

## Consumer Movement in Tamil Nadu

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### ABSTRACT

The consumer is the one who pays something to consume goods and avail themselves of services offered. As such, consumers play a vital role in the economic system of our nation. Without consumer demand, producers would lack one of the key motivations to produce or to sell any product. The consumer also forms a part of the chain of distribution. This study is related to the consumer protection and the ways for ensuring consumer rights. The study on consumer protection improves the knowledge of consumers. This study aims at examining the socially responsible activities, and the need for assessing the role of smaller units in protecting the rights of consumers. Further, there is always a question about increasing concern for consumer distress and how good are the remedies. Any substantial change in the Consumer Protection Act would need a matching appraisal of the whole problem and the relief is a product of such appraisal.

### INTRODUCTION

The consumer is a very important person of a global market. He is the principal force or motivating factor of every business. He is the central point of all the economic activities. His community is the largest economic group in every country and wields enormous powers in the market. He can control production by deciding not to purchase or make use of a particular product. By collective action, he can regulate production, distribution and consumption. In a free enterprise economy, the consumers have been regarded as the 'King'.

#### Meaning and Definition

The meaning and definition of consumerism depend upon a person who defines it

*"Consumerism is not concerned with any movement. In reality it is a series of efforts, having in common, the feeling of dissatisfaction with goods and services and the marketing practices involved in their distribution, coupled with the protest for information and for protection in the market."* (G. Prasad, et al. 1990)

*"Accordingly, consumerism is defined as the organized efforts of consumers seeking redress, restitution and remedy for dissatisfaction they have accumulated in the acquisition of their standard of living"*. (Virginia H. Knover, Oct. 1987)

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is unfortunate that a great majority of consumers are unaware of their rights and the various laws available to protect them. In fact, lack of awareness is a major problem in the path of consumer protection. The consumer has some rights, and there are numerous laws to protect him. There are a number of voluntary consumer organizations to help him and he can have support from government also. There are consumer courts that take up cases at free of cost. The problem is lack of awareness in knowing their rights from the consumer perspective.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ✓ To know the development of consumer movement around the world and especially in Tamil Nadu.
- ✓ To portray the India's Position on Consumer Movement
- ✓ To narrate the evolution of consumer movement in India

### CONSUMER MOVEMENT IN INDIA AND TAMIL NADU

Movement means all that is done by a citizen, group of citizens, associations and organizations to obtain relief from perceived injustice. The Consumer Movement could be very well said to mean the process of business done by consumers as individuals, group of individuals, associations or organization, when consumerism indicates a movement, as highlighted in Encyclopedia Britannica:

*"Consumerism is a movement of policies aimed at regulating the products or services, methods and standards of manufactures, sellers and advertisers in the interests of any buyers and such regulation may be institutional, statutory or embodied in voluntary code accepted by a particular industry, or it may result more indirectly from the influence of consumer organizations"*.

Consumer organization is the embodiment of their ideologies, policies, programmes and activities. It encompasses the evolving activities of government, business, independent organizations, and consumers concerned to protect and enhance the rights of consumers. The term 'consumerism' is identified with the contemporary consumer movement, launched in the mid - 1960s indirectly by Rachel Carson and directly by Ralph Nader's auto safety investigation and by US President Kennedy with his efforts to establish the Four Rights of Consumers".

The Indian consumer movement can be viewed historically in two stages. The first stage consisted of what happened before the enactment of Consumer Protection Act of 1986 and the second stage consisted of all that happened after the enactment.

Looking at Indian scenario, the formation of the Passengers and Traffic Relief Association and the Women Graduates Union Bombay in 1915 are the two important pioneering attempts with regard to the origin of consumer organizations. It came into existence before Indian's independence. With regard to Tamilnadu, the formation of the Triplicane Urban Co-operative Stores (TUCS) in Chennai during the year 1904, as the first consumer cooperative society, was an important milestone (Mishra, S.K., Puri, V.K., 2001.). This had grown into a cooperative consumer society with nearly 150 branches all over the Chennai city. The consumer Protection Council in Madras founded by Rajaji is still in existence. The real beginning of consumer movement in terms of sustained, visible and continuing expansion was taken into account during the sixties only with the formation of The Consumer Guidance Society of India, All India Bank Depositors' Association, Bombay, Civil Trust, Bombay, Surat Consumer Association and Jyoti Sangh Grahak Suraksha Vibad, Ahmadabad (Velmurugan, M., 2005). The Consumer Protection Council in Tiruchirappalli was formed in 1974 twelve years before the enactment of Consumer Protection Act of 1986. Jajie Mandanna, who established the Karnataka Consumer Service Society in 1970, was instrumental in the formation of the country's first consumer protection board. Mandanna's book titled 'the Indian Market place' is one of the earliest books on consumer protection.

