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The Role of NGOs in Consumer Protection

Ch.Ravi Kumar¹, Dr.D.Nageswara Rao², Dr.M.S.Narayana³

Research Scholar, Dept of Management Studies, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur, India¹

Retd. Reader, Dept of Commerce, Hindu College, Guntur, India²

HOD, Dept of Management Studies, Narasaraopet Engineering College, Narasaraopet, Guntur, India³

ABSTRACT: In the encroachment of life human race has emerged as the most dominating creature on this earth. The story starts with the apes turning into homosapians giving birth to human civilization . Any civilization requires a system giving space and generating place for everything .With the passage of time human has been generating commodities providing comforts to his life .With the enormous development man has tried his hands in every sector .In the present time human has made his life more and more relaxed creating more pressure on the modes of production .Earlier it was nature based but now it is demand based. Population increase has created more pressure on the production .As a result the whole system has been affected with the overflow of money and consumerism .Whether it is a need or a greed these production scatter life are continuing the demands of the society .It has been become essential to put a check on the movement of all the commodities to check consumerism and make consumer protection laws. The role of Government and Non Government organizations (NGO's) to execute these laws is mandatory. Against this backdrop the present paper is an attempt to examine the role of NGO's in protecting and executing consumer laws.

KEY WORDS: Population explosion, Pressure on production modes, NGO's

I.INTRODUCTION

In India, consumer protection is of supreme importance in view of the fact that there are an ever increasing people. This in turn increases the demand for large variety of goods and services. To assist the consumer in getting a fair deal for all their purchases, and in settling their grievances, if any, local agencies like a consumer alliance can play a crucial role. Their role is not only to educate and lead the consumers with respect to redressal of their complaints but also to make the consumer movement a reality through coordinated efforts. There are more than 300 voluntary organizations working in the area of safety of the consumers all over the country.

With the development of standardization of products and the consumer protection efforts initiated by the Government, the consumer organizations are in a better position to play an important role in protecting and educating the consumer. It can instill a feeling of poise in the minds of the consumers and make them feel that there is no substitute for their combined efforts. The producers also lean to lend an ear to the consumers' complaint when voiced through the organization of consumers. A consumer with a grievance on confronting a manufacturer will generally be able to get his grievance redressed when the manufacturer gets the note that a consumers organisation is also behind him. Consumer's organizations also play an important role as an arbitrator between the consumer and the manufacturer for resolving the grievances that are not settled for a long time.

For many consumers, handling a complaint would be a first experience; but for a consumers organization, it is different as several such complaints are handled by them usually, and would be well acquainted with the procedure for a settlement. In fact, consumers organizations are always in touch with the manufacturers and their good will be of much help in the agreement of the consumer's complaints.

II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONSUMER ORGANISATIONS

Education

Every one of us is a consumer and therefore, have the right to consumer education. But it is the right education that would facilitate us to act as an informed consumer, throughout one's life. One of the problems of the Indian consumers is their ignorance. Most of the consumers are apathetic because they are not aware of their rights. then, they do not have

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the strength to resist whenever they are cheated or exploited and they suffer silently. It is for this reason that education should be given to each and every one of them.

Research

This is one of the most important sections of a consumer organisation. Many of the consumer problems can be solved by conduct research studies and surveys. The organisation, in the first instance, would require carrying out research to find out what brand of consumer education the society needs, to what level and to what extent. Research also needs to be carried out in the market place on malpractices and tests are carried out to check safety and eminence of consumer products, water and foodstuffs. The results of these tests can also be available in the organisations journal or circular.

The consumers, generally, have lot of complaints one consumer issues like poor quality products and services, food sullyng, polluted conditions, water and electric supply etc. The complaints may be received through mail, telephone or in person. Such consumers need proper counseling and supervision so that their grievance is redressed.

Vigilance

In India, many services like postal services, telephone, electricity, water supply and the public distribution system are managed by governmental agencies. Unfortunately, no resolute attempt appears to have been made so far in an adequate measure to make the government functionaries consumer friendly. Due to various reasons, such services tend to become impersonal in their approach. Therefore, most of the consumer complaints pertain to the public value services. Some of the volunteers of the organisations, specially the younger group, can form a vigilance group to observe the rendering of these services.

