CHAPTER - 6

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION
CONSUMERISM IN INDIA

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

I) INTRODUCTION

Consumer are being totally neglected and exploited by the middlemen and the manufacturers since times immemorial. Consumers are ultimately bearing the burden of exorbitant charges and profit margins, indulged in by the middlemen in their distributive channels of trade. It is happening and continuing as the consumers are vulnerable and totally unorganized in our country. This is due to lack of minimum education and rational thinking among consumers and causing damage to consumer welfare and responsible for such a pathetic state of affairs.

The mercantile proverb of "Caveat Emptor" let the buyer beware prevails in the market than vice versa, and the welfare of the consumer has been relegated back. This is the de facto sovereignty of the consumer in the present Indian market.

The innocent consumers are being suffered from multifarious and multidimensional problems like malpractices, exploitations indulged in by the businessmen and industrialists in the market milieu. Charging exorbitant prices, adulteration, underweightment, sale of poor quality good, spurious goods, improper preservation of goods, lack of proper after sale services can be cited as some of the malpractices indulged in by the unscrupulous businessmen. Lack of proper information about the goods and services, literacy, ignorance, lack of proper organization, unity and communication among consumers are responsible causes for their helplessness state in the market economy. The consumer is also totally neglected element in the market though he is responsible for the creation of the economic activity.
The sovereignty of consumer is not a truth, but only a myth. It prevails only in theory rather than in practice. The consequent need to give protection to the consumers from the nefarious activities, exploiters has sprouted up all the world over. This leads to an effective consumer protection movement in the country.

In India consumer himself partly responsible for such state of affairs due to lack of awareness, information and understanding of his rights viz., 1) The right to safety 2) The right to information, 3) The right to choose, 4) The right to be heard, 5) The right redressal and 6) The right to consumer education. As long as the consumers are being ill-informed, they did not get any satisfactory treatment in the market while making purchases. This needs concerted efforts from the side of the consumers in the form of consumer associations to combat against the malpractices prevailing in the market environment.

The consumer movement is a protective measures to safeguard the interest of the consumers from the nefarious activities of the middlemen and the sellers. It aims to protect the right of the consumer against various unfair trade practices indulged in by the producers and the middlemen. It also demands for the fair and reliable information from the manufacturers of goods and services about their relative merits and demerits of the competing product. In this context it would be more appropriate to recall the speech of Mr. T. Thomas, former Chairman of Hindustan Lever Ltd., at Annual General Meeting in 1977, who apathy pointed out that while the producer has the power or the right to design, distribute, advertise and rice the product, the consumer has only on option of not buying it. Though the producer bears greater risk the consumers enjoy several rights since purchasing power and option are with them. However, the often feels that while he has the power of veto, he is not always fully equipped to exercise that power in his best interest. This may be due
to lack of information and too much information which cannot be
digested by him and misleading information from one or several
competing producers. This piquant situation has been responsible in
a large measure for the origin and growth of the concept of
consumerism.

OBSERVATIONS OF THE STUDY

(a) Exploitation of Consumers in India

The list of instances and kinds of exploitation through
malpractices adopted by businessmen is a very long list. We may
mention some of these to indicate the gravity of consumer
exploitation so as to prove the dire need of consumer protection
and education.

(b) Adulteration

Adulteration is the outcome of the shortage economy,
spices are liberally mixed with a large content of brown powder,
yellow mud, sand, jute fibre and saw dust. Adulteration of water in
the milk to the extent 50 percent is very common. Same is the
case with milk products such as ghee, butter, ice cream etc., leaves
and tree banks are sold as tea. It is very difficult to get pure honey
in the market mixing of diesel or mineral oil in edible oil was
reported in Calcutta when a large number of people because victim
of paralysis. Similar is the case of Khesari dal sold as tur dal or
mixed with tur dal. The ill effect of spurious drugs and glucose
was horrible. Even costly fertilizers, pest control Chemicals and
disinfectants have not been spared by these anti-social elements.
They cause a lot of damage and sometimes even result in death.
There are also a lot of spurious doctors around which makes the
situation much worse. Even in Delhi 25 to 30 per cent of edible
items are adulterated with inferior and Non-edible stuff.
2. Warranties and Guarantees

Warranties and guarantees are present in bold print but taken away in fine print. Letters of complaint are often skillfully ignored. Even in case of consumer durables, warranties are either inadequate or defective. More often than not manufacturers fail to honour warrantees and guarantees.

