



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMPUTER APPLICATION AND MANAGEMENT

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JUDICIAL CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL AGENCIES UNDER THE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT, 1986

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ABSTRACT

The enactment of the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, a milestone in the history of socio-economic legislation in India, has considerably consolidated the process of consumer protection and has given rise, during the past few years, to new consumer jurisprudence. The act introduced a three-tier quasi-judicial consumer disputes redressal mechanism at the district, state and national level for dispensing inexpensive and time-bound consumer justice. In this article the authors discussed about the statutory powers and jurisdiction of the three redressal agencies along with the details about the cases disposed by the redressal agencies.

KEYWORDS

Redressal agencies, powers, cases filed/disposed/pending.

INTRODUCTION

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. 'Consumer is sovereign' and 'customer is the king' are nothing more than myths in the present scenario particularly in the developing societies. In this regard the government, however, has a primary responsibility to protect the consumers' interests and rights through appropriate policy measures, legal structure and administrative framework. As a consumer, we would know how market products are constantly under-weight, of inferior quality and do not prescribe to quality standards specified by quality-control agencies. Consumers not only do not get value for their money but also often have to suffer losses and inconvenience due to market manipulation.

In order to safeguard consumer interest, 6 consumer rights were initially envisioned by consumer rights activists of the West, namely:

- Right to Safety
- Right to Information
- Right to Choice
- Right to be Heard
- The Right to Redress
- The right to consumer education

These rights were conceptualized in the developed world's consumer context where consumers are wealthy and completely dependent on the market to fulfill their needs. These rights had to be redefined keeping in mind the realities of a developing country like India. Consequently, two very important rights were added viz.:

- The Right to Basic Needs and
- The right to a healthy and sustained environment.

These two rights are very closely linked with the realities of developing countries where environment plays a very important role as a resource and support-structure for the people. In a country like India, a large section of the population looks for food security, assured safe water supply, shelter, education and health services. Most consumers relate very little to imported goods stocked in supermarkets or for choice among latest models of cars, as is the case in the developed world. For India's 1 billion population, food security and a safe environment are more pressing needs than any other consumer options and rights.

The Consumer Protection Act has set up three-tier quasi-judicial consumer disputes redressal machinery at the National, State and District levels, for expeditious and inexpensive settlement of consumer disputes. It is an alternative to the ordinary process of instituting actions before a civil court. These fora are mandated to provide simple, speedy and inexpensive redressal of the consumers' grievances. The three redressal agencies are as follows:

DISTRICT FORUM

Under the Act, the State Government shall establish a District Forum in each district of the State, though, more than one District Forum may be established in a district if it is deemed fit. Presently, there are 604 District Forums functioning in different States. The District Forums are headed by the person who is or has been or is eligible to be appointed as a District Judge. If the consumer is not satisfied with the verdict from the District Forum, he can appeal in the State Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission within a period of 30 days. If a verdict has been given against the company, it can appeal only after depositing 50% of the compensation to the consumer or Rs.25,000 whichever is less. The following table shows the cases files/disposed/pending before the District Forum.

