CHAPTER-III
GENESIS AND GROWTH OF CONSUMERISM
ABROAD AND INDIA

Review of previous studies and profile of consumers have been covered in the previous chapter. Before undertaking analysis, it is appropriate to study the genesis and growth of consumerism abroad and also in India. Importance of consumer organisation, constraints in organising consumers and the techniques used by the consumer organisations for protecting consumer interests have all been discussed at length in the present chapter.

The term ‘Consumerism’ identifies the modern consumer movement launched in the mid-1960’s by the concerns triggered indirectly by Rachel Carson and directly by Ralph Nader’s auto safety investigation and by President Kennedy’s efforts to establish the rights of consumers such as the right to safety, to be informed, to choose and to be heard. It is an evolving dynamic movement with an enlarging scope and changing spokesmen and issues. Consumerism is an action-oriented approach, indicating the response of people and organisations to consumer problems and dissatisfaction. Consumerism is concerned with protecting consumers from all organisations with which there is an exchange relationship.

Consumerism – defined:

Some definitions of consumerism are noted below:

Consumerism falls within the most scientific conceptions of contemporary social movements. It can be defined as a diverse and evolving social movement seeking to enhance the economic well-being and political power of consumers. In fact, the terms ‘Consumerism’ and ‘Consumer Movement’ can be used interchangeably. Consumerism denotes a common thread that runs through the consumer activism, characteristic of different times and places. Consumerism has
been a movement in which the trader and the consumer find each other as adversaries.⁵

David Aaker & George Day Aaver, take an environmental view of consumerism as one that is increasingly interwoven with and converging on common issues. According to them “Consumerism encompasses the evolving set of activities of Governments, business, independent organisations, that are designed to protect the rights of consumers. Consumerism is concerned with protecting consumers from all organisations with which there is an exchange relationship.”⁶

Harper W. Boyed Jr. and David E. Allen Jr. observed that consumerism is “the dedication of those activities of both public and private organisations which are designed to protect individuals from practices that impinge upon their rights as consumers.”⁷ As senator Charles Percy observes” Consumer movement is a broad public reaction against bureaucratic neglect and corporate discharge for public.⁸

Peter Drucker offers the following definition of consumerism: “Consumerism means that the consumer looks upon the manufacturer as some one who is interested but who really does not know what the consumers realities are. He regards the manufacturer as somebody who has not made the efforts to find out the world in which the consumer lives and who expects the consumer to be able to make distinction which the consumer is neither willing nor is able to make”.⁹

The market is more technologically sophisticated, more monopolistically organised. The consumer has more to spend: he stakes, very often, a larger sum of money on each consumer transaction. So the consumer often has more to lose in a more difficult economic environment. That is the reason why consumerism is so much more with us to day. Any consumerism obliges us to consider the procedures as well as the substance of the law. Consumerism obliges us to consider aspects of criminal and administrative as well as of ordinary civil law. Consumerism obliges us indeed to consider the adequacy of the legislative process itself”.¹⁰
These definitions bring out that consumerism tries to protect the consumers against abuses of business companies and to get their difficulties redressed while dealing with business.

3.1. NEED FOR CONSUMERISM

Philosophy of consumerism emphasizes on the protection, preservation and enhancement of human life. Consumerism as a social movement energises consumers, creates new responsibilities to producers and buyers, promotes consumer consciousness and educates the consumers about their basic rights in the larger interest of coordinated economic growth. In this task the role of consumerists is vital for the rational utilization of country's resources in order to reshape and regenerate an already-strained economy.

India is a vast country where nearly half of the total population is living below the poverty line and with illiteracy spending half of their income on daily purchases of their livelihood. They could be easily cheated by the business community including in unethical trade practices. Unless a strong consumer movement is organized, the rights of the consumers can not be protected. Hence, there is need for consumer movement.

3.2. SCOPE OF CONSUMERISM

Consumerism emphasizes the direct relationship between the individual consumer and business firm. As consumerism is an evolving concept, there are no accepted lists of various facets of the said relationship.

