

Assessment of Consumer Awareness amongst Undergraduate Students of Thane District- A Case Study

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Abstract- Any individual who buys goods and services for personal consumption and not for commercial purpose are called consumers. Consumers form the largest economic group in any country. They are the pivots of all economic activities. The advancement of technology and the advent of sophisticated gadgets in the markets and the aggressive marketing strategies in the era of Globalization have not only thrown open a wide choice for the consumers but also rendered the consumer vulnerable to a plethora of problems associated with such rapid changes. There is an urgent and increasing necessity to educate consumers so that they can be protected against the exploitation of the manufacturers and sellers.

In spite of the various initiatives undertaken by the Government to educate and promote welfare to the consumers, the analysis of the primary data collected from 758 undergraduates' students from six different colleges located in six different talukas of Thane District revealed that the level of consumer awareness is limited. This paper tries to suggest some measures that should be undertaken by the Government, business houses and consumer themselves to protect the interest of the consumers. An enlightened consumer is an empowered consumer. An aware consumer not only protects himself from exploitation but induces efficiency, transparency and accountability in the entire manufacturing and services sector.

Index Terms- consumers, government initiatives, consumer awareness, and intellectual property rights

I. INTRODUCTION

The Latin term 'Consumo' means, "eat up completely" which understandably led to the current use of the term 'consumer'. Any person who buys goods and services for personal consumption and not for commercial purpose or resale is called a consumer.

Consumers form the largest economic group in any country. They are the pivots of all economic activities. The Government, Industry and the Consumers form the three main partners in the venture of national development. While the Government provides the capital resources, industry utilizes the capital for producing goods and consumer procures the goods, paying money for their material needs and facilities.

The need for empowerment of consumers as a class cannot be overlooked in India and is already well recognized all over the world. The advancement of technology and the advent of sophisticated gadgets in the markets and the aggressive

marketing strategies in the era of Globalization have not only thrown open a wide choice for the consumers but also rendered the consumer vulnerable to a plethora of problems associated with such rapid changes. There is an urgent and increasing necessity to educate and motivate the consumers with regard to quality of products. 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 enable to protect himself from any malpractice on the part of the traders.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- 1) To prod consumer awareness regarding ration card and card holders rights.
- 2) To assess consumer awareness amongst under graduate students regarding information to be displayed in a ration shop.
- 3) To probe the awareness of the undergraduate students regarding the intellectual property rights and consumer protection.
- 4) To analyze the opinion poll amongst the students.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is largely descriptive and analytical. The required data for the study was collected from primary and secondary sources; the primary source constitutes the main corpus of information as it will make the major thrust area to collect reliable complete and first hand information about the awareness of consumers in the areas under study. To test the objectives, field study was conducted wherein a combination of direct approach, comprising of questionnaire-aided interviews, discussions and observational techniques was followed.

Primary data was collected from the sample subjects, the undergraduate students of conventional courses from six different colleges which were randomly selected from the areas of Ambarnath, Ulhasnagar, Kalyan, Murbad, Bhiwandi, and Thane talukas of Thane District on the basis of geographical location convenient to the researcher.

Similarly, information was collected from officials of Consumer Guidance Society, Mumbai Grahak Panchayat and consumers at large.

In order to test the above stated objectives 850 questionnaires were distributed to the under graduate students. Out of the 850

questionnaires, 758 questionnaires which were correctly filled were taken into account, out of which 404 were females and 354 were male students.

Data of sample units chosen is listed below in a tabular form.

Table -1: Data of sample units chosen for the study

Name of the College	Taluka	Sample Units
P.D.Karkhanis College	Ambarnath	81
Smt. C.H.M. College	Ulhasnagar	246
Saket College	Kalyan	73
Shivle College	Murbad	50
B.N.N. College	Bhiwandi	154
Dnyanasadhana College	Thane	154

Source: Compiled from primary data.

Secondary data was collected from the following sources:

- 1) Reports and bulletins, both Indian and foreign relevant for the study,
- 2) Books, journals, seminar papers, speeches, symposia, conferences etc., related to consumer education, consumer protection and consumer guidance.
- 3) Study of reports of well established consumer organization like Consumer Education and Research Centre (CERC), Ahmedabad, Consumer Guidance Society of India, Mumbai.
- 4) MRTP Act 1969, Consumer Protection Act 1986 and other relevant acts concerned with consumer protection.

