SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION
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The survey of available literature on the subject under study revealed the universal prevalence of food adulteration and general consumer apathy towards quality of food bought and consumed. Law enforcement in this field, even when sincerely and strictly implemented, has succeeded only marginally in eradicating this social evil. Activist groups, while rendering commendable service, also have not made any major impact in the field.

In the developed countries, the consumers are well-educated, well-informed and highly sophisticated about their choices and selection of food. They are also protected well by effective laws.

But in developing countries like India, the consumers are largely poor, uneducated and ignorant of the importance of quality and packaging, though their wants are unlimited. In the present study, it has been proved that under existing conditions women consumers are the major victims of the malpractices perpetrated by traders and manufacturers. They seldom react to the situation, may be owing to their unawareness or to loss of confidence in the Government machinery for preventing food adulteration.
Food adulteration has also caused degeneration of values in life: this has a demoralising effect on social values. Corruption on the part of the enforcement agencies, hoarding, backmarketing and other forms of malpractices by traders, have cast the society into the midst of perverted values. Adulteration of food articles and cheating by mislabelling, short-weighment and over-pricing, seem to have become accepted facts, like corruption on any front. This predicament has led to a peculiar kind of consumer behaviour, among all the categories of consumers, including law-enforcing officials and activists.

The present study entitled 'Social values and consumer behaviour in food adulteration' was carried out in Trivandrum District, among 500 respondents representing three categories of consumers, namely, women consumers, activists and government officials. The findings of the study are summarised below:

The study brought to light the socio-economic and family background of the respondents; social value as well as consumer behaviour oriented to food adulteration was also ascertained by developing certain criteria given to assess the same. The association of these dependent variables with their socio-economic background and certain selected variables was also studied.
5.1 The Socio-economic profile of the respondents

Information pertaining to the socio-economic and family background of the respondents indicated that the majority of them in all the three categories belonged to the Hindu community, which still represents the typical Trivandrum population. Also, the majority of the respondents were residing in the urban area; only 4 per cent of the activists surveyed belonged to rural area, probably owing to the fact that consumer movement had not reached the rural section of the society.

The majority of the respondents belonged to the age-group of 31 to 50 years, in all the three categories. But, among the activists, 24 per cent were in the age-group of 51 to 60 years, and they had enough leisure to spare for social activities. The respondents were moderately educated, from matriculate level to graduation, and the officials were found to be better educated than the other two groups of the respondents. Fifty-five per cent of the women consumers, and fifty-eight per cent of the activists were wage-earners, but the occupation ranged from that of ordinary labourers to highly educated professionals.

The 'small family' norm was found to have been adopted by the majority of the respondents, as they had only 3 to 4 members in the family. Regarding economic status, the activists
and officials were in a more advantageous position than the women consumers. While analysing the food expenditure pattern, the officials were found to be spending less on food items than did the other two groups, probably because they were better educated to spend money wisely. Combined decision-making by the members of the family was found to be very popular among the respondents. This indicated the dignified status and collective responsibility in families of Kerala.

Consumer movement in Kerala is still in its infancy and its concentration among the elite class has been confirmed by this study. Only a negligible number of the women consumers and officials were found to have been inducted as members of the consumer protection councils.

5.2 The purchasing behaviour of the respondents

Consumer behaviour indices of the respondents were determined by ascertaining the purchasing behaviour related to staple and processed food items, the knowledge level of the respondents on the various aspects of food adulteration, and their reaction to the situation when the social evil was felt. In the present study, most of the respondents in the three categories were observed to have taken direct responsibility in effecting the purchase of staple food articles such as cereals and pulses,
spices and miscellaneous items, oils, milk and milk products. The officials under study were found to do the purchasing of food articles themselves, in order to avoid the chances of mishandling the food articles and to ensure the purchase of quality products.

While critically analysing the frequency of purchase, only 44 per cent of the women consumers were found to be purchasing most of the staple food items on a monthly basis, while 54 per cent of the activists were doing monthly shopping. Only 8 to 10 per cent of the women consumers were found to be buying food items daily, mostly owing to their low purchasing power.

In the present study, among the various sources of purchases listed, retail shops were found to be very popular among most of the respondents, followed by Government/co-operative stores, wholesale shops, and finally petty local shops.

With regard to the purchase of milk, sixty per cent of the activists and officials were observed to depend on Government agencies, while only 61 per cent of the women consumers preferred milk produced at home, probably because they had given greater importance to convenience than to quality.
Specific evaluation of preferences regarding the place of purchase revealed that most of the activists and officials had chosen Government or co-operative stores as their first preference, while the women consumers gave equal preference to retail and wholesale shops for the purchase of common staple food items. The trend of preference among the activists and officials was almost similar. When the association between present and preferred place of purchase was statistically analysed, most of the respondents were observed to show significant difference, which implied their dissatisfaction with the present place of purchase. But with regard to the purchase of milk, this trend was not noticeable.

