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REVIEW ARTICLE

CONSUMER PROBLEMS IN INDIA AND ITS MEASURES

Consumer Problems in India and Its Measures

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INTRODUCTION

The etymology of the word 'consumer' indicates its origin from the verb 'to consume' first mentioned in literature in its old English form 'consumed' by Wyclif in 1382. Till the sixteenth it conveyed a kind of negative meaning, viz consumer being the one who wastes or squanders. Consumer buys the goods and services, expecting that the goods he buys are fresh, the drugs are pure and effective, the products are safe and work well; the price that he is charged for is fair, the water he takes is pure, the air he inhales is unpolluted, the telephone functions properly, his letters reach the destination in time his electricity supply remains uninterrupted and he can travel safely in time from one place to another. Consumer faces many problems, for example, Variation in Prices, Adulteration, Unfair means of measurement. Misleading advertisements, Misleading and incomplete labels, Sale of inferior goods, Malpractices adopted by the manufacturers or sellers etc.

The consumer has to be aware of his rights and play a key role. This is possible through consumerism, it refers to wide range of activities of Government, business & independent organizations designed to protect right of the consumer as envisaged in Consumer Protection Act 1986 and ensuring right standards for the goods & services for which one makes a payment.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- To study the problems faced by consumers in India.
- To study the settlement of problems (measures).
- To provide suggestions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper is an attempt to understand the problems faced by consumers, consumer issues, rights of consumer and the measures. The same person can be both a consumer as well as a seller. A consumer utilizes his resources-money, time, energy wisdom,

etc. to buy these items. Survey & observation method is used to carry out the research.

THE FOLLOWING PROBLEMS ARE FACED BY CONSUMERS:

VARIATION IN PRICES:

The consumer has to pay different prices for the same item at different places. Some shopkeepers charge higher price than the printed ones by putting their own price tags or increase the price by adding local taxes.

NON-AVAILABILITY OF ITEMS IN THE MARKET

Sometimes daily consumed items like butter, potatoes, onions, etc. are not available in the market or one may get these by paying higher prices. The moment when there is possibility of price rise of a commodity, it vanishes from the market. In some situations like drought or floods, etc., the shopkeepers hoard stock of essential items and sell these items only when consumer agrees to pay higher price.

ADULTERATION:

Adulteration of goods is one such problem which is faced by the consumer in day-to-day purchases. In the present times the biggest problem is that the consumer does not get pure commodities like ghee, milk, spices, maida, basan, cereals, etc. even if he is prepared to pay higher prices. Traders do not hesitate to use such adulterants as these adulterants are injurious to health and fatal.

UNFAIR MEANS OF MEASUREMENT.

Incorrect measurement is another problem in addition to adulteration. Often standard weights and measurements are not used in the market. For example:

- Spurious, under weights, or stones, bricks, etc. are used in place of standard weights.

Picking along with the goods. Boxes and bottles are used in packed goods. Use of magnet that increase weight.

MISLEADING ADVERTISEMENTS

Because of competition, manufacturer resorts to advertisements for the sale of their products. Such advertisements lure the consumer in buying these products. Such misleading advertisements cheat the consumer.

MISLEADING AND INCOMPLETE LABELS

The labels on products provide information about the products to the consumer. The consumer can decide judiciously after comparing the quality and price of the product from the label. Often the manufacturers try to cheat the consumer by appending incomplete information on the label.

SALE OF SUBSTANDARD GOODS

Sometimes, seller sells sub-standard goods at higher price in place of standard goods. For example, selling furniture made up of inferior quality wood after polishing, using substandard sheets in steel almirahs and furniture, selling substandard cloth by claiming it of a superior quality and inflates its price, etc.

SALE OF INFERIOR GOODS

The seller does not hesitate to sell even inferior goods. In order to earn more profit inferior medicines, cosmetics, oil, ghee, etc. are sold in original pickings.

MALPRACTICES ADOPTED BY THE MANUFACTURERS OR SELLERS.

Manufacturers or sellers lure the consumer to buy their product by adopting malpractices misleading schemes like 'free gifts' or 'heavy discounts' attracts the consumer easily. In reality, the price is inflated in the first place and then discount of 20% to 50% is offered.

CONSUMER ISSUES

The relevant areas of consumer issues are as under:

1. Inflation: Due to inflation sky rocketing prices prevail in the market for goods and services.
2. Overcharging: It is common experience that a product bought at one price can be available at cheaper rate three shops ahead.
3. Weights and Measures: Underweight selling is one of the most serious widespread consumer abuse and exploitation in India.
4. Product quality: Substandard, sub-standard material, duplication and adulteration have

become a normal phenomenon characterizing the modern Indian market.

5. Misleading Advertisement: Consumers are misguiding through advertisement which often give misleading information.
6. Health and Safety: Ingredients of drugs are normally not tested or examined. Sometimes incomplete information regarding its components proves fatal to the consumers.
7. Safety: Safety is a part of products fitness. Sometimes basic necessities of life are delivered in the form most hazardous and even sometimes fatal to the consumer.
8. After Sales Services: Consumers are often cheated and misguided on this front as well. Money is extracted on one pretext or the other even in the guarantee and warranty period. The consumers are made to pay at unaffordable rate for home services.
9. Consumer Credit: The consumers have no idea of paying unreasonable high cost for credit or under hire-purchase in the influence of the slogan "Easy installments".
10. Imported Goods: There is clear preference among the purchasers for high technology products and for the brands imported from the western and other developed countries. This has led to the problem of selling spurious goods with names under the garb of foreign goods.
11. Consumer Complaining: In India there are two main reasons for not complaining against the producers for their mal practices in the business. First, lack of awareness of consumer and second, the cultural considerations.