3. Hazardous or unsafe products

There are many products which are hazardous and unsafe to use. The range of such products vary from toys, bicycles, cooking ranges, ovens, television etc. Electric appliances or gas containers which do not conform to safety standards can cause death. Even if the consumer is lucky in escaping death, the performance of appliance is to be substandard and they are also proved to frequent break downs.

4. Underweight

Another way of exploitation of consumers is underweight. Underweight is resorted to in many ways including soaking of vegetable and sugar, using heavy containers and manipulation of seals. Even in the packed articles weights are not correct. Indian consumers spend a rough estimate of Rs. 85,000 crore annually in the domestic market. According to the consumer Guidance society of India consumers in India are cheated to the tune of Rs. 1,600 crore a year through defective weights and measures.

5. Duplicate products

Some cheates are always busy to find out the duplicate products having no merits. In Calcutta duplicate products are very popular. For a consumer, it is extremely difficult to recognize the real product. These products are sold in the rural areas by the businessmen in the lust of heavy profit. But it creates numerous
problems to the consumers.

6. Bogus and misleading advertisements

More often than not, the advertisement are defective more misleading, exaggerated and offensive, health and beauty aids and consumer durables are those products of which tall claims are very common. Price concealment is another drawback of these advertisements. Thus whatever, information is available to the consumer is inaccurate, unreliable, incomplete and unfair.

7. Sales promotional tactics

There are several sales promotional tactics adopted by modern businessmen. Some of the important ones are offering of discount of gifts, reduction sales, economy size, coupons or competitions based on draw etc., such schemes rather mislead than lead the consumer.

8. Service

In contrast to commodities services are abstract. They can not be easily identified as good or bad. It quality changes from customer to customer. The service of hospitals, banks, hotels, transportation and insurance are very poor.

(b) Why consumerism is not powerful

1. Docile and Fear

It is said that a common citizens in India is by and large, a docile person. He takes the problems as Karma and does not complain much. This is largely due to lack of education which has not educated to know their rights which our laws have given. Education should make the people to learn the art of asserting
their rights. We are more bothered about what other people think about us rather than what we think about ourselves or what we think about a problem facing us. A common man always afraid that if he does not succeed in an effort who, no one else, has hitherto undertaken, he will be put to blame. This is the reason why common people refuse to take a lead in solving a social problem for they feel that if something went wrong, they would be held responsible for that, and they may lose face in the society. The often say, “I want to cut a sorry figure before the people.” This fear of blame many a times prevents us even from asking a trader as to why there is a difference between the printed selling rates on an article and the actual price charged by him.

2. Rationalisation

Quite a number of times we justify our weakness. For example,

(1) If municipal water supply is irregular, we would say why not draw water from the well? The well water is good for health and it gives us good exercise.

(2) If a steam of dirty water from the gutter is overflowing into the street, just leap over it. That is a good exercise and reduces the weight.

(3) Rich society also spoils the system. Because of their connections or wealth, they are able to meet their requirements without any trouble and they ignore social responsibility. For example (1) if electricity fails, they install generator set. (2) If water is not available, either they create overhead tank or dig bore-wells (3) If public transport is not available, they use car or two wheelers.

Thus the rich instead of fighting for consumerism, they spoil the system.

There is no end for this type of rationalization
3. **Apathy and Consumers**

The apathy of consumers has slackened the growth of consumerism. For example, it is common to find toothpaste coming out from the wrong end of the tube. Yet, how many consumers take the trouble of returning the tube or writing to the manufacturer? Since toothpaste costs very little, consumers feel that it is too minor to make an issue of.

Complaints regarding delayed delivery of gas cylinders, faulty T.V. Tubes, noisy refrigerators, adulterated petrol, excess billing by water and power bodies, delay in encashment of cheques and demand drafts are a common affair.

When it come to the question of either writing a complaint or following it up with the dealer, most consumers choose the softer option of throwing up their hands in despair.

4. **Increase in Population**

The increase in population has put a tremendous pressure on the production of food articles and other services and public utilities. As a result, supplier of goods do not pay much attention to the quality of goods.

