government must also provide sufficient machinery to attend to the consumer grievances and their redressal. Wide publicity must be given about what sort of machinery is available for redressal of grievances.

The department must not only create awareness about the existence of the machinery, they must also instill confidence among the public that grievances addressed are not only looked but also given credence and settled.

The machinery available for the redressal of grievances at present is as follows:

1. Suggestions book is kept at the disposal of every post office and the customers are free to enter their suggestions in it.
2. At district level senior superintendent of post offices will look after the grievances with one Inspector divisionwise meant for the purpose.
3. Grievances of public in general can be discussed during Advisory Committee meetings at national/regional level.
4. There are also parliamentary consultative committees to discuss postal consumer problems.

Grievances Cell with a senior official attending to the customer grievance personally is of recent origin. He is empowered to answer the written complaints after duly getting the required information. But enough publicity about these grievance cell has to be given so that public utilise the services.

Other Suggestions

The government may also consider sanctioning of loans against postal securities at reasonable interest rates.

Government may consider the reduction in money order charges which is comparatively costlier than exchange on demand drafts issued by commercial banks.

Important days of the postal department may be given wide publicity. The redressal machinery must be directed to participate in the customer meets for an on the spot study of consumer grievances for redressal. When a complaint reaches the official concerned, acknowledgement must be sent and also the steps to be taken by the authorities must be informed to the complainant.

The time for Indira Vikas Patras and Kisan Vikas Patras be reduced to 5 years.

The availability of PIN code directory for the public must be ensured in all post offices.

Number of post offices in the towns must be increased for making postal services more accessible. Office timings of post offices in towns and colonies may be changed to suit the local conditions.

Answerability to certificate of posting should be assured.

Delivery of postal articles may be done twice in a day in cities and metropolies.

People feel that postal seals are so old and worn out and they are not visible. Visibility must be assured for it ensures detection of reason for a delay in delivery of letters. Therefore, postal seals need overhauling.

Extra vans may be procured for speedy delivery of postal services. More postal boxes be provided in busy centres of the towns and cities.

Money order charges must be reduced. Charge levied on telegraphic money order is too exhorbitant and must be reduced. To raise resources, it is suggested to increase the rate of post card to 0.50 paise. procedure of carrying postal bags in the rural areas need a change.

Loans must be granted in the post office itself against savings certificates issued by the department instead of raising loans by pledging them with commercial banks.

Postal employees must be paid bonus on par with telecommunications. More financial incentives may be given for

those postal employees who put good efforts and are helpful to the consumers. Good pay structure to the postal employees is also suggested.

Interest on savings bank deposits must be enhanced. Repayment must be made immediately on maturity without giving any trouble in case of recurring deposits and other postal savings.

Commission may be given to all postal staff on savings mobilised by them,

Acknowledgement cards are not delivered properly. Necessary checks may be initiated to set right this anomaly.

Telegram operatus shall be provided to all the post offices including rural areas.

Registration of letters and operation of savings bank accounts should be attended during all the working hours. Timings shall have to be strictly maintained even in rural branches of post offices.

Postal deliveries must be prompt and to the correct address. Number of counters in Head post Office at Ongole be increased. Good accommodation and cordial atmosphere are conducive for overall development of postal services.

Sometimes postal bags to the villages are brought once in two or three days especially in case of rural areas. Authorities should take action against such lapses. For instance, postal consumers in Komarole complained that postal bags do not come to them regularly from Ongole.

Frequent inspection and checks by the authorities will help eliminate lethargy among such postal staff.

Timely clearance from post boxes must be ensured.

Wide publicity may be given for 'record delivery' postage which is less costlier to registered post but serves the purpose of a registered postage.

Wide publicity must be given on Tapala Varotsavas where postal authorities can freely discuss about problems and invite suggestions from the public.

To be on par with mutual funds the time of the postal saving schemes be reduced to 2 to 3 years so that it will generate interest for investment in short term funds.

Every one in the society is a consumer of some sort of postal service. The nature of high demand for postal service has made the department to be more onerous in its responsibilities in discharging service to its customers. The

more the demand for such services the greater is the possibility for occurrence of some lapses which need immediate attention and correction. A more dedicated staff comprising redressal machinery would go a long way in the improvement of quality of services and thus help satisfy the omnipresent postal consumers.