Protection against clear-cut abuses, provision of adequate information about the products and services and protection of consumers among themselves are the areas providing scope for studying consumer movement. Of late, consumerism is extended even to protection against environmental pollution and against declining quality of physical environment.
Failure to provide adequate information to the consumers about the features of the products is one of the important reasons for the lack of awareness of the consumers about their rights. The two polar positions identified by Bauer and Greyser are the business view that the buyer should be guided by his judgment of the reputation of the manufacturer and the quality of the brand, versus the view of the consumer spokesmen that information should be provided by impartial sources and reveal performance characteristics.

In India consumerism is yet to take birth and become a people's movement. It is correctly said:

India, a great nation whose ancient philosophers once showed the road to salvation, fails to remain unaffected by this trend. 'Development', urbanization are creating a new culture. Consumerism is the order of the day. Consumerism is essentially an attitude towards life and the world. It is nothing but man's pathological obsession with commodities, 'success' and 'achievement'.

3.3. CAUSES OF CONSUMERISM

The concept that the "Consumer is the King" in the market place has been largely discarded and handling him as a pawn is a major driving force of consumer movement. The doctrine of "Caveat Emptor", that is, "Let the buyer beware" is no more accepted by the customers. They put forward the doctrine of "Caveat Venditor", that is, "Let the seller beware" and it has received judicial support in recent times. It is pointed out that the manufacturers and sellers dupe the consumers by committing breach of contract regarding products and services.

The following are some important factors responsible for the enhancement of consumer movement presently in India.
1. Spread of higher education,
2. Increased income in the hands of consumers,
3. Rising prices of goods,
4. Expectation of different products with better quality,
5. Increased product complexity due to large variety of products,
6. Development of new technology,
7. Legislation leading to consumer protection,
8. Exaggerated advertisements about the products,
9. Increasing awareness of various social problems,
10. Social responsibilities of the business,

3.4. CONSUMERISM—IT'S IMPACT ON BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

The late President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, said in a special message to the congress on protection of consumers that they have certain definite basic rights. They are as follows:

The Right to safety—to be protected against the marketing of goods which are hazardous to health or life.

The Right to be informed – to be protected against fraudulent, deceitful or grossly misleading information, advertising, labelling or other practices and to be given the facts he needs to make an informed choice.

The Right to choose – to be assured, wherever possible access to a variety of products and services at competitive prices and in those industries in which competition is not workable and government regulation is substituted, an assurance of satisfactory quality and services at fair prices.
The Right to be heard – to be assured that the consumer interests will receive full and sympathetic consideration in the formulation of government policy and fair and expeditious treatment in its administrative tribunals.

But consumers are unaware of the above rights due to their ignorance and illiteracy and as such Businessmen get used to cheating them. The unorganised and disintegrated consumers are not able to fight against these evils. But, the growing awareness of the rights on the part of the consumers and the consequent formation of many consumer organisations, advisory councils and the consumer dispute redressal agencies coupled with the enunciation of certain legislations by the Government resulted in the change of attitude of businessmen. The impact of consumerism on the business community is evident from this. Consumers should rise up to the occasion and fight for their rights, when they are being denied or deprived of them. This would be possible only when the consumers are aware of their rights, legal remedies and the provisions available to them. Hence, the need for consumer education.

3.5. ATTITUDES OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY TOWARDS CONSUMERISM

Businessmen feel that consumerism is a costly affair and it will ultimately be a costly affair to the consumers. The businessmen will have to abide by the legal requirements which will limit or modify some of their methods for selling their commodities which will amount to less production and less benefits which will ultimately be passed on to the consumers.¹⁵

Dr. Drucker called consumerism, “the shame of marketing.”¹⁶ He wrote that if those in marketing had looked at business from the buyer’s viewpoint instead of the seller’s viewpoint, there would have been no need for the consumer movement to develop.
3.6. ATTITUDES OF THE CONSUMER TOWARDS CONSUMERISM

In the Reagan administration Virginia Knauer, spokesperson for consumer affairs, claimed that consumers are not concerned with consumer rights and issues, but tend to worry about economic issues such as interest rates and purchasing power. In Knauer’s words, “These are the things that turn people on, not labelling or so called consumer issues”.17

The 1982 Harris Poll disagree with Knauer’s view and said that consumers worry about some of the same issues such as unsafe products; after-sales service and repairs; handling of consumer complaints; failure of live upto advertising claims; and misleading labelling. 18

Harris in conclusion said that consumer not only recognise the limits of regulation of business activities, but also expects that the Government has an important role in protecting the consumer. The same attitude could be found even among the Indian consumers.