For example:

1. Supply substandard electrical goods which create electric shocks
2. Defective cooking gas cylinder - which leaks
3. Toys with sharp edges - which may cut the finger/skin of the child who plays with it.
4. Misleading advertisement - Tooth paste, Soap powder, glucose, horlicks, etc.
5. Defective Telephones.
6. Issuing of Licences to wrong/enable persons.
5. Lack of Knowledge

Many a time consumers just do not know the legislations that are available in India. For example: vegetable oil should be sold only in kgs. Selling the same in litres is an offence. But it is common that traders sell edible oil in litres. Depending on the type of oil that is sold, the consumer may lose anywhere between 100 to 150 grams for the price he pays per Kg. Of oil if the same is given in liters. Though some people know they are not showing any interest to exercise their rights.

6. Quality marks and expiry dates

Many consumers are not aware that there are things like "quality marks", "expiry dates" etc., Though many may not be able to identify them, yet they do not know that there are things like that which they should look into. Such marks on the products meant to protect the consumer's interest.

(C) What needs to be done

In our country the consumer protection movement has not made much headway, for a variety of reasons. First of all the majority of our population are illiterate and live below the poverty line. Illiteracy, ignorance, and poverty are the chief obstacles to getting knowledge regarding the rights of consumers and the legislative measures guaranteeing them. These millions form a large but weak segment of the population, accustomed to resigning themselves to their lot rather than asserting themselves. They are not used to forming themselves into associations to fight for their legitimate rights. Therefore they have not been able to counter the malpractice of middlemen and producers. The industrialists and middlemen who are far better organized and motivated by the desire to make huge profits -
irrespective of the means, fair or dubious they adopt, and who have plenty of financial and legal resources, have been adepts in finding out loopholes in the consumer protection laws and manipulating the situation successfully to their own advantage. They do not seem to be troubled by any scruples, let alone entertain any common humanitarian or altruistic notions.

The consumer movement in India can be successful only with the active co-operation and co-ordination of businessmen and legal mechanism in the Indian market. Sincerity and honesty of purpose on the part of businessmen, and awareness, understanding, knowledge and education on the part of consumers together would make for a strong consumer protection movement. Such Co-ordination and Co-operation of the businessmen would not only strengthen the consumer movement but also help the businessmen as it builds mutual trust and confidence. Mere enactment of legislation to protect consumers would be of little use without the active and honest cooperation of businessmen. In the long run it is truthfulness, honesty and straightforwardness that brings dividends in all human dealings, including trade and business. There is no substitute to them. Sooner this truism is realized the better for all concerned. The business community, for its part, would do well to regulate voluntarily its practice and aim to doing what is right, just and fair by the consumer, without foregoing its own legitimate advantages. This self-discipline on its part is bound to do good for business community as well as the consumer community. The most important gain is that it promotes mutual trust and confidence.

The legal machinery as it exists in our country at present for the redressal of consumers' grievances, is mostly confined to urban areas. It hardly spreads its wings to rural areas. Even in -
the urban areas where some amount of consumer awareness may be found, it is not effective as it is expected due to some obstacles. What is urgently required is to bring all consumers under the protective umbrella of a well-knit and powerful organization to protect them from being exploited by unscrupulous businessmen and manufacturers. Consumer organizations can serve as deterrents to the malpractices of businessmen. It hardly needs to be pointed that mere forming consumer organizations would not bring salvation to consumers unless they too are actively involved in the activities of the organizations and function as watch dogs of the market scene. If the situation warrants, the consumers should not hesitate even to boycott products in the market which are detrimental to them. The principle of ‘Satyagraha’ is as valid in this field as in politics. Thus it would be always helpful for the consumers to protect themselves through their own organizations instead of totally depending on legislative measures. This realization must dawn on the mind of every consumer of our country.

Despite several measures undertaken by the government of India and consumer organization, the condition of consumers has not proved as much as desired. This is due to low literacy and low income of the majority of people who fail to understand and utilize provisions and facilities offered by the government of India to safeguard their interest. It is imperative not only to increase the literacy and income level of people, but also to educate them in the causes for their present plight, in their legitimate rights and privileges as consumers, and in the course of action to be adopted to translate them into actualities. This is bound to be a long-drawn out process and therefore requires ceaseless, concreted and determined action by all the agencies concerned, voluntary as well as governmental. It is eminently desirable that education institutions, from the middle school -
onwards, take up the task of consumer education. Special attention should be bestowed on educating women in consumer protection, since they are most vulnerable to the tricks of clever and unscrupulous tradesmen. In this regard, the potentialities of such mass media as the radio and television should be fully exploited to real advantage. The consumer organizations themselves have to devise a two-pronged strategy to achieve their objective. While they should keep constant vigil on trickster tradesmen, counter their moves, and make them answerable, they should not hesitate to expose corrupt officials without whose tacit or active support unscrupulous businessmen cannot thrive and exploit consumers. It would seem that the consumer protection movement will have to be a permanent institution, given the vagaries of human nature.