Government Initiatives:

Various Acts and legislations enacted by the Government to protect consumers are Drugs Control Act, 1950; Industries (Development and Regulation) Act, 1951; Indian Standards Institution (Certification Marks) Act, 1952; Drug and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act, 1955; Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954; Essential Commodities Act, 1955; Trade and Merchandise Marks Act, 1958; Hire Purchase Act, 1972; Cigarettes (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 1975; Prevention of Black-marketing and Maintenance of Supplies of Essential Commodities Act, 1980; Essential Commodities (Special Provisions) Act, 1981; Multi-State Co-operative Societies Act, 1984; Standard of Weights and Measures (Enforcement) Act, 1985; and Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, and the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. The latest addition in the list of laws having bearing on consumer protection is Competition Act, 2002, the Right to Information Act, 2005 and the Food Safety and Standards Act 2006.

Similarly, Government has under taken various initiatives to spread consumer awareness by resorting to publicity like advertisements have been released in national dailies as well as regional newspapers in local languages promoting consumer awareness. Around 30 major issues like, ISI, Hallmark, Labeling, MRP, Weights and Measures, Credit Cards, Financial Product,

Real estate, Pharmaceuticals etc. were taken as a part of the print advertisement and more than 12000 insertions were given in the newspapers throughout the length and breadth of the country as per the DAVP(Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity) policy.

The Consumer Affairs Department has produced 6 video spots of 30 seconds duration on various consumer related issues such as short measurement of petrol, Grievance Redressal System, MRP, ISI, and Hall-marking etc., which is being telecast through Doordarshan and Satellite Channels. Issues pertaining to rural and remote areas have been given prominence in the various advertisement spots.

Radio being cheapest and having widest reach, a 15 minute weekly programme titled "Jago Grahak Jago" is being broadcasted through 70 stations in 20 regional languages from the year 2004. To make the programme popular a prize of Rs. 500/- per programme in every language is given. The Department of Consumer affairs has provided programmes produced in the field of consumer protection for broadcasting through Gyanvani FM Radio Stations functioning under Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) for the benefit of students. The Department of Consumer Affairs has produced 6 radio spots of 20 seconds duration on various consumer related issues such as MRP, short measurement, expiry date on medicine, adulteration, ISI mark, redressal system and started broadcasting from 14th October 2004 onwards in All India Radio and Radio City Stations.

A 12 episode video programme namely, 'Grahak Dost' of 30 minutes duration was produced by the Department of Consumer affairs in Hindi language initially which was telecasted on Doordarshan in the year 2004. This programmes is further made in 4 regional languages to spread the message of consumer awareness in remote areas.

The Department of consumer Affairs also prepared 4 video programmes in Hindi each of 30 minutes duration specially targeting primary, upper primary and secondary level students of schools during the year 2004-05 and got it telecasted through Doordarshan. The programme, is made available in CD to schools, consumer clubs in the schools, State Governments and others concerned to involve the students in consumer movement. The Department of Consumer Affairs has launched its consumer campaign in all regional languages through cinema slides in 9186 cinema halls in States/ Union Territories.

Nukkad Natak Contest on consumer issues is organized by the Government to spread awareness amongst the students. Government also make use of sport events, outdoor publicity, participating in national and international trade fair, tie up with the Department of Post, use of Internet etc. to promote consumer awareness.

In spite of the initiatives undertaken by the Government, the study revealed that the consumer awareness amongst students were limited and hence they are exploited by the manufacturers, traders and sellers who use fraudulent methods to market their goods.

IV. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Assessment Regarding Ration Card and Card Holders Rights:

While assessing the awareness of student regarding the statement that weekly quota is not forfeited if not purchased, it was observed that only 17.5% students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be 12.0% and majority of the students who were unaware of the law was 70.4%.

While assessing the awareness of students regarding the statement that samples of food grains to be displayed in sealed plastic bags it was observed that majority of students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law i.e. 48.4%. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be 17.8% and the students who were unaware of the law was 33.8%.

While assessing the awareness of students regarding the information that yellow receipts have to be issued with date of purchase, it was observed that majority of students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law i.e. 52.2%. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be 12.7% and the students who were unaware of the law was 35.1%.

While assessing the awareness of students regarding the law that there is no rule that ration quota can be purchased only once a day, it was it was observed that a meager percentage of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law i.e. 14.9%. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be 12.9% and majority of the students who were unaware of the law was 72.2%.