When asked about the specific reason for choosing the present place of purchase, most of the women consumers reported convenience as the most important factor, while the activists and officials gave more weightage to quality of food items, which indicated their higher level of knowledge about healthy living. Preference given to packed food articles by most of the activists and officials (and a few women consumers) also confirmed their higher awareness level regarding adulteration of food articles.

While assessing the consumption and purchasing pattern of processed food items, it was observed that the maximum number of processed food items were purchased by the women consumers,
since 29 per cent of them purchased seven to ten food items, while only 4 per cent of the activists and 16 per cent of the officials revealed similar behaviour. The purchase of extruded products such as seva, noodles and other similar products was influenced by younger members, much more in the families of the women consumers than in the families of the activists and officials.

Pickles and sauces were observed to be purchased by most of the respondents, and the women consumers were noticeably influenced by younger members in the family. Products like jam and jelly were better accepted by families with young members. A similar trend was observed regarding the purchase of health drinks also. Another interesting observation was that in almost all the families of the respondents, baked and fried items were found to be very popular irrespective of their economic status. But, at the same time, fast food was found to be popular only among the urban elite.

Twenty-five per cent of the women consumers had the habit of buying sugar-based products, while only 6 per cent of the activists and 10 per cent of the officials showed similar behaviour. The women consumers had great affinity to powdered spices, cereals and pulses, followed by the officials and activists. Lack of time could be the probable reason for this kind of consumer behaviour.
Most of the respondents in all the three categories liked to have pappads and chips in their daily diet.

While elucidating the various factors influencing the purchasing behaviour, the women consumers were found to be greatly influenced by the mass media, followed by the activists and officials. But the officials were positively influenced by variables such as friends, neighbours, colleagues and health-related officers. While statistically analysing the data, the women consumers were found to be significantly influenced by extraneous and intrinsic factors, while effecting food purchases for the family. But the activists and officials were not so influenced. This indicated that they showed a better independent consumer behaviour than the women consumers.

5.3 The knowledge level of the respondents

Problems faced by consumers, awareness about common adulterants and adulteration detection tests, health hazards due to adulteration, knowledge of food standards and existence of redress agencies, were the few variables studied in order to assess the knowledge level of the respondents.

Decreased quantity was one of the problems faced by most of the respondents; but, the presence of adulterants in food
articles was felt by 60-62 per cent of the respondents belonging to all the three categories. The officials ranked the highest in suspecting adulterants in various food items. But decreased quantity was pointed out as a problem by a smaller number of respondents, probably owing to the fact that the consumers did not have the facility to check the quantity.

In respect of information about the extent of adulterants present in various food items, the officials were found to be very familiar with various types of adulterants, followed by the activists, and lastly by the women consumers. The variation in the knowledge of the activists and officials regarding this aspect is due to their constant exposure to such problems because of their occupational status and their fields of activity. Lack of interest, negligence, and socio-economic background, may be the reasons for the women consumers remaining ignorant of this aspect.

An assessment of knowledge about food adulteration detection tests revealed that the majority of the women consumers were unaware of the detection tests, while most of the activists and officials were well aware of these tests, ostensibly owing to their fields of activity and occupational status.
While assessing the adoption level of these tests, only ten per cent of the activists were found to have adopted the tests at the household level, owing to lack of facilities, while most of the officials never bothered to adopt these tests at the household level because they believed that conducting tests alone would not eradicate the social evil.

Awareness of health hazards caused by consumption of adulterated foods, among the three categories of respondents, was assessed. This revealed that, compared to the women consumers, the activists and officials had better awareness of the ill-effects of adulteration.

While elucidating the experience of health problems caused by food adulteration, only 15 per cent of the women consumers, 20 per cent of the activists and 16 per cent of the officials were found to have experienced them.

Information regarding the food standards and the labels in India was determined from the reports of the respondents. One hundred per cent of the officials were found to be well aware of these standards, while 84 per cent of the activists and 18 per cent of the women consumers were fully aware of them. This implied that the women consumers had the least knowledge of this factor, and this might have affected their consumer behaviour.
One hundred per cent of the officials and seventy per cent of the activists were well aware of the various redress agencies existing, while the women consumers were found to be the least informed about them. Better social values and consumer behaviour could be expected from well-informed consumers. Thus, while analysing the various sources of information by which the respondents decoded the facts, mass media like radio, TV, newspaper and magazines ranked first among all the three categories. But, the activists gave much weightage to friends, co-workers and neighbours, probably owing to their frequent exposure to social gatherings. Shop-keepers were found to be the least informative persons, as opined by most of the respondents.