3.7. CONSUMERISM – ABROAD

a. United States of America : (U.S.A)

The first Consumers’ League was formed in New York city in 1981.19 The chief exponent of consumerism was Ralph Nader. He recruited staff members and organised volunteers to wage a relentless war against consumers exploitations. This contributed to the enactment of a host of consumer legislations. For achieving his goals, Ralph Nader employed several methods including research, lobbying, litigation and media publicity. The book entitled “Test and protest: The influence of Consumer’s Union” throws light on the movement started by him.20
By 1898, local groups also joined the National Consumer League. After Roosevelt was elected president of America in 1904, he urged the enactment of a pure food and drug law and the bill was passed by the Senate in February 1906. Consumers' income rose gradually in 1920's and prices remained relatively stable. Sales of autos, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, radios and photographs were doing brisk business. Consumers were being flooded with advertising. As the decade passed, a vague dissatisfaction grew among the consumers. This found expression in 1927 in "Your Money's Worth," a book by Stuart Chase and F.J. Schlink. Chase and Schlink proposed the formation of a consumer-sponsored organisation to do product testing. The inquiries from the traders of "Your Money's Worth" soon convinced Schlink that the local consumers club organised by him should be expanded. The new organisation formed in the year 1929 was one among the number of new product testing laboratories. Several major departmental stores and trade associations also started testing laboratories.

The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 was badly in need of revision due to a number of court decisions unfavorable to it and due to being out-dated by new technology. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) felt the need for new legislation exhibiting dangerous patent medicines, unsafe cosmetics and adulterated foods. When hearing began on the bill in 1933, the American Home Economics Association and the National Congress of Parents and Teachers were the only groups actively supporting it. In 1936, Ruth De F. Lamb's the American Chamber of Horrors documented the FDA's case in print and gave it wider publicity. Gradually opposition to the Bill by special interests drew more concerned groups into the fight. At the end of the five year fight, 16 National Women's Organisations had become involved. A shocking new tragedy seems to have provided the final impetus for congressional action.

In 1937, a liquid from one of the new sulfa wonder drugs was released in market. Although the drug was safe enough in capsule form, its liquid form, Elixir Sulfanilamide, proved lethal and around 100 died. A new section was quickly added
to the proposed Bill requiring that manufacturers have to prove the safety of new
drugs to the satisfaction of the FDA before placing them on the market. Substantial
changes had occurred in the rest of the Bill in course of five years of hearings and
controversy, the grade-labeling provisions had been dropped and the responsibility
for control of advertising had been given to the Federal Trade Commission. Finally,
in June 1938, a much modified version of the Bill was passed. In order to gauge the
impact of the movement on public opinion, the Advertising Research Foundation
Commissioned a national survey by Dr. George Gallup. In 1940, he found that the
movement had developed its greatest strength among teachers, the higher income
group and the more intelligent and among the young. He concluded that the
movement had made considerable headway and was likely to continue to grow
because of its strength among influential groups. Consumer Unions grew from
50,000 in 1944 to almost, 5 lakhs in 1950. There was, however, little activity among
the grass-roots consumer organisations.

The Federal Trade Commission especially after 1958, adopted a more active
policy of controlling false advertisements in food, drugs, cosmetics and curative and
collective devices. John F. Kennedy, in March 1962, said, "The basic rights of
consumer must be protected", while addressing the U.S. Congress he specially
mentioned the necessity of having a strong consumer movement. He enunciated the
new famous consumer Bill of Rights, namely, the right to safety, the right to be
informed, the right to choose, and the right to be heard. Thereafter, the emergence of
Ralph Nader on the American horizon gave further momentum for consumer
consciousness and pushing forward important consumer legislation in U.S. About the
same time the need for consumer education was recognised.