While assessing the awareness of students regarding the law that no fees to be charged for adding or deleting names in the existing ration card , it was observed that a small percentage of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law i.e. 25.7%. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be 8.5% and majority of the students who were unaware of the law were 65.8%.

Assessment Regarding Information to be displayed in a Ration Shop:

While assessing the awareness of students regarding the rule that it is mandatory to display registration number of the ration shop , it was it was observed that majority of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law i.e. 60.8%. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be 8.5% and students who were unaware of the law were 30.7%.

While assessing the awareness of students regarding the rule that it is mandatory to display inspector’s name and time of his weekly visit, it was it was observed that only30.7% of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be 17.9% and students who were unaware of the law was estimated to be 51.4%.

While assessing the awareness of students regarding the rule that it is mandatory to display of stock position of all ration commodities in units, it was observed that only18.6% of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be 11.6% and majority of the students who were unaware of the law i.e. 69.8%.

While assessing the awareness of students regarding the rule that it is mandatory to display of official price list, it was observed that 32.6% of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law. Partially aware percentage

was estimated to be 11.9% and majority of the students who were unaware of the law i.e. 55.5%.

While assessing the awareness of students regarding the rule that it is mandatory to display of total number of ration cards registered with the shop, it was observed that meager percentage of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law i.e.14.6%. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be 11.4% and majority of the students who were unaware of the law i.e. 74.0%.

While assessing the awareness of students regarding the rule that it is mandatory to display of total number of units registered with the shop, it was observed that a very small percentage of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of the law i.e.13.7%. Partially aware percentage was estimated to be 11.4% and majority of the students who were unaware of the law i.e. 74.9%.

Assessment Regarding Intellectual Property Rights and Consumer Protection:

While assessing the information of students in all the six colleges under study regarding the awareness of existence of Trademarks Act of 1999, it was found that majority percentage of the students i.e. 63.2% of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware of it and only 36.8% of the students were unaware of the Act.

While assessing the information of students regarding the awareness of Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection Act, 1999), it was found that only a meager percentage of the students i.e. 18.2% of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware and majority of the students who were unaware of it was estimated to be 81.8%.

While assessing the information of students regarding the awareness of Competition Act, 2002, it was found that only a meager percentage of the students i.e. 25.5% of the students from all the six colleges taken together were aware and majority of the students who were unaware was estimated to be 74.5%.

Comparison of Opinion Poll of Ki to Kvi Statements Taken Together of All Six Colleges Under Study:

Table 2- Opinion poll of students

Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Ki- Consumer education should be incorporated in the syllabi of schools and colleges	4.79	1.387	1.924
Kii- There should be faster consumer disputes Redressal.	3.93	1.329	1.765
Kiii- More			

people participation in promoting consumer welfare	2.93	1.349	1.821
Kiv- More Participation by voluntary consumer organizations in promoting consumer welfare	2.21	1.308	1.710
Kv- Dominant role of mass media in creating consumer awareness	2.68	1.525	2.324
Kvi- More Stringent Punishment to sellers and traders who indulge in malpractices	4.44	1.603	2.569

Source: Compiled from primary data.

While analyzing the preference order of the students from all the six colleges under study regarding to the above said statements it was observed that students had polled greater preference for the (Ki) statement i.e. Consumer education should be incorporated in the syllabi of schools and colleges a mean of 4.79, which was followed by (Kvi) statement i.e. More stringent punishment to sellers and traders who indulge in malpractices a mean of 4.44. The third preference order was for the statement (Kii) i.e. there should be faster consumer disputes redressal a mean of 3.93. The fourth preference was shown for (Kiii) statement i.e. More people participation in promoting consumer welfare a mean of 2.93. The next preference was for statement (Kv) i.e. Dominant role of mass media in creating consumer awareness a mean of 2.68. The students polled least preference for statement (Kiv) i.e. more participation by voluntary consumer organizations in promoting consumer welfare a mean of 2.21.

V. SUGGESTIONS

Imparting Consumer Education:

We live in a consumption society. Consumption is an important part of our everyday life and uses up a significant proportion of our money and our time. This consumption society is changing very rapidly. Ever since the mid-twentieth century consumers have faced major changes in their life styles and consumption habits due to different cultural, social, economic and technical influences. The increasing mobility of population, production of new items and services, new purchasing methods and information availability modify perceptions. This

development has created the need for consumers who can interpret relevant information and corporate messages in order to make prudent choices. Hence consumers need information and education.

