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Abstract:-

Indians believe in holidays. The country has among the largest number of public holidays in the world. Yet the most common reason for getting away is to “visit a native place”, migrant workers return to their family farms at harvest time, others return to their villages and extended families for an annual pilgrimage. But the concept of a holiday where you let your hair down has been accepted only in recent years.

The idea of Rural Tourism is therefore a bit of puzzle for many Indians. They go back to their

SERVICE QUALITY IN RURAL TOURISM AND TOURISTS SATISFACTION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF KOLHAPUR DISTRICT

village every year, why should they pay good money to go to some other village? Rustic Charms holds greater appeal for foreign tourists. Concerted Government and travel industry efforts to sell India abroad with campaigns such as “Incredible India” began only this decade, but rural tourism as a product is still evolving in India. Rural tourism is a form of nature based tourism that uncovers the rural life, culture, art and heritage at rural locations, thereby favoring the local communities economically and socially. Tourists have expectations when they visit a place and accordingly quality of the concerned tourism place is perceived. The above study aims to apply SERVQUAL instrument to service quality dimensions and asking a sample of tourists to opine. Study was conducted in Kolhapur district only and mostly at summer vacation time in order to get varied respondents.

Keywords:

Service quality, Rural tourism, Servqual, Tangibility, Tourist satisfaction, Assurance, Infrastructure.

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INTRODUCTION:

The word quality means different things to different people according to the context. David Garvin identifies five perspectives on quality. The transcendent view of quality is synonymous with innate excellence: a mark of compromising standards and high achievement. It argues that people learn to organize quality only through the experience gained from repeated exposure. The product based approach sees quality as a precise and measurable variable. Differences in quality reflect differences in the amount of an ingredient or attribute possessed by the product. User based definitions start with the premise that quality lies in the eyes of beholder. These definitions equate quality with the maximum satisfaction. The manufacturing based approach is supply based and is concerned primarily with engineering and manufacturing practices. Value based definitions define quality in terms of value and price. By considering the tradeoff between performance and price, quality comes to be defined as “Affordable Excellence”.

Service quality is a relatively new academic discipline; emerged in the USA in the 1980’s, when the manufacturing sector declined in economic importance and the service sector grew. Service quality became a key management issue as it became central to private sector competitiveness.(Parasuraman). A key factor in designing and delivering quality services is the need to understand customer needs in order to provide services, which meets those needs within available resources. Service quality would include not only quality final service but also production and delivery process of services. Thus, the importance of employee involvement in process redesign and commitment to the improvement of the final tourism product or service comes into picture. Quality issues have never been alien to tourism. In fact, quality tourism has become one of the global tourism policy issues in the light of the rapid growth of tourism industry. The complexity and globalization of today’s competitive business environments in tourism have made quality as one of the most important sources of competitive advantage. Each government is aware of the fierce competition in tourism sector and customer expectations have never been greater. It is no longer sufficient just to maintain a business, it is necessary to move forward if tourism wants to achieve a sustainable future.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

India has enormous potential for developing tourism because of its special eco-cultural transoceanic trade and even cultural characteristics and features. However, here an attempt is made to high light the earlier studies conducted by many scholars. *Dutta(1980)*, Tourism in north east region, *Hardikar (1993)*, Tourism Potential in Sangli district, *Akash S.B.(2006)* Tourism opportunities and challenges etc had concentrated on many issues related to tourism.

A review of literature reveals numerous studies that have been reported a positive relationship between satisfactions and measures of purchase intentions (*Bloomer and De Reiter, 1998, Lovemen, 1998, Jones, 2000*) and between service quality perceptions and satisfaction. Previous studies have highlighted the site’s concerns about declining numbers of tourists and the outcomes argued that the lack of tourists was because many were dissatisfied with the quality of service delivered to them by businesses in the tourism sector. In a post modern society rural areas and the countryside have grown in both importance and appeal. For this reason, academics and politicians have become interested in understanding rural tourism phenomenon since it was recognized as a developmental tool of often economically and socially depressed rural areas.(*Gilbert,1989,Blaine and Golan,1993,Dernoi,1991,Grefe,1994,Page and Getz,1997, Sharpley and Sharpley,1997.*)

Tourist service is very sensitive, intangible and imperishable. Today’s tourists are very conscious about the service quality of tourist destination. If the service quality of any tourist destination meet the expectation of the tourist then it is easy to attract more tourists towards that destination (*Kamndampully and Duddy, 2001*).

By considering the importance of service quality of tourist destinations, managers of every tourist destinations are very concerned to improve the quality of service. By improving the service, managers can satisfy their tourist and make them loyal towards the destinations (*Tian-Cole and Crompton, 2003*).

Akama and Kieti investigated the cause of the decreasing numbers of tourist in national parks in Kenya. They found that tourist were satisfied with the quality of the parks and related the decline in the number of tourists to bad transportation and political unrest in East Africa. In order to provide a better understanding of the Muslim tourist satisfaction in Malaysian Islamic tourist destination in the different facets; study conducted to explore influential factors that lead to tourist’s satisfaction in destination based Islamic tourist destinations in Malaysia.(*Abdul kahn,2013*) .

