

Awareness of Consumers towards their Rights and Consumer Protection Act, 1986

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Abstract - Consumer Awareness is the understanding by an individual of their rights as a consumer concerning available products and services being marketed and sold. The concept of consumer awareness involves four categories including safety, choice, information and the right to be heard. Consumers are the central point of all economic activity. Everyone is a born consumer, whether he is an industrialist, a producer, a trader engaged in any profession or service or belonging to any other class. Whether one is a producer or whether he renders a service, the ultimate object of all production is to ensure consumption of goods and services to the satisfaction of the consumers. This could be achieved only when the products are of acceptable standard quality and are not produced and distributed with the only motive of making profits. This idea referred to the concept of consumer protection. Consumer protection is a group of laws and organizations designed to ensure the rights of consumers as well as fair trade, competition and accurate information in the marketplace. In India, consumer protection is specified in The Consumer Protection Act, 1986. This Act is based on the principle of 'self-help' to protect oneself against all kinds of exploitative and unfair dealings such as over-pricing, defective goods and cheating. This paper is designed to throw a light upon the role of Consumer Protection Act, 1986 in protecting the consumers in India.

The Charter on consumer rights provides a detail about the rights of consumers. This paper is designed to analyze the degree of awareness of consumers about their rights as consumers. The basic rights of consumers were first reorganized and defined on March 15, 1962 by John F. Kennedy, the President of the United States of America, in his special message to the Congress on consumer protection. Four basic rights such as the right to safety, the right to be informed, the right to choose and the right to be heard were incorporated in the UN charter on human rights. Later the International Organization of Consumer Union (CICO) added three more rights like right to healthy environment, right to consumer education and right to redressal.¹ In the National Commission of CICO, held at Calcutta in 1991, a resolution was passed to press for the inclusion of another right i.e. the right to boycott. Moreover, right to basic needs is the latest addition to the rights of consumers. These rights, declared and recognized internationally, add a new dimension to consumer protection. Each of these rights tries to widen the scope of consumer protection.

The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 provides for the establishment of Consumer Disputes Redressal Agencies at District, State and National levels for the protection and promotion of the interests of consumers and to redress their grievances in a speedy, simple and inexpensive manner. This paper also analyzes whether the consumer approached to any consumers redressal machinery for redressing their grievances or not. The study was done through a structured questionnaire which was made specifically for the study. The consumers belonging to different income and social groups have selected to understand their level of awareness about rights of consumers. From this point of view of a sample of 200 consumers has selected. While selecting the respondents due care has taken to have proper representation of the different social segments. Data has been analyzed and tabulated on the basis of responses given by respondents. Respondents have analyzed on the basis of their area of residence viz., rural and urban. Then, Chi square test has used to find out the association between the area of residence of respondents.

Keywords: *Consumer Awareness, Consumer Protection, Redressal Machinery.*

I. INTRODUCTION

A consumer is defined as someone who acquires goods or services for direct use or ownership rather than for resale or use in production and manufacturing.² Consumer awareness is a need of present days. Consumer awareness is about making the consumer aware of his/her rights. It is a marketing term which means that consumers are aware of products or services, its characteristics and the other marketing P's (place to buy, price, and promotion). In this age of capitalism and globalization, the main objective of each producer is to maximize his profit. In each and every possible way the producer are trying to increase the sale of their products. Therefore, in fulfillment of their aim they forget the interests of consumers and start exploiting them for example –overcharging, under weighing, selling of adulterated and poor quality goods, misleading the consumers by giving false advertisement etc. Thus in order to save himself from being cheated, it is necessary for a consumer to be aware. In this way, consumer awareness means creating awareness of a consumer towards his rights and duties.

The consumers should aware themselves of the following matters:

- Receive proper invoice, bill, cash memo or voucher.
- The name of things bought or the description of the service should be mentioned in the invoice.
- The date of the transaction should be mentioned.
- Taxes should be mentioned on the invoice or bill.
- Consumers should check if the name of the goods, weight, quantity, manufacturing-date, name of the manufacturer and address are mentioned on the covers of the packaged goods.
- The government has fixed the rate of indirect taxes on different kinds of goods.
- Consumer should check for symbol such as ISI mark on industrial goods, Agmark on agricultural products, Hallmark on golden ornament, etc.
- The good which can be weighed should be bought after checking the product.³

Consumer protection is a form of social action which is hatched to attain the well-being of the society namely consumers. Since an individual consumer is considered more vulnerable, in the modern world, to exploitation and harassment by the manufacturers and distributors or sellers because of environmental complexities of business operations, technological changes, application of mass production techniques, vast resources, manpower and

acrimonious advertising, it is necessary that the various groups of society namely, government, judiciary, business units, traders, voluntary associations of consumers are to play their due role to protect and promote the consumer interest-economic, social and environmental, all rolled into one.