(A) A CHALLENGE FOR CORPORATE HOUSE

Consumerism has grown in India over a period of time as a social phenomenon. It has acquired considerable potential to influence business decision making and public policy formulation. This paper attempts to highlight major indicators of consumerism in India, identifies its causes and outlines the alternative options available to consumers when interface with dissatisfaction. The paper describes and discusses the need for the configuration of an information oriented corporate action program designed to assist corporate management's to convert consumerism to a mutually profitable proposition.

Consumerism has been defined as the organized efforts of consumer seeking redress, restitution, and remedy for dissatisfaction they have accumulated in the acquisition of their standard of living. It is also said to include, a widening range of activities of government, business and independent organization that are designed to protect individuals from practices (of both –

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business and Government) that infringe upon their right as consumers. Over a period of time when these efforts of consumers and other directed at safeguarding consumer interests attain a consistency and/or are institutionalized these efforts may be referred to as consumer movement in a society.

The indicator:

The emergence and existence of consumerism in India is indicated by a number of factors like, e.g. presence of organized consumer group, consumer protection legislation, judicial decisions, and a consumer prone press.

According to a recent study, nearly 187 consumer group exist in India which organize consumers and direct their efforts and energies towards safeguarding consumer interests. Out of these nearly 20 each exist respectively in Delhi and Ahmedabad. In the country among the more visible groups include, such as, consumer education and research centre, Ahmedabad, Consumer Guidance Society, Bombay, and Mahila Dakshta Samiti, Delhi. These groups have been spearheading consumer movement in the country. The number of new area have been slowly but steadily growing.

Consumer protection legislation, too, has been slowly but steadily growing in the country. Both the Parliament and State Legislatures have evinced considerable interest. In the country there exists nearly thirty major laws which provide to consumers means and avenues to seek redressal, restitution, and remedy against exploitation and damage to the legitimate interests of consumers. In order to impart proper thrust to consumerism in India, a major legislation, Consumer Protection Bill, is pending with the Parliament. The bill provides for a comprehensive set of provisions to protect consumer interests and to institutionalize
consumer grievance redressed machinery. The bill envisages, inter-alia, constitution of a Consumer Protection Council, Directorate of consumer protection and a consumer Dispute Redress Forum. The Council would act as the watchdog of consumer interests whereas the Directorate will be a window to receive consumer complaints and ensure effective implementation of various consumer protection laws operating in the country. The forum will settle all consumer disputes other than those dealt with by the Monopolies and restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC).

The quality of judicial in the country also indicates a very sympathetic disposition of judicial Institution towards problems of consumers and their adequate redress. Among these institutions MRTPC has made landmark in the history of consumerism in the country. It has successfully launched a number of investigations, many of them suo moto, against restrictive and unfair trade practices followed by firms in India. During the year 185-86, it has already disposed of nearly 50 cases of unfair trade practices and issued, cause and desist, orders against companies following them, some of which are leading names in the country, in a number of cases it has also issued interim injunctions of as to insulate consumer interests from any further damage till the matter is decided either way.

The press, the fourth estate of democracy, too has been very actively supporting the cause of consumerism by highlighting the exploitative, restrictive and unfair trade practices violate of consumer interests. It has not only been devoting news space to the achievement of the consume movements but also writing very powerful edits in order to underscore the need for consumer protection.
CONSUMERISM: INFORMATION ORIENTED CORPORATE ACTION PROGRAMME

The objective of the information oriented corporate action against is to bring into focus the internal and external environments of the firm through an information communication system. It links and integrates the firms with its markets consumers in such a way that the information revenant to consumer interests flows in and out of the firm on a continuous basis.

The information flowing in may relate to consumer needs and problems, product quality and communication perception, price expectations, and level of satisfaction indicated in terms of complaints, suggestions and appreciation. Whereas information flowing out may relate to produce features and attributes, prices, places and time of product availability and the agencies/means evolved to help consumers solve their consumption problems.

