Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION
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Food is the prime necessity of life. But, in recent years, adulteration of food has become widespread and has come to pose a big problem to the health and physical welfare of human beings. Adulteration deprives food of its nutritive value, and adulterated foods in many ways affect the health of the consumer. Adulteration also causes irreparable injury to public morality since it is an unmitigated menace to society, economically, socially, psychologically and legally.

In this context, the present study aims at examining the nature, magnitude and dimensions of food adulteration as a major social problem in India, with special reference to the State of Kerala. This study examines the social values that help or hinder adulteration, the forms and modes of adulteration, the agencies that are available for checking adulteration, and the attitudes of the consumers, activists and the law-enforcement agencies towards adulteration. These aspects are subjected to detailed analysis in the study. Thus, the study will go into (1) the social impact of food adulteration, (2) the various items of foods that are
adulterated, (3) the common methods of adulteration, (4) the consumer behaviour vis-a-vis adulteration, and (5) the role of law-enforcement agencies, consumer protection councils and anti-adulteration activist groups in checking the social malady.

Relevance of the Study

Adulteration is a universal social evil and food adulteration is more so, because food absorbs the lion's share of the family income. But, unlike adulteration of other commodities, the adulteration of food results not only in depriving the consumer of a considerable part of the purchase value of the commodity, but also in undermining the consumer's health to the extent of causing some permanent disability or even death.

Adulteration has been in vogue for ages but, of late, it has changed its forms and methods. As mass consumption has become the order of the day in industrial societies, the adulterators have discovered new ways of practising their tricks by using techniques evolved by modern scientific development. Thus, food-stuffs are now released into the markets with impressive labels and colours, and presented in attractive packages but without any food value. At the same time, through persistent advertisement, the producers are able to create in the minds of consumers and
potential consumers, an impression of superior qualities about their products, qualities that claim various properties like better health, better energy and better balance in diet. While the process of deluding the consumer is still going on in advanced societies, inspite of enlightened public opinion and consumer laws, in developing countries, adulteration has an additional dimension also. In these countries, anti-adulteration laws are few and have only limited coverage. The ignorance of the consumers about these laws, the ingenious ways of adulteration and the presence of large numbers of non-standardised and non-standardisable food items, make it easy for adulterators to practise their business without guilt or hindrance. At the same time, the preference of the consumers for conventional non-standardisable food items like flour, wheat, curry powder and processed foods (sweets and savouries), makes them an easy prey at the hands of unscrupulous suppliers of food items.

It is very difficult to devise faultless instruments for measuring the quality and content of all or even the major food items sold in the market. It is more difficult to make them available to the consumers at affordable prices. These factors, along with the ignorance of the consumers about adulteration and its health hazards, and their indifference even in the face of knowledge about the consequence of adulteration, have added to the magnitude of the evil of food adulteration.
Of late, consumer protection councils and activist groups have come out in large numbers in many states, but adulteration continues to be a big social problem. In Kerala, the most highly literate state in India, consumer protection councils and activist groups exist in very large numbers. One could naturally hope that consumers in Kerala are better protected against adulteration when compared to those in the rest of India. Even so, the fact is that innumerable cases of adulteration fill the columns of the Kerala newspapers also. Even when assuming that better education and better vigilance against adulteration have their dividend in Kerala, it will be worthwhile to examine the extent of success achieved in Kerala in this field. It is, therefore, necessary to conduct an empirical study of this problem to throw light on the modus operandi of the trade in this field, so that it will help all concerned in the better protection of the consumer against adulteration. In operational terms, the study aims at examining:

1. The nature, magnitude and consequences of food adulteration. This is done through a survey of the available literature relevant to the problem.

2. The extent of public awareness and attitude towards food adulteration, measured in terms of the survey of attitude and
behaviour of the different categories of respondents, (a) women consumers, (b) activists, and (c) officials.

3. The social values and consumer behaviour of the above three categories of respondents.

4. The attitude of consumers to the eradication of this problem, elicited from the actions taken and proposed by the groups concerned.