Consumer Rights Awareness (CRA) is directed to make the consumer aware of their rights and to establish high level ethical conduct for those engaged in production and distribution of goods and services. High prices, duplicate articles, underweight and under measurements, rough behavior, undue conditions, artificial scarcity are some of the ways by which consumers are exploited by manufacturers and traders. Limited information, limited supplies and low literacy are factors causing exploitation of consumers. The consumers have to be aware not only of the commercial aspects of sale and purchase of goods, but also of the health and security aspects. Food safety has become an important element of consumer rights awareness and depends not only on its nutritional value, but also on its safety for human consumption.

Modern business and company has a great social responsibility towards the well being of society. Therefore consumer is an important component of society. Consumer occupies a supreme position in a free economy and the welfare of the consumer lies in the fulfillment of his normal and legitimate expectation with regards to the goods and services.

The need for empowerment of consumers as a class cannot be over emphasized and is already well recognized all over the world. The advancement of technology and advent of sophisticated gadgets in the market and aggressive marketing strategies in the era of globalization have not only thrown open a wide choice for the consumer, but all the same also rendered the consumer vulnerable to a plethora of problems concomitant to such rapid changes. There is an urgent and increasing necessity to educate and motivate the consumer to be wary of the quality of the products, and also the possible deficiencies in the services of the growing sector of public utilities. In short, the consumer should be empowered with respect to his rights as a consumer. He should be equipped to be vigilant with a discerning eye so as to be able to protect himself from any wrongful act on the part of the trader. In order to be able to position the consumer in such a state, there is every need not only to evolve legal remedies but also provide reliable and exhaustive information, which he can access without much effort and expense. Recognizing the importance of the problem, the Government of India and State Government have initiated steps to introduce dispute redressal mechanism by way of Consumer Protection Act, but a lot more has to be done in the area of creating awareness on the part of the consumer to facilitate his seeking suitable remedy wherever there is a need. This becomes more important in the rural areas, where there is wide spread illiteracy.

Consumer rights awareness is most vital to society and a way to eliminate malpractices by the manufacturers, producers, and marketers. The heartening part of present day consumer courts to
uphold the grievances, agony and strive for a transparent method of essential commodities, services reaches the consumers and keep the service providers as well as manufacturers, marketers at bay. Corruptions at all stages let those traders to go scot free and unpunished. Hence the need of the consumer rights awareness and legal remedies through consumer courts to help the society’s welfare is much needed today as we pay for the products from our hard earned money and we should get its worth. We have been all along mute spectators to those malpractices, fraudulence trade practices so for and it is time to time this evil which spoils the society. The present day techniques by many firms to mislead the customers by reduction of weight, quality, price differences, worthless services, lack of after sales service by ignoring customer’s complaints, requests, and lethargic high handedness of monopoly practices. It is our fundamental right to know about the safety, durability, worthiness of any product we buy. There are many instances we insist for bills, records, warrantee cards and many times they ignore and it leads to black money transactions, malpractices and what not. Every product has to be displayed with date of manufacturing, weight measurements, Maximum Retail Price (M.R.P.) and warnings of its misuse. Although there are number of laws introduced and still the traders find it easy to dodge and ultimately we are the sufferers. Right from the beginning we have been cheated by wrong information, higher pricing, after sales service. With regard to service providers, they take advantage of our urgency and exploit us. The recent methods to reduce the weight and maintaining its price by biscuit manufactures, cases of cement bags sold with lesser contents, the medical services by those corporate & private hospitals, exorbitant tuition fees, capitations fees by educational institutions and do we have any say on their terms. Parking lot woes are another area of disturbing for every motorist; do they charge a uniform rate. Every day we are deprived of our mental peace and forced to tensions due to unfair practices by the trade & services as well as losing our valuable funds in turn. Purchase of consumer goods and essential commodities always bring us bitter experiences and regret. This has to be changed. Monopolies and Restricted Practices Act, 1969 is yet to serve us our goals and needs. The reason is that we are afraid and do not take it seriously to redress our grievances due to lack of knowledge about consumer forums, delays in claims and our well known Indian willingness to keep quiet and not to complain. Many countries have been able to redress the customer's complaints and the awareness through constant consumer educations.