The rational of such an information system is that it keeps of firm in a continuous two way communication with consumers, intermediaries and advertising agencies providing a base for all other corporate actions impugning on consumer interests. It also helps in generating mutual; trust and keeps, each party informed of mutual needs, expectations and problems. The needs for such a system is heightened because paucity of relevant and reliable information is a contributory factor to consumer problems. In a research study it was discovered that the information is one such foremost issue which consumers wanted to be included as a component of consumerism.

A paradigm of the information system that may provide broad quad lines to firms to build up own typical individual systems. It portrays information flows relevant from consumer viewpoint. These may be briefly described as follows:
1. The information relevant from consumer viewpoint flows in direct from consumers or through intermediaries and institutions involved in consumer movement. Likewise information's flows cut of the firm, direct to consumers or through intermediaries, advertising agencies or these institutions. The importance of these institutions lies in the help they provide both to the consumers and the firms in understanding and interpreting each other's requirements and problems through this information.

2. In order to monitor information, a firm may have monitoring points within its internal environment. Information inflows may be received by the marketing research department or Consumer Relations Department (CRD). Information outflows may be transmitted by other components of firm's marketing mix and the CRD.

3. In order to monitor information, a separate Consumer Relations Department (CRD) may be created within the marketing organization of a firm accountable to marketing sales, or marketing research executive depending on the status of the marketing function. The CRD may constantly lay with consumers, intermediaries, advertising agencies and institutions involved in the consumer movement and monitor information considered relevant and important for maintaining consumer relations at a satisfactory level and help consumers solve their consumption problems.

4. CRD may initiate and help marketing executive in co-ordination different marketing functions in such a way that homogenous and goal directed information is transmitted by each component of the marketing mix to consumer which the firm desires him/her to have in order to help him/her maximize satisfaction.

5. In the whole information system the role of intermediaries is very crucial and critical. It is crucial because in a large number of
situations they interact with consumers and represents the firm. It is critical because effective interpretation and implementation of firms policies and strategies largely hinge on the communication ability and willingness of the intermediaries. Unless each firm integrates the operations of its intermediaries with its own operation it will be really difficult to help consumers solve their consumption problems. In India a large number of firms do not know the direction and end use of their product's proceeding link in the distribution channel or to the firm, as the case may be periodic inventory data, consumer reaction-complaints suggestions, problems, and appreciation, governmental action and regulations in respects of the firms offerings. Likewise intermediaries may be required to probed product information to consumers as desired by the firm.

6. The role of advertising agencies, like that of intermediaries, in the whole information system is now very crucial and critical. In the crucial because is a large measure business houses communicate with the forces in the external environment, including consumers, through their advertising agencies only. It is critical because effective interpretation and communication of firms messages largely depend on the quality of understanding developed by advertising agencies i.e. respect of firms policies, strategies, and mission besides its won physical facilities, creative abilities, and access to media. Unless, each firm adequately briefs its advertising agency it will be really to help consumers solve their consumption problems, reduce their cognitive dissonance, and their satisfaction perception. The two way communication should help agencies to better understand consumer reactions and responses to firm's communications.
7. The information feedback received through the information system about consumer expectations and perceptions of product performance and pricing should be assimilated in the product development program and pricing strategies of the firm and necessary responses should be built up.

The Corporate action program suggested here would be effective only when management has positive disposition towards its purpose and need and a long range business vision. It is important because experience suggested that company response to such pressure (Consumerism) has been more in the form of tokenism than affirmative action. The problem appears to be not one of economics or ability to respond but of management attitude.

(C) BUSINESS RESPONSE TO CONSUMERISM

The University rising social conscience which finds expression in movements like consumerism pioneered by Ralph Nadir and John Banzhaf had added a new dimension to business decision making in U.S.A., U.K. and having its echo in other counties of the world. Now consumers have been getting organized so as to offer collective resistance to business's anti customer behavior and to put pressure on business to elevate consumer interest in desired way. Riochard H. Busbirk and James. T. Rathe describes consumerism as the organized efforts of consumer seeking redress, restitution and remedy for dissatisfaction they have accumulated in acquisition of their standard of living. Thus, consumerism can be properly explained as the organized activities and efforts of and/or for consumers designed to give them protection against commercial parties, which infringe upon their right as consumers. Action for safeguarding the consumer's interest is the outstanding characteristic of consumers' organization. Actions taken by –
consumer federations or organizations can be of various forms, e.g. to put pressure on government for passing and enforcing consumer protection laws, to make available authentic consumer information for wise buying decisions, to eliminate unproductive middlemen etc.