1. “Consumer education is a process that equips people to function as responsible consumers in a complex, technological society-it helps them understand their value systems; develop sound decision-making procedures in the market place; recognize their rights and responsibilities; and understand the cumulative effect of consumer decisions on the community, economy and environment.” [Western Provincial Task Force Report on “Consumer Oriented Studies for Elementary School Children”, 1976, pg 21]
2. Consumer education is the process by which consumers:
 - a) “Develop skills to make informed decisions in the purchase of goods and services in the light of personal values, maximum utilization of resources, available alternatives, ecological considerations and changing economic conditions.
 - b) Become knowledgeable about the law, their rights and methods of recourse, in order to participate effectively and self-confidently in the market place and take appropriate action to seek consumer redress.
 - c) Develop an understanding of the citizen's role in the economic, social and government systems and how to influence those systems to make them responsive to consumer needs.” [US Department of Education, 1980]

Consumer education should help to open the ‘consumer eye’ of the consumers. The 'consumer eye' concept means that an informed consumer looks at a product critically and analytically, first from his own point of view as an individual consumer, then with the interest of the community at large in mind.

Consumer education must inculcate the responsibilities of consumers. Responsibilities always precede rights. If consumers want their rights recognized, they must first exercise their responsibilities.

A free market economy can only function effectively with the support of an educated consumer. Consumer education is a way to balance the power between the producers and consumers. Consumer education provides the insight necessary to develop citizens into responsible and intelligent acting consumers.

Education is the first line of defense against fraud and deception. It is the most powerful tool for progress of the country and is a social and political necessity. Undoubtedly, knowledge is power. It is education, which transforms the individual's personality, enriches the mind, sublimates the emotions and illuminates the spirits. Education leads to liberation- liberation from ignorance, subjugation, exploitation, superstition and prejudice. Education has a well-defined role in creating conditions of change. Education helps an individual as a consumer in making rational choices and protects him from trade and business related exploitation. It can help one to make well-informed decisions before one spend money. Only knowledge and alert consumers aware of their rights and responsibilities can protect themselves efficiently. Where the literacy rate is high and social awareness is greater, the consumer cannot be easily

exploited. Informed, educated and aware consumers are assets to the society. Education and information bring independence, which in turn contributes to the growth and development of individual personality. An informed and educated citizen is considered to be sine quo non for the success and well functioning of constitutional democracy.

In India 240 million people are between the age group of 10 to 19. But this demographic dividend is not something that it comes to India automatically. It could well turn into a demographic disaster in the absence of right type of education. We need to move from education based learning to inspired learning.

Consumer awareness plays a key role in customer decision making. By increasing a potential or current customer's knowledge about a product, service or business, a healthy economic environment is established in which customers are informed and protected and businesses are accountable. It benefits both individuals and society as a whole. From individual point of view it enhances critical thinking, improved life skills and increased self- confidence. Consumer awareness benefits the society by promoting satisfaction, increasing economic stability and creating realistic customer expectations.

Within India, the level of consumer awareness varies from State to State depending upon the level of literacy and the social awareness of the people. The report of the study on the Consumer Protection Act commissioned by the Comptroller and Audit General (C&AG) of India conducted in July-August 2005 brought out that 66% of the consumers were not aware of consumer rights and 82% were not even aware of the Consumer Protection Act (CPA). In rural areas, only 13% of the population had heard of the CPA. The need of the hour is, therefore is to educate the common consumers particularly in rural areas who happen to be easy victims of unlawful trade practices being adopted by wrongdoers, because of their less education and poor knowledge to understand about their responsibilities as consumers. Creation of awareness among consumers about their rights at districts and taluka level needs to be given high priority. Once they are educated and made aware of the schemes that have been drawn up for their benefits and also the redressal forum that is available, the benefit of various schemes, in true sense, will reach the common consumers of the society.

It is, therefore, our bounden duty to play our part jointly and effectively is disseminating various schemes to the common consumers of the country. In this regard, the role of educational institutions cannot be ignored.