Counseling

A few members of an organisation who are well conversant with the legal provisions under the various acts of interest to the consumers can provide support and legal advice to consumers who are in need of such advice. In addition, they can observe the implementation of the laws that might have been enact by the local government which affects the consumers. They can also handle public interest cases and symbolize the community in need of such legal assist and representation.

Publications and Media

It is said that the 'the pen is mightier than the sword'. No organisation is complete without a publication division. A regular newsletter or a magazine brought out sometimes can become the medium of communication between the consumer activists and the consumer public. During its columns, consumer activists can communicate their ideas and information to the consumers. The consumers can also the problems they encounter in their area. Besides publications, the organisation can also produce audio-visual materials like posters, charts, video films, cassettes and slides which can serve as a good media for dissemination of information.

Library

An organisation can also become a good information centre if it maintains a library. A wide range of books, journal, research reports and pamphlets along with press clippings can meet the reference needs of the consumer. The library premises can also be used occasionally as a meeting point for the members of the organisation. Many activities of the organisation may go unnoticed if they do not have a place to exhibit their notes on consumer issues. A Library is an ideal place for the display of charts, posters etc. Notices for the members can also be situate up on the notice board in the library for their information.

Public Meetings

Another important function of a consumer organisation is to organise public meetings. A public meeting where there are only a few speakers and a large inactive audience cannot be a successful one. But participation in many persons can be an effective tool for advocating consumerism. In addition, the impact of such meeting would make the organisation work on democratic principles. When consumers meet peacefully and discuss concerning their interests, the entire process becomes a independent process. Most of the consumer arise problems out of dread and apathy on the part of the consumer. However, when a consumer picks up courage and takes the initiative to speak first, the rest follow him. Thus, it becomes a chain reaction and the consumer movement is augmented through such open negotiations.

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III. SOME IMPORTANT CONSUMER ORGANISATIONS

Consumer movement in India had its beginning in the early part of this century. The first known collective body of consumers in India was set up in 1915 with the 'passengers and Traffic Relief Association' (PATRA) in Bombay. Women Graduate Union (WGU), Bombay was another organization started in 1915. One of the earliest consumers co-operative was the 'Triplicane Urban co-operative stores' started in late 40's in Madras. It has about 150 branches all over the city. The Indian Association of Consumer (IAC) was set up in Delhi in 1956. This was an All India Association for consumer interests with the governments hold. However, even IAC did not make any development.

The first organization to really make an impact was the Consumer management Society of India (CGSI), Bombay started by nine housewives in 1966 with Mrs. Leela Jog as its founder secretary. Instead of just holding conferences and meetings and asking questions like earlier consumer associations, it started testing and reporting the quality of items of daily use of harvest and behavior consumer complaints. It has 8 branches at various places carrying on exposure, exhibitions and education. It publishes a magazine called 'keemat', in English, for consumer information.

The second consumer organization which made quite an impact in assembly the cause of consumers known right through the country is the 'Karnataka Consumer Services Society' (KCSS) formed in 1970. The main potency of the KCSS was Mrs. Mandana who spread the word of the movement throughout the country, especially among direction circles at a time when the word 'consumer' was not familiar to many. It is based in Bangalore. It organized important seminars on consumers' education in schools and is represented on prevention of Food and Drug Adulteration committee and Karnataka Food and civil Supplies Corporation.

Visaka Consumers Councils (VCC) started in 1973 in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, is another revolutionary consumer organization which has made a significant contribution to the consumer movement. It represented the plight of the poor ration card holders and LPG gas users, who had to stand in long ques because of the irresponsible position of the concerned authorities. Mr. V. K. Parigi with 20 members held meetings, survey of ration card holders and succeeded in achieving compulsory changes in the fair price shops and the public distribution system. Besides this about 15 more organizations came up in Andhra Pradesh taking up the task of solving problems of fair price shops and milk supply in different parts of the state.

