
CHAPTER VI **WAITING FOR CORRECT WEIGHTS!**

Meaning

Tricks in Weights and Measures

Tips to guard against manipulations

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WAITING FOR CORRECT WEIGHTS !

Till recently there had been an absurd multiplicity of weights and measures in India. Stones, pieces of wood sticks and bits of old iron were often used as units of weights, and earthen pots of odd shapes were used as measures. Units of weights and measures varied not only from region to region but different units of weights and measures were used for different commodities in the same region. A survey conducted by National Sample Survey discovered that as many as 143 different systems of weights were in use. Even worse where the same term is used, it does not represent the same unit. More than 100 types of 'maund' existed with varying weights from 280 to 8,300 tolas. The seer ranged from 8 to 160 tolas. A man travelling from one part of the country to another was bewildered and confused. This confused every one - the farmer, the villager and a city dweller. The need for a reformed and unified, single system of standard weights and measures was the only answer to normalise and simplify our transactions¹.

The Standards of Weights and Measures Act, 1956 laid down metric system for laying down common and uniform methods.

The metric system is so called because it uses the 'metric' as a primary unit. The 'Metric System' though evolved from the Indian System of numbers and decimals, originated in France in the wake of French Revolution. In order to make the new system universal and

unvarying, it was decided to base the standard of length on Nature itself. The ten-millionth part of the earth's quadrant at the meridian [Longitude] was, at that time, declared to be the 'metric', the primary unit of length under the metric system².

Tricks in weights and measures³ are, essentially a legacy of the past. They assume special significance when prices are high and the quality questionable. Periodic checks have revealed that:

Some shop keepers loaded down the merchandise by

Placing Magnets under the pan so that it was pulled down by magnetic force;

Stones are sometimes used on the pretext that the weight has been lost.

Banging the goods down heavily on the pan so that the sensitivity of the balance is disturbed.

The string or chain used for suspending the weighing pans could be manipulated in such a way that the point of suspension of the weighing pan could be shifted without being noticed;

The hollow beams of the weighing scales had mercury put inside so that this heavy liquid could be used to tilt the beam, when required;

The weighing pans were made of uneven thickness and the merchandise was placed in the heavier pan to weigh less;

A thread fixed to the bottom of the scale pan which can be manipulated by the hawkers' toe.

Iron bars or nails cleverly concealed in cloth wrapping were used to hold the balance so that the scales could be manipulated to weigh less.

While measuring cloth, the metre rods were cut in the centre and rejoined so that the measure delivered less;

While measuring milk, oil, etc. uncertified or dented measures were in use so that the measure delivered less;

Weights were cut at the base or the lead checking seal is removed so that the weight is manipulated.

Fixing a metal piece on the underside of the pan in which goods sold are weighed.

The consumer while buying goods by weight, measure or volume should make sure that - he always buys 'metric' as it minimises chances of cheating and makes calculations simpler,

he is entitled to the net weight of the goods, which does not include the weight of containers. While buying sweets, etc., he should see that the weight of the box or the packing is not included in the weight of sweets;

he should buy milk in terms of 'litres' not 'Kilos'. Litre and milli-litre measures have been specially devised for milk;

When buying packaged commodities he should see that the nett weight or measure is indicated on the package. Mere package size may be deceptive; he buys definite quantities and not by money's worth;

balances should not be held by hand especially by jewellers. The beam balance should be suspended;

ensure that the pans of the scale are empty. No weight should be kept in the pan. This is the most important thing to minimise error; the shop keeper cleans the goods pan before weighing.

In case where the purchase is made from the street hawkers, the goods purchased should be divided. Take half first in one pan and using this as the weighing unit take the other half in the other pan. This will help to nullify any error in the balance and assure best value for money.

Use of wrong weights and measures is illegal, but the practice is widely prevalent. The traders are benefitted in more than one way; they charge exorbitant prices, lower and adulterate the quality, and use wrong measures and weights. Maitra Committee came to a surprising but sad conclusion that even one percent error by inaccurate weights and measures cause the consumers a loss of over Rs.170 crores in cities; the farmers lose about Rs.150 crores by such an error. A report released in January 1977 has disclosed that underweighing alone cheated the consumers to the tune of Rs.3,000 crores annually. The committee further observed, "If the loss incurred in retail transactions is taken as 5 per cent and in whole-sale transactions at 10 per cent, the total loss in a five year period would amount to Rs.11,000 crores. This tidy sum also dramatically emphasises the erosion of the purchasing power of the common man-- - - -"4.

To create awareness among consumers about correct weightment and measurement many programmes are telecast. The programme 'Suj-Buj' telecast in afternoon transmission on 12th April 1989 and 26th April 1989 is noteworthy as it mentioned about the way in which weights are manipulated by vegetable vendors, hawkers and cloth merchants.⁵

In Belgaum, administration of Weights and Measures Act and Packaged Commodities Act is looked after by Consumer . Protection and Legal Metereology Department. The department on its own, has booked 1252 cases under weights and measures act and 233 under Packaged Commodities Act upto 30th June, 1989. No member of the public has approached the department in connection with underweights and measures so far.

It is statutorily obligatory under the Act for the businessman to get his weights and measures verified by the department once in twelve months and display a certificate in this regard.

REFERENCES:

1. Jajie Mandana, 'Consumer Education' P-63
2. Ibid P.62
3. Ibid P 64
4. Satya Sundaram, 'Consumer Protection in Inda, P.56
5. T.V. Afternoon Transmission 'Suz- Buz' 12th and 26th April 1989.