Most of the times manufacturers form a syndicate and fix up the prices irrespective of quality and durability and we stand to lose our money in the long run. The more we are alert and conscious about selecting the goods before purchasing and knowing about their service options
thereby we stand to gain in the long run. We do believe that how “FREE” a country is as much a function of consumer rights, as it is of free and fair elections. With a billion consumers, India is one of the biggest consumer markets in the world, but has consumer protection kept pace with the burgeoning markets? For a consumer, life has only become tougher as services have increased and as technology has made rapid strides. It is a treacherous path we have to walk on and every development warrants a serious debate by consumers, who must fight on many fronts to go parallel with government action, to keep checks on the industry, to address environmental concerns, and to protect their own rights in the bargain.

Even though strong and clear laws exist in India to protect consumer rights, the actual plight of Indian consumers could be declared as completely dismal. Very few consumers are aware of their rights or understand their basic consumer rights. Of the several laws that have been enacted to protect the rights of consumers in India, the most significant is the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. Under this law, everyone, including individuals, a Hindu undivided family, a firm, and a company, can exercise their consumer rights for the goods and services purchased by them. It is important that, as consumers, we know at least our basic rights and about the courts and procedures that deal with the infringement of our rights.

The rights of consumers such as:

The right to be protected from all types of hazardous goods and services, the right to be fully informed about the performance and quality of all goods and services, the right to free choice of goods and services, the right to be heard in all decision-making processes related to consumer interests, right to seek redressal, whenever consumer rights have been infringed and right to complete consumer education.

The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 and various other laws like the Standard of Weight and Measure Act, 1976 have been formulated to ensure fair competition in the market place and free flow of true information from the providers of goods and services to those who consume them. However, the success of these laws would depend upon the vigilance of consumers about their rights, as well as their responsibilities. In fact, the level of consumer protection in a country is considered as the correct indicator of the extent of progress of the nation.

The rational frame of intellect towards this direction is a micro level study that reveals the real status of CRA and consumer protection in India at large. A detailed survey was made with respect to the districts of Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur to give an ever present glimpse of
consumer interests and protection. The majority of the consumers in rural areas of Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur districts do not know their rights relating to consumer protection. In urban areas, the level of CRA is high with the comparison of rural areas especially with respect of both the districts but due to the reluctant behaviour of consumers, the implementation of these rights are very low. The level of CRA differed from village to village in rural areas. Almost the same situation lies within the urban center.

**General Consumer Awareness**

Consumers become aware of their rights through television, radio, newspapers and other sources. A majority of the rural and urban consumers opined that the television was the principal media through which they come to know about their rights. The highest 34 percent of the consumers received the information from news papers in the urban area of Muzaffarnagar district. The lowest 10 percent of the consumer got the information from the other sources in rural area of Saharanpur district. About the role and achievement of the government to spread CRA majority of the consumer under these areas believed that the government has failed to spread the CRA. Nearly 37 percent people were not able to give the answer in rural area of Muzaffarnagar district. Nearly 30 percent of the respondent replied in rural area of Saharanpur district that the government has succeeded to spread the CRA.

A majority of the urban consumers were aware of the MRP and they compared the actual rate paid with MRP. As far as rural consumers are concerned some of them were aware of MRP, only few of them compared the price paid with MRP. A majority of the urban and rural consumers were aware of ISI and AGMARK. In comparison to the rural consumers, most of the urban consumers preferred ISI and AGMARK product. They believe, it is a guaranty of good quality and fair price. A majority of the consumers opined that the Mark and Certification are always a guaranty of good quality. About 38 percent of the respondent in urban area of Muzaffarnagar considered that the Mark and Certification is always a guaranty of all the three i.e. good quality, fair price and measurement. The majority of the consumers in both urban and rural areas purchased adulterated goods and spurious services and they had complained to their sellers only. They do not prefer to go consumer court. Majority of the people in these areas ignore if they found any adulteration in food stuff. People generally believe that it was their fate. They do not want to involve in any legal hassle because they think it is a time and money consuming and they will not get any return from the court.
Consumer Education

Consumer education is one of these rights of consumer which is provided in United Nations guidelines as well as in CPA itself. The majority of the people in these areas opined that certainly the consumer education is helpful to prevent him from any kind of exploitation. Some of the respondents considered that the consumer education is helpful to the consumer but to some extent. Nearly 10 percent of the respondents in rural area of Muzaffarnagar believed that it never help the consumer against the exploitation. The study proved that the consumers in these areas know the importance of the consumer education.

