

Functioning of the Consumer Dispute Redressal Forum in Tirupati – An Analytical Study

Nithya Devi C. and Prof. (Dr.) Sanjaya Choudhury

Bhagwant University, Ajmer, Rajasthan, India

Abstract: *Consumer is the backbone of every economy. Without consumer there is no visible boom in any kind of business as well as economy. Every person who exists in the world is a consumer. Hence, it becomes very necessary for every government to safeguard the rights of the consumers. Consumer dispute redressal agencies in India play crucial roles, including admitting or rejecting complaints, informing opposing parties, conducting examinations if necessary, and delivering timely decisions. This paper attempts to study working and performance of Tirupati District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forums working in state of Andhra Pradesh. Although overall disposal percentage of cases is satisfactory in case of District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forums of Andhra Pradesh*

Keywords: District, Consumer Disputes Redressal Forums, backbone

I. INTRODUCTION

Consumer protection is a critical aspect of market regulation, aiming to safeguard the rights and interests of consumers in their transactions with businesses. In India, consumer protection has been addressed through various laws and regulatory frameworks designed to ensure fair practices and redressal of grievances. Key legislations, such as the Consumer Protection Act of 2019, provide a legal framework for protecting consumers against unfair trade practices, defective goods, and inadequate services. These laws also establish mechanisms for resolving consumer disputes and addressing grievances. Despite these legislative measures, consumer protection remains a significant concern in India. One of the major issues is the level of consumer awareness. Many consumers are unaware of their rights and the procedures for filing complaints. This lack of awareness often results in underutilization of available grievance redressal mechanisms, leading to dissatisfaction and loss of trust in consumer protection systems. Grievance redressal mechanisms in India are designed to offer remedies for consumer complaints, ranging from the Consumer Dispute Redressal Commissions at various levels to online complaint portals. However, these systems face challenges such as delays in processing complaints, inadequate resources, and inconsistent implementation across different regions. As a result, while some consumers successfully resolve their issues, others may experience significant obstacles in seeking redressal. This research paper explores the current state of consumer protection, awareness, and grievance redressal in India. It aims to assess how effectively consumer rights are protected, the level of awareness among consumers about their rights, and the efficiency of existing grievance redressal mechanisms. By analyzing secondary data, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of these aspects and offer recommendations for improving consumer protection and grievance handling in India.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study uses secondary data, which includes documents and reports from government agencies that provide information on consumer protection laws, complaint statistics, and regulatory activities. Studies and papers from scholars that analyze consumer protection practices, awareness levels, and grievance redressal mechanisms were also included. Evaluations and reports from industry experts and consumer organizations that discuss the effectiveness of consumer protection measures and identify gaps in the system also consulted. This data is reviewed to understand the current state of consumer protection in India, assess consumer awareness, and evaluate the performance of grievance redressal systems. By analyzing these sources, the study aims to offer insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the existing consumer protection framework and suggest improvements.

TYPE OF RESEARCH

The present study is descriptive cum exploratory in nature. It describes and explores state of affairs of Tirupati District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forums in state of Andhra Pradesh.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

It attempts to elaborate the state of affair of the cases filed/disposed of at the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forums in state of Andhra Pradesh. The study points out various problems being faced by these Consumer Disputes Redressal Agencies and suggest their possible solutions.

Table 1- List of cases filed and disposed off in Tirupati and neighbouring district of Andhra Pradesh

S. No.	Name of District	Cases Filed Since Inception	Cases Disposed off Since Inception	Pending percentage
1	Guntur	11017	10881	1.23
2	Nellore	14236	13546	2.35
3	Tirupati	17301	17176	0.72
4	Srikulam	7383	7339	0.59
5	Kurnool	7524	7125	5.62
6	Vishakhapatnam	9171	9118	0.58

Source: Unpublished records of AP Consumer Dispute redressal Commission

III. RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Consumer Protection The increasing interconnectedness of the world economy and the global nature of many business practices have led to a universal focus on protecting and promoting consumer rights. Modern technology has certainly improved the quality, availability, and safety of goods and services. However, consumers still face many unfair trade practices. The idea that "the consumer is sovereign" or "the consumer is king" often doesn't hold true, especially in developing countries. Correctly identified, consumer protection is a socio-economic endeavor that companies and the government should undertake in order to ensure that customers are satisfied, as this benefits everyone. To protect consumers, the government has made several important efforts, such as: The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 The Consumer Protection Act, 1986, was a landmark legislation in India designed to protect the rights and interests of consumers. Its primary goal was to provide a legal framework for addressing grievances related to goods and services and to ensure that consumers receive fair treatment in the marketplace. Here's a detailed look at its features:

- 1. Consumer Rights:** The Act established several fundamental rights for consumers, including, Protection against goods and services that are hazardous to health or life, access to complete information about products and services to make informed choices, freedom to choose from a variety of goods and services at competitive prices, opportunity to voice grievances and seek redressal, and access to mechanisms for resolving disputes and obtaining compensation.
- 2. Consumer Dispute Redressal Mechanisms:** The Act set up a three-tier system for handling consumer complaints handles complaints involving claims up to 20 lakhs. It is the first point of contact for consumers seeking redressal, addresses complaints where the claim exceeds 20 lakhs but is below 1 crore. It also hears appeals from the District Forum, deals with claims above 1 crore and hears appeals from the State Commissions. It also supervises the functioning of State Commissions and District Forums.
- 3. Consumer Protection Councils:** The Act provided for the formation of Consumer Protection Councils at the national, state, and district levels. These councils aim to promote and protect consumer interests through advocacy, education, and policy suggestions.
- 4. Penalties and Compensation:** The Act allows consumers to seek compensation for losses incurred due to defective goods or deficient services. It also provides for penalties against manufacturers, service providers, and sellers who engage in unfair trade practices.

5. **Consumer Protection Agencies:** The Act mandated the establishment of the Consumer Affairs Ministry, which oversees the implementation of consumer protection laws and coordinates with other agencies to address consumer issues.

Overall, the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, played a crucial role in empowering consumers and providing a structured approach to addressing consumer grievances. Its framework laid the foundation for subsequent updates, including the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, which further strengthened consumer rights and redressal mechanisms.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the modern era, consumer protection and unfair trade practices have expanded their legal and financial reach. Antitrust laws and other consumer protection regulations are now in place in many nations across the world, ensuring that trade standards are raised and that unfair and restrictive commercial practices are curbed. The Indian government has launched numerous projects, but the customers aren't able to fully profit from them. Due to bad geographical condition, illiteracy, population explosion, less network coverage, low network accessibility and lack of communication between administration and consumer are main hurdles in the way of consumer awareness and grievance redressal. Despite these hurdles government of India has made good efforts to make its consumers aware and provided some safeguards to protect the consumer from unfair trade practices.

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