RURAL TOURISM–A CONCEPT:

As per Ganon, “Rural Tourism covers a range of activities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their area in order to generate extra income for their business.” Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. Rural tourism is essentially an activity which takes place in the countryside. It is multifaceted and may entail farm or agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism and eco tourism. As against conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain typical characteristics like it is experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, it is

predominantly in natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation and culture, heritage and traditions. Tourism in India is founded on many concepts such as rural tourism, medical tourism, heritage tourism, wildlife tourism and so on. The rural tourism in India is being promoted as a joint venture of Ministry of Tourism; Government of India in collaborations with UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). The rural tourism in India is a link between the tourist and villagers. The main focus is on the skill of artisan and other diverse skills of village folks besides agriculture and agricultural products. Tourism in India can fetch great awards in the rural sector, if the state rural tourism helps in exposure of the local and regional culture and historical heritage supports movement of tourist in rural areas.

Ministry of tourism has identified many spots which are being developed as tourist destinations in rural area. These sites are unexplored and incredibly beautiful. The rural tourism in India is also helping to promote the skills and arts of the villagers along with natural, cultural and historical heritage of India. A national tourism policy was introduced in 2002, with rural tourism identified as a focus area to generate employment and promote sustainable livelihoods. "As a part of the National Tourism Policy 2002, the ministry of tourism is developing and promoting rural tourism sites which have core competency in art, craft, culture, heritage, handloom etc." Today's rural tourism business models are using existing infrastructure like home stays, farm stays, and community managed guest houses. Despite such market differentiators, rural tourism has not picked up significantly, being plagued by issues such as information asymmetry, difficult booking and payment processes, non-availability of quality budget accommodations and quality issues.

Within this context, this study aims to explore various factors that can impact the current service quality level of rural tourism services in India. The main objective of this study is to explore influential factors that lead to tourist's satisfaction in selected rural tourism destinations in Kolhapur district. This research is necessary for identification of influencing factors that make tourist satisfied and which can help marketer to make strategic marketing plans.

II. Research design-

The study can be as great theoretical contribution to the body of knowledge as this area has not yet been explored. Findings may be considered by local authorities, tourism development companies for necessary implementation. The study is conducted by focusing on following objectives-

1. To analyze various parameters of service quality provided at selected rural tourist destinations based in Kolhapur district.
2. To study the relationship between tourist satisfaction and service quality.
3. To find out the areas where infrastructural facilities can be improved with respect to qualitative service.
4. To give necessary suggestions.

This study is exploratory in nature and based on primary as well as secondary data. The respondents were tourists selected on the basis of following criteria:-

Two destinations of rural tourism pertaining in Kolhapur district namely Kanheri Math and Khidrapur were selected. The data was collected through questionnaire designed for the study. Quality of selected Rural Tourism destination was assessed through 17 different parameters. The questionnaire designed for the above study consists of 17 parameters consisted of Likert Type scale items designed to fit into five dimensions of service quality which are as follows-

Tangibility- The appearance of physical facilities, equipment appearance of personnel and communication materials.

Reliability- The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.

Responsiveness- The willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.

Assurance- The knowledge and accuracy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.

Empathy- The caring, individualized attention the firm provides to its customers.

Scale categories were labeled numerically indicating 1 as Fully satisfied, 2 as Satisfied, 3 as Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4 as Dissatisfied and 5 as Fully dissatisfied. The perceptions of tourists are judged using these scales. The data has been processed with SPSS software. The Kolmogorov- Smirnov test has been applied to test the hypothesis.

Sample size-

The study was conducted in the district of Kolhapur only. Total 50 tourists were asked to participate in survey, using a self administered questionnaire. Researcher had selected the sample size on the basis of random sampling method.

Hypothesis-

Tourist's satisfaction and Service Quality are independent of each other.

III. Results and Discussion:

The researcher have included personal data in questionnaire where information like name, age, group, gender is also gathered from the respondents .Table 1 is illustrative of total no. of male candidates, total no. of female candidates and age group wise classification for the same no. of respondents.

Table No.1
Age Group wise and Gender wise classification of respondents

Age group	Male	Female	Total
Below 20	1	1	2
21-30	6	4	10
31-40	8	7	15
41-50	6	8	14
51 and Above	3	6	9
Total	24	26	50

The data was analyzed in two phases .During the first phase, mean is used to calculate the opinions and also the percentile value of each statement. If the mean value is greater than or equal to 2.5, it shows that tourists are highly and moderately satisfied with the mentioned parameter. If the value is lesser then it shows dissatisfaction.