Theoretically, consumer has been regarded as the king and it is said that the consumption is the sole end and the purpose of all production, and the interest of all the producers ought to be attended only so far as it may be necessary for promoting the interests of all the consumers. About the question concerning consumer empowerment, the reaction of the people was mixed, majority in these areas believed that the consumers are empowered in modern days to some extent. Some of them consider that consumers are partially empowered. Only the highest, nearly 28 percent respondent in urban area of Muzaffarnagar that the consumers are fully empowered. Although the government as well as NGO are trying their level best to promote and protect the interest of the consumer but it is far away from the ground reality that the consumers are cheated regularly by the seller or producer.

The very less number of the consumer in both urban and rural areas of Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur are fully aware of the Consumer Protection Act. It is interesting to note here that more than 80 percent of rural consumers had never heard of this Act. The people generally do not want to involve in any legal hassle, those went to consumer court, their experiences were also not encouraging because the time limit prescribe by CPA in which the consumer disputes should be disposed of by the consumer court, but the decision comes in two to three years on an average in these forums. The reason for this apathy that the majority of the respondents answered is due to irresponsible behavior of lawyers, some of them replied that the problem is due to the pendency of large number of cases, it is also revealed that the problem is also due to the reluctant behavior of consumer courts and its irregular sitting. A majority of both rural and urban consumers reported that illiteracy and failure to implement CPA were the main causes for lack of an effective consumer movement. A large number of consumers stated that lack of awareness, and misleading advertisements were the main problems of consumers.
Functioning of Consumer Helpline

Regarding the functioning of consumer helpline and toll/free numbers, the result was surprising because majority of the respondents were not knowing about the consumer helpline and toll /free number and those who were knowing about this facility, majority of them never take advice from this helpline, some of them believed that it is only for name .Only the highest 14 percent of respondents replied that they always take advice from the consumer helpline in the urban areas of Saharanpur district.

Functioning of Consumer Forum

Majority of the consumers opined that it redressed their grievances and offered compensation. It was identified that the main basis for disposal of cases were original portion number, petitioner and opposite party .The major reasons for the dismissal of cases by the consumer forums were of the absence of petitioner, opposite party, endorsement made and settled out of the forums and irrelevant cases. The background of the complainants reflect their attitudes in approaching consumer forums for legal decision .A few cases in which judgments were in favor of the consumers had been analyzed. A study of the consumers beneficiaries showed that majority of the respondent were widows in insurance cases, electricity cases the majority of complainants were the farmers.

It is identified in the study that in the rarest of the rare cases the decision come within the time frame which is prescribe by the CPA i.e. 90 days and 150 days if the testing is required. The analysis indicated that consumers in general, did not complain because of the lack of awareness and lack of time and those who were found ‘always’ taking action on finding fault with the use of day- to- day products, majority of them were male, as against of female .On the other hand, those who ‘never’ took action, majority were from business class in urban areas and mostly laborer and farmer class in rural areas, as they found any action taken was not worth the time and effort, as the loss suffered was not much.

The sex and marital status of the consumers have the association with the awareness. The age, educational qualifications, occupation, size of family and income of the consumers influenced their awareness. The production and distribution systems have become larger and more complicated today. The high level of sophistication achieved by the providers of goods and services in their selling and marketing practices and various types of promotional activities like advertising resulted in an increased need for higher consumer awareness and protection. In India,
the government has realized the plight of Indian consumers and the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution has established the Department of Consumer Affairs as the nodal organization for the protection of consumer rights, redressal of all consumer grievances and promotion of standards governing goods and services offered in India. A complaint for infringement of consumer rights could be made under the following circumstances in the nearest designated consumer court: 1) The goods or services bought by a person or agreed to be bought by a person suffer from one or more deficiencies or defects in any respect. 2) A trader or a service provider resorting to restrictive or unfair trade practices. 3) A trader or a service provider charging a price in excess of the price displayed on the goods or the price that had been agreed upon between the parties or the price that had been stipulated under any law in force. 4) Goods or services that pose a hazard to the safety and life of a person offered for sale, knowingly or unknowingly, causing injury to health, safety or life.

