FOOD SAFETY STANDARDS AND ITS GROWING ROLE IN RECENT TIMES IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to understand the significance of food safety, growing demand for the rigorous enactment of regulations to monitor quality food and also the moral responsibility of manufacturers and advertisers to ensure to cater healthier and safe food practices in India. Foodborne diseases are a burden on public health and a challenge to administer healthier food supply which contributes significantly to the expenditure of health care. India, being a signatory to World Trade Organization (WTO) on food trade and therefore has to abide by guidelines. In recent years, the food safety has taken the centre stage as the public are getting aware of their health and the quality of the food they consume. Hence, the standards in food safety are gaining much concern in India these days.

KEYWORDS: *Food Safety Standards, Food Safety Regulations, Public Health, Moral Responsibility*

INTRODUCTION

Food safety is an issue that remains undetermined and challenging in both the developed and developing countries. For consumers around the globe, approach to safe and healthy food is a fundamental requirement for maintaining overall health and well-being. Food safety is an important social and health priority for any country. Unsafe food causes many diseases ranging from diarrhoea to deadly cancer. Food borne diseases and infections have devastated the health and economic sectors across the globe. Sicknesses due to unhygienic and contaminated food are a hindrance on public health. Worldwide, food borne diseases are extensive health burden which is leading to high mortality. In 2017 WHO (World Health Organization) reports that One-third of total global deaths are caused due to food-borne diseases.Among the affected are of children aged less than five years, in contempt the fact that they make up only 9% of the world's population, says a WHO report. Apart from children, pregnant women and old aged people are also been affected from unsafe food. This has become the most significant issue time immorable. Every country is fighting to build better, healthier future. Food safety has always been a topic of majortargetall over the world. To be able to contributesafe and hygienic food is a challenge even today for many countries and India, being the most populated country it is like a mission to cater safe and hygienic food to all.In developed nations there are sophisticated standards for food safety, whereas in under developing and lesser developed nations the enforcement of standards to monitor food safety is a challenge. Thought avoiding outbreak of diseases through food contamination is preventable, but this cannot be achieved due to the involvement of many people in the preparation and supply chain. Lately, the public / consumers are now being aware of their health and hygiene. Also they are more concern about the food they consume and there is an awareness of their right to have safe food, this has led the government and the regulatory body to be more alive to cater healthier future

for the society.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In the present study, the implication of food safety standards and its growing significance in the recent days are considered as major objectives. The manufacturers and advertisers of the food products play a key role in conferring a healthier future. But at the same they have a challenging task of selling their products with other competitive brands which often leads to hard-core marketing and advertising tactics which eventually obliterates the regulations to safeguard the food quality. Hence the moral responsibility of the manufacturers and the advertisers will be assessed in this study.

Food Safety in India

In India, the food and cultural pattern display great diversity among the geographical regions. Approach to safe and hygienic food should be considered as a basic right for India's 1.34 billion people with population growth rate at 1.2%. With this population density, most of the food borne diseases goes unreported and only few are reported. This makes the mission to cater healthier future becomes challenging. Administering quality criteria of foods has become a significant task with time and the emphasis on the quality parameters related to hygienic foods as taken the centre stage. Still and all the safety measures in providing safe and hygienic foods are not rigorous compared to other countries like USA, UK, Europe and Japan.

In India, food-borne diseases can be bizarre and often go unreported, but in a nationwide 2006 study, 13.2% of households reported food-borne illness (Kohli&Garg. 131-135). The obligation to have a regulatory body on food to oversee the quality and standard of food safety in India was first sensed in the early 2000's with growing sales in the packed foods due to which the Indian Parliament passes the Food Safety and Standard Act (FSSA) in 2006. Two years laterthe Food Safety & Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) was regularised and since its outset the FSSAI has initiated an integrated food safety regulatory framework. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is an autonomous statutory body which is established for science based standards of food products and also to administer their manufacture, storage, distribution, sales and import to protect the quality and hygiene.

The food market, the manufacturers and the sellers in India are using Indian prime time advertisements and intensive marketing campaigns and unethical marketing tactics including brand endorsements by prominent celebrities to sell junk food as desiring health food. It is also evident that these manufacturers are reserving more budgets for advertising their product than that for quality testing. This is nothing but a warning that the manufacturers of the food products are least bothered about the quality and safety of their packaged food products which are increasingly proving to be unhealthy. In one such case in2015, India observed one of the most controversial food scare wherein an extremely popular instant food product Nestle's'Maggi' noodles had to be declared hazardous and unsafe despite all the rules and regulations.Though there are regulators to monitor the quality of food, still do not erase the fact that the country has been termed as world's worst food violator by Food Sentry, a global food sourcing monitoring agency. Food adulteration and contamination issues in India are not new. There are many instances recorded of mortality due to food poisoning and outbreak of diseases due to unsafe food and one such incident to remember is that of the of dropsy (caused by adulteration of mustard oil) that killed over 60 people in 1998. Unfortunately similar incidents keep occurring now and then which justifies the violation of basic food regulations that include unsafe food, contaminated soft drinks and infected chocolates

etc.

