

# Does the Government Lack Concern for Consumer Welfare?

## Background on Consumer Redressal Commissions

Consumer Redressal Commissions were established in 1986 to prevent consumers from being cheated by sellers and to provide them with a means of grievance redressal. These commissions were designed to ensure:

- Quick, simple, and cost-effective solutions for consumer disputes.
- A resolution timeline of **90 days** as per the Consumer Protection Act.

As per the **Consumer Protection (Amendment) Act, 2019**, consumer commissions operate at three levels:

1. **District Level**
2. **State Level**
3. **National Level**

## Current Backlog and Delays

Initially, these commissions worked efficiently, resolving cases promptly. However, due to various reasons, their functioning has deteriorated, resulting in **long delays ranging from 1 to 5 years** for case resolutions.

### Pending Cases Across India

As of **July 31, 2024**, a total of **50,258 consumer cases** are pending in consumer redressal commissions nationwide.

### Pending Cases in Tamil Nadu

By **December 31, 2024**, around **4,000 cases** remain unresolved in the **Tamil Nadu State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (SCDRC)**.

## Judicial Concerns and Court Intervention

Recognizing the alarming backlog, the **Madras High Court** took **suo motu cognizance** of the issue. A hearing was conducted on **February 7, 2025**, by a division bench comprising Chief Justice **K.R. Sriram** and Justice **Mohammed Shafiq**.

## Key Issues Identified

During the court proceedings, the following critical issues in Tamil Nadu's Consumer Redressal Commissions were highlighted:

### 1. Severe Staff Shortage

- According to Section **42(3)** of the Consumer Protection Act, the **State Commission** must have **one chairperson and at least four members**.
- However, Tamil Nadu's commission currently has **only the chairperson** with no additional members.

## 2. Lack of Basic Infrastructure

- Many district and state-level commissions \*\*lack proper facilities\*\*, including \*\*video conferencing options and even basic restrooms\*\*.
- \*\*Only 5-6 consumer courts\*\* in Tamil Nadu have video conferencing facilities.

## 3. Inefficiency in Implementing Orders

- Due to administrative inefficiencies, \*\*114 consumer verdicts\*\* remain \*\*unenforced\*\*, rendering them ineffective.

## 4. Neglect by the Government

- The \*\*chairperson of the Tamil Nadu State Commission\*\* had written to the government \*\*22 months ago\*\*, requesting an additional member to reduce the workload.
- No action was taken, raising concerns that the \*\*government lacks concern for consumer welfare\*\*.

## Government's Response

Following the court's intervention, the **Tamil Nadu government** stated that steps are being taken to fill **vacant positions** in the commissions.

## Impact of Financial Constraints

- The **state government's financial crisis** is also affecting the commissions' efficiency.
- **Lack of coordination between the central and state governments** regarding financial allocations further worsens the situation.

## Supreme Court's Previous Warning (2021)

- In **2021**, while hearing a similar case, the **Supreme Court of India** strongly criticized the government's neglect of consumer courts.
- The court remarked, "*If the Central Government does not want Consumer Disputes Redressal Commissions to exist, they might as well repeal the Consumer Protection Act.*"

## Conclusion

Consumer Redressal Commissions were established to protect consumers and ensure fair market practices. However, due to severe **delays, staff shortages, lack of infrastructure, and government apathy**, they are failing to serve their purpose effectively. Only proactive measures, including **staff recruitment, financial allocation, and proper infrastructure development**, can ensure that consumer rights are genuinely protected.