**Behaviour of the Consumers**

An average Indian consumer is noted for his patience and tolerance. Perhaps because of these two traditional traits and due to the influence of the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Bhagavad Gita, he considers the receipt of defective goods and services as an act of fate or unfavorable planetary position in his horoscope. When a new television or refrigerator purchased by him turns out to be defective from day one, he takes it reticently, blaming it on his fate or as the consequence of the wrongs committed by him in his previous birth. Very often he is exploited, put to avoidable inconveniences and suffers financial loss. It is rather paradoxical that the customer is advertised as the "king" by the seller and service provider, but in actual practice treated as a slave or servant. Goods are purchased by him along with the label "Items once sold by us will never be received back under any circumstances whatsoever."

This unethical, illegal and unilateral declaration has to be viewed in the light of the practice in developed countries where the seller declares, "In case you are not fully satisfied with our product, you can bring the same to us within a month for either replacement or return of your money." This will clearly indicate the level of consumer consciousness. However, things are changing slowly but steadily and the momentum has increased considerably since the establishment of consumer courts and due to the efforts of a number of consumer organisations and the media. The next millennium will witness a high degree of consumer rights awareness and the concepts of "comparative costs", "consumer preference/ resistance/ abstinence" and "consumer choice" will become vital aspects of the economy.
An analysis of the data from the consumer courts in different States shows that there is a direct relationship between literacy and consumer awareness. Statistics relating to Kerala and Bihar will justify this. The question to be considered is what can the Government do to improve the position?

**Citizen Charter**

The Government wears three hats to deal with cases of three different categories. The first one is dealing with the ministries and departments of government. Recently, the Standing Committee of Parliament on Health said Government hospitals should be brought under the purview of the Consumer Court. To this, we had pointed out the latest ruling of the Supreme Court which lays down that the *Consumer Protection Act* will apply only when the consumer pays for the goods and services and on this count the government hospital, where the services are not charged on the consumer, will not come under the Act. For such cases the government has developed the concept of "Citizen's Charter". All government departments dealing with the public are to publish a "Citizen's Charter" clearly indicating the services offered and the procedure to be followed. All the information has to be made available in a single window. This programme is in its incipient stage and has a long way to go to achieve the desired levels of consumer satisfaction. The general reaction of the consumer to this is what happens if what is stated in the Citizen Charter is not adhered to? Unless and until this is clarified, the responsibility fixed and those held accountable are dealt with, the purpose will not be achieved.

**Services and Utilities**

The second area is where the services/and utilities are provided and charged either by the government department or the agencies under its control. At present, a number of regulatory authorities have been constituted and the country is entering a new regime of "regulatory economies" in the services sector. It is heartening to note that the regulatory bodies like the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) have given importance to the interests of consumers and this has been publicly declared as one of the main objectives. In the field of telecom, power, transport and water supply, the consumers today are going through a number of problems not knowing how to get their grievances redressed. The numbers of cases relating to these sectors are increasing in the consumer courts. It must be possible for the government to take steps to see that the areas of grievances are identified and remedial steps taken through proper systematisation of procedure and working style.
There are a number of areas where the procedure has to be made simple and consumer-friendly. For example, when it was felt that the quality of bottled water purchased by the consumer has to be ensured by fixing standards, it came out that even though it is necessary and desirable, under the existing laws it cannot be done. The Ministry of Law pointed out and rightly so, that water is not "food" as per the provisions in the *Food Adulteration Act*. The process of getting statutory notification in the interest of the consumer in this case, where all concerned are agreeable, is likely to take 12 to 18 months. In such a situation the only answer is to prevail upon the manufacturers to go for voluntary ISI (Indian Standards Institution) certification. This method is working in the case of bottled water, thanks to the cooperation of producers and the clear preference expressed by the active consumer groups.

Similarly in the area of "investor protection" in spite of several steps taken by the regulatory authorities such as the Reserve Bank of India and the Securities and Exchange Board of India, the case of exploitation of consumers is increasing. This is an area of grave concern and requires concerted action by the regulators, government and the consumer organizations. We must find a way out to save the consumers from the unscrupulous functioning of Non-banking finance companies.