The law relating to consumer protection is contained in the Consumer Protection Act, 1986.⁴ The Act applies to all goods and services. The Act extends to the whole of India except the state of Jammu and Kashmir [Sec 1 (2)]. The provision of chapter 1, 2, and 4 came in to force on April 15, 1987 and of chapter 3 on July 10, 1987. Act 1986 is referred to as the Act as amended by the Consumer Protection (Amendment) Act, 2002. The Amendment Act came into the force with effect from 15th March, 2003. The consumer protection is nothing but to provide safeguard against the basic rights of the consumers. In India, Consumer Protection Act of 1986 is the law governing consumer protection. Under this law, Separate Consumer tribunals have been set up throughout India in each and every district in which a consumer [complaint can be filed by both the consumer of a goods as well as of the services] can file his complaint on a simple paper without paying any court fees and his complaint will be decided by the Presiding Officer of the District Level. Appeal could be filed to the State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions and after that to the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC). The procedures in these tribunals are relatively less formal and more people friendly and they also take less time to decide upon a consumer dispute when compared to the years long time taken by the traditional Indian Judiciary.

The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 recognizes six consumer rights. There rights are:

- (a) The right to be protected against marketing of goods which are hazardous to life and property;
- (b) The right to be informed about the quality, quantity, potency, purity, standard and price of goods to protect the consumer against unfair trade practices;
- (c) The right to be assured, wherever possible, access to a variety of goods at competitive prices;
- (d) The right to be heard and to be assured that consumer interests will receive due consideration at appropriate forums;
- (e) The right to seek redressal against unfair trade practices or unscrupulous exploitation of consumers; and
- (f) The right to consumer education.

² "West Encyclopedia of American Law. Consumer. Answers.com. n.d.. Retrieved on January 31, 2010"

³ www.importantindia.com

⁴

http://ncdr.nic.in/bare_acts/Consumer%20Protection%20Act-1986.html

The Act provides a more accessible and speedy Legal Avenue for consumers-no fees, no lawyers and the judgment is to be delivered in 90 days. Redressal machinery is provided for in the Act for the enforcement of the rights of the consumers. It is laid down in the act that quasi-judicial machinery, in the shape of special consumer courts, will be established all over the country to enable aggrieved consumers to knock at its door for ready redress. The machinery is to comprise a District forum, a State and union territory level and a National commission at the apex level in Delhi. Jurisdiction of this three-tier quasi-judicial machinery is defined. The District Forum shall have jurisdiction to entertain complaints where the value of the goods or services and the compensation, if any, claimed "does not exceed rupees twenty lakhs. The State Commission shall have jurisdiction to entertain complaints where the value of the goods or services and compensation, if any, claimed exceeds rupees twenty lakhs but does not exceed rupees one crore; and appeals against the orders of any District Forum within the State. The National Commission shall have jurisdiction to entertain complaints where the value of the goods or services and compensation, if any, claimed exceeds rupees one crore; and appeals against the orders of any State Commission