Role of Government in Food Safety

Consumers generally foresee government and regulatory authorities to take liability for the safety of food products. Periodically, when necessary various laws have been enacted by the concerned ministries to cater safe, healthy and nutritious food to its citizen. Prior to 2006 in India, the issues related to food were administered, managed and regulated by various departments and ministries through various parliamentary acts. These include 'the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act 1954', 'Fruit Products Order 1955', 'Meat Food Products Order 1973', 'Vegetable Oil Products (Control) Order 1947', and the 'Edible Oils Packaging (Regulation) Order 1988', etc. Lately, the Government of India consolidated theses orders and brought under a single act 'Food Safety and Standards Act' (FSSA) in 2006.

The most significant regulatory body established by the government of India is 'The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)'. The FSSAI is an autonomous body established under the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India. The FSSAI has been entrenched under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. FSSAI is liable for protecting and promoting public health through the regulation and supervision of food safety in India. The FSSAIis conceived for science-based standards for food products, and regulating the manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import of food products to ensure the availability of safe and nutritious food for the consumption. Enforcement and execution of the act is done at the central level by the Food authority and at the state level by Food Safety Commissioners. (www.fssai.gov.in)

Regulatory Framework of FSSAI

FSSAI is liable for protecting and promoting healthy food supply through regulation and supervision of food safety. Hence FSSAI has been given the statutory powers through the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 to administer and manage the food safety standards in India.(www.fssai.gov.in)

- Framing of regulations to lay down food safety standards

- Laying down guidelines for accreditation of laboratories for food testing

- Providing scientific advice and technical support to the Central Government

- Contributing to the development of international technical standards in food

- Collecting and collating data regarding food consumption, contamination, emerging risks etc.

- Disseminating information and promoting awareness about food safety and nutrition in India

Apart from these above said framework, FSSAI has set certain guidelines for food safety research and development also for the food safety standards.(www.fssai.gov.in)

Food Safety Standards of FSSAI

The process in formulating and developing the food safety standards is a vigorous process. The process is based on the latest developments in food science, consumption pattern, new food products and additives, changes in the processing technology and identification of new risks or other regulatory options. With all the latest

scientific developments in food technology the FSSAI has determined food safety standards under Food Product Standards and Food Additives Regulation, 2011, Packaging and Labelling Regulation, 2011 and Contaminants, Toxins, and Residues Regulations, 2011.(www.fssai.gov.in)

The FSSAI has prescribed standards for following food products:

- Dairy products and analogues

- Fats, oils and fat emulsions

- Fruits and vegetable products

- Cereal and cereal products

- Meat and meat products

- Fish and fish products

- Sweets & confectionery

- Sweetening agents including honey

- Salt, spices, condiments and related products

- Beverages, (other than dairy and fruits & vegetables based)

- Other food product and ingredients

- Proprietary food

- Irradiation of food(www.fssai.gov.in)

Consumer's Perception on Food Safety

Consumer perceptions on food safety are based on a number of factors, including the type of food, their culture, life style, demography etc. Last few decades India has observed a change in life style and eating pattern. Also the choice of storing and consuming food has also gone through a transformation. Rise in population, urbanisation and globalization and majorly the working population has led to an increased demand for packaged and ready foods. At the same time, the mind-set of the consumers in India is gradually changing and the awareness about health and fitness has become much tenacious and set deep into the consumer's mind.Overall, increasing concern among consumers regarding the safety of food is creating the demand for the food safety in India. Consumers are now believing that the healthy and hygienic food are of upmost important. Consumers are growing conscious about the food they consume regarding its packing, nutritional facts and of course price! They are not ready to compromise with the standards of the food they consume and they find the government accountable for all the issues regarding food safety.

CONCLUSIONS

From the last couple of decades, India has shown notable changes in the population as well as economy. These changes have an impact on the life style and food habits. Economic growth, rising incomes, and urbanization have influenced Indian'sdietary habits. There is an increased demand for variety in food choices, and as the same time Indian

consumers are becoming more concerned about food quality and safety. There is an increased rate of imports of some packed foods too. But in 2015, India witnessed one of the most food safety controversy of most popular food brand Nestle's Maggiwhich was declared unsafe and was immediately banned the sale of Maggi for by the India's authorized food safety regulator FSSAI. This incident is not unique in India like Maggi even Coke had faced similar issues a few years back. These controversies on food safety have drawn further scrutiny of the regulatory authorities and the manufacturers. These controversies also are evident that despite the tough regulatory steps taken by India is still not able to monitor safe food.

One of the major objectives of the study is to understand the growing significance of food safety in India. This study has been able to identify three main reasons for the growing importance of food safety issues in India. The first reason is the changes in food habit. People are these days tend to eat out more and the reason is the increase in working population and raise in income which is resulting in greater consumer awareness of hygiene. Second reason is the availability of packed and ready food products which are availablethrough supermarkets. Third and main reason is the awareness of consumer right to safe food quality.

The Indian government and the media are playing a vital role in mass awareness in promoting healthy food habits. However, there is still a need to increase consumer awareness about food safety and encourage in developing healthy life style in certain part of the country. Despite the fact that the government is watching on misleading advertisements but still rigorous regulation needed to be enacted on such misleading advertisements. Kids and youngsters look forward to celebrities as their role models, so the celebrities should take moral responsibility in promoting healthy food habits.

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