MEASURES:

The consumer does not know whether he is paying the right price or not. To avoid this, the consumer should verify price from various shops or from super bazaar because by this, the consumer cannot be deceived.

In some situations like drought or floods, etc., the shopkeepers hoard stock of essential items and sell these items only when consumer agrees to pay a higher price. In such a situation the consumer should take a collective decision not to buy commodities sold in this black market.

Due to adulteration traders cheat the consumers. So in order to avoid such cheating, the consumer should always buy only from reliable shops. The Government of India has enacted an act called PFA

(Prevention of Food Adulteration Act) in 1954 to check such immoral acts of adulteration. This act was implemented in 1955. Under this act, minimum standards have been fixed for all food products available in the market. It is mandatory to adopt these standards. If a food product does not conform to these standards, it will be treated as adulterated.

To prevent unfair means of measurements, government has passed certain acts from time to time-

- In 1956, government has passed a standard measurement Act.
- In 1962, decimal and metric system of measurement was introduced. This system! has following units of measurement:
 1. Unit of length - Meter
 2. Unit of weight - Gram
 3. Unit for measuring liquids - Liter
- In 1976, Standard Weight and Measurement Act were passed. Under this Act, use of any other method except decimal and metric system is illegal. For weighing and measuring, the use of standard weights and measures is compulsory.
- In 1977, certain rules were fixed for packed products. Under these rules, weighing of the products along with the weight of the packing is illegal.

The consumer should take the following steps in order to avoid such malpractices:

- (a) The fruit and vegetable vendors should not be allowed to weigh by stone or brick in place of standard weights.
- (b) The bar of the hand weighing scale should be checked beforehand. In case of weighing scale, ensure that the needle is at zero.
- (c) Check the weights and ensure that the weights are not hollow or with false bottom.
- (d) The shopkeeper should not be allowed to weigh the goods along with packing or boxes.
- (e) Before purchasing packed goods, check the weight on the label.
- (f) If the consumer feels that the shopkeeper uses malpractices in weights and measures, he should immediately lodge a complaint in Weights and Measure Bureau.

The consumer should not purchase a product only on the basis of the advertisement.

The consumer should purchase goods from reliable shops.

- (a) The consumer should be vigilant while purchasing goods.
- (b) The consumer should check the label carefully. In case he finds it different, he should not purchase that good.
- (c) The consumer should not sell empty pickings of original goods. Rather crush these pickings to avoid reuse.

The consumer should carefully check the name and brand of the product.

The consumer should only buy standardized items because these are durable and safe to use.

Consumer protection provides safeguards for basic rights of consumers. Consumer protection has very wide implication. It includes everything that is conceivable to protect the consumer viz free availability of quality goods, use of correct weights and measures, fair prices, provisions of hygienic conditions and environment etc.

CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT

Though the consumer protection is a term of wide importance, yet it can be stated that there are three important aspects of consumer protection

1. **Physical Protection of The Consumer:** It includes all measures to protect the consumer against the product that are unsafe or injurious to health and hygiene.
2. **Protection of Economic Interest of Consumer:** It includes all measures to protect the consumer against deceptive methods and unfair trade practices and prevention of abuse of monopoly position or restrictive trade practices
3. **Protection of Public Interest and Property:** It includes all measures that tend to protect public property and thus ensures welfare of the society at large.

MAIN ELEMENTS OF CPA:

Consumer protection act is referred to as Magna Carta of Consumer protection. It is milestone in the

history socio-economic act in India. Main features of the act are:

1. It applies to all kinds of goods and services except those notified by the central government
2. It covers all the sectors whether private, public or co-operatives.
3. Provision of this act are in addition to the provisions of other acts. This act does not limit the scope of other act.
4. This act redresses in a simple, cheap and dynamic manner the grievances of the consumers within a time limit framework.
5. This act provides following rights to the consumer:
 - a. Right to safety
 - b. Right to choose
 - c. Right to be informed
 - d. Right to be heard
 - e. Right to seek redressal
 - f. Right to consumer education
6. This act also provide to the consumer from different types of exploitation like adulteration, under-weightment, excessive price, defective goods, deficient services and unfair trade practices.
7. Under this act there is provision for centre and state governments to set up consumer protection councils with the objectives to promote the interest of the consumer, to promote the rights of consumers and to educate and to protect the consumers.
8. This act is based on the principles of compensation where fair compensation to the aggrieved party is provided for. To redress the grievances, there is a provision for three tier quasi-judicial machinery.

SUGGESTION:

There is an increasing necessity of empowering the consumers through education and motivation regarding their rights and responsibilities. He/she should be equipped to be fully vigilant so as to be able to protect himself/herself from any wrongful act on the part of the seller/trader.

The government should take necessary steps to improve the functioning of Redressal Agencies for

quick settlement of complaints by making them available with all necessary amenities such as infrastructure and staff facilities. It should also take necessary steps to avoid delayed tactics. In addition to this consumer should be more aware about its rights. For this the government should carry out some consumer awareness campaigns and programs to improve general awareness of consumers of India.

CONCLUSION:

The Redressal Agencies under the Consumer Protection Act 1986 clearly proves that the act has played a key role by its implementation that the interests of consumers are better protected then ever before. However it should be noted that it is not the legislation alone on which we can depend for safeguarding the interest of consumer. Consumer activities and associations are also equally needed to make consumer protection movements a success in the country. There should be more awareness, education, understanding, realization of the rights and privileges on the part of the consumers.

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