1.3 Literature Review

- Mittal, Ishwar (2015) in his paper "Consumer Awareness about Different Consumer Legislations in India" analyzed the awareness level of consumers towards various consumer protection legislations enacted in India to protect the interest of consumers. Besides the protection granted under Indian Constitution, the Indian Government of India has passed a number of statutory regulations to and amended from time to time to put more teeth into the enforcement machinery to ensure better protection of the consumers' interests. Various statutes intended to protect the consumer against different forms of deceit, injury and exploitation were enacted.
- Dr. Kavitha R.(2015) in her paper "A Study on Consumer Awareness and Determinants of Online Shopping" analyzed that with the rapid development of network technology, electronic commerce and electronic marketing had been formed and developed gradually, thereby forming new business model and business chance which exerted an important influence on the country's economic future competitiveness. Online shopping is a recent phenomenon in the field of E-Business and is definitely going to be the future of shopping in the world. Most of the companies are running their on-line portals to sell their products/services on-line. The facility of Online purchasing has allowed customers to identify the different types of products available in the global market, Due to rapid globalization, all types of products are available on the internet. Goods and services, consumer durables, books, audio and video cassettes and services like and air tickets can also be purchased online. In this paper, they have studied about the consumer awareness and factors affecting on online shopping. They have used Qualitative and Quantitative research methods to study the impact of Demographic factors of consumers on on-line shopping, respondents behavior, awareness about the rules and regulations of online shopping and benefits and services of online shopping.
- Dr. Arora, Reeta & Dr. Chawla, Asha (2014) made "An Analytical Study of Consumer Awareness among Teenagers" to measure the level of consumer awareness among teenagers and also to know their perception about today's market. In the country like India, which has a higher population rate and illiteracy rate, there is a great need to increase consumer awareness especially among teenagers. Consumer awareness plays a key role in decision making and benefits society by promoting customer satisfaction, increasing economic stability and creating realistic expectations. The benefits of consumer awareness of an individual include enhanced critical thinking, improved life skills and increased self-confidence. Legal and administrative machinery and consumer redressal system are working in our country under which the consumers can file a complaint in a consumer court and demand justice when they are cheated by the sellers or manufacturers of the products or services.
- Virender Pal Singh, Amit Bery, Gautam Biswas, Akashdeep Aggarwal (2014) conducted a study to know awareness about Consumer Protection Act, 1986 and medical negligence among medical and surgical specialists working in Private and Government Medical Colleges. They have found that the awareness about Act and medical negligence among medical as well as surgical specialists was unsatisfactory.
- Sharma Vijay Kumar Ramchandra (2013) in his study of Consumer Protection Act related to Banking Sector, throw a light on the negligence and deficiency in service of banks in relation to shares and investments and he has also discussed some cases related to topic.
- Bolazinb (2012) in his article "The Role of Consumer Protection Agency and The Judiciary on Consumer Protection" has discussed various laws and organizations designed to ensure the rights of

consumers as well as fair trade competition and the free flow of truthful information in the marketplace.

- Dr. P. Jayasubramanian and Ms. A. Vaideke (2012) have studied the consumer awareness and attitude towards consumer protection measures. The study shows that consumers' protection measures are not aware to general public because of lack of proper communication. It further reveals that government brings out lot of measures to protect consumer, but consumers are not using it properly.
- Nair, Indira (2012) in her paper entitled "Assessment of Consumer Awareness amongst Undergraduate Students of Thane District- A Case Study" made an attempt to study the level of awareness amongst undergraduate students of Thane District. 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 tried 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.
- Aman Chatterjee and Sheetal Sahoo (2011) have done a study to analyze the various problems and prospects relating to consumer protection. They concluded that there is no doubt that the legal system in India provides some remedies for the consumers' problems. But in reality, consumer is powerless to assert his rights and to compel a solution of his grievances in the marketplace.
- Ms. Kiran Choudhary, Ms. Tanu Chandhiok and Mrs. Parveen Deman (2011) made an analysis to explore the consumer protection consumerism in India in their

research paper "Consumer Protection and Consumerism in India". They analysed that consumer awareness through consumer education and action by the government, consumer activists, and associations are needed the most to make consumer protection movement a success in the country.

1.4 Objectives of the study

A wide range of consumers pay their hard – earned money to buy several products, but in case they do not get the right value for their money in terms of the right quality or quantity of goods and services bought or if they are made wrong promises, they are supposed to stand against their deceit. Quite often, they are either unaware of their rights or unable to raise their voice against exploitation. They need protection against malpractices and deceit by seller. So, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the awareness of rural and urban consumers towards their rights and responsibilities.
2. To analyze the general awareness and perception of rural and urban consumers towards Consumer Protection Act, 1986.

1.5 Methodology

The study is based on the mixture of both primary and secondary data. The instrument for the study was a self-made questionnaire written in English language which was made specifically for the study. The primary data were collected through questionnaires from the sample of 200 respondents of Punjab in India. The questionnaire was handed over to each of the study participants. The questionnaire was pre-tested for validity and reliability and modified accordingly. The questionnaire was comprised of questions based on the awareness (Annexure 1). Questionnaire was handed over to all the respondents by the investigator and later on collected from them. Incomplete questionnaires were not included in the study. Total knowledge/awareness score was calculated on the basis of each participant's response. Apart from this, the secondary data were collected from journals, books, websites and published data. The respondents were selected on simple random method.