STATEMENT OF CASES FILED/DISPOSED/PENDING (STATE WISE) BEFORE THE DISTRICT FORUM AS ON 31.12.2010

TABLE -1

Sl. No.	Name of State	Cases filed since inception	Cases disposed of since inception	Cases Pending	% of Disposal
1	Andhra Pradesh	182042	177281	4761	97.38
2	A & N Islands	330	301	29	91.21
3	Arunachal Pradesh	310	270	40	87.10
4	Assam	13704	11976	1728	87.39
5	Bihar	78400	67714	10686	86.37
6	Chandigarh	42033	40707	1326	96.85
7	Chattisgarh	31514	29066	2448	92.23
8	Daman & Diu and DNH	153	129	24	84.31
9	Delhi	214314	202712	11602	94.59
10	Goa	6031	5449	582	90.35
11	Gujarat	158169	139250	18919	88.04
12	Haryana	198958	180898	18060	90.92
13	Himachal Pradesh	52390	49318	3072	94.14
14	Jammu & Kashmir	20792	18855	1937	90.68
15	Jharkhand	31986	29571	2415	92.45
16	Karnataka	137296	132101	5195	96.22
17	Kerala	168204	160795	7409	95.60
18	Lakshadweep	64	58	6	90.63
19	Madhya Pradesh	155236	142553	12683	91.83
20	Maharashtra	228984	210961	18023	92.13
21	Manipur	1037	1012	25	97.59
22	Meghalaya	322	308	14	95.65
23	Mizoram	2065	2011	54	97.38
24	Nagaland	246	205	41	83.33
25	Orissa	83530	78137	5393	93.54
26	Puducherry	2766	2527	239	91.36
27	Punjab	135519	130913	4606	96.60
28	Rajasthan	253945	230657	23288	90.83
29	Sikkim	252	240	12	95.24
30	Tamil Nadu	95576	89489	6087	93.63
31	Tripura	2015	1807	208	89.68
32	Uttar Pradesh	508695	426862	81833	83.91
33	Uttarakhand	32241	30599	1642	94.91
34	West Bengal	77630	72942	4688	93.96
	TOTAL	2916749	2667674	249075	91.46

Source: Annual Report (2010-11) of Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution

STATE CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL COMMISSIONS

Under the Act, a State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission shall be set up by the State Government for the respective State. At present there are 35 State Commissions functioning in differ States. The State Commissions are headed by a person who is or has been a Judge of High Court. Under the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission exercises administrative control over the State Commissions. If the consumer is not satisfied with the verdict from the State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions, he can appeal in the National Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission with in a period of 30 days. If a verdict has been given against the company, it can appeal only after depositing 50% of the compensation to the consumer or Rs.35,000 which ever is less.

NATIONAL CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL COMMISSION (NCDRC)

The Act empowers the Central Government to establish a National Consumers Disputes Redressal Commission. It is headed by a sitting or retired Judge of the Supreme Court of India. If the consumer is not satisfied with the verdict from the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions, he can appeal in the Supreme Court with in a period of 30 days. If a verdict has been given against the company, it can appeal only after depositing 50% of the compensation to the consumer or Rs.50,000 which ever is less. The following table shows the cases filed/disposed/pending before the State/National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission as on 31.12.2010.

STATEMENT OF CASES FILED/DISPOSED/PENDING BEFORE THE STATE/NATIONAL CONSUMER REDRESSAL COMMISSION (STATE WISE) AS ON 31.12.2010:

TABLE - 2

Sl. No.	Name of State	Cases filed since inception	Cases disposed of since inception	Cases Pending	% of Disposal
	National Commission	67413	58836	8577	87.28
1	Andhra Pradesh	26026	23179	2847	89.06
2	A & N Islands	42	38	4	90.48
3	Arunachal Pradesh	56	49	7	87.50
4	Assam	2354	1475	879	62.66
5	Bihar	13915	10007	3908	71.92
6	Chandigarh	11046	10632	414	96.25
7	Chattisgarh	6608	6238	370	94.40
8	Daman & Diu and DNH	23	16	7	69.57
9	Delhi	31469	30148	1321	95.80
10	Goa	2176	2074	102	95.31
11	Gujarat	35079	30577	4502	87.17
12	Haryana	39219	28853	10366	73.57
13	Himachal Pradesh	6995	6384	611	91.27
14	Jammu & Kashmir	5884	5175	709	87.95
15	Jharkhand	4547	3657	890	80.43
16	Karnataka	37079	33918	3161	91.47
17	Kerala	23274	21952	1322	94.32
18	Lakshadweep	16	15	1	93.75
19	Madhya Pradesh	36159	31953	4206	88.37
20	Maharashtra	50103	32399	17704	64.66
21	Manipur	139	96	43	69.06
22	Meghalaya	238	152	86	63.87
23	Mizoram	177	169	8	95.48
24	Nagaland	94	64	30	68.09
25	Orissa	19820	13417	6403	67.69
26	Puducherry	899	851	48	94.66
27	Punjab	25449	19449	6000	76.42
28	Rajasthan	45309	41829	3480	92.32
29	Sikkim	35	32	3	91.43
30	Tamil Nadu	21762	19028	2734	87.44
31	Tripura	1233	1220	13	98.95
32	Uttar Pradesh	59297	28448	30849	47.98
33	Uttarakhand	4088	3285	803	80.36
34	West Bengal	14376	13613	763	94.69
	TOTAL	524986	420392	104594	80.08