Non- Governmental Organizations (NGOs) of this type were those associations of people which aim at promoting the welfare of the public without any profit motive. They were voluntary bodies having a constitution and rules of their own, and are free from government interference. They depended on donations and partly on government assistance. NGOs dealing with consumer problems were known as consumer associations or consumer organizations. The role of NGOs had become increasingly more significant in the last two decades.

They performed several functions, like creating awareness about consumer rights and educate the general public about the consumer problems and remedies through seminars, workshops and training programmes, providing legal aid to consumers by exhibiting the legal remedy, undertaking advocacy of consumers' point of view as representative members of consumer protection councils and others official boards, arranging comparative testing of consumer products through their own testing apparatus or accredited laboratories so as to evaluate the relative qualities of competing brands and publishing the test results for the benefit of consumers to become informed buyers, publishing periodicals and journals to disseminate information among the readers about consumer problems, legal reporting and other emerging matters of interest. Most of these periodicals did not accept advertisements from business firms. They also made suggestions and recommended steps which were considered by government authorities in policy making and administrative measures adopted in the interest of consumers.

Some NGOs had successfully used Public Interest Litigation (PIL) to enforce consumer rights in several cases. These non-governmental consumer organizations collaborated with one another among themselves at district, state and national levels. A movement can never be built in an isolated manner. The followings are some of the salient consumer protection and advocacy groups working at the all India level which extend their helping hand to consumer problems in Tiruchirappalli district and consumer organizations in Tiruchirappalli District.

Consumer Coordination Council (CCC) was established in 1993 under the Societies Registration Act 1860. Consumer Coordination Council (CCC) had been a stalwart proponent of good governance. In 1996, CCC launched a national campaign on citizens' charter to implement transparency, accountability, standards of service and a public grievance redressal system at the government level. CCC had made a notable achievements in influencing the making of laws, governmental policy decisions, and providing administrative infrastructure for protecting consumer interest. It also served as an umbrella organization for all other consumer NGOs in India.

Consumer Guidance Society of India (CGSI) was founded in 1966 to eliminate all the possible forms of consumer exploitation (India Today, 10 June 2002). It is one of the oldest consumer organizations in the country and has been instrumental in lobbying the government to pass a consumer protection act. It had been a member of Consumers International for several years and seventy percent of the consumer complaints received by it have been resolved. CGSI had been instrumental in promoting consumerism by publishing its flagship monthly periodical "Keemat", performing product testing, providing consumer education at the grass root level such as schools, and giving legal guidance to consumers with grievances. It won the national award for consumer protection in 1991 for its long, dedicated and effective services to consumers.

Citizen Consumer and Civic Action Group (CAG) were established on 7th October, 1985. Citizen Consumer and Civic Action Group (CAG) had grown out to be one of the country's leading consumer advocacy groups (Cecilia, S., 2004); being an Instrumental in running campaigns for greater access to information, improved functioning of public utilities, greater transparency and accountability in governmental and private sector functioning, and protection of our open spaces and natural environment, CAG played a vital role in the growth of consumerism in our country. CAG specialized in attending issues that affect the common man's life such as lack of hygiene, pollution of our natural resources, inaccessible healthcare facilities, corruption and lack of accountability for the government revenue from tax sources. CAG had been a member of Consumers International since 1990.