1.5.1 Sampling Design

Punjab State has both rural and urban population. The data have been collected from two hundred consumers from the study area using simple random sampling to analyze their awareness. The efforts have been made to give balanced representation to various demographic characteristics of the respondents such as place, age groups, educational levels, occupations, various segments of society and both the genders to make the sample representative.

Urban Consumers refers to consumers who reside within the limits of the corporation, Municipalities and Town Panchyats. Rural Consumers refers to consumers residing

in villages or in rural panchayat regions outside the corporation, municipalities and town panchayat regions.

Table 1: Details of Sample Respondents

| Gender | Rural | Urban | Total |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| Male | 58 | 52 | 110 |
| Female | 42 | 48 | 90 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 200 |

Source : Compiled by researcher

1.5.2 Data Processing

After completing the data collection a thorough check was made. Then the Researcher prepared a tally mark sheet for the purpose of classifying data. With the help of the sheet, the master table was prepared. Lastly classification tables were prepared for further analysis and interpretation of data. For the presentation of results of analysis of questionnaires, the researcher has used Stacked Column Charts as it is very easy to present all the response categories on the basis of percentages of responses of rural as well as urban respondents.

1.5.3 Plan of Analysis

The data were analyzed by using appropriate statistical techniques such as percentages, averages, ranks and chi square test. The percentage analyses and ranking technique

were used throughout the thesis whenever required. The Pearson’s Chi Square test using Stata Statistical software was used to find out whether area of residence of the sample respondent influenced the awareness towards consumer rights.

1.6 Findings

In the present study, an attempt is made to study the awareness of consumers about the consumer rights, consumer legislations such as Consumer Forum and Consumer Organization and so on. Study is also made to know about whether consumers approach to Consumer Redressal Machinery any time or not. Data has been collected from 200 respondents at random basis.

1.6.1 Awareness of Consumer’s Rights

There are eight recognized rights for consumers viz., Right to Safety, Right to be informed, Right to choose, Right to heard, Right to redressal, Right to consumer education, Right to healthy environment and Right to basic requirements.

The awareness of these rights varies from place to place. A majority of consumers in rural and urban areas were very aware of their rights. There were 11% consumers who were slightly aware and 7% consumers were not aware at all (Table 2). Illiteracy, lack of awareness, lack of interest and lack of knowledge may be the reasons for this.

Table 2: Awareness of Consumer’s Rights

| S. No. | Awareness | Rural | Urban | Total |
|--------|--------------|------------|------------|-----------------|
| 1. | Extremely | 28 | 24 | 59(30) |
| 2. | Very | 39 | 31 | 63(31) |
| 3. | Moderately | 18 | 24 | 42(21) |
| 4. | Slightly | 06 | 16 | 22(11) |
| 5. | Not at all | 09 | 05 | 14(07) |
| | Total | 100 | 100 | 200(100) |

Source: Compiled by researcher

Two sets of samples are drawn from the different populations to find out whether the proportion of awareness was significant or not. Hence the researcher has used Pearson’s Chi Square Test in Stata for the study. Stata is a complete, integrated statistical software package that provides data analysis, data management, and graphics. The hypothesis for using the Pearson’s Chi Square test is that the area of residence does not influence the awareness of the consumers' rights.

Fig. 1: Output of Chi Square Test in Stata Statistical Software

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Notes:
1. Unicode is supported; see help unicode_advice.
2. Maximum number of variables is set to 5000; see help set_maxvar.

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| row | col | | Total |
|-------|-----|-----|-------|
| | 1 | 2 | |
| 1 | 28 | 24 | 52 |
| 2 | 39 | 31 | 70 |
| 3 | 18 | 24 | 42 |
| 4 | 6 | 16 | 22 |
| 5 | 9 | 5 | 14 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 200 |