President John F Kennedy in his directive to the Consumer Advisory Council given in March, 1962, summed up the right as: (a) right to safety, (b) right to be informed, (c) right to choose, and (d) right to be heard.

Right of Safety means that the products should not cause any physical danger to consumers or put them in difficulty due to sudden failure, and high quality, reliability and performance standard of products should be assured. Right to be informed means that consumers as a matter of right demand the information on the quality, performance, and characteristics of product. They like to know what they are paying for before they would part with their money in exchange for goods. Right to choose implies that monopoly is disliked by consumers who do not want any pressure in making a decision to buy a particular product. They want to buy a product of their free will, and exercise their opinion for choose a particular brand or to decide about the quality. Also in the absence of an adequate quality of supply, consumers feel that there is pressure on them in the matter or deciding about the quantity as well as brand. Thus the right to choose implied a market with ample quality and variety. Right to be heard has even grater importance. Even if consumers have the right to safety, to be informed and to choose but do not enjoy the right to be heard, there would be no real control on other three rights. If a particular right is desired to consumers, there would be right would be defeated. The right to be heard implies the existence of a legal framework.
Suggestions:

To improve consumer protection Act.

The act seems to have been enacted in a great hurry. This is why many significant aspects have not been covered or foreseen. The deficiencies include:

1. Some of the definitions contained in the Act, particularly those of 'consumer' and complaint have been found to be of a restrictive nature. As a result, the redressal forums are constrained to decline relief in many cases.

2. Under section 14(i) of the Act, the district forum has no jurisdiction to award interim relief or to order the offending party to cease production of goods in question or to recall goods certified as defective by an appropriate laboratory.

3. Consumerism confined only to cities and urban areas. The consumer movement in India is active and effective only in the cities and urban areas and has yet to reach the villages and the rural and semi-urban areas where more than three-fourth of the Indians live.

4. Huge amounts belonging to consumer are lying with various Ministries and Corporations. There are various ministries and corporations such as textiles, soft drinks, Indian cotton mills Federation, Life Insurance Corporation of India, Commercial Bank and Indian Railways where unjust enrichment running into crores of rupees belonging to consumers has been lying in the hands either of the respective corporations, industry or the excise or customs department.

5. Inadequacy in the implementation and functioning of the consumer Protection Act causing undue delay in disposal of cases. The three-tire quasi-judicial machinery set up under the Act for speedy redressal of consumer grievances is not working properly resulting in pulling up a thousands of cases at the district, state and national levels. Though the statute clearly –
states the cases should be disposed off within 90 days, it has a rider as far as possible due to which in many cases the first hearing is scheduled nearly four to six months after the filing of the complaint some cases filed with the National commission almost a year ago have not yet come up for hearing.

6. Appointment of unqualified politicians on Districts forums and delay in filling up vacancies in district forums and state commission. It is common practice among the state government to appoint semi-literate underserving members of the political party in power as members of district fora. The vacancies in the consumer forum and state commissions at district and state levels are not filled up in reasonable time. Added to this there are complaints of inordinate delay in the payment of allowances to members of the benches of consumer courts whose working are affected due to inadequate accommodation and understanding.

7. Abuse of the provisions of the Act by filing false and frivolous complaints. In the absence of any fees payable by a person for filing a complaint before a consumer forum and a deterrent penalty against false and frivolous complaints (the existing maximum penalty being Rs.10,000/-) a large number of false and baseless complaints are filed with the consumer courts by a number of unscrupulous persons.

(b) The following measures will help to develop an organised and meaningful consumer movement in the country.

1) Consumer Education

Consumer education is a prerequisite for the success of consumerism. Consumers should be made aware of their right and responsibilities and the utility of consumer movement. Proper consumer education and motivation would help change the stoic –
attitude of the hopeless consumer. Consumers should be convinced that things could be made better if only they have the determination to complain against anomalies and fight for justice.

There is urgent need for both formal and informal consumer education. The formal consumer education should form a part of the school curriculum. Informal education can be imparted to those who are not regular students of the educational institutions. Consumer forums, consumer co-operatives, social service organizations, trade unions, educational institutions, students unions, etc., can play an important role to impart informal education to the consumers to make them conscious of their right and their role in protecting these rights.