Association for Consumers Action on Safety and Health (ACASH) is a consumer organization that focuses on health-related consumer issues. It conducted many programs for the general public by promoting consumer rights and overall dispersion of information regarding consumer safety. It was founded by a group of doctors, lawyers and other eminent personalities, ACASH today helps consumers in India through education & awareness, training, developing IEC (Information, Education and Communication) material, networking, advocacy and lobbying and follow-up action as. A member of Consumers International since 1990, ACASH is also a member of Globalink, International Network of Women Against Tobacco (INWAT), International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), Health Action International (HAI), Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI), All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN), Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI).

Consumer Education and Research Centre (CERC) protects consumer interest in India through consumer research, campaigns through media, creation / monitoring / enforcement

of effective consumer laws, consumer advocacy and information dissemination (Velmurugan. M). CERC has research facilities recognized by the Indian government, and the United Nations has approved CERC as an NGO. CERC's mission includes environmental protection, creating transparency and accountability in the public and private enterprises and agencies in our country, resolving individual consumer complaints, ensuring consumer safety through product research, consumer education, awareness campaigns and product test results dissemination.

The Consumer Protection Council (CPC) is a consumer organization that is non-affiliated to any statutory agency (Mishra, S.K., Puri, V.K). It should not be confused with the governmental bodies established as per the Consumer Protection Act 1986. It was instituted in Ahmedabad, and the CPC has been instrumental in undertaking consumer issues such as consumer safety, traffic safety and pedestrian safety. It had effectively and successfully pursued legal battles against the governmental agencies when they neglect or fail to carry out their duties to the tax payers. CPC has been a member of Consumers International since 1986.

Consumer Unity and Trust Society (CUTS) is being originated from a rural background in Rajasthan. It operates five program centers in India, an advocacy center in New Delhi, and resource centers in several international locations. CUTS's consumer work is focused on consumer protection and consumer safety. With about 20,000 square feet office space, 140 employees, and affiliation to / recognition from major national and international consumer agencies, CUTS is truly equipped to be the champion of consumer causes in our country. It publishes a monthly 'Gram Gadar' which has been effective in ensuring justice for oppressed social masses. CUTS has been a member of Consumers International since 1990.

Consumers Association of India (CAI) was established on the world consumer rights day to be a powerful lobby for the consumer. It has successfully and determinately taken up the mission to spread awareness among the consumers, educate them about their responsibilities and rights and to ensure that the consumers' voices can be heard. In the past six years, CAI successfully settled over ninety eight percent of the 7500 complaints received through arbitration. For the remaining two percent, CAI supported the consumer in pursuing the complaint through the Indian legal system. CAI has been a member of Consumers International since 2003.

Consumers' Forum is one the consumer organizations that existed in India long before the Consumer Protection Act 1986 was passed. The mission of the organization, at its start, was to promote consumerism by creating awareness, training and educating the consumers about their rights. This was necessary when there were no stalwart laws in our country to protect the consumers. The forum provided free advice to consumers, and conducts brain storming sessions on matters related to consumer protection and ensures the representation of consumers in national, state and district level consumer courts and legally mandated consumer protection councils. Consumer Forum has been a member of Consumers International since 1996.

Mumbai Grahak Panchayat (MGP), or Bombay Consumer Forum, was started as an agitation against the increase of consumer prices at festival season for fair and free distribution of consumer goods (Cecilia, S., op.cit. pp. 67-68). The distribution system that flourished was registered under the

Indian Societies Registration Act 1960 and Indian Public Trust Act 1950 in the name of MGP. MGP promotes consumerism by bringing the consumer to the forefront of the logistics and supply chain of consumer goods as decision makers, executors and monitors. MGP's primary objectives include organizing the consumers for common causes, educating them and protecting consumer interest through legal and other means.

Voluntary Organization in Interest of Consumer Education (VOICE) strives to be the voice of the consumer that the governments and other statutory / regulatory bodies of the country seldom hear (Mishra, S.K., Puri, V.K). The primary focus of this NGO is to have informed consumers in India. Information is being passed to consumers through VOICE includes corporate negligence / misconduct on issues such as consumer safety or customer satisfaction, your rights as a consumer to get value for your money, and the recourse that can be taken if your consumer rights are defied. It was founded by students and teachers of the University of Delhi in 1983, and it was registered as charitable public trust in 1986, and in the same year the consumer protection act came into existence.