**Consumers and Private Sector**

The third category is the protection of consumers from the private sector dealing with goods and services. It is not to be construed that the entire business sector is keen on exploiting the consumers. These are established business firms which really care for consumer satisfaction, their own reputation and goodwill. Voluntary bodies like the Fair Business Practices Forum are functioning effectively and are quick in removing the grievances of the consumers. These can go a long way in reducing the number of cases in the consumer courts.

If the Government is to take a pro-active role in increasing consumer rights awareness, encouraging consumer education, training and research and administering the infrastructural need of the consumer courts - then it should have enough funds. It is not easy to get adequate budget allocations for obvious reasons. The best way appears to be to work out methods by which the Central Consumer Welfare Fund is augmented and a similar fund is set up at State level also. It is gratifying to note that action has been initiated in this direction and there is every reason to hope that the future will be better.
The success of "consumerism" is a strong function of CRA and depends on the assistance the movement gets from the government and four basic consumer rights (choice, information, safety and the right to be heard). The survey of the two districts of Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur has revealed that a number of consumers in the urban as well as rural areas are not very much aware of the CRA. It is in this context that it is considered relevant to quote the objectives adopted by the General Assembly of United Nations in 1985.

The U.N. guidelines for consumer protection are meant to achieve the following objectives:

- To assist countries in achieving or maintaining adequate protection for their population as consumers,
- To facilitate production and distribution patterns responsive to the needs and desires of consumers,
- To encourage high levels of ethical conduct for those engaged in the production and distribution of goods and services to consumers,
- To assist countries in curbing abusive business practices by all enterprises at the national and international levels which adversely affect consumers,
- To facilitate the development of independent consumer groups,
- To further international cooperation in the field of consumer protection,
- To encourage the development of market conditions which provide consumers with greater choice at lower prices.

It is interesting to note that in spite of U.N. recognition, encouragement from the developed countries and the pro-active role played by the Government, the consumer in India still does not get his due. It is time that he wakes up and realizes his rights. It will be useful if voluntary consumer organizations take up this role and make way for the realization of the objectives of the U.N. guidelines and the *Consumer Protection Act*.

In the next millennium, every consumer in his own interest has to realize his role and importance in the right perspective. Each citizen in a democracy derives his power at the time of elections and exercises it through the ballot. In a competitive economic environment the consumer has to exercise his choice either in favor of or against the goods and services. His choice is going to be vital and final. He should realize his importance and prepare himself to exercise his rights with responsibility. After all the dictum in democracy is, the citizens get a government they deserve. Similarly the consumers in society get a position in the market depending upon what they do or
do not do. It is agreed on all hands that "consumer empowerment" in India has a long way to go. This is the right time to act. Let us prepare for the next millennium and usher in a new era of "Consumerism". When we cross the winter, spring cannot be far behind.

The success of the consumer movement in Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur mainly depends upon the level of consumer rights awareness generated in aforementioned area by educating consumers about their rights and responsibilities. In spite of overall constraint of resources in the department, a 15 minutes weekly programme “Jago Grahak Jago” is broadcasted through 110 station of All India Radio in 22 regional languages. To involve students in the consumer movement, a video programme in 4 episodes, each 30 minutes, targeted for primary, upper primary and secondary level students was prepared and telecasted on the Doordarshan. The 4 programme in the form of CDs were distributed to schools also. The department has produced 12 TV episodes on consumer awareness and the same were brought to viewers by the Doordarshan in the National Network on every Saturdays at 3.30 p.m.

Consumer Clubs with a view to educate children about the rights of the consumers was provided in the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 to mobilise youngsters by instilling in them the spirit of protection of consumer rights. A scheme for setting up of Consumer Clubs in school was recently finalised in the Department of Consumer Affairs. The scheme has been forwarded to all States/UTs for immediate implementation. It has been decided to set up Consumer Clubs in 50 schools of the government of the N.C.T. Delhi on National Consumer day i.e. 24th December 2003. The major bottleneck in the growth of the consumer movement is the mental attitude and apathy on the part of the consumer himself. He is not willing to fight for his right, but expects the other consumers to fights for protecting his interests. This is really a paradoxical situation. Thus, Consumer Organisations (COs) are only there to educate and guide the consumers and not to fight on their behalf.