2) Consumer Advocates

Because of the relatively unorganized and inarticulate nature of the individual consumer, there arises the indispensable need for the consumer advocate. "The consumer advocate is an organization that acts as a public interest group protecting, educating, and safeguarding the rights of the consumer."

There is need to organize consumer forums throughout the country. People with dedication and courage to take initiative is a prerequisite for the development of consumer forums. Whatever little efforts have been made in this respect in India are confined to urban areas.

The names of two important organizations – the Consumer Education and Research Centre (CERC), Ahmedabad, and the Consumer Guidance Society of India (CGSI), Bombay – which have been doing appreciable work may be mentioned here.

The CERC, established in August 1978, aims at the education of the consumer and the protection of consumer rights. It has urged the government to discontinue false and misleading advertisements, to see that the weights and measures used by –
traders are proper, to improve the quality of consumer items by having stricter quality control measures, etc. It has been dauntlessly attacking the misdeeds and indifference of the State monopolies like the LIC, Indian Airlines, Road Transport Corporations, Electricity Boards, etc. It has been actively involved in dealing with consumer grievances and getting them redressed with the sellers.

To promote consumer consciousness, CERC uses the mass media to enlighten consumers of the ways in which they can be tricked. It publishes two periodicals, the Consumer Confrontation (English) and the Grahak Suraksha (Gujarati). Besides these, there are quite a few publications brought out frequently, on various aspects of consumerism by experts and professionals. The CERC also organizes workshops, seminars, lecturers and class-room training sessions on consumer protection.

The CERC is funded by the Central and State Governments. It also receives some funds from the Ford Foundation of the United States, with the approval of the Central Government.

The Consumer Guidance Society of India, started in April 1966 in Bombay by nine housewives and social workers, now has thousands of members and several branches. It is supported solely by membership subscriptions and grants from public interest groups or charitable trusts. It does not accept commercial donations or advertisements.

The CGSI has been successful in getting thousands of complaints redressed for consumers who failed to get redress on their own. It tests foodstuffs for adulteration and consumer products for safety hazards or sub-standard performance. ISI Certification of food colours demanded by CGSI is now mandatory.

Consumer education is one of the important tasks of the CGSI. Surveys, talks, seminars, exhibitions and demonstrations-
are organised round round the year on food, drugs, weights and measures, quality marks and other subjects for consumer education. CGSI publishes a monthly, namely, Keemat which carries these results, articles on important consumer topics, news and views.

If such active consumer organizations come up in all parts of the country, it will certainly give a boost to consumer protection.

3) Government Support

Government has a great role to play in encouraging consumer movement. Government's role in this respect extends much beyond the provision of the proper legal framework for consumer protection and its effective implementations.

Government should pay due attention to consumer education, both formal and informal. Consumer education should be made a part of the school curriculum. Financial and other support should be provided for imparting informal education by consumer forums and other bodies. Consumer advocates should also be encouraged by providing financial and other support.

Government should ensure that the public sector undertaking set an example in consumer grievance handling. Government have taken a number of measures for consumer protection. These include development of public distribution system and government involvement in several industries and public utilities. However, the performance of the public sector in several sectors is far from satisfactory.

How to Become a Better Buyer?

We have ample literature on advertisement, salesmanship, marketing etc. filled with numerous ways and means for successful setting. Hence, we have professional sellers in the market. However,
we have comparatively limit literature on by buymanship particularly for consumers. Books on purchasing invariably concentrate on industrial purchasing or merchandising useful for industrial buyers and merchants.

Better buymanship substitute rational or intelligent action for emotional consumer action in the market. An alert and informed consumer is his own best friend and needs no consumer advocates or world savers to protect him. The needs no protection from big, a bad business, which is incidentally the producer of largest variety and best quality of good and services in the world.

**Ingredients of Better Buymanship**

1. Be prepared with adequate up-to-date information. Professional purchasing agent is always an informed buyer. One can collect relevant information from consumer magazines, e.g. Keemat, from informative labels and advertisements and from other buying guides.

2. Watch for lures and traps, such as bait and switch advertising, deceptive labels, etc. Bait advertising is used to lure innocent consumers into a store. The low priced advertised item may not be shown on the sales counters and the salesman may urge the consumer to see more expensive item and persuade him to buy it. Buymanship helps the consumer to guard against such deceptive and fraudulent sales methods.

