A developing country, like India, has to put up with shortages in economic goods and services. These shortages always lead to Unfair Trade Practices, which have their foundation in human greed. Consumers in a developing country need more protection than those in a developed country, since they are neither aware of such practices nor are fully organised to combat against them.

Consumer's sovereignty is a meaningless praise in India. Consumer exploitation takes places through a number of shoddy deals, like underweight specifications, adulteration, deceptive hire-purchase arrangements at exhorbitant rates of interest, aggressive selling techniques and misleading and false advertisement. The misleading advertisement is the most notorious one. It confuses maximum number of consumers all over the country. Blatantly made dishonest claims in the advertisements, especially for products like baby-foods, toiletries, health tonics and cigarettes show the irresponsible attitude of the industry. It is the high pressure sales technique rather than the quality of any product that accounts for the success in the market. High voltage sales gimmicks have virtually left the consumer helpless.

Further, consumers are subjected to the sale of hazardous toys, foods, drugs and appliances without due regard for their safety. Economic interest of the industry have gained precedence over the safety of the consumer. Prices of some items are being increased without any relation to their cost on the ground that they are in short supply, which has been artificially created.

Thus the importance of Consumer Protection in India is well recognised. Recognising the necessity of protecting consumers from unscrupulous traders various Acts were passed during the post independence period. The significant statutes are:

(i) Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940.
(v) Standards of Weights and Measures Act, 1956.
These statutes failed to achieve their objective. The failure was partly due to inadequate provisions in the legislation and partly due to ineffective implementation.

Realising the ineffectiveness of existing laws to protect consumers' interest, Government of India appointed SACHAR COMMITTEE to examine the provisions of M.R.T.P. Act and other related laws and suggest suitable amendments in public interest.

The Sachar Committee identified the major lacunae in the M.R.T.P. Act, viz. no specific provision for consumer protection against false and misleading advertisements and similar other unfair trade practices. There is a greater awareness at present that the consumer should be protected against such practices resorted to by the trade and industry to mislead and dupe the customers. Feeling the need of the time, comprehensive far-reaching amendments were made in 1984 vide M.R.T.P. (Amendments) Act, 1984 to curb Unfair Trade Practices. Further M.R.T.P. Act also envisaged the formation of Voluntary Consumers' Association and also framed rules for according recognition to such associations.

Present study is aimed to examine the provisions of M.R.T.P. Act, 1969 with respect to restrictive and unfair trade practices. In order to have wider coverage, provisions of Consumer Protection Act, 1986 have also been examined and analysed. At the time of conclusion of study important amendments were made in M.R.T.P. Act and Consumer Protection Act. These amendments have also been incorporated at appropriate places.

An endeavour has also been made to examine the role of Voluntary Consumer Associations in protecting consumer interest. Various cases of R.T.P. and U.T.P. decided by M.R.T.P. Commission have been analysed. And then effort has been made to give suggestions for improving consumer protection machinery in India.

The study is based on various sources of information, such as reports of M.R.T.P. Commission, news bulletins of various consumer organisations, various articles published in journals and newspapers and other literature on consumer protection.

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