Source: Annual Report (2010-11) of Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution

THE STATUTORY POWERS AND JURISDICTION OF THE THREE REDRESSAL AGENCIES SUMMARIZED BELOW:

Amount of compensation you seek	Court	President	Other members
Up to 20 lakhs	District Consumer Disputes Redressal Forum	Must be qualified to be a District Judge	Two other members; one must be a woman
Rs.20 lakhs to 1 crore	State Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission	Must be a person who is or has been a Judge of a High Court	At least two other members
Higher than Rs.1 crore	National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission	Must be a person who is or has been a Judge of Supreme Court	At least four other members

The consumer must file a complaint in a consumer court with in two years after the cause of action. The following table shows the details of the cases pending before the redressal agencies as on 31.12.2010:

Sl. No.	Name of Agency	Cases filed Since inception	Cases disposed of since inception	Cases Pending	% of total Disposal
1.	National Commission	67413	58836	8577	87.28
2.	State Commissions	524986	420392	104594	80.08
3.	District Fora	2916749	2667674	249075	91.46
	Total	3509148	3146902	362246	89.68

Source: Annual Report (2010-11) of Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution

POWERS OF THE REDRESSAL AGENCIES

The District Forum, State Commission and the National Commission are vested with the powers of a civil court under the Code of Civil Procedure while trying a suit in respect of the following matters:

- The summoning and enforcing attendance of any defendant or witness examining the witness on oath;
- The discovery and production of any document or other material producible as evidence;
- The reception of evidence on affidavits
- The requisitioning of the report of the concerned analysis or test from the appropriate laboratory or from any other relevant source;
- Issuing of any commission for the examination of any witness; and
- Any other matter which may be prescribed.

Under the Consumer Protection Rules, 1987, the District Forum, Commission and the National Commission have the power to require any person:

(i) To produce before, and allow to be examined by an officer of any authorities, such books of accounts, documents or commodities as may be required and to keep such book, documents etc. under its custody for the

Purposes of the Act;

(ii) To furnish such information which may be required for the purposes to?

any officer so specified. They have the power to:-

a) To pass written orders authorizing any officer to exercise power of entry and search of any premises where these books, papers, commodities, or documents are kept if there is any ground to believe that these may be destroyed, mutilated, altered, falsified or secreted. Such authorized officer may also seize books, papers, documents or commodities if they are required for the purposes of the Act, provided the seizure is communicated to the District Forum / State Commission / National commission within 72 hours. On examination of such documents or commodities, the agency concerned may order the retention thereof or may return it to the party concerned.

b) to issue remedial orders to the opposite party.

c) to dismiss frivolous and vexatious complaints and to order the complainant to make payment of costs, not exceeding Rupees ten thousand to the opposite party.

CONCLUSION

The consumer courts are milestone in the socio-economic legislation. The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 was enacted to give a speedy, simple and cost effective remedy for consumer grievances. The effective implementation of the Act is affected by lack of awareness among consumers, the rampant practice of sales taking place without bills either by ignorance of consumer or by the practice of seller. Further the district forums are always functioning with shortage of judicial officers and staff. Spreading awareness among consumers especially among consumers in rural areas is the biggest challenge. In spite of the enactment made in the year 1986 still it is a long way in implementation of the Act through the various forums. The government should take steps to remove the deficiencies as discussed above and also rope in NGOs for creating awareness among consumers and empowering them instead of simply assisting them to file cases.

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