3. Avoid Impulse Buying Average consumer buys on impulse at least on 50% occasions. The sellers exploit the buyers' tendency to purchase impulsively. Consumer should be aware of impulse purchase traps.

4. Watch for sales during certain seasons, buying is profitable. Seasonal purchases can give the consumer nearly 20% savings. In addition to seasonal sales, we have annual sales, special sales, one-day sales, reduction sales and so on.
5. Shopping around before actual buying can save easily 20% of consumer income. It is desirable to have price comparison study of a product in several stores. Consumer who shop around, comparing quantity, quality and price, get definite reduction in their purchase bills.

Suggestions on Consumer Education

By keeping in mind the needs of Indian consumer Anju D Aggarwal had made the following suggestions for consumer education and information.

1. It is hearing to know that the selection Board for IAS Officers has asked questions on the Consumer Protection Act. It is also accordingly suggested that other interview boards, especially in companies both in the public and private sectors, also ask questions on consumerism from the candidates so that persons appearing for the interview are aware of the present state of consumerism in this country.

2. There are six Indian Institutes of Management in this country Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Calcutta, Lucknow, Indore and Guahati. Persons who pass out of these institutions ultimately get employed in companies and should therefore be fully conversant with the consumer Law and Practice applicable here. It should, therefore, be made compulsory for them to obtain pass mark in a paper especially structured on consumer issues.

3. The Government of India and some State Government have set up training institutes – for IAS officers at Mussoorie and for IPS officers at Hyderabad. The officers, being trained in these academies and other similar institutions, should also be made aware of the consumer law and consumer problems as these officers are at times called upon to deal with consumer -
4. To ultimately prepare a person for interview on consumer issues, there should be a compulsory paper on consumerism in the post-graduate classes and an optional paper on the same subject in the graduation course.

5. There are also institutions for specialized knowledge such as the institute of Chartered Accountants at New Delhi, the Institute of Cost and Works Accounts at Calcutta. The candidates passing out of these institutions should have compulsory paper on consumerism in the final examination.

6. The various Chamber of Commerce and trade – the Indian Merchants Chamber, Bombay and other similar institutions in metropolitan towns – should regularly hold seminars and also talks on current consumer issues by leading people in the consumer field to make their members aware of the latest trend in consumerism.

7. Financial institutions such as the ICICI, IDBI, IFCI should also hold seminars and talks on consumer issues so that their officers are aware of the present state of consumerism in India. In fact, these financial institutions should insist on the setting-up of a consumer cell in the assisted companies before a sanctioning loans to them.

8. Important libraries all over India should have a separate section marked ‘Consumerism’ so that reference books and literature on consumer issues are readily available to readers.

9. Finance is a problem for the expansion of consumerism in India. Charitable Institutions should provide funds for the publication of consumer journals and books. Already a charitable institutions in Calcutta has sponsored a consumer rights and education. It is suggested that other charitable institutions should follow suit.
10. There should be at least a fortnightly programme on television and another fortnightly programme on Radio so that consumers are effectively educated on consumer issues that have cropped-up during the previous fortnight.

11. Manufacturing organizations as well as service organizations should invite persons in the consumer field to give them talks on consumerism so that there is awareness in their organizations about consumer issues.

12. Women of this country can play a very important role in promoting consumer problems. Already the Government of India had laid down that there should be a lady member in the district Forum, State Commission and the National Commission set up under the Consumer Protection Act 1986. Women can form a small groups or retired personnel as well as social workers (if possible include MP or MLA of the area) and start redressing the grievances of the particular locality in which they reside. This work can also be performed by the various women organization that already exist. The memory of 'Rajani' is the television serials may be fresh in the minds of many even now.

13. The various bar association (Supreme Court and High Courts) should have a consumer wing to give free legal aid to consumers especially in cases that come up for hearing before the state Commission and the National Commission set-up under the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. The companies, which the parties to the proceedings, are well represented sometimes even by known legal stalwarts. The Law Examination of various Universities should include in its syllabus the consumer Protection Act and cases decided thereunder. In the final law examination, there should be questions on the Act in separate part of a question paper.
14. As the consumer set-up in this country has come as a result of the guidelines formulated by the United Nations, the United Nations should set-up Consumer Welfare Centres in this country on the lines of the offices of the World Health Organisation. These centers will help in initiating interaction on consumer issues with International Consumer Organization. There should also be wider coordination of activities in the consumer field in SAARC countries of which India is a prominent founder-member.