Grahak Shakti works towards creating consumer awareness by organizing various programs, street plays and shows such as 'Hello Geleyere'. The organization had undertaken a number of surveys like the one on spurious drugs in coordination with the Drugs Control Department – Government of India. Its campaign on credit cards and effective liaison with the regulator was an effective way to warn the erring bankers to conduct business ethically. It also participated in joint raids in coordination with the Department of Legal Metrology and some oil companies to check malpractices related to weights and measurement, adulteration and pilferage.

In Tamilnadu, there is one organization that co-ordinates the activities of all the consumer associations. This is known as Federation of Consumer organizations in Tamilnadu and Pondicherry. Its acronym is FEDCOT (Annual Report of FEDCOT for the year 2010-2011, Cuddalore, 2011). FEDCOT is a unique Non Governmental Organisation in the sense that it is both an organization and a movement. High spirit of voluntarism presented in FEDCOT kept up the high morale in the Double faceted consumer federation. With a view to decentralize power and to encourage wider participation of talented people in the running of the Federation, various directorates have been created with independent charge.

From 1992, a number of training programmes ranging from consumer awareness programmes to highly specialized workshops have been organized to build up a strong base for informed consumer activists. FEDCOT conducted four state level consumer conferences at Trichy in September 1992, at Madurai in February 1994 exclusively for women, at Chennai in March 1997 and at Salem in February 2001. FEDCOT has carefully cultivated a working relationship with the network of many Non Governmental organizations in India and Abroad. FEDCOT was adjudged as the Best Consumer Group among the Voluntary Consumer Organizations in the country for the year 1994 and received a cash prize of Rs. 50,000/- and a certificate of merit by the Government of India.

FEDCOT in collaboration with CI- ROAP, Kuala Lumpur and UNICEF conducted Street Food Vending Survey in three major districts and Iodine awareness campaign throughout Tamilnadu respectively. FEDCOT has published a number of books such as the judgements of consumer cases in Tamil for

the benefit of consumer organizations and people who are involved in consumer affairs.

Federation of consumer organizations in Tamilnadu and Pondicherry (FEDCOT) got split into two in 2008 and the VCOs attached with that federation have begun to quarrel instead of fighting for the cause of consumer protection. On 4 March 2012, there was a meeting at Tiruchirappalli for the unification of FEDCOT and the leaders of the Consumer Movement accepted the unification. Now FEDCOT is the umbrella organization of all the voluntary consumer organizations in Tamilnadu having 360 members. FEDCOT, as a member of Consumers International, had also obtained funds for its member organizations to different activities and programmes.

CONFET was formed in 1991 and registered under the Societies Registration Act 1975. The focus of CONFET is creating awareness amongst all the classes of consumers about their rights & duties and to empower the consumers. CONFET has close networking with Regional consumer movements like the following.

- ✓ Bless –Cuddalore, CCC - Consumer Coordination Council, New Delhi,
- ✓ CAG - Consumer Action Group, Chennai , CAI - Consumer Association of India, Chennai,
- ✓ CCI Consumer Confederation of India, Tamil Nadu,
- ✓ Creed Centre for Rurral Education Empowerment and Development, Chidamarabam,
- ✓ Federation of Dalit Viliages for Livelihood Rights, Tamil Nadu, Peoples
- ✓ Watch, Madurai,
- ✓ Coastal Action Network, Nagapattinam,
- ✓ CATALYST TRUST, Chennai,
- ✓ Global Community Monitor, USA,
- ✓ Other Media, New Delhi,
- ✓ Tamilnadu Environment Council, Dindigul,
- ✓ Equation, Bangalore,
- ✓ Thozhmai, Chennai,
- ✓ SASY, Tindivanam,
- ✓ Seeds - Socio-Economic, Empowerment & Education development Society, Tamil Nadu.

The programmes of such bodies are sincerely carried out and executed. The Regional, National and International Consumer Organizations have great attachment in CONFET and entrusted many works like Street Food Testing, Drugs Testing, Real Estates, etc.

