

## **An Analysis on the Functioning Of Grievance Redressal Mechanism of Public Distribution of Kerala with Special Reference to Wayanad District**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Grievance Redress Mechanism is the part and parcel of the machinery of any administration. The present article aims at assessing the efficiency of existing consumer grievance redressal mechanism of PDS system and to identify the impediments responsible for its effective working. The study covers the nature of the citizen's requests and complaints, the processing of the applications, the time taken in disposal and the reasons for the delay. No administration can claim to be accountable, responsive and user-friendly unless it has established an efficient and effective grievance redress mechanism. In fact, the grievance redress mechanism of an organization is the gauge to measure its efficiency and effectiveness as it provides important feedback on the working of the administration. Through this study, we try to find out, how effective is the functioning of grievance redressal mechanism in Wayanad (study area), the existing weakness in the machinery and procedures for the redress of citizens' complaints and to suggest appropriate remedial measures for improving its efficiency.*

**Key words-** *Grievance redressal mechanism, public grievance, suo-motu, red-tapism*

## Introduction

Since the early sixties, the need for developing an adequate machinery for the redress of public grievances has attracted increased attention in the media among the public, in the Parliament and State legislatures, and in the reports of the various administrative reorganization enquiry committees and commission. Even though the problem of redress of citizen's grievances has been under the public gaze in recent years, it has hardly received any detailed and comprehensive treatment either at the hands of the political leaders and the administrative reformers or from scholars and professional associations.<sup>1</sup>

With the phenomenal growth during the past few decades of the developmental and nation building activities of the Central and the State Governments in India, proliferation of the machinery of the government and increase in the complexities of the administrative process, the citizen's dissatisfaction with administration has mounted significantly. The increase in public grievances is partly the result of the rising expectations, which have followed in the wake of the speed of general education and political awakening after the attainment of Independence. While efficiency and discipline among the public employees have gone down the activities of the government, particularly the development tasks, have expanded in scope and scale and there has been no commensurate strengthening of the administrative machinery. Even the demand made by the citizens on the administration are too enormous compared to the capacity of the administration. However notwithstanding the several measures taken by the government to strengthen the administrative machinery, the general level of efficiency has gone down. But the people's aspirations and expectations from the government continue to rise and the gap between the delivery capacity of the administration and the people's demand is likely to increase during the next 15 years.

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<sup>1</sup>Dr R.K. Dhawan, *Public Grievances and The Lokpal*. Synergy Books, 2012. p.2.

Even the general attitude of the civil service, as inherited from the past, has been authoritative and paternalistic and shows a singular lack of belief in the dignity of the individual and want of regard for his felt needs and difficulties. Though several government reports have dealt with the problem since independence, from the historical perspective the impetus to initiation measure for the redress of citizens grievance has come from the three main source as follows<sup>2</sup>

- The need for the adaptation of the administrative system to the requirement of plans of economic and social development
- The fight against corruption that followed the growing public criticism of lowering of standards of integrity in high places and delicate areas of administration
- The spiraling public dissatisfaction with the administration

In order to eliminate the underlying causes that lead to public grievances, government organizations would have to be proactively engaged in a rigorous and periodic exercise towards analyzing the nature of grievances received by them. Thus grievance would have to be identified correlated and linked with the different process involves in the functioning of both the organization and its this would provide a clear mapping of the public grievances based on both functions and functionaries .Once the mapping is done it would be easy to identify the grievance various departments prone areas processes functions and units within the organizations. This should lead to devising and taking corrective measures in order to eliminate the reason for generation of grievances both in number and magnitude.

Grievances could be categorized into three broad categories (a) grievance arising out of abuse of office and corruption on the part of public functionaries(b) grievance arising out of systematic deficiencies within an organization (c) grievance arising

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<sup>2</sup>DrR.K.Dhawan, *Public Grievances and TheLokpal*. Synergy Books, 2012.p.6.

from non-fulfillment of needs and demand<sup>3</sup>. While the first category is amenable to statutory intervention similar to those embodied in the RTI act the second and the third category might require internal reforms, organized capacity building and substantial budgetary allocations. Statutory mechanisms already exist to deal with the first category of grievances. Public grievances which emanate out of systematic deficiencies or those which are in the nature of request or demands are best handled through providing a strong internal grievance redressal mechanism transparency in use of resources and reforming internal processes. Therefore there is no doubt that the internal public grievances mechanism needs to be much more effective and efficient both in terms of its reach and obligations. The Santhanam Committee of 1963, in its report stated that this can be best achieved in the following manner<sup>4</sup>