To remuneration a war against exploitation by the traders, some organizations came up with the novel idea of export quality product of everyday use at wholesale and advertising these to the consumers at much lower prices than that being sold by the merchants. These are the Akhil Bhartiya Grahak Panchayat (ABGP) started in 1974 in pune, Mumbai Grahak Panchayat (MGP) in 1979 in Mumbai and Grahak Panchayat in 1979 in Jamshedpur.

Another organization which finished a significant contribution to the root of consumers is the Consumer Education and Research Centre (CERC) which started in Ahmadabad in 1978. It added a new dimension to the Consumer movement with prof.Manubhai Shah, the Managing Trustee CERC. The organization constantly used legal machinery to carry about changes and protect consumer human rights. Its special focus and intervention is beside the governments and public corporations. It has a big library, computer centre and a product testing laboratory. Only just, it also launched a project on comparative testing in Ahmadabad, where comparative testing, ranking and evaluation of consumer products are being undertaken with the aim of publication of such findings for consumer education. To begin with, testing of food, pharmaceuticals and domestic appliances had started. Findings will be published and action may be initiate against unsafe products. CERC also undertakes internship training for any consumer organization, besides routine exhibitions, seminars and publications of the magazine 'Consumer Confrontation'.

IV. GUIDELINES FOR SMOOTH FUNCTIONING OF CONSUMER ORGANISATION

❖ A consumer organisation should declare that it is non-political. To show this, it should avoid inviting politicians to speak to its members, and all members mounting political connections should be aloof from the membership of organisation.

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- ❖ The organisations members should set an example by practicing what they tell other members; for example, if they direct the consumers not to give or accept gifts or bribes, they should also follow the same principles.
- ❖ The organisation should be willing to admit a mistake if proved with facts. Mistakes are a part of the learning process and by admitting mistakes; it is not likely to be repetitive again.
- ❖ The organisation should assure that it has nothing against any individual. It should be made clear that the fight is beside the wrong doings and not against any particular individual. Efforts should be made to separate issues from personality.
- ❖ All consumer activists should avoid loose talks. One should not give vague impressions of what they do or speak. Listening to loose talk and acting ahead it spoils the main objective of consumerism.
- ❖ Under all conditions, violence should never be resorted to. The consumer activist should organise his behavior and precede one after the other without resorting to extreme reactions. Before deciding on any action, the activist should work out whether such action would get the desired results.
- ❖ It is better not to expect too much from others. The activist should do and advise the fellow consumers to respond themselves when confront with exploitation. If the pained person could not react himself, he can hardly expect another to fight for his cause.
- ❖ The consumer activist should resist excessive tolerance, criticism, delay or the inability to communicate directly. He should be time mindful perceptive, patient and develop ability to learn and sense cheating or fraud.
- ❖ They should work quietly avoiding all publicity. Publicity may impose a person as the leader and the other activists may resist such moves. It may lead to jealousy and resentment and the work will suffer in the end.
- ❖ An activist should not get alarmed by the enormity of the problems around him. If the problem is worked out and carried out systematically, even a big problem would turn out to be small.
- ❖ It is important for the activists to be prepared to meet the consequences. They should understand the risks involved in taking the action proposed to be taken. They should also be careful not to give false promises and ambiguous information to others.
- ❖ Activist should take care that the goals and objectives of their organisation are practical. It should be made clear what kind of guidance and help the organisation is likely to give in solving the problems. It should be clearly printed in the organisations brochure and any consumer seeking help from the organisation should be given a copy of the same to elucidate its position.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have evaluated the activities of consumer organisations and highlighted guidelines for smooth implementation of consumer organisations. Consumer organisations have been awarded and appreciated for the kind of work they have done to inform the people towards their rights and spread attentiveness to create a healthy society for the sake of every consumer. The guidelines discussed in this paper have boosted the confidence of the consumer organisations and made the seller more sensitive towards the consumer rights. This is a beneficial change which has pretentious each and every individual for the broad awareness about the consumer rights. More number of NGO's can be formed in every district and their work can be replicated for the betterment of society.

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