The Consumer Protection Council in Tiruchirappalli has been one of the resourceful and dynamic NGOs in Tamilnadu. It had undertaken several consumer issues successfully. It is the oldest one in India as well as in Tamilnadu . It has got its roots established in the year 1974, after the consumer councils of Bombay and Calcutta. (Annual Report of Consumer Protection Council in Tiruchirappalli, 2010-2011).

It was founded in January 1974 by Rajiv Taranath, Dinamalar R. Krishnamurthy, M. Meenakshisundaram and S. Pushpavanam, it has grown from modest beginnings, by holding the rallying point for the consumer movement in Tamil Nadu. Its objectives are to inform itself about consumer's problems, to channelize consumer's grievances to officials, to educate consumers of their rights and help them to exercise and to protect consumer's interest in general. It was with thirty

members, but at present the organization emerges with a total strength of 850 members. Its activities and focus on consumer protection have been brought at into both the national and international level. It has served as a member of the Central Consumer Protection Council, Government of India.

On April 26 1974, in the first General meeting of the Council Regional Transport Officer they passed the order of the removal of air-horn (Timeline Report on the Activities of Consumer Protection Council, Tiruchirappalli, 1974 – 2009). In November secretary gave oral evidence before the Joint Select Committee of Parliament regarding Prevention of Food Adulteration Act. In December, the organization conducted a survey on the needs of Tiruchi-Madras Rail Passengers which resulted in two carriages getting added to Rock Fort Express. In 1979, 600 people demonstrated in front of air-conditioned cinema hall protesting against beating up of a member who demanded air-conditioning in the theatre during a film show. Collector ordered for the reduction of fare in case there was no air-conditioning. On April 14, 1980 this organization campaigned against adulteration, took samples and worked with Dr Murali, the Municipal Health Officer. This created awareness among the public. In 1984, the representatives contributed to the discussion on the draft of consumer protection Act in New Delhi organized by Government of India, department of Civil Supplies. In 1986, it measured the noise pollution level at five different places in Tiruchi for 14 hours a day and for 8 days and drew up noise pollution map of Tiruchi. This was followed by a meeting with government officials in which decision was taken to remove the air horns. In spite of the complaint made by this organization in 1987 about irregularities in reduction sales, MRTP Commission intervened and warned the Textile Shop and the Textile Shop was made to give an undertaking to MRTP Commission.

In 1990, this organization represented India as one member-delegation in the International Standards Organisations in Florida, USA and visited standard Organizations in USA.

In 1992 ten rural consumer education camps were organized. With the aid of Central Government, 100 Adulteration Detection Kits were prepared and distributed to all the consumer groups in Tamilnadu.

In 1993, under the pressure of this organization the Union Minister for Railways for the first time fixes the speed of fifty five kilometers per hour as per the norms for super fast trains in India.

In 1994, this organization prepared the report on citizen's charter for the working group of Central Consumer Protection Council. This won several cases in District, state and National Consumer Commission Resolving over 200 complaints a year. In the same year this conducted a Regional Programme of Training of Trainees in association with consumer coordination council New Delhi for representatives of consumer organizations from South. This won a case in District Consumer Forum against City Cooperation Bank which refused to give the interest rate contracted as per Fixed Deposit Receipt. Bank was instructed to pay compensation plus interest.

In 1995, this was nominated member of Doordharsan Advisory committee council and renominated to Telecom Advisory Committee. This had conducted state level training programme for eighty consumer activists at Tiruchi.

In 1996, this was elected to Governing Council of consumer coordination council, an apex body of consumer organisations. In 1997, the organization was nominated to Divisional Railway users consultation council. The organization under took a forty eight hours to draw the attention of the Department of Telecom for not insisting on the display of information about tariff and permitting excess collection by phone booths. This move was resulted in the necessary action by Department of Telecom.

In 1998, this organization participated in an International Workshop on 'Public Administration / Issues of Governance' in Theodore Academy, Germany for a period of ten days. In the year 1999, this organization was invited by the Union Finance Minister for pre-budget consultation. In the year 2000, this organization was invited by Union Finance Minister for pre budget consultation of January 2000 in which two of their suggestions were accepted. In the year 2001, this organization was invited again by Union Finance Minister for prebudget consultation. This also campaigned for amendments to Consumer Protection Act through newspaper articles and in meetings.