- The union and the state government should issue directions asking all public authorities to designate public grievance officers on the lines of the public information officers specified in the RTI Act
- All grievances petitions should be satisfactorily disposed off by these officers within a stipulated time period
- Each organizations should also designate an appellate authority and devolve adequate powers upon them including the power to impose fines on the defaulting officers

The State government have also evolved mechanisms for redressing public grievances. The chief minister offices generally have a public grievance cell which receives complaints from citizens, forward these to the concerned departments and follow them up. At the district level, the district magistrate is normally designated as the district public grievance officer. He /she monitor the disposal of various complaints received by the public. In some states the zila panchayat have also constituted their own public grievance mechanisms. At the state level a detailed examination of the problem of public complaints was made by various committees

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<sup>3</sup> Government of India, Administrative Reforms Commission, *Interim Report on Problems of Redress of Citizens' Grievances*, 1966, p335.

<sup>4</sup> A.P. Barnabas, *Citizen's Grievances in Development Administration*, New Delhi, IIPA, 1966, p.149.

like The Rajasthan Administrative Reform Committee (1963), The Punjab Administrative Reforms Committee (1964-66), The Kerala Administrative Reorganization And Economy Committee (1965-67), All India Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) (1966) followed by establishment of Ombudsman Type of Institution at the center.<sup>5</sup>

The parliamentary standing committee on personal, public grievance law and justice formed by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) (2007), in their twenty five report recommends that the grievance handling mechanism system should be accessible, simple, quick, fair, responsive and effective. The committee is of the view that the time limits should be fixed for approval or rejection of applications on the basis of well publicized and uniformly applied criteria.

The Justice Wadhwa Committee (2006) in its report, recommends that every ministry / departments in the union / state government / should have a dynamic public grievance redressal mechanism in place with special focus on the information delivery mechanism, the language and the content of various applications should be user friendly and should be widely available in various outlets, like post office.

The major points that highlight the need for Grievance Redressal Mechanism, in the state are as follows (Santhanam Committee Report 1963)<sup>6</sup>

- 1) Providing a single platform for registering grievances
- 2) Keeping track of each grievance coming from the customers
- 3) Providing status of a grievance immediately to the citizen
- 4) Follow up to the concerned person until the issue is resolved
- 5) Making the communication process between the government and citizen easier
- 6) Providing solutions for easy monitoring of grievance

In this article, an attempt has been made to review the importance of grievance redressal mechanism in the current scenario and to assess the effectiveness of

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<sup>5</sup>Dr R.K. Dhawan, *Public Grievances and the Lokpal*. Synergy Books, 2012. p.9.

<sup>6</sup>Prabhat Kumar Datta, *India's Democracy*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi.

existing grievance redressal mechanism in the state with regard to Public Distribution System.

## II

### **Kerala Context**

- **CM's On Line Registration of Grievances**

Making 'Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System' (PGRAMS), operational with every Director of Grievances was the crux idea of CM's. This shall enable the Director of Grievances to immediately place the details of grievances received in a database (efficient 'dak' management) as well as record the fact whether he intends to monitor its progress, identify the section/division where it is being sent, etc. generate the time taken in dealing with the grievance, enable review of pending grievances in the organization or across the organizations, generate acknowledgements to complainants, conduct analysis etc. The system should also have the facility of on-line registration of grievances by the citizens and access to information on the status of hisgrievances. The online public grievance monitoring system provides information about the status of the complaint, including the response of the department concerned<sup>7</sup>

As stated by the reports, the much-touted online public grievance redress mechanism and call Centre of Kerala Chief Minister have turned out to be a non-performer. Not even a small fraction of the large number of complaints received by the Chief Minister's Office through the system is getting resolved. Official data accessed and analyzed reveal that, more than 80 per cent of the complainants, who filed their complaints in January this year, are waiting for an online response even eight months after filing their complaints. Not even five per cent of the complaints have been resolved.