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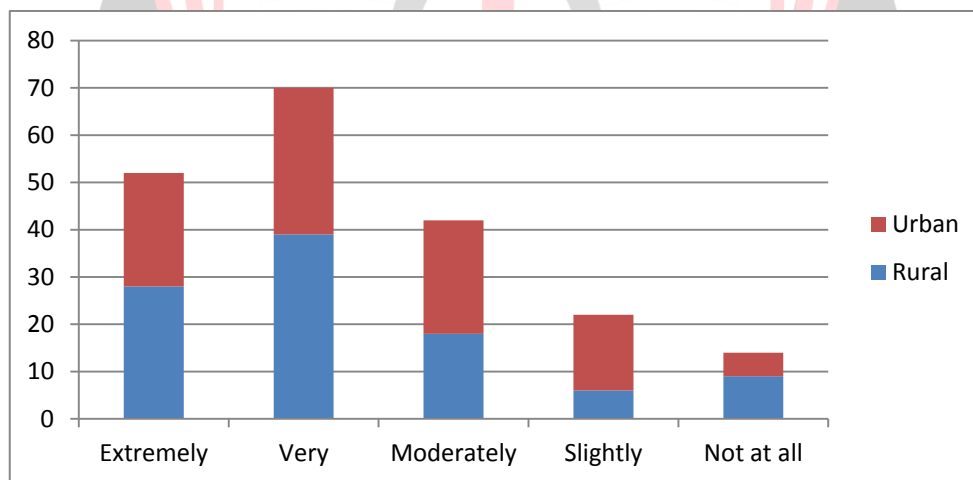
Pearson chi2(4) = 7.7674 Pr = 0.100

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As the Pr value is greater than 0.05, so this can be inferred that there is no association between the areas of residence whether rural or urban and awareness level of the consumers.

Chart 1 depicts that majority of the rural as well as urban consumers of Punjab state were very aware about consumer rights.

Chart 1: Awareness of Consumer’s Rights



1.6.2 Awareness of Legislation to Protect Consumers

One of the major steps taken by the government to protect the interests of the consumers was the introduction of Consumer Protection Act, 1986. Besides, there are a number of allied Acts to protect the consumers. It is understood from the following Table 3 that majority of the sample respondents were very aware about it.

Table 3: Awareness of Legislation to Protect Consumers

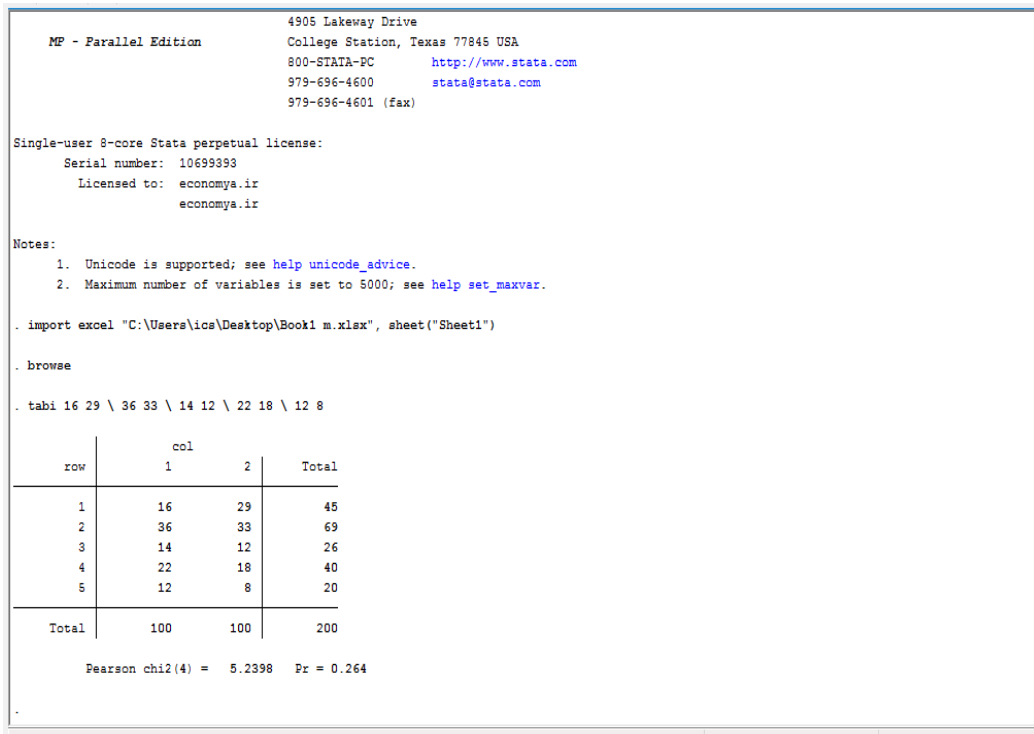
| S. No. | Awareness of Legislation | Rural | Urban | Total |
|--------|--------------------------|-------|-------|---------------|
| 1. | Extremely | 16 | 29 | 45(23) |
| 2. | Very | 36 | 33 | 69(34) |
| 3. | Moderately | 14 | 12 | 26(13) |
| 4. | Slightly | 22 | 18 | 40(20) |
| 5. | Not at all | 12 | 08 | 20(10) |

| | | | | |
|--|--------------|------------|------------|-----------------|
| | Total | 100 | 100 | 200(100) |
|--|--------------|------------|------------|-----------------|

Source: Compiled by researcher

The researcher has used Pearson’s Chi Square test for the study. The hypothesis here is that the area of residence does not influence the awareness of legislation to protect the consumers' rights.