In 1961, Consumer Union increasingly came to view itself as an organisation
and spent a significant portion of the budget in promote consumer education rather
than simply as a product testing agency. In January 1964, President Johnson
appointed Esther Peterson as a Special Assistant for Consumer Affairs. In 1965,
hearings on tire and auto-safety revealed the lack of any deep concern over safety
problems in either industry. This view was challenged a few months later when Ralph Nader’s in his book entitled “Unsafe At Any Speed” presented evidence of the role of faulty engineering, construction and design in auto-accidents and injuries. As a result in March 1966 President Johnson passed Highway Safety Act of 1966. In late 1966, Senator Philip Hart’s “Truth-in-Packaging” Bill was passed and signed into law. In 1968, the President called for passage of along list of consumer bills such as Truth-in-Lending and other new legislation on poultry inspection, pipeline safety, fraudulent land sales, hazardous appliance radiation and so on. Finally, Federal Trade Commission Improvement Act, 1975 was probably the legislative high water mark of the current era of consumer protection.

It was President Carter who took the initiative of nominating two important bodies. Federal Trade Commission and Consumer Product Safety Commission, Persons from consumer and public interest movements. Despite set-backs, of late, consumer movement is alive and kicking and is ever eager to mobilise its resources to fight out erosion of consumer rights.

b. Great Britain

The Common Law, relating to Consumer Protection in England and the European Countries was initially based on the concept of ‘product liability’. The classic case of Donoghue vs Stevenson has given rise to the law of negligence relating to consumers. This case was concerned with the nature of the duty owed by the manufacturer to the ultimate consumer of his products. Lord Atkin, while explaining the nature of this duty, observed: “A manufacturer of products which he sells in such a form as to show that he intends them to reach the ultimate consumer in the form in which the left him with no reasonable possibility of intermediate examination, and with the knowledge that the absence of reasonable care in the preparation or putting up of the products will result in an injury to the consumer’s life or property, owes a duty to the consumer to take reasonable care”.
Thus where the consumer has suffered any loss or injury by a manufacturer's products, the manufacturer was held liable if negligence could be proved against him. The principle laid down in 'Donoghue Vs. Stevenson' was made applicable also to the suppliers, distributors, retailers packagers, bottlers and repairers over a period of time.

By the end of 19th century, the warranty of merchantability had been developed and incorporated as exception to the Caveat Emptor rule in the Sale of Goods Act, 1893. Slowly and gradually the doctrine of 'Caveat Emptor' took the back seat, with the advent of more and more legislations like the Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1956 and the Weights and Measures Act, 1963, 1976 and 1979. As regards the regulation and control of monopolies in the United Kingdom was concerned, the Monopolies and Restrictive Practices (Inquiry and control) Act of 1948 was the first law to cover that area. A commission called "Monopoly and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission was set up under the Act and was renamed as the Monopolies Commission in 1956. This particular body has been vested with the power to investigate the 'Mergers also under another statute called the Monopolies and Mergers Act, 1965. These legislations have been consolidated by the Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1976.

With a view to ensuring fair trading, the Fair Trading Act, 1973 was enacted. The Director General of Fair Trading has been vested with many powers including the power to look into violation of resale price maintenance and laid-down instructions or quantities or description of goods etc.

Apart from the above mentioned legislations there are quite a good number of other legislations in United Kingdom that protect the consumers. They include the Competition Act, 1980, the Consumer Safety Act, 1978, the Food and Drugs Act, 1955, the Prices Act, 1974 and the Unfair Contract Terms Act, 1977. This list is only illustrative in nature.
The Consumer Credit Act, 1974 deserves special mention as it from the modern law on consumer credit. In Britain too, enormous amount of sales take place on credit. With the availability of credit facilities, the consumers could change their living styles by acquiring various consumer goods. However, to prevent the exploitation of consumers, availing credit facility, by unscrupulous traders, various legislations like the Hire Purchase Act, 1938, the Supply of Goods( Implied Terms) Act, 1973 and Sale of Goods Act, 1979 have been passed. The Consumer Credit Act of 1974 provides many safeguards to the consumers like the right to information of cash price. All proprietors of Consumer Credit or Hire Purchase business are required to obtain licenses from the Director General of Fair Trading, after satisfying the authority that they have good credentials.