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<sup>7</sup>[http://www.rtfoundationofindia.com/what-happens-petitions-filed-common-man#.Voo7G\\_196M8](http://www.rtfoundationofindia.com/what-happens-petitions-filed-common-man#.Voo7G_196M8)

Citizens lodge their complaints, related to any department in the Government of Kerala, through the official website <<http://cmcc.kerala.gov.in>>. They can also call the 24x7 Call Centre (Toll free number 1076) to register their complaints. The complaints are forwarded to the departments concerned by the Chief Minister’s Public Grievance Redressal Cell-Call Centre which works round the clock. The online public grievance monitoring system provides information about the status of the complaint, including the response of the department concerned. The status will be ‘waiting’ if the department concerned has not responded, ‘processing’ if the department concerned has acknowledged the complaint or given an interim reply, and ‘resolved’ if the complaint is disposed of. The response to the complaint is available to the complainant online.<sup>8</sup>

**Status of CM’s On Line Grievance Cell as on February, 2015.**

<b>Total no of complaints received</b>	<b>1742</b>
<b>Total no of complaints resolved</b>	<b>327</b>
<b>Total no of complaints pending</b>	<b>1415</b>

**Source-The Hindu dated 1<sup>st</sup> Feb 2015.**

Official data show that the cell received 1,742 complaints from January 1 to January 31, 2014. The status of 1,415 of these complaints is still ‘waiting’ as on October 10. That is, the complaints have received no response from the department. As many as 229 complaints are still in the ‘processing’ stage. The number of grievances listed as ‘resolved’ is just 327. Complaints are closed with remarks such as lack of details or clarity or with request for more information, and the online status is shown as

<sup>8</sup>*The Hindu*, September 05, 2015.

'resolved.' Only a few departments have cared to redress public grievances through the system.

- **Jana Samparka Paripadi Karuthal-2015**

The Chief Ministers Jana Samparka Paripadi Karuthal-2015 is an innovate step taken by the ministry to deal with the grievances of the people and to find solutions' to the problems addressed by them. Known for its wide coverage and its objective to serve the masses, it has won the United Nation's Public Service Award for CM's Mass Contact Programme, which saw him directly engaging with people in the state to address their grievances.

The underlying objective of this programme is to meet people directly, to hear their grievances and to take all possible action to redress those grievances. The success of the JSP 2015 depends on the prior homework done in the form of receiving applications, forwarding them to the concerned officers and following them up to get as many of these redressed as possible. Petitions will be invited from the public and will be received through the Online Web Portal at latest by 30 days before the JSP. Option to attach the supporting documents along with the petition is also available. Petitions can be entered through the web portal directly from any computer connected with internet and through Akshaya Centers, Taluk Offices and Collectorate.

There will be no charges for entering applications through Akshaya Centers, and a fixed amount will be given by the Government to the Akshaya Centers for this service.

The petitions will be forwarded to the concerned departments from the Collectorate through the web portal. The district level departmental officers will process the petition and forward to Collectorate with their remarks through the web portal. Based on the recommendations of the Collector, the Screening committee will take appropriate decision on the petition and decide whether to call the petitioner for JSP. The petitioners identified for the JSP will be called based on fixed time slots. The



objective of JSP is to meet people directly, to hear their grievances and to take all possible action to redress those grievances.

### **Effectiveness of JSP**

The JSP was conceived as a platform for the head of the government to directly meet the people, hear their complaints and take all possible action on them then and there itself.

The programme is structured in such a way that the petitions are invited 30 days before its schedule in each district and each one of them would be sent to the district administration for screening and making recommendations. The identified petitioners are then invited to attend the JSP giving them fixed time slots. At the JSP held in Ernakulum, 14218 petitions were heard and benefits of over Rs. 2.02 crore sanctioned<sup>9</sup>

In the first phase of the JSP last year, over five lakh petitions were received from 14 districts and a vast majority of them were settled. A few that was left out involved legal hitches or were beyond consideration. Besides, 14 families were assigned small pieces of land under the Zero Landless scheme, title deeds for 323 people disbursed, 632 families' allotted BPL ration cards and 40 physically challenged persons got motorized tricycles. An analysis of the petitions revealed that, that much of the complaints that reaches the office are mainly land related disputes/applications for medical treatments. The petitions from the public will be received through the online web portal latest by 30 days before the JSP.

Petitions can be entered through the web portal directly from any computer connected to the internet, or through Akshaya centers, taluk offices or the collectorate. The petitions should be accompanied by the mobile number of the applicant or any other contact number. As of now the district administration has received around 850 applications. Most of them are related to financial assistance, assistance to the handicapped, assistance for house construction etc.

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<sup>9</sup><http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/Overwhelmed-CM-Office-Clueless-over-status>.