Role of educational institutions in consumer protection movement may not legitimately be denied on any conceivable ground. It is recommended that educational institutions need to play an effective role in consumer awakening and imparting information regarding organizations working for the consumer's interest. Various methodologies should be adopted by the educational institutions such as organizing seminars, workshops, lectures, discussions, colloquiums, essay competitions, quizzes etc. in the area of consumer protection and welfare to give boost to the consumer protection movement in the country. Consumer education teaches individuals to be more skilled buyers and enables them to know what the value is for money. Consumer education therefore should take place in the classrooms, work place, community centre and homes. The practitioners of

consumer education should include teachers, parents, trade unionists, NGOs and the media. Thus consumer education should embrace all sections of the society formally and informally. Government should establish links with educational institutions like universities, colleges, high schools to emphasize the need for improving consumer education. Synergies should be made among all stakeholders to contribute to the development of appropriate education and information materials, to disseminate amongst the poor, marginalized, disadvantaged and rural illiterate communities to enable them to access to advice and assistance in meeting their essential needs.

Activation of Consumer Clubs in Schools and Colleges:

Consumer clubs in schools and colleges have to be activated through some structured activities. An interested teacher, who can act as the catalyst, with the approval of the school Principal and with the assistance of the local consumer organization can initiate the school and college consumer club.

The teacher can identify a core group of students who will advertise the setting up of the club to the school population. It is important that the core group is not selected merely on academic performance. The club should avoid the pitfalls of elitism - including students of different capabilities and social strata.

The teacher's discretion and influence should be exercised in the selection of some special members who will be needed by the club. These important students can be nominated as the organizers, speakers, artists and writers. They are necessary for the survival of the club (or else the teacher will end up doing all the work). Monthly meetings and demonstrations for one hour after school hours on the 1st Monday of each month can be held. Each month a topic or activity may be scheduled as in the model calendar.

Activities both long term and short term, undertaken by members that will benefit the general school and college population should be the priority. It is a good idea to plan activities requiring minimum resources but benefiting maximum numbers of students.

A notice board placed in a pivotal position in the schools and colleges, where there is a lot of traffic, as for instance, somewhere between the classrooms and the canteen. The board should display clippings, pictures, attractively and legibly written results of surveys and inquiries. To sustain interest, all materials should be changed regularly. A consumer club notice board should be opened to be updated daily by the teacher and students with consumer related news.

There should be a consumer corner in the school and college library to display samples and all forms of consumer education materials.

Days of national and international importance to consumers i.e. 24th December and 15th March may be celebrated in the schools/ colleges. Posters/speech/essay competitions can be organized at schools/colleges levels by the consumer club. Field visits to local markets/consumer courts and door to door campaign in the local community etc. may be organized for at least four days in a year. It can be done on Saturdays by prior arrangement.

Minutes of each activity have to be recorded by the students and teacher coordinator jointly and to be documented.

The informality of consumer education via clubs is a magnetic force for consumer education. Sustained activities raise consumer consciousness.

Media: It can play an important role to promote general awareness of the rights of the consumers by providing information to them. It can publish periodical and product specific booklets, pamphlets, cassettes, CDs, slides, documentary films and other devices of mass communication for promoting consumer awareness in English and regional languages, highlighting the problems in specific areas like real estate, public utilities, non-banking financial agencies etc. Enlighten the business community on its ethical and legal obligations to maintain quality of the products or services and to be transparent in dealing with consumers. Conduct motivational campaign for groups of potential customers both in urban and rural areas. The role of media to promote consumer awareness cannot be undermined and mass media is required to play a more rigorous and positive role.

Large Business Houses: The large business houses especially those who are producing consumer products must have a consumer affairs cell at the highest level in their own business organization. This should be made compulsory by the concerned ministry. To follow the directions very strictly if necessary ordinance has to be passed. Business organizations should regularly provide information in regard to self-regulatory or consumer protection activities to the media and that should persuade important newspapers to publish a regular feature on consumer affairs so as to promote consumer awareness. Consumer meets should be organized regularly by traders and business houses on open invitation through advertisements published in newspapers and customers attending these meets should be invited to offer their complaints and suggestions in regard to the products and services of the company. The concerned governments should direct all the business houses to organize meets regularly and should be watched constantly.

Need for a Strong Intellectual Property Right Regime:

A strong Intellectual Property Right (IPR) regime is a critical precondition for enhancing and stimulating economic growth in the country. It facilitates greater investment into the research and development as well as provides means to improve the quality of life of people of the country. IPR not only protects the innovative and creative capacity of competitors and owners of IP rights that supply goods and services, but it also concern itself with the interests of the consumers of those goods and services, directly or indirectly. The existence of such rights is necessary for overall development of society.

The areas of intellectual property that are most relevant for consumer protection are Trade Marks, Geographical Indications and Protection against unfair competition.