In the year 2002, this organization measured noise pollution with sound level metre and seminar on noise pollution seminar at Seethalakshmi Ramasamy College was conducted. In this regard, it also campaigned for ban on air-horn. It won a case against Kasi Housing Ltd., on behalf of Professor Usha Devi. It surveyed the distance of bus stop from ground level and campaigned for reduction. It started a campaign for reduction of fax charges. In the year 2003, it published "A Handbook on Consumer Protection Act" in a function at Chennai. C.Sitaram & co has sold two editions so far. In the year 2004, this organization won a case in National Commission against Chinthamani coop society for payment of deposits and also got a written agreement with Chinthamani coop society by which society would pay Rs. 7.5 lakhs every month to the depositors through the council towards Principal long denied. This also reduced Public fax charges from Rs.30 to Rs.10 per page. In the year 2005 this organization had won two cases against LIC and got back Rs. two lakhs and Rs.20,000 for policy holders. It also got a refund of 70,000 for defective air-conditioner. It also won a case against dealer for refund of defective television. In the year 2006, this organization had pressurized Chinthamani cooperative society to return to the 462 depositors with a principal amount of Rs. 3.12 Crores. The Trichy-based consumer protection council, filed a case before the district consumer forum on behalf of S Ramesh, whose wife Pushpalatha died in the hospital on October 16, 2006 due to heavy bleeding after delivering. Secretary of the council S Pushpavanam argued before the forum that the hospital had no facilities for a safe delivery. The bleeding started within one hour of delivery at 7.23 pm and it was only noticed around 8.30 pm, according to a cardiologist's report. The district consumer forum has ordered G V N Hospital at Babu Road in Trichy to pay a compensation of Rs two lakh to Ramesh whose wife died in the hospital on the day of admission (The Times of India, Consumer Forum Fines Trichy Hospital for Negligence, dated 8August 2012).

### **BIRTH OF CONSUMERS' DAY**

Considering the importance of Kennedy's speech to the USA Congress, 15th March has been observed as the World Consumer Rights Day from the year 1983. Even though it is considered 15th March is not observed as a special day in the world's largest and most pulsating consumer society - the USA. In India, the Government, adopted 15th March as the National

Consumer's Day. India is a country, where never fell behind in introducing progressive legislation and it was among the first in the world to introduce universal adult franchise for women.

### **INDIA'S POSITION ON CONSUMER MOVEMENT**

Laws, rules, regulations and orders (for which India has unparalleled distinction in the Guinness book of records) alone do not protect the consumers, but it is the consumer movement of people which produced a positive results in a democracy. One of the greatest achievements of the Indian consumer movement is the enactment of the dynamic consumer law. After Independence, it has acknowledged the rampant consumer abuses, including those of the government - owned public utilities like telephones, transport, power etc. These utilities, in the first place, were created as state monopolies, ostensibly to protect consumers.

Critics of consumer law rightly conclude that though it cannot do anything about increase in prices, it has succeeded in bringing about fair play in the supply of goods and services available in the market place, giving substance to the adage: 'Customer is King'. Also, consumer law has encouraged active consumer bodies to demand and perhaps see in the near future, independent Public Utility Regulatory Commissions to debate costing, pricing and fair competition.

This confidence emanates from the empowerment of voluntary organizations under other consumer laws. While right to information act is enshrined in consumer laws, addition of the enlarged Right to know in the fundamental rights chapter of the Indian Constitution would only result in meaningful empowerment.

In fact, the Central Consumer Protection Council has recommended to the Government to enact a Freedom of Information Act on the pattern of a similar law in the USA. Another major achievement of the Indian consumer movement in the context of the world scenario was to direct the government in 1989, to declare the World Consumer Rights Day of 15<sup>th</sup> March as the National Consumer's Day in India. Unlike the Labour Day on 1st May, which has roots in the USA, the Consumer Rights Day, which originated in the USA, is not even observed there."