The consumers will not fight their battles except when they become aware of public interest and grievances. Individual battle must be fought by consumer himself for which he has to take initiative. Beside this the government is producing maximum percentage of products and services. Most of the consumer problems shoot from the government sectors. The consumer movement in India is weak because the so-called leaders and social workers are busy in petty politics and they are hardly interested in solving the consumer problems. During previous three decades, consumer awareness of their rights has increased. The whole nation now celebrates March 15 as the National Consumer Day. Efforts are being done to make the consumer
movement emergence as the people movement. To fulfill this objective, The National Consumer Action programme needs to be activated

But today, there seems to be a discernible and even a dramatic shift in consumer behavior. When it came to the introduction of conditional access system, urban consumers rose in protest. So strong was their opposition to it, that even consumer groups were forced to come together on the issue. And for once, the government had to listen to consumers. Earlier, consumer in certain localities took the extreme step of seeking disconnection of their cable connections in protest against arbitrary hikes in cable charges and took the matter to the local police. Then came the Coca-Cola (soft drink) controversy, to which Indian consumer reacted like the consumers in North America or Europe; School in different parts of the country banned these drinks, several restaurants and cafeteria stopped serving them of their clients choice. The clients like the college students who previously drink gallons of Pepsi/Cock and had stopped drinking it after controversy. These people were not member of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, or Multinational Corporation (MNC) of CRA activist, they were people who were hooked to their daily dose of Cola drinks.

Indian consumers at least the urban middle–class have started taking issue concerning their health and safety more seriously. It is just a knee jerk reaction spurred by media reports. The consumers become mature enough to use boycott as a weapon to show our strength. The television is a powerful medium and can really bring about that kind of a reaction, but Indian consumers did not take benefit.

Indian economy faces a severe economic crisis and unscrupulous practices of business further victimizing consumer. The organized consumers are the most powerful force but outside consumer remain awareness net. The researchers, administrators and autonomous organisation renders by public enterprises and awareness macahanism. When consumers know their power, they can easily mould businessmen and government. The present efforts of the government to create consumer rights awareness need to be reviewed and redesigned. The law relating to consumer protection covers goods and services which from an integral part for the continued survival of human beings.

The real purposes of consumer laws is not to make the task of securing compensation easier, but to increase the feeling of responsibility of the supplier and to reduce the risk of faulty goods or services that he wants. The real aim of the consumer protection is to compel the manufacturer and producer is to sell standard products, at fair prices, with full details of weight and measures,
maintain purity in food stuff and drug. The public shall have to assert its right and demand that courts function properly. The consumer shall have come to their rescue because an alert consumer is an asset to nation. The success of this legislation will depend on effective implementation of its provision by the Central and State governments in letter and sprits. In addition, it will require support of strong broad-based consumer movement in the country, involvement of women and youth and cooperation trade and industry.

The CPA, 1986 has been enacted to promote and protect the rights of consumers and provide speedy and simple redressal to consumer disputes. The three-tier quasi judicial machinery is sought to be set up at the District, State and Central levels who are to observe the principles of natural justice and have been empowered to give reliefs of a specific nature and to award whatever appropriate compensation to the consumer. A milestone in the history is the socio-economic legislations by redefining the relationships between consumers and suppliers or manufacturer of goods and services, the new law is major step forward in the direction of justice for the consumers through an institutional arrangement which is easily available, speedy and less expensive redressal for their grievances thus enabling them to seek compensation or damages in case of faulty goods.

The District Forums and the State Commissions are to be established by the State Governments and in every State they have been established as well. The National Commission is to be established by the Central Government and by virtue of Section 23 of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 an appeal against the order of the National Commission lies to the Supreme Court of India. The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 is intended to protect the legitimate interests of consumers against traders, suppliers, etc.

The Consumer Forums have to protect the interests of consumers and formulate and articulate principles of natural justice. They should take cognizance of any deficiency in service or unjust reduction in the amount payable to the complaint *suo moto* on the basis of facts disclosed, full opportunity must necessarily be given to the opposite party to justify and defend its action. Under the Consumer Protection Act, 1986 engagement of lawyers by the complainant is not a must for pleading their cases before the Consumer Forums. On the other hand a consumer can be an illiterate or ignorant, this makes it all the more necessary for the forums to determine, on the basis of the facts disclosed in the petitions and in the proceedings before them, whether the complainant has been wrongfully denied the amount which becomes payable to him for the alleged defective goods and deficiency in service.
The objective of the *Consumer Protection Act*, 1986 to provide speedy, simple and inexpensive redressal of consumer disputes has, therefore, been accomplished by the establishment of a three-tier system for the redressal of grievances under the Act. Regarding the implementation of the Act, the redressal machinery has not been made functional in all States/Union territories. In this connection, it becomes necessary that other states should make sincere efforts to implement CPA by establishing district and state-level redressal agencies without any further delay.