A trade mark is a sign which is used in the course of trade and distinguishes goods or services of one enterprise from those of other enterprises. Consumers often make their purchasing choices on the basis of recognizable trademarks/ service marks. So, the main thrust of trade mark Act is to ensure that trademarks don't overlap in a manner that causes users/ consumers to become confused about the source of a product.

Geographical Indication is an indication used to identify goods having special characteristics originating from a definite geographical territory. The benefits of registration of geographical indications are:

- a) Provides legal protection to Geographical Indications in India, which in turn gives boost to the exports;
- b) Prevents unauthorized use of a Registered Geographical Indication by others;
- c) Promotes economic prosperity of producers of goods produced in a geographical territory;
- d) Promotes consumers' welfare by providing goods of reputation and quality; etc.

These IP rights help the consumers in buying quality products and protect them from use of substandard products which may cause health and safety hazards. Thus, the proper operation of IP rights and their enforcement is very important for consumers. Further, it is the core of IP system that people of the country must be protected from unfair competition, that is, from any act of dishonest practice in trade and business.

Protection against unfair competition has been recognized as one of the main objectives of intellectual property system. It does not grant exclusive rights to the owners with respect to the subject concerned, like in the case of patents, trademarks, etc. In fact, it prohibits any act of competition that is contrary to honest practices in industrial or commercial matters, referred to as "unfair competition".

The acts of unfair competition not only adversely affect the competitors, which tend to lose their customers and market share; but also affect consumers as they are likely to be misinformed and mislead and tend to suffer economic and personal prejudice. Free and fair competition between enterprises is considered to be the best means of satisfying supply and demand in the economy as well as of serving the interests of consumers and economy as a whole. This stimulates innovation and productivity and leads to the optimum allocation of resources in the economy; reduces costs and improves quality; as well as accelerates economic growth and development.

Formation of Local Organizations of Ration Card Holders:

It is difficult for individual alone to ensure proper implementation of the rationing rules and assert one's rights hence, it is necessary to form local organizations of ration card holders. Local groups, women's groups and party branches should take the lead in solving card holder's problems. Complaints redressal committees need to be set up for this purpose. Card holder, ration shopkeepers and ration inspector should be member of this committee.

Such a committee could be for 5 - 10 ration shops jointly. Problems that cannot be solved by the committee can be referred to the Controller or the Department. The PDS covers all of Maharashtra. Rationing Problems affect everyone from city dwellers to people living in rural areas. It is essential that organizations which are working on behalf of cards holders should come together in the form of a federation to ensure proper working of the PDS.

Role of Government: Government will have to play more effective role in promoting consumer awareness and protecting the interest of the consumers. Government should make and implement rules of punishment more harsh so that manufacturers and traders think twice before adopting fraudulent practices. A campaign should be set in motion to involve each and every consumer for making them more conscious and aware of their rights and responsibilities. To involve each and every consumer seminars, conferences, talks, street plays etc. should be made a part of the campaign.

Government and other consumer activist 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.

Redress procedure should be made more logical, easy enough to be understood by a large number of consumers. Further, procedures should be designed as to have easy handling and quick disposal of cases.

Involvement of people at large: The policies, schemes and programmes of the Government of India through the Department of Consumer Affairs are no doubt useful but their effectiveness finally depends on the involvement of the institutions and the people at large. A number of schemes have already been in operation such as, Grahak Jagran, consumer clubs in schools, promoting involvement of research institutions, universities, colleges etc., in consumer protection and welfare. Similar programmes and schemes are needed at the State Government level also to provide further impetus to consumer movement in the country. Organisations of civil societies are having special responsibility in this regard. However, as consumers, all of us should join our hands and remember the bold words of Shri. Swami Vivekananda, a famous saint and philosopher of India-“Arise! Awake! Stop not till the goal is reached”.

VI. CONCLUSION

The efficient and effective programs of consumer protection are of special significance to all of us because we all are consumers. Even a manufacturer or provider of service is a consumer of some other goods or services. If both the producers/providers and consumers realize the need of coexistence, adulterated products and spurious goods and other deficiencies in the services would become a thing of past. The active involvement and participation from all quarters i.e. the Central and State Governments, the educational institutions, the NGO's, the print and electronic media and the adoption and observance of a voluntary code of conduct by the trade and industry and the citizen's charter by the service providers are necessary to see that the consumers get their due. The need of the hour is for total commitment to the consumer cause and social responsiveness to consumer needs. This should, however, be proceeded in a harmonious manner so that our society becomes a

better place for all of us to live in.

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