Today India is the only country in the world, which has exclusive courts for consumer redressal. In the 13th World Congress of locus held in Hong Kong during 7 - 13 July 1991, India came in for praise and developed countries were called upon to emulate India. In the same year, these developments inspired Jim Sugarman, a noted USA consumer activist and a close associate of Ralph Nader, to candidly observe: "India is getting a global reputation for the rapid development of its consumer movement".

### **EVOLUTION OF THE CONSUMER MOVEMENT IN TAMIL NADU: INDIA MARKED ITS HISTORICAL**

Identity of consumer protection. Consumer protection was a part of ancient culture and formed the core of its administration. But the introduction of boundless commercialisation of activities eclipsed the old rich heritage. As in Europe, in India also the origin of the Consumer Movement was also in the form of Consumer \ Co-operatives in India.

India's history reveals that in various periods and regimes of different kings and dynasties prior to the British rule, there were enactments to punish the dishonest and unfair traders and producers. The laws of Manu and Chanakya's 'Arthashastra' also refer to the punishments to be given to the dishonest traders. The British introduced in India laws such as the Sale of Goods Act, Weights and Measurements Act, which were being followed in England. Some organized effort to protect consumers from the middlemen was made in the 1940s by eminent freedom fighters such as Sri Tanguturi Prakasam, Sri C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji), in Southern India. They started consumer co-operative stores to retail essential commodities. It became a social movement and the concept of consumer co-operatives spread to different parts of the country. Today, consumer organizations such as the 'Mumbai Grahak Panchayat' in Mumbai are continuing this approach to consumer welfare by organizing the procurement and distribution of essential items to their members. The origin and growth of the consumer movement in India which has many similarities to the movements elsewhere, can be divided into three significant phases. The first phase constitutes the 1960s in which organizations such as the Consumer Guidance Society of India (Bombay) were formed to inform and educate consumers on the quality of goods and services and to conduct simple tests on goods of daily consumption. During the second phase, 1970-1980, shortages in the supply of essential commodities and the unsatisfactory functioning of the Public Distribution System (PDS) led activists to form consumer organizations in their towns and localities to ventilate their grievances to the authorities concerned. Several such organizations which were formed between 1970 and 1980 were primarily concerned with the problems of inflation, food adulteration and the Public Distribution System. These organizations served a very useful purpose as voluntary vigilance groups in the market place. The third phase of growth covering the period from 1981 to 1990 signifies the expansion and consolidation of the consumer movement in India, especially after 1986. With the enactment of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, there has been a spurt in the number of new organizations in the country.

### CONSUMER ORGANIZATIONS IN INDIA

As it was inspired by the Consumer Bill of Rights by John F. Kennedy, some devoted house wives conceived of an idea of a consumer organization and the result was the formation of the Consumer Guidance Society of India (CGSI) in 1966, as a non-profit organization. Protection of consumer rights, promotion of consumer interest, dissemination of necessary information, counseling, taking up the complaints with the offending party and / or the authorities concerned and helping them to select goods and services which are fair and worthy of the money were said to be some of the prime objectives of the CGSI.

The prime slogan of the society had been "Grahak Seva, Suraksha and Santosh" and it served as a forum for ventilation of consumer complaints and frustration due to trade misbehavior. The motto of the CGSI is 'quality at a fair price'. Various sub committees were instituted by CGSI to deal with complaints, publications, public utilities and testing of food and other items. The test results and articles of consumer interest are published in its monthly magazine 'Keemat'. In an effort to bring all the consumer activities all over the country, the CGSI organized the first All India Conference on Consumer Protection in 1972 in Bombay. In 1974, CGSI started a project called 'Consumer Education', specially made for the low-income group, and in 1975, in collaboration with a university and it established 'milk testing' centre. It was the first consumer

organization to appeal to the government to declare a National Consumer Education Week every year.

The CGSI is the only Indian consumer organization with 'Association (voting) membership in the International Organization of Consumers Unions (IOCU). Being elected to the IOCU Council in 1975, it was considered one of the greatest honours achieved by the CGSI. The Central Committee, ISS Oil Burning Appliance Committees, ISI Drugs and Cosmetics Committee and many state level advisory committees accommodated representatives of the CGSI. In its pursuit to educate consumers of their rights and their responsibilities, the CGSI has created a separate web page, Consumer Guidance Society of India.