**Status of the Jana Samparka Paripadi Programme as on Feb, 2015.**

<b>SL NO</b>	<b>DISTRICTS</b>	<b>Total no of complaints received</b>	<b>Total no of complaints resolved</b>	<b>Total no of complaints pending</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>KANNUR</b>	16505	4262	12243
<b>2</b>	<b>PALAKKAD</b>	37761	26985	10776
<b>3</b>	<b>THRISSUR</b>	28340	21567	6773
<b>4</b>	<b>IDUKKI</b>	17451	12768	4683

**Source-The Times of India.**

Almost all the Chief Ministers and even the prime minister receive petitions from the people who look forward to a solution to their problems. Most if not all petitions are hardly followed by the offices of the dignitaries. It raises a fundamental issue of whether the CM office should keep a track of each and every petition received and what should be the degree of follow up.

In a democracy the head of the elected party is the last hope to the common people who may have tried every other means to address his problem without success. With the rising expectations of the citizens there is inadequate manpower to deal with an ever increasing number of petitions and some of the petitioners directly approach the CMO without the hierarchy, this calls for a different approach to the process of receipt of applications by the senior dignitaries like CM and their follow up

- **Citizen Call Centre**

A Citizen Call Centre is established with a sole aim to provide information to citizen in a user friendly manner especially in the context of increased focus on e-governance and also to promote transparency in all government related activities. It provides opportunity to citizen to interact with government effectively. It has also made a

provision to enable quick delivery of critical information which was in a way inaccessible or difficult for citizens to trace. Also act as a guidance and information helpline to the common public based on the FAQs furnished by the concerned departments. Calls are attended by specially trained executives and are answered both in Malayalam and in English keeping in mind the consumers comfort service is being enabled 24/7(except on public holidays).

### **Effectiveness of CCC**

In September 2015, there was an increase in Service Reach Of CCC by 3 persons per 1,000 population as compared to September 2014. The Approval rate during the month was an increase of more than 1% from September 2014 at 83.66%, also there was more than 20% increase in approvals quantity wise at 5.06 lakhs .The overall performance for the State during September 2015 was 86.31%, and individually also almost all the districts have maintained the performance above 85%.<sup>10</sup>

During the month, there was a rise of more than 20% in the disposal of the grievance through CCC, as compared to September 2014, the total transactions touching 6.05 lakhs.

The performance of Thiruvananthapuram, Kottayam and Thrissur districts continue to lag in comparison to other districts as only around 8 to 11 persons from 1,000 of the district population received redressal to their problems through citizen call center

### **III**

#### **Analysis**

The present study is an empirical research based on both primary and secondary data. For the purpose of the study primary data was collected through a set of pre –structured questionnaires and the result was further analyzed through percentage method. The primary survey was done in Wayanda highly dependent district on PDS and also the district with high density of tribal population and implicit economic backwardness. The

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<sup>10</sup><http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/kerala/>

study is mainly conducted to assess the efficiency of grievance redressal mechanism with respect to the following variables

- Awareness among the general public regarding consumer grievance redressal cell
- Timely disposal of the problem resolving mechanism of grievance redressal system
- Accessibility to the grievance redressal to hear their complaints
- Responsiveness of Call Centre executives in the disposal of the complaints lodged
- Effectiveness of the existing feedback mechanism and the overall satisfaction level of the grievance redressal, mechanism.

In order to assess the underlying objectives a sample size of 50 were taken randomly from the various parts of the district

#### *Awareness among the general public regarding consumer grievance redressal cell*

The survey revealed that out of the total respondents, 46 percent of the respondents were not even aware about the existing grievance redressal system. Twenty two percent of the respondents though being aware about the system, lag behind as they are economically backward.

#### *Timely disposal of the problem resolving mechanism of grievance redressal system*

As regards, the disposal of complaints, the respondents were highly dissatisfied. Only 23 per cent of the respondents said that their complaints had been acknowledged. The proportion of the complaints who received an intimation of the decision was 55 per cent and the decision being favorable only in one –fourth of intimation (14 per cent of the total complaints lodged)

It would have been noted that 44 per cent of the respondents did not lodge a complaint even though they had reasons to do so. When asked about the factors which prevented them from lodging the complaint, about two fifths of them felt that no useful purpose would have been served by lodging a complaint and they would have only wasted their

time money and energy. About one fourth of the respondents did not lodge a complaint due to lack of knowledge about the appropriate authority to be approached and one fifth of the respondents had hesitated to lodge a complaint for the fear of various kinds such as harassment, victimization by the officials.