At present, the Consumer Protection Act, 1987 is the primary legislation dealing with Consumer Protection in United Kingdom. It is a comprehensive legislation containing 35 sections. It contains provisions with respect to the liability of persons for damages caused by defective goods and consumer safety. This Act is consolidated with amendments, such as the Consumer Safety Act, 1978, the Consumer Safety (Amendment) Act, 1986. It also makes provisions with respect to the giving of misleading price indications, laying safety requirements, power to obtain information and other allied matters. 23

C. Consumerism in India

The consumerism which is now familiar all over the world is not a new one. As early as 1750 B.C the Mesopotamians had laws on money lending, weights and measures and prices. In Koutilya’s ‘Arthrasatra’ a mention was made about the existence of superintendents in case of sales of government products. Narada and Brihaspati laid on various laws to safe guard the interests of buyers and sellers. 24 Thus, it is clear that even during early civilisation, legislations existed to protect the interest of consumers. The development of consumerism in India can be classified into three stages, namely.
1. **Pre-Independence**

   Days:
   Before independence for India, no legislation was there in India to protect the Indian consumers. But, rise in sale of goods and the problems resulted in disputes between the seller and buyer and the Indian Contract Act, 1872, was amended and the Sale of Goods Act, was passed in 1930 to provide some safeguards to the seller and much protection to the buyer. In 1934, Mahatma Gandhi and Adam Smith clearly supported the need and protection of the Indian Consumer. As a result, the Agricultural Produce Grading and Marketing Act, 1937 was passed and in 1940, the Drugs Act, 1940 was enacted to regulate the irresponsible behaviour of the seller. But, nothing substantial was done for educating the consumer or for redressal of his grievances. Thus, the development was neither satisfactory nor was it up to the expectations of the Indian Consumers.

2. **Post-Independence Days**: The first Consumer organisation in India was established in the year 1949 by R.R. Dalavai in Madras, under the auspices of Shri Rajagopalachari. Since then, consumerism in India started taking shape with a few mass membership organisations. After the constitution of India came into force it provided some safeguards for the benefit of its citizens under various Articles. The Indian legislature, has enacted several legislations which are given in Appendix. These Acts indirectly provided protection to the Indian consumers and brought Indian consumerism to a new orientation which was supported by a majority of the courts.

   Some Voluntary Consumer organisations came into existence and substantially influenced consumerism in India. The Consumers Education and Research Centre, Ahmedabad, (1978) is the most popular voluntary organisation. It has successfully filed and prosecuted many cases for the protection of consumer interest.
Inspite of the above legislative, judicial, administrative and organisational help, consumerism in India suffered from some shortcomings they sabotaged the desired goal of consumerism. The facts of the heterogeneity of the consumer groups over lapping role of the individual members, illiteracy, apathetic attitude of the consumer, lack of consumer awakening, information gap, performance gap, different views of the market place, the poverty, the complexity of goods, altered the pattern of communication, fundamental innovation, problems of developments, inactive consumer involvement, solidarity of consumer, and the defective redressal machinery for consumer, created hindrances in the path of success of consumerism on its way to reach its desired goal.

3. After 1980's: After 1980's the development of consumerism in India is remarkable and more or less equal to that of the advanced countries such as the U.S.A. the U.K., etc. The Indian legislature passed a few important social legislations, during this period, which are also included in the concerned appendix. Out of these enactments, the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, is one of the best pieces of social legislation, designed to achieve the welfare of the Indian Consumers. Besides, states have also made certain rules to implement the objectives of this Act. The provision of speedier redressal, free of cost through the Consumer Dispute Redressal Agencies (CDRAs) such as the District Forum, the State Commission and the National Commission, is one of the special features of this Act.

When there were no voluntary organisations in the first stage of development, between twenty and thirty in the second stage, it has reached to 549 at present. So, now large numbers of these organisations show the awakening among the consumers in India. Of late, Consumer Organisations are permitted in file a suit in the consumer court on behalf of the affected consumers and this is a relaxation in the principle of locus standi as it existed before.
In the Pursuit of globalization, India has responded by opening up its economy, removing controls and resorting to liberalisation. The natural corollary of this is that the Indian market should be geared to face competition from within the country under outside The Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969 has become obsolete in certain respects in the light of international economic developments relating more particularly to competition laws and there is a need to shift our focus from curbing monopolies to promoting competition.