5.4 The actions taken by the respondents

The various actions taken by the respondents, against food adulteration, also determine the consumer behaviour of the individuals. So, facts pertaining to this aspect were ascertained.

Even though the activists and officials were aware of the various aspects of food adulteration, the majority of them did not take the initiative to lodge any complaint when they came across instances of adulteration of food. Lack of interest in a common social cause, and lack of time could be the reasons for this kind of negative attitude among the activists and officials.
The women consumers also showed a negative attitude, probably because they were not fully informed about food adulteration.

Most of the respondents admitted that they refrained from taking up the issue, in order to avoid risk, while a few women consumers, activists and officials were suspicious of the credibility of the law-enforcing authority. But, only very few respondents among all the three categories accepted food adulteration as a common social phenomenon.

Positive actions such as banning the shops and warning the shopkeepers were adopted by the majority of the officials, followed by the activists and women consumers. But, most of the activists and officials preferred to return and exchange the item for a better one rather than initiate action involving consequences. Forty per cent of the women consumers had no other alternative than to continue buying from the same shop, as they did fully depend on the local retail shop for various reasons. All the activists and officials had made attempts to inform others of the social problem prevailing in the locality.

All the activists and officials were found to be in the habit of checking the labels before effecting purchases while only 75 per cent of the women consumers had similar habits.
In respect of checking the quantity, the activists ranked the highest, followed by the officials and women consumers. The officials were seen to be facing fewer problems regarding quantity, may be due to the fact that they were supplied with products of better quality and quantity. But, here, the women consumers were found to be the most affected, probably owing to their ignorance and lethargy.

5.5 The participation of the respondents in Consumer Protection Organisations

Regarding participation in local consumer protection councils, most of the women consumers were found to be ignorant of the existence of such organisations, probably owing to the fact that most of the consumer action groups were concentrated among the urban elite. Only one per cent of the women consumers were found to be members of such organisations.

A cold attitude was evident among the officials regarding consumer protection councils. Since they believed that such organisations were not very useful, they always tried to find fault with the law enforcing authority. So, only a few officials were found to be members of such organisation.

Among the activists, 80 per cent were found to be very active in the organisations, while 4 per cent were observed to be
mere members. While elucidating the opinion regarding consumer protection councils, the activists were found to be very clear in their views regarding the matter, while the officials were not sure about the objectives and the women consumers ranked the lowest in this regard.

Regarding the interest to join consumer protection organisations, 65 per cent of women consumers and 74 per cent of officials gave affirmative answers to join such organisations provided they worked for a good social cause.

5.6 The distribution of the respondents based on social value and consumer behaviour indices

The social value scores and consumer behaviour scores among the three categories of the respondents were assessed from the tools developed and administered during the interview. Based on the mean score values obtained, the respondents were classified into two groups - low and high. In respect of social value, the activists were found to be holding the highest mean scores (88.1), followed by the officials and women consumers. But, in the case of consumer behaviour, the officials scored the highest (139.27), followed by the activists and women consumers. In both the cases, the women consumers were in a disadvantageous position, as they were found to have lower social value and consumer behaviour.
The scores obtained for consumer behaviour, by the officials and activists, were found to be 33 per cent and 18 per cent respectively higher than those obtained by the women consumers. But, the social value scores of the officials and activists were found to be only 8 per cent and 18 per cent respectively higher than those obtained by the women consumers.

5.7 The influence of the socio-economic profile on the social value and consumer behaviour indices

While assessing the association of various socio-economic factors underlying social value and consumer behaviour indices, most of the factors were found to be more associated with the social value and consumer behaviour indices of the women consumers than with those of the officials and activists.

The places of residence of the women consumers were found to be associated with their social value and consumer behaviour indices. But this factor did not have any such association in the case of the other two categories of the respondents. The religion and age of the respondent and the spouse were not found to be associated with the social value and consumer behaviour of all the three categories of the respondents, except for the consumer behaviour of the women consumers. This result proved that older women consumers had better social value and consumer behaviour.
While analysing the education of the respondent and the spouse, it was found to be associated with the social value of the women consumers and officials. But, the educational level of the activists and officials had direct association with their consumer behaviour. This proved that education played an important role in the consumers' understanding of the various facts of practical life.

The average educational level of the family seemed to be influencing the social value of the women consumers, and the consumer behaviour of the officials. But, the occupation of the respondent and the spouse had great influence on both the social value and consumer behaviour of the women consumers, but it had no association with those of the activists. The occupation of the officials was obviously related to their social value.

