

Essay on Adulteration – Crime Against Society

“Adulteration thrives in India, with a view of ‘Scab Kuchh Chalta Hai. Such belief encourages and allures even the honest traders to resort to making quick bucks. The unholy nexus between death merchants and corrupt officials, even the Police has allowed this heinous crime”.

What do we find pure or unadulterated now-a-days? False branded ghee, adulterated petrol, turmeric mixed with chromate powder, Chilli powder mixed with red colour, dal with stones bits, dust tea garnished by saw dust, white powder in salt, milk with water or synthetic milk, mustard oil with argemone are known examples of adulteration. Even fruits, vegetables and cereals sold in market, reportedly contain high level of toxic metals like lead, nickle, cadmium. A survey conducted recently by a private agency revealed that all the cold drinks, Pepsy, Cocacola etc., are found adulterated with unhygenic substances. The episode of Cocacola had been in International news recently. National Dairy Development Corporation also conducted a survey which revealed that 90% of the edible oils available in the market contain highly intoxicated elements.

“Food adulteration has become the order of the day and consumer education and awareness is the need of the hour”, assert experts. “A common mistake committed by most consumers is to blindly pick up any product without reading the label which includes details like batch number, expiry date, manufacturer’s name and address. Sometimes it is a spurious or duplicate product and can be mistaken for a reputed brand. The consumer has to keep his eyes open while buying a product. One must avoid informal transactions which deprive the consumer of a receipt of the purchases made,” explains Kagadwala.

Adulteration like corruption has become rampant. Every citizen and the government is well known to the fact, that 90% spices, dais, milk, ghee, sugar, tea to be sold in our rural area are adulterated. We have laws against adulterations but like any other social legislation it is rarely enforced. Adulteration has become a way of life, the negligent government officials, society are awakened only when a tragedy takes place.

Adulteration of food is a very serious anti-social act as it poses a major health hazard. Lack of awareness among people and corrupt officials even the police is the reason why spurious food products continue to hit the shelf. As an academician, I feel there is a need to evolve better techniques to detect adulteration. A lot of research allocation is pending in this field too. Co-ordination between various government bodies scrutinising the quality of food products and increase in awareness can go a long way in containing adulteration.

Can't we forget the death of 54 people in the Capital because of dropsy triggered by the consumption of adulterated mustard oil? Dropsy is caused by a toxin called sanguinarine, found in the seeds of common weed, prickly poppy argemone mexicana. Its seeds have been used in recent times to adulterate mustard seeds for a 'zing' taste. It was claimed that 'zing' having been lost in some of the high yielding hybrid varieties of mustard, so some unscrupulous oil mill owners have started adding an overdose of argemone' to restore the 'zing' punch, the taste liked by many consumers. It was a pity that a major cooperative giant, like NDDB (National Dairy Development Board), which supplies mustard oil under the brand name of 'Dhara' was also in the list of adulterated oils.

The story of the adulterated 'Dal' mixed with 'Kasari Dal' is also an example. Hundreds of people disabled in M.P. after consuming this

adulterated Dal. But those committed this crime, have gone scot-free. Don't we remember the recent finding of pesticides and other non-edible items in the cold drinks of renowned brands? No result of action could be seen as yet. After a lapse of a little period, everything is in the same shape. Neither the government nor the public at large is worried all these happening. So rightly observed about India, Sab Kuchh Chalta Hai Yahan.

Despite amendments to the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act, 1954, the level of adulteration in food products in Vadodara was found to be per cent. About 37 of the 453 food samples collected by the Food & Drugs Laboratory in 2002-2003 were found adulterated. Loopholes in law have emboldened erring manufacturers, and lack of consumer awareness has made things worse. "Most consumers are not brand conscious. They are ignorant about PFA standards and pick up cheaper products by compromising on quality and subsequently health too. And those who look for label details like the manufacturer's name, expiry date and batch number, do not make an effort to lodge a complaint on finding spurious or substandard food products. At the most, they should avoid buying these things themselves," said Arun Kagadwala of Jagrut Nagrik, a consumer protection organisation. Why not the inspectors should honestly execute their duties and put the doers behind the bar with the help of Police.

"The penalty for selling substandard products is a meagre sum of Rs. 500 to Rs 1,000 which every trader can pay. Also, the fact that one is rarely put behind bars for food adulteration is also a reason why people have no fear of law." There should be a law to cancel the certificate for selling anything in the market for a person who is once caught in this crime.

There is hardly any pure item in the Indian market. Adulterators spare nothing to make quick money. Reports have come to light that

empty water bottles are being used to supply well-known brand names of mineral water. Every year thousands of people die after consuming spurious liquor. Every time when the tragedy takes place, some arrests are made and actions are initiated just to pacify the public agitations. The production of spurious liquor can't be possible without knowledge and support of local police, but no action is initiated to correct the police. There is no system to check or punish the known ignorance of such police or other officials. The police should also be taken on the task when found guilty for ignoring such cases. They should be treated as a killer.

It is the duty of the State to improve food testing facilities. The Inspectors, Drug Inspectors, Police Officials, Food Analyst should be taken to task and must be made accountable if any incidence of adulteration is found in their area of jurisdiction. Unless they are held responsible, they will not be worried about the happenings and adulteration will thrive with more pace and speed.

The Health Ministry must also make ISI or Ag Mark certification mandatory for all edible items. Every citizen should also be made aware that consuming any adulterated item may prove to be more dangerous than their imaginations. The indifferent attitude of general mass towards the hygienic values is also responsible for the prevalence of such crime. Unless the common people be conscience to the hygienic values and protest against the spurious and adulterated items, the adulteration will not be checked as the law takes its own time. If we like to remain healthy we shall have to act at our own and wherever and whenever the availability of such items come to our notice, the matter must be brought to the notice of officials through letters and newspapers. Unless we care for the health of our family members, nothing can be changed. A social awakening against adulteration can only check such a crime. Honestly on the part of. Food Inspections, Police Officials and judiciary in dealing with such

cases to book the guilty and award a punishment of nature as awarded to the murderer, will help to some extent to end up this rigorous crime.