Objectives :-

1. The Competition Act, 2002 seeks to ensure fair competition in India by prohibiting trade practices.
2. The Bill also aims at curbing negative aspects of competition through the medium of CCI. CCI will have a Principal Bench and Additional Benches and will also have one or more Mergers Benches.
3. The Bill also provides for investigation by the Director General for the Commission. The Director General would be able to act only if so directed by the Commission but will not have any suo motu Powers for initiating investigations.
4. The Bill Confers power upon the CCI to levy penalty for contravention of its orders, failure to comply with its directions, making of false Statements or omission to furnish material information, etc.

3.8 IMPORTANCE OF CONSUMER ORGANISATION

Throughout the world, the producer and the manufacturer have powerful organisations to secure their interest. In the absence of adequate co-operation from the consumers against the unscrupulous businessman, not a Single Act to protect the consumer, could be implemented effectively. So, the consumers must invite and form an association to protect their interests. The involvement of voluntary organisation to create public awareness by holding seminars, exhibitions and media publicity and
thus to educate consumer has become absolutely necessary under these circumstances. Realising the importance of such organisations, to-day Government itself made call for consumer movement. But, they are still not sufficiently organised and functioning due to certain constraints given below.

3.9 CONSTRAINTS IN ORGANISING CONSUMERS

The heterogeneity of the consumer group with various socio-economic and cultural back grounds, demographic and geographical dispersion of individual consumers having wide varieties, needs, attitudes and social status acts as a constraint to form consumer organisations.

Multiple overlapping roles of individual consumers (for example labour in an organisation is playing a role of consumer in the society) with diverse interest and attitudes are often contradictory and conflicting with each other. This is another constraint in the formation of consumer organisation.

Under present condition of scarcity of goods, individual consumers are more interested to protect self interest, even by paying higher prices, for short and immediate benefits ignoring the long range common interest. The protection of self interest over common interest always lays constraints on the organisation of consumer.

The major bottleneck in the growth of consumer organisation and consumer movement in India is also the mental attitude and apathy on the part of consumer himself. He is not willing to fight for his rights himself due to his negligent attitudes to which he terms on ‘lack of time’. This tendency of negligency and non-co-operation greatly constraints the organisation of consumer.

Lack of Governmental support, mass-illiteracy and grave poverty of the consumers of India in one way or other affect the organisation of consumer. Lack of
consumer awakening, the information gap, the performance gap, different view of the market place, the poverty, the complexity of goods, altered pattern of communication, fundamental innovation, problems of development, inactive consumer involvement and solidarity of consumer are some of the other constraints in organising consumers.

3.10 TECHNIQUES USED BY CONSUMER ORGANISATIONS

a. Education: Consumer Education is being imparted by consumer organisations about their rights, responsibilities of the consumers and the laws so as to make them protect their interest. Consumer organisations can give timely and well-written press releases to provide information to the public about their activities. Articles and features dealing with consumer issues and problems can be written and published in newspapers and magazines. Like this, consumer organisation should make use of the different media effectively so as to educate and create awareness in the minds of the consumers and the techniques to be adopted in protecting their rights and interests.

b. Research: It is an important technique in the hands of Consumer organisations which gives priority to the different issues of consumers relating to safety, quality, durability, price and so on of goods or services. The findings of the research are being published by the consumer organisations so as to increase the awareness of the consumers in protecting their interests.

c. Education of Members of Parliament: Making the parliament aware of consumer problems through unstarred questions by MP’s, sending memoranda signed by a large number of people, may even help in the passing of laws in the interests of the consumers.

d. Complaints: Consumer organisations play a vital role in getting redressal for the complaints sent to them by individual consumers. They used to fight on behalf of the affected consumers and try to solve their problems.
e. **Litigation**: In case of failure to redress the grievances of the consumers through negotiation, they will even go to the extent of taking up the issues to the consumer court on behalf of the consumers and fight for the consumer rights through legal remedy at free of cost.

Having studied the genesis and growth of consumerism abroad and also in India, an analysis with regard to the extent of awareness of consumers about their rights are made in the succeeding chapter.
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