An elucidation of the influence of the composition of the family revealed that young members in the family influenced the consumer behaviour of the women consumers, as did the teenagers. The activists were also influenced by the teenagers in the family in framing their consumer behaviour. But, only the social value of the officials was found to be influenced by this factor.

But, surprisingly enough, it was noted that the number of adult members in the family and family size did not have any
association with the social value and consumer behaviour of all the three categories of respondents, except that the consumer behaviour of the officials seemed to be associated with the size of the family.

Even though combined decision-making was popular among all the three categories of respondents, this variable was found to be associated with the consumer behaviour of the women consumers and with the social value of the officials.

The economic parameters, such as the total monthly income of the family and the expenditure on food, appeared to be closely associated with the social value and consumer behaviour of the women consumers alone.

5.8 Correlation of selected variables of the respondents with their social value and consumer behaviour indices

The magnitude and direction in which the socio-economic and other characteristics of the respondents were related to the social value and consumer behaviour, were assessed. The results indicated that most of the socio-economic characteristics had positive and significant correlation with the social value of the women consumers, while the proportion of money spent on food, knowledge of redress agencies and factors influencing purchases,
were found to have negative but significant correlation with their social value index.

But the social value indices of the women consumers and officials were found to be related to the education of the spouse and the experience in detecting food adulteration, while the young members in the family were observed to be negatively and significantly related to the social value indices of women consumers and activists. This evidences that young members in certain families have strong influence on their parents.

While elucidating the correlation of consumer behaviour indices among the respondents, mature women consumers having more grown up children and also with frequent exposure to various sources of information had better consumer behaviour indices, and they were found to be influenced by the young members in the family.

Various extraneous and intrinsic factors were found to be significantly and negatively related to the consumer behaviour indices of the activists and officials. Monthly income of the family was found to be another important determinant in moulding the consumer behaviour of the women consumers and officials. But, this variable had negative relationship with the activists as they
had the tendency to buy more of processed food items, which inversely affected their consumer behaviour indices.

In the light of the findings of the study, the researcher ventured to make the following suggestions:

a) Women consumers should:

1. Realise and assert their rights as consumers, while selecting, purchasing and consuming food articles.

2. Change and improve their buying habits with a proper understanding of their rights, the quality of marketed goods and other related matters, including the technology of adulteration.

3. Create an environment of quality consciousness in the society by using their friendship and neighbourhood network.

4. Participate in local voluntary organisations and use them as a forum for sensitising society and fighting adulteration.
5. Organise neighbourhood action groups to discuss and react to the local situation regarding the supply and marketing of goods.

b) Activists should:

1. Strengthen group consumer movements to ensure one hundred per cent awareness among them regarding food adulteration.

2. Encourage consumers to react to erring situations and to take prompt steps to eradicate the menace.

3. Organise training programmes with the help of other local voluntary organisations, mahila samajams, etc., to extend knowledge about consumer rights, adulteration, etc.

4. Set up self-sufficient food and weight testing laboratories for quick testing and checking against possible adulteration.

5. Educate the public to insist on packed, properly labelled and graded products.
6. Organise, wherever possible and necessary, boycott of suspected articles and shops.

7. Organise public awareness programmes, such as seminars, meetings, processions, protest demonstrations, etc.

c) Government should:

1. Take strict steps to stop spurious and injurious manufacture, blackmarketing, duplication, false advertisements and over-pricing.

2. Enforce strict vigilance at the places of manufacture and sale of articles for home consumption, through quality control.

3. Ensure minimum basic honesty on the part of the traders and make them aware of the hazards caused by food adulteration.

4. Take action against the retail shops also for the sale of adulterated articles, even when the adulteration is done at some other level, in order to compel them to buy products from reliable sources.
5. Carry out regular surprise inspections to make sure that the articles marketed are of approved quality.

6. Treat adulteration as a cognisable offence, and make prosecution prompt and the procedure quick.

7. Ensure that the items produced and distributed by traders are of top quality, so that the consumers will have no occasion to complain about them.

8. Buy, in its capacity as a monopoly buyer, only quality products for distribution through the public distribution (civil supply) system.

9. Encourage consumer movement throughout the country with sufficient funds and facilities.

10. Motivate the people to be vigilant, self-protective and self-reliant, through the various mass media.

11. Accelerate consumer education through an extension wing, reaching even the rural illiterate.

12. Give adequate training to law-enforcing officers and urge them to be more vigilant.
13. Set up an autonomous nutritional safety board with a statutory authority over all aspects of food safety.

14. Make the Advertisement Standard Council of India to evolve specific guidelines on advertising, and take measures to curb misleading advertisements.

15. Organise educational programmes at all levels through Government departments and institutions.