For the first time, in the history of the consumer movement in India, a university gave birth to a very popular and powerful consumer organization. The Voluntary Organisation in the Interest of Consumer Education (VOICE) was formed for the students and teachers of Delhi University, Delhi, during the academic year 1983- 84 and it was registered three years later. V. M. Tarkunde, a noted jurists, and P. K. Ghosh of Delhi School of Economics, were its founder office-bearers.

Besides taking up cases and removal of lacunae in various laws affecting consumer protection in India, VOICE dwelt on conducting research for consumer problems, educating the public about the problems of consumers, undertaking consumer interest litigations etc. The hidden strength and power of consumer organizations were brought to limelight when VOICE took the multinational giants like BATA and ITC to court for their 'Bubble gummers' and 'Made for each other' contests. All the soft drink manufacturers were forced to write 'artificially flavored' and 'contains no fruit juice or fruit pulp' in their advertisements by the efforts of VOICE. Its first battle had been against the five percent discretionary quota of directors of public sector companies. It had been affiliated to the IOCU, besides finding berths for its representatives in various official committees like the Electronic Test Lab Advisory Committee, Central Committee on Food Standards, Committee on Urban Waste Management, and Committee on the Issue of Fluoride in Toothpaste etc.

VOICE prepared a draft document on "Tobacco Free Initiatives and Action for Consumer Protection from Tobacco", based on the work of organizations and individuals in Asia. The study was a preparation for a conference, sponsored by the World Health Organizations (WHO) and it was designed to be an important input into the WHO Report for the World Health Assembly, scheduled in the month of May 2000.

In 1986, under the provisions of the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986, the erstwhile Indian Standards Institute (ISI) was transformed into Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), with necessary statutory authority. The following activities of BIS would explain how it takes due account of consumer needs in the background of successful consumer organizations in the century.

1. Standards Formulation
2. Certification Scheme to identify Quality Products
3. Publicity to educate Consumers
4. Awareness Programmes and
5. Publications of Brochures / Specialists / Guide.

All India Consumer Movement, Jamshedpur, Pidugurala Consumer Society, Lucknow, Association for Consumer

Action in Safety and Health (ACASH) etc, came into existence at during the end of 1980s. All India Consumer Action Network (AICAN) was established with the primary objective of spreading legal awareness among the people living in the remotest areas of this country, in 1990 by the former (Justice P. N. Bhagwat)

Even after the notification of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, many states were slow in implementing the provisions of the act. Only when Supreme Court intervened and ordered the immediate setting up of consumer courts in each district of the country, many states started responding to the demands of the consumer organizations to set up consumer courts in each district and to implement the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.

#### Various Councils

- ✓ The Central Consumer Protection Council
- ✓ The State Consumer Protection Councils
- ✓ Central and State Forum
- ✓ District Forum: Members
- ✓ State Commission
- ✓ Consumer Movement in Tamil Nadu

The consumer movement in Tamilnadu received a big boost with the State Government's implementation of the Consumer Protection Act. It has set up State Commission and the District Forums in all the districts. It is rendering all assistance for the

growth of the consumer movement. Due to the positive efforts of the Tamil Nadu Government, there are about 185 voluntary consumer organizations in the State. They are rendering Yeomen service to the people of Tamil Nadu. The State Machinery has taken steps to modernize and simplify the Public Distribution System. Very often, action is being taken against the unscrupulous traders. The Commissioner for Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs is expected to safeguard the interest of consumers. Above all, Tamil Nadu is in the forefront in the implementation of several legislations enacted to protect the consumers. As per the order of Supreme Court, the Government of Tamil Nadu has established separate, full time consumer courts, in the district headquarters.

#### CONCLUSION

The consumer organisations not only solve consumers' cases but also they act as consultants, advisors and mediators for the consumers in many fields. They render general counselling on family disputes. They conduct workshops, seminars and training programmes to create consumer awareness. They file public interest litigations also. Some of the organisations work on a full-time basis. A notable feature is that a few organisations and consumer activists in Tamil Nadu have received awards through the Government of India for their sincere efforts and great service.

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