The reasons for the delay in disposal of cases were the reluctant behaviour of consumer court, irresponsible behaviour of lawyers, and pending of large numbers of cases. Though the consumers can approach the forums directly for redressal of their grievances, they can file cases either through lawyers or voluntary consumer organizations. The majority of the cases were filed through lawyers in both forums. Majority of the cases filed were relating to unfair trade practices, electricity finance, followed by other categories which include medical negligence and other government departments.

In the end, it can be said that the consumer movement has just begun in these districts, i.e., Muzaffarnagar and Saharanpur, and it has a long way to go. It is for the consumers and the voluntary organizations to get together and make a joint effort to make this movement a success. The study has revealed the fact that the consumers in general lack consumer rights awareness regarding the existence of protective services provided by the government and the voluntary consumer organization for redressal of their grievances, and that is the main cause that the consumer in this area are prone to exploitation in the market today. But despite this, the consumer in these areas is not even willing to fight to combat these malpractices. They have become immune to the system as such, and this consumer apathy has become the root cause for most of their grievance.

During the course of study, it was found that consumers were not completely satisfied with the functioning of the Consumer Dispute Redressal Forum (CDRF). At the same time, they also expressed their dissatisfaction with regard to the use of day-to-day products and the services of various kinds, including the public utility departments. The study, thus, has revealed the lacunae in the existing protective services available in India, particularly in these areas, which would serve as a clue to the authorities to make improvements in these measures. For the redressal of their grievances with regard to both the products and services, if they approach the district forum, more time is required for the disposal of their complaints. Thus, the study had indicated that the dissatisfaction of any kind with day-to-day products. The study had also proved that it is
much simpler, less time consuming for the settlement of the dispute and this in a way, would help to reduce the backlog of cases in the district forums, thus, improving its functioning in the long run.

**Recommendations & Suggestions**

Consumer awareness should be created both in urban and rural areas by highlighting the rights of consumers by educating about the complaint, forum and redressal system. The study suggests following measures to spread consumer rights awareness for the protection of consumer interest:

1. **Consumer Right Awareness**

2. **Consumer Education**

3. **Role of Government**

4. **Enforcement Agencies**

5. **Enactment and Amended existing laws**

**1. Consumer Right Awareness**

Consumer rights awareness is a very important element in dealing with consumer protection. The present situation calls for greater efforts to increase public knowledge and public participation. The suggested measures of the facts stated above are as follows:

1. Consumers should be made aware of consumer rights and organize to promote and protect their own interest.

2. Consumer should beware of deceptive advertisements. The consumer should insist on guarantee and warranty card duly stamped and signed by the seller.

3. The consumer should be more conscious and aware of their right and responsibilities, through seminar, conferences, talks, Nukkar Natak and campaign. The consumer literacy should be imparted by booklet in simple and regional language to create awareness among the consumers about their rights.

4. Consumer clubs should be set up at block and village levels to entertain the consumers problem. There should be consumer helpline at the grassroots level so that their complaints can be redressed promptly.
5. Consumer rights awareness camps should be held at block and village levels and consumer information centers and voluntary consumer organizations should be motivated and the women should also be made aware.

2. Consumer Education

For the proper functioning of the legal system it is necessary that the knowledge of the availability of a legal remedy should be so widely disseminated that people as a whole become conscious of their rights. The consumer education becomes very important and pertinent in a country like ours where a large section of the consumer is poor and illiterate. In view of the above stated findings, the following points deserve consideration:

1. Consumer education forms the edifice on which is a strong consumer movement can be developed through equipped libraries –cum-consumer education and advocacy center in every district and block.

2. Consumer Education should be given through posters, folk arts, street plays, T.V., dramas seminars etc. because no law can become forceful unless the consumer movement gains momentum.

3. Consumer Education should be introduced in educational institutions from primary to higher level as a subject in their curriculum to educate youth specially students of colleges and universities.