#### *Accessibility to the grievance redressal to hear their complaints*

In case of accessibility of the service, as of total 32 percentage who used the service, majority of the respondents found technical difficulties to connect with the Call Centre executives. They have to wait in long run to get the call answered by the respective authorities. Out of the 32 percent of the service availed respondents, 21 percentage were not satisfied with the response of the concerned executives while the rest find it somehow satisfactory.

#### *Responsiveness of Call Centre executives in the disposal of the complaints lodged*

Survey revealed that only 32 per cent of the respondents had lodged complaints even though 68 per cent had some or the other specific grievance with regard to PDS. Out of the total respondents 44.4 per cent agreed that they had a complaint to lodge but they did not file because of certain consideration. The remaining 24 per cent said that they did not had any occasion to complain.

Out of the total respondents, twenty five percent of the respondents said that the complaints are not disposed of within 3- 7 days as stipulated under the system. Only 5 percent of the respondents said that complaints are disposed within the time limit. Only 29.8 percent of the respondents are satisfied with the progress of the complaint. Among those who are satisfied, 43.0 percent are fully satisfied and 57.0 percent are satisfied only to some extent.

#### *Effectiveness of the existing feedback mechanism and the overall satisfaction level of the grievance redressal mechanism.*

The survey by and large, reveals that there is at present a high level of dissatisfaction

with the administration and that the existing machinery for the redress of citizens' complaints is inadequate in several responses, with reference to the quality and quantity of the system. It would have been noted that out of the total respondents, 44 per cent of the respondents were not satisfied with the overall performance of grievance redressal mechanism, 26 percent of the respondents are satisfied with the present grievance redressal mechanism while the remaining feels that, it is not worth functioning. Only 46 percent of the respondents were receiving feedback reports from the concerned executives, while the majority did not receive any facilities for their complaints lodged.

#### IV

#### **Recommendations based on the study**

- There is an urgent need to strengthen the current system of consumer grievance redressal system. At present hardly 15- 20 percent of all the data of the redressal agencies is being uploaded. As a result there is no mechanism through which an all India data of the redressal agencies can be retrieved. Unless data and record management improves it would be very difficult to enhance the efficiency of the redressal agencies.
- With a view to attract better talent, a reasonable uniform pay scale should be given to all the members.
- With the increasing workload of the redressal agencies there is a need to have adequate manpower to man the work of the redressal agencies. At present there is no uniform staffing pattern. There is no doubt that the current staff strength is inadequate and not sufficient to handle all the grievances at time from all the departments, which is extremely high during the season time of sabarimala pilgrimage. Hence proper reforms are needed to resolve this problem.
- Steps are required for Setting up Mediation Centers and department level grievance redressal mechanism to try and resolve Consumer Grievances through Conciliation and Mediation prior to filing of complaints in Consumer Forums
- The Vigilance Committees, Consumer Helplines and CAC scheme needs to be

strengthened. The state governments may be requested to set up the helplines at the earliest, and to create more awareness regarding the existence of these facilities.

## V

### **Conclusion**

By and large the existing redress machinery at the state level has been unable to deliver goods. It has been already noted that the experiments with the creation of special directorates of public grievances with the creation of special directorates of public grievances did not succeed. The existing arrangement for acknowledging complaints and for their timely disposal within specified time limits need to be reinforced adequately. It is not enough to have departmental redress machinery. The public must have confidence and faith in the impartiality and effectiveness of such machinery. As regards the redress of grievances on the spot there is already appearing on the scene a reaction against the misuse of this mechanism for furthering of their political ends by the ministers, this channel of redress is important enough in the case of far flung rural areas where it is difficult for the citizens to approach the officials.

The effectiveness of the departmental redress machinery is obviously circumscribed by the general quality of administration. Such machinery cannot succeed beyond a certain point unless the administration is capable of meeting the citizen's claims in prompt fair and judicious manner and rendering effective services. Any administrative machinery for redress of the government which is a part of the bureaucratic system is not likely to be really effective, it is natural for the bureaucracy to defend itself and fight for the preservation of the status and dignity of the officials there has been a growing realization in recent years that the real solution to the problem of citizens grievances lies in the creation of an agency outside the normal governmental machinery, e.g. an ombudsman type of institution.