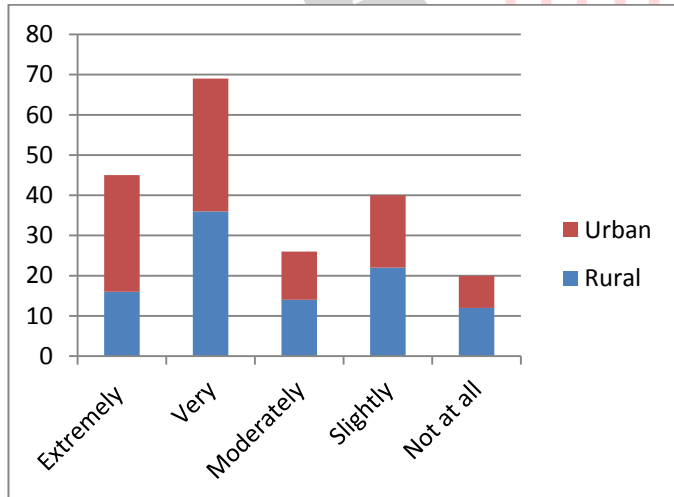
Fig. 2 : Output of Chi Square Test in Stata Statistical Software



As the Pr value is greater than 0.05, so this can be inferred that there is no association between the area of residence and awareness towards legislation to protect the consumers' rights.

Chart 2 depicts that 23% consumers were extremely aware of legislation whereas 10% consumers were not at all aware.

Chart 2: Awareness of Legislation to Protect Consumers



1.6.3 Knowledge about Consumers’ Redressal Machinery

Under this law, Separate Consumer Dispute Redress Forums have been set up throughout India in each and every district in which a consumer can file his complaint on a simple paper with nominal court fees and his complaint

will be decided by the Presiding Officer of the District Level. The complaint can be filed by both the consumer of goods as well as of the services. An appeal could be filed to the State Consumer Disputes Redress Commissions and after that to the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCRDC). The procedures in these tribunals are relatively less formal and more people friendly and they also take less time to decide upon a consumer dispute. Consumers' problems are solved by redressal machineries like consumer organizations, consumer disputes redressal forums and others. Consumers should have good knowledge of redressal organizations. Consumer organizations function under different names. They admit any individual as a member by collecting an annual or life subscription. Consumer disputes redressal forum is a government body and it is quasi-judicial in nature. It is established to redress consumers' grievances. The following Table 4 shows the knowledge of the respondents relating to the redressal machinery.

Table 4: Knowledge about Consumers’ Redressal Machinery

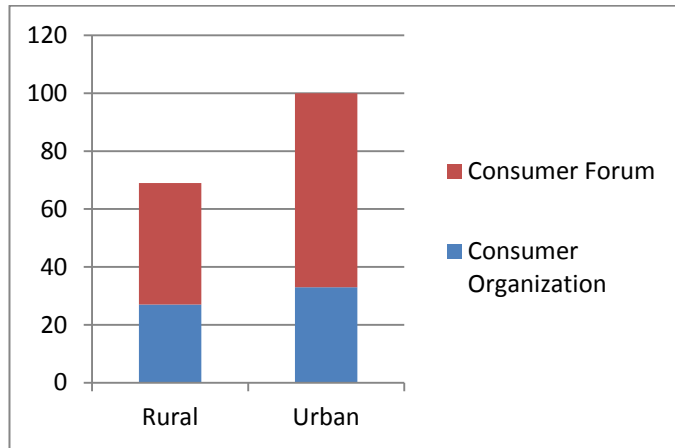
| S. No. | Redressal Organizations | Rural | Urban | Rank |
|--------|-------------------------|-------|-------|------|
| 1. | Consumer Organization | 27 | 33 | II |
| 2. | Consumer Forum | 42 | 67 | I |

Source: Compiled by researcher

A large number of sample consumers in rural and urban areas stated that they know about the Consumer Forums

(Chart 3). As per the Consumer Protection Act, the Consumer Redressal Forum should settle the grievances within 90 days, free of cost. Normally the consumer organizations redress the grievances faster than the consumer forum. But these organizations may charge some fees for redressal.