4. Consumer should seek information related to its quality, price, measurements and purity certified with ISI mark etc. Consumer should demand appropriate receipts/cash memo of the purchased good failing which resort to compliant before district forum, State commission or National commission.

3. Role of Government

The Government through its legislative and other measures should promote welfare of a consumer by encouraging fair trade practices and under taking following steps:

1. Sufficient cooperation is required from government system. In order to protect consumers from unsafe and hazardous goods, the government needs separate law on production, safety and liability and an independent Product Safety Commission for effective enforcement.

2. Government should improve all consumer services. A consumer representative has to be appointed in every consumer cell and redressal machinery for solution of consumer complaints within a specific period. It Government should take necessary steps to bring out the deficiency in service of postal, railways and chit funds and bring it to the notice of redressal agencies.
3. Government should implement rules of punishment more harsh so that manufacturer and shopkeeper deter before adopting fraudulent practices.

4. Government and other consumer activists’ agencies should make efforts in the direction of propaganda and publicity of District Forum, State and National Judiciary established for consumer protection so as to make more and more consumer aware about the machinery for their greater involvement and to seek justice in case of grievances.

5. The Government should have schemed to give enough financial assistance to voluntary organization. The existing number of consumer organization is not sufficient to meet the requirement.

4. Enforcement Agencies

The evolution of consumer redressal agencies reveals mixed pattern of success and failures. No doubt these bodies have been active and within the constraints given far reaching relief to the consumers in a number of cases. The delay in disposal negates the very purpose of setting up these quasi–judicial bodies can be corrected by under taking following measures:

1. Consumer forums should be established at Block and Tehsil level to decide complaints pertaining to consumer rights. The consumer disputes and complaints should also be redressed by pre-litigation, negotiation, cancelling etc. The Guidance and counseling units may be arranged within the premises of Forum to assist the consumers in filing their complaints.

2. The Consumer Redressal Agencies order should be equipped with the personnel for execution of their orders, and in this way the necessity of depending on Civil or Criminal Courts would be obviated.

3. The strength of members of courts should be increased and the Chairman may be appointed from active service. The Courts should be given more teeth and their meetings may be held, on certain days, at block level to provide justice at the door step. For this purpose, mobile consumer courts may be setup.

4. There is a need to prescribe the essential infrastructure to the District Forum State Commission so that they are not hamstrung functioning effectively. The selection of members of these organsaition should not be affected politically; Service of suitable, committed and experienced people should be taken.

5. The court needs to take a second look at the quantum of damages that they award. Similarly; redress procedure should be made more logical, easy enough to be understood by a large
number of consumers. Further procedures shall so designed as to have easy handling and quick disposal of cases.

5. Enactment and Amended to Existing Laws

The CPA was enacted provide an effective remedy against the violation of consumers rights arising out of unsafe and hazardous goods, the government needs separate law on production, safety and liability and an independent Product Safety Commission for effective enforcement. The following points may be derived which reforming laws and amendment.

1. The Act should be amended to make the right to safety, right to information, right to choose, right to be heard, right to against exploitation and right to consumer education six rights of consumers’ justifiable. In any case; to begin with, it should be made obligatory for redressal agencies to consider them when adjudicating a complaint.

2. The Act should be amended to empower consumer courts to publish the names of manufactures, traders and dealers whose goods are found to be hazardous to public safety. This empowerment would as a deterrent to the erring business community.

3. The Act should be amended as to stream line the procedure that would facilitate expeditious disposal of a consumer cases. As regards the time frame provided in the Act, in order to adhere to this time frame, it is necessary to prescribed a procedure wherein any compliant that is received in the consumer court at the district level is intimately scrutinized and competent personnel to determine whether the case falls within the Act and whether should be perused. The Act should be modified to recognize a very important right of consumers viz, the right to healthy environment.

4. Section 2(1) (d) and 2 (1) (o) of the CPA should be suitably amended to modify the definition of the terms consumer and ‘services’ to make it clear that consideration shall not be precedent in case of availing medical and municipal services provided by the government. A victim of medical negligence in a government hospital should be entitled to compensation by enlarging the definition of consumer and bringing free services provided to the public by the government. CPA Provides only compensatory provision and not for penal provision. Some penal provision should be incorporated under this Act.