Table No.2
Service quality dimensions and Tourist's opinion

Sr. No.	Parameters	Scale of tourist's opinion					Mean value	% Value
		1	2	3	4	5		
1.	Climate	20	17	8	5	-	2.06	41.2
2.	Kindness and co-operation of local people	19	14	3	3	1	2.06	41.2
3.	Road links	18	15	12	3	2	2.12	42.4
4.	Local traffic	20	16	5	5	4	2.14	42.8
5.	Parking	21	16	9	3	1	1.94	38.8
6.	Information about your destination	17	19	7	4	3	2.14	42.8
7.	Cleanliness and order	19	14	11	6	-	2.18	43.6
8.	Crowding	18	15	12	3	2	2.12	42.4
9.	Landscape beauty	17	18	10	14	1	2.08	41.6
10.	Environmental safeguarding	19	20	4	5	2	2.02	40.4
11.	Quality of drinking water	15	18	15	-	2	2.2	44.0
12.	Amenities for children	19	17	8	5	1	2.04	40.8
13.	Safety	13	17	14	4	2	2.3	46
14.	Food and Catering services	18	15	12	2	3	2.14	42.8
15.	Hotel services	21	16	9	3	1	1.94	38.8
16.	Overall rating of what this place offers as a tourist destination	19	14	3	3	1	2.06	41.2
17.	Tourist satisfaction and service quality are independent	5	25	15	5	-	2.5	50

The above table, Table No.2 shows various parameters indicating quality of tourism destinations. Results are showing that 41.2 % of respondents are highly satisfied about climate and also about kindness and co-operation of local people. Opinion about road links and parking facilities is also highest i.e. 42.8 % . Almost 46% of respondents have assured safety of selected tourism destinations. The respondents are not much happy about hotel services as they were expecting Local and Kolhapur specialty food to be available at destinations.

The next phase of data analysis was to assess the relationship between tourist's satisfaction and service quality, where Ks test is used to calculate the relationship between service quality and tourists.

Table No.3
Table showing relationship between Service quality and Tourist's satisfaction

Opinions	Scale	Observed frequency	Observed proportion	Observed Cumulative Proportion	Null Proportion	Null Cumulative Proportion	Absolute Difference (Observed & Null)
<i>Fully satisfied</i>	1	5	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1
<i>Satisfied</i>	2	25	0.5	0.6	0.2	0.4	-0.1
<i>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</i>	3	15	0.3	0.9	0.2	0.6	0.3
<i>Dissatisfied</i>	4	5	0.1	1.0	0.2	0.8	0.7
<i>Fully Dissatisfied</i>	5	0	0	1.0	0.2	1.0	0

HYPOTHESIS TESTING USING KS TEST:

From table no.3 it is found that the largest absolute difference is 0.7 which is the value of Kolmogorov –Smirnov D value. Here the critical value for a sample of 50 at an alpha of 0.05 is $1.36/\sqrt{n}$ that is, $D=1.36/\sqrt{50} = 0.1921$. Since the null hypothesis that Tourist satisfaction and service quality are independent of each other is rejected and hence we established an alternative hypothesis as Tourist satisfaction and service quality are dependent on each other.

IV.CONCLUSION:-

As the researcher has conducted an empirical study on service qualities rather facilities available at two selected destinations namely Kanheri Math and Khidrapur, the results are showing that Service quality dimensions and tourist satisfaction are depending upon each other. Tourists are expecting pleasant climate, awareness by local people to guide tourists, good hotels, hygienic food and catering service. Researchers observed and analyzed the opinions of respondents during the survey conducted at tourism destinations. On these grounds researchers have recommended following suggestions:

- 1.As suggested by respondents during survey, road indicators and connectivity boards should be updated. Also parking facilities to be provided for vehicles.
- 2.The detailed information about destination should be provided on concerned website and also it should be updated as per requirement.
- 3.As Kolhapur is become a well known destination of Western Maharashtra ,people prefer to come here because of Mahalaxmi temple and other attractions, the same tourists should be captured and they should be guided to visit the rural tourism destinations pertaining to kolhapur district.
- 4.Rural tourism showcases the rural life, art and heritage. Exposure of this sector enables in enriching experiences between tourists and rural people. Accordingly, craft training centers need to be established at the Gram Panchayat level to train rural youth.
- 5.Rural food and its importance in the fast food culture needs to be introduced in the home stays.Accordingly; food specialties like Tambda Pandhra, Kolhapuri missal should be promoted.
- 6.A separate outlets for rural tourism needs to be provided at government sponsored festivals like district level cultural fest, heritage fests etc.
7. The existing promotional methods are not enough to propagate rural tourism in kolhapur district. Hence, proper promotional activities are needed in marketing rural tourism as niche tourism product. The encouragement of rural tourism will improve the socio economic benefits and thereby, enable to put a stop to the exodus of the people from rural to urban areas.

The rural tourism not only provide more exposure to local art, craft and rejuvenate the local economy, in situ development will also be instrumental in reducing migration of rural people to cities. It brings new opportunities, better infrastructure and communication facilities to the villages and also help in bringing the heart of India to the tourists who wish to see where true India resides.

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