Chart 3: Knowledge of Consumer's Redressal Machinery



1.6.4 Approach to Consumer Redressal Machinery

Table 5 stated that nearly 83% of the rural consumers and 62% of the urban consumers did not approach to the Consumer Redressal machinery any time.

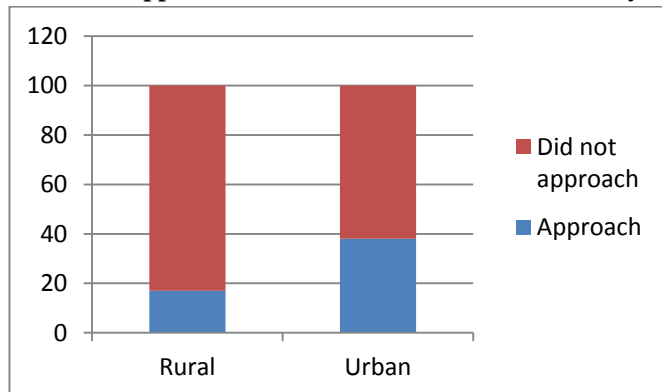
Table 5: Approach to Consumer Redressal Machinery

| S. No. | Approach to Consumer Redressal Machinery | Rural | Urban | Total |
|--------|--|-------|-------|----------|
| 1. | Approach | 17 | 38 | 55(28) |
| 2. | Did not approach | 83 | 62 | 145(72) |
| | Total | 100 | 100 | 200(100) |

Source: Compiled by researcher

Chart 4 is self-explanatory. Majority of the rural as well as urban consumers of Punjab state did not approach Consumer Redressal Machinery.

Chart 4: Approach to Consumer Redressal Machinery



1.6.5 Grievances Redressed

An attempt has also been made to know that whether the grievances of those who approached to Consumer Redressal machinery, were settled or not. Table 6 stated that grievances of 48 consumers were settled out of the 55 consumers who approached.

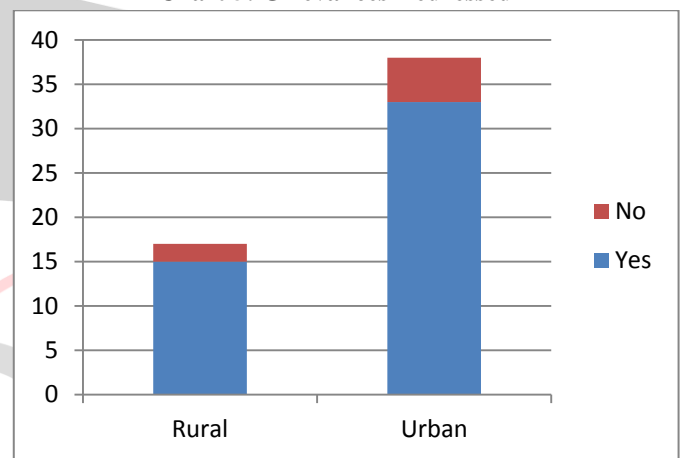
Table 6: Grievances Redressed

| S. No. | Grievances Redressed | Rural | Urban | Total |
|--------|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. | Yes | 15(88) | 33(87) | 48(87) |
| 2. | No | 02(12) | 05(13) | 07(13) |
| | Total | 17(100) | 38(100) | 55(100) |

Source: Compiled by researcher

Chart 5 depicts that grievances of 88% rural consumers and 87% of urban consumers were settled.

Chart 5: Grievances Redressed



Source: Compiled by researcher

1.7 Conclusion

Consumer rights awareness is most vital to society and a way to eliminate malpractices by the manufacturers, producers, and marketers. The heartening part of present day consumer courts to uphold the grievances, agony and strive for a transparent method of essential commodities, services reaches the consumers and keep the service providers as well as manufacturers, marketers at bay. The need of the consumer rights awareness and legal remedies through consumer courts to help the society's welfare is much needed today as we pay for the products from our hard earned money and we should get its worth. We have been all along mute spectators to those malpractices, fraudulence trade practices so far and it is time to time this evil which spoils the society. The present day techniques by many firms to mislead the customers by reduction of weight, quality, price differences, worthless services, lack of after sales service by ignoring customer's complaints, requests, and lethargic high handedness of monopoly practices. It is our fundamental right to know about the safety, durability, worthiness of any product we buy. There are many instances we insist for bills, records, warrantee cards and many times they ignore and it leads to black money transactions, malpractices and what not. Every product has to be displayed with date of manufacturing,

