



CHAPTER I

The Problem STATED

C H A P T E R - 1

1.1 The Problem of Food Adulteration :

In developing countries like ours, adulteration of food articles and also the intermediary goods popularly known as duplicate products seems to have been rampant. This statement can be corroborated by citing a number of news in regard to adulteration of both consumption goods and intermediary products published in the past and even currently by the daily news papers. In the past there have been increasing cases against food adulteration filed with the court of laws. Therefore, the adulteration of both consumer and producer products seems to have become the rule of the day in the recent past. Adulteration amongst the dealers and particularly amongst the wholesale and retail traders. It is, therefore, worthwhile undertaking the causes and the effects of adulteration of commodities from the economic and social view-points. Under the prevailing circumstances it is further necessary to undertake a critical review of its technical aspects and the institutional measures implemented so far and their impact on the trend of adulteration.

2.2 Definition and Nature of Adulteration :

In popular jargon the term adulteration means, "When a consumable commodity is mixed with substance that causes injury to the consumer's health". So adulteration is being understood by the general public in its quite restrictive sense as stated above. But if one examines the definition of food adulteration given by the prevention of Food Adulteration Act (P.F.A.) 1954, the food adulteration has got wider connotation. The following are some definitions given by P.F.A. Act of 1954.

- 1) An article of food shall be deemed to be adulterated,
 - i) If the article sold by a vendor is not of the nature, substance or quality demanded by the purchaser and is to his prejudice or is not of the nature, substance or quality it purports or is represented to be.
 - ii) If the article contains any other substance which affects or if the article is so processed as to affect injuriously the nature, substance or quality thereof.
 - iii) If any inferior or cheaper substance has been substituted wholly or in part of the article so as to affect injuriously the nature substance or the quality thereof.

- iv) If the quality or purity of the article falls below the prescribed standards or its constituents are present in quantities not within the prescribed limits of variability which does not render it injurious to health.¹

The definitions quoted above include wider scope of adulteration with respect to food articles. The contention of these clauses indicates that the adulteration can be extended to not only the acts of mixing a substance with consumption article that causes injuries or cripples the human health but acts of mixing the substance of inferior quality and priced at lower level though they do not cause any injury or produce any harmful effects on human health are brought under the scope of adulteration. Besides the definitions quoted above there are other definitions of adulteration which should be taken into account while considering the particular incidents of food adulteration. For instance, any food article being mixed with the principal article which serves the same purpose but because of lower price than that of the original products for which lower priced article can serve as a substitute being mixed with the original article be treated as adulterated food. When groundnut oil for example is being mixed with the lower priced substitutes which serve as parity articles like Sunflower oil, Refined cotton seed

oil, Castor oil, Soyabeen oil even though these substitutes are perfect substitutes for ground nut oil, amounts to an adulterated ground-nut oil. If the consumer reveals their preference for ground-nut oil (G.N.oil) and the sellers supply mixed G.N.oil with the parity substitutes it also amounts to an act of adulteration. Even though these substitutes are mixed with the original article in question the taste or odour is not changed so as to create suspicion in the minds of consumers. This type of practice which is almost common among the traders in respect of edible oils. The adulterated edible oils and even some food articles could not be distinguished by the consumers apparently for the taste of the adulterated product may or may not change but may slightly vary. Under such situation there is large scope for adulteration of high priced consumer food articles. The possibility of adulteration could ^{be} envisaged at different levels viz., manufacturing, packing, transport, wholesale and retail traders. Again from the consumers' point of view the consumption of goods which have greater price inelasticity of demand have been subjected to adulteration very frequently. In other words, because of price differentials of parity goods and because of variation in their respective demand and supply conditions the adulteration of consumption articles takes place very often. The lower priced parity articles like refined castor seed oil can be used as adulterant for

G.N.oil. If such articles are added to it, the adulteration cannot be easily detected without laboratory test . Hence the traders are much more prone to use such safe articles for adulterating high priced food articles.

The foregoing discussion brings out the nature of the adulteration, its different kinds, and possibilities, which are brought under the scope of institutional/legal vortex. Thus the scope for adulteration extends to the areas of products where a large substitutes priced at lower level are available.

1.3 Adulteration and Developing Countries :

In developing countries like India, the scarcities of different kinds of article are likely to occur very frequently. In the initial stages of economic development or in the initial process of industrilisation of developing countries, the adulteration of scarce articles and perticularly food articles are likely to be more frequent. The adulteration of food articles or any other products can take place from different view-points. At the manufacturing level the adulteration of commodities takes place with a view to earning windfall profits. At the wholesale and retail trading level, it often takes place with a view to making quick profit.

Though the profit motive is major cause of adulteration some other anti social elements are responsible for adulteration. The adulteration in developing countries

shows an increasing trend on account of mainly supply-demand gap in respect of certain commodities. The commodities which have the attributes of uncertainty with respect to their supplies and also inelasticity of demand for them are more subject to adulteration. The producers, the wholesalers, the retailers keen to take an advantage of rising prices of the scarce articles in the markets have tendencies to indulge in anti-social activities. The acts of adulteration are considered to be anti social activities and as such these activities have to be curbed by measures either institutional or other than institutional like steps to expand the supplies of the scarce articles which have been subjected to being adulterated very often.

From the above general discussion it becomes crystal clear that scarcity conditions or the real factors that give rise to increasing incidents of adulteration of various types described somewhere in the foregoing paragraphs. Though the scarcity conditions often gives rise to an adulteration it is the price inelasticity of demand for essential articles that provides an incentive for increasing trend of adulteration. These scarcity conditions might be either seasonal, temporary or of permanent nature. The price inelasticity of demand might be perfect or imperfect these two factors from economic points of view provide greater opportunities for manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers to squeeze such type of situations which occur

in developing countries. Sometimes the incidence of adulteration seems to have been of large magnitude affecting a large segment of the population. On realising this, many countries such as India have adopted institutional measures to hold in check the extent of adulteration, particularly in regard to essential food items, rather than going ^{into} the very grass roots of the causes of adulteration which tend to be pervasive.