weight measurements, Maximum Retail Price (M.R.P.) and warnings of its misuse. Although there are number of laws introduced and still the traders find it easy to dodge. Every day consumers are deprived of their mental peace and forced to tensions due to unfair practices by the trade & services as well as losing their valuable funds in turn. Purchase of consumer goods and essential commodities always bring bitter experiences and regret. This has to be changed. The more we are alert and conscious about selecting the goods before purchasing and knowing about their service options thereby we stand to gain in the long run. With a billion consumers, India is one of the biggest consumer markets in the world, but has consumer protection kept pace with the burgeoning markets? For a consumer, life has only become tougher as services have increased and as technology has made rapid strides. Even though strong and clear laws exist in India to protect consumer rights, the actual plight of Indian consumers could be declared as completely dismal. Of the several laws that have been enacted to protect the rights of consumers in India, the most significant is the Consumer Protection Act, 1986. Under this law, everyone, including individuals, a Hindu undivided family, a firm, and a company, can exercise their consumer rights for the goods and services purchased by them. It is important that, as consumers, we know at least our basic rights and about the courts and procedures that deal with the infringement of our rights. The rights of consumers such as: The right to be protected from all types of hazardous goods and services, the right to be fully informed about the performance and quality of all goods and services, the right to free choice of goods and services, the right to be heard in all decision-making processes related to consumer interests, right to seek redressal, whenever consumer rights have been infringed and right to complete consumer education. The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 and various other laws have been formulated to ensure fair competition in the market place and free flow of true information from the providers of goods and services to those who consume them. However, the success of these laws would depend upon the vigilance of consumers about their rights, as well as their responsibilities. In fact, the level of consumer protection in a country is considered as the correct indicator of the extent of progress of the nation.

Consumers become aware of their rights through television, radio, newspapers and other sources. A majority of the rural and urban consumers opined that the television was the principal media through which they come to know about their rights. During previous three decades, consumer awareness of their rights has increased. The whole nation now celebrates March 15 as the National Consumer Day. Efforts are being done to make the consumer Conclusion & Suggestions 339 movement emergence as the people movement. To fulfill this objective, The National Consumer Action programme needs to be activated.

Study reveals that approximately 30% of the total respondents were extremely aware of their rights and in total 31% of them were very aware. An average of 23% of consumers was extremely aware and 34% of consumers were very aware of Consumer Protection Act and allied Acts. It is interesting to note here that 10% of consumers had never heard of these Acts. A large majority of both rural and urban respondent had knowledge of the Consumer Disputes Redressal Forum. Some of the consumers had the knowledge about consumer organizations. Study reveals that irrespective of the knowledge of the consumer disputes redressal machinery, 72% of the consumers who had disputes, did not approach to any consumers' disputes redressal mechanism. Grievances of 87% consumers among the 28% of consumers who had approached to any consumers' disputes redressal mechanism had redressed and they were satisfied about the functioning of consumers' disputes redressal mechanism.

The consumers will not fight their battles except when they become aware of public interest and grievances. Individual battle must be fought by consumer himself for which he has to take initiative. So, there is need of creating consumer awareness in our country. Higher the consumer awareness, lower the exploitation and vice versa. The degree of consumer awareness determines the satisfaction levels and standard of living of the consumers.

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1.9 Annexure

Questionnaire

1. Name
.....
.....
2. Gender Male ()
 Female ()
3. Age.....
.....
4. Address
.....
.....
5. Are you aware about the rights of a Consumer?
Extremely () Very () Moderately ()
 Slightly () Not at all ()
6. Specify the rights if you know
 - (a) Right to Safety ()
 - (b) Right to be informed ()
 - (c) Right to choose ()
 - (d) Right to heard ()
 - (e) Right to redressal ()
 - (f) Right to consumer education ()
 - (g) Right to healthy environment ()
 - (h) Right to basic requirements ()
7. Are you aware about legislations to protect consumer rights?
Extremely () Very () Moderately ()
 Slightly () Not at all ()
8. Please tick the consumer's redressal machinery you are aware of
 - (a) Consumer Organization ()
 - (b) Consumer Forum ()
9. Did you approach any consumer redressal machinery any time?
Yes () No ()
10. If yes, did your grievances entertained by them?
Yes () No ()