



A STUDY OF EXPECTATIONS OF THE VISITORS TO SEVERAL RELIGIOUS TOURISM CENTRES IN THE STATE OF MAHARASHTRA

Eesha Vinayak Deshpande¹ & Kishor L. Salve², Ph. D.

¹Ph.D. Scholar- Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University

²(Principal- Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar College of Arts and Commerce, Aurangabad)

Abstract

Maharashtra, a state in India, having residents of almost all prominent religions like Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism respectively, has a heterogeneous composition of religious centres. Religious tourism is the most popular form of tourism in India. Since the religious practices and visits to various religious centres are rapidly gaining popularity, studying the expectations of the devotees from such religious tourism centres would prove to be salubrious to the management of such centres as well as to the visitors. There is a need to bridge the gap between the expectation of facilities by the visitors and the provision of such facilities from the management's side.

This paper is an attempt to understand the expectation of the facilities by the visitors to the various religious tourism centres. This will help to understand the need for further infrastructural development as well as other facilities offered by such centres.

Keywords: Religious centres, religious tourism, pilgrimage, devotees



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I. INTRODUCTION

Faith is one of the basic instincts and therefore, an inevitable part of our lives. People often travel to the places of religious importance for religious and/ or recreational purpose. Religious tourism is the most popular form of tourism in India. Hence there is a need to bridge the gap between the expectation of facilities by the visitors and the provision of such facilities from the management's side.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To study the expectations of facilities by the devotees visiting various religious tourism centres in Maharashtra.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Despite the fact that the religious tourists having a different mindset which perhaps does not prioritize comforts, they still need amenities and facilities. In fact, historically, the origin of commercial hotels can be traced back to religious travelers; hotels were occasionally alluded to in contemporary hymns (O'Gorman, 2009). Bryce *et al.* (2013) found that in Safavid (Iran), both commercial and religious travelers were benefitted from amenities such as the

caravanserai. Melian *et al.* (2016) have posited that curative shrines signify the overlap between religious and accessible tourism; they found that both secular and religious tourists gave importance to various factors in accessibility. Jauhari and Sanjeev (2010) propose creation of infrastructure and hygiene facilities in order to enhance the experience of the visitors to spiritual and cultural places. Going by the anecdotal evidence, perhaps people may even travel more for religious purposes when things get rough.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on primary data collected from 433 visitors at various centres in the state of Maharashtra, by way of random sampling. Such data is collected by way of personal interview with the respondents with the help of questionnaires. In a bid to go green, the information was recorded using the ‘Google forms’ function. The centres were selected across the six administrative divisions from Maharashtra in such a manner that each religion got adequate representation.

V. LIMITATIONS

The study is limited to 18 religious’ tourist centres in the state of Maharashtra.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS

Information pertaining to general profile of the respondents was collected.

a. Age of the respondents:

Information about the respondents’ age was collected. This information is classified into four different groups. The classified information is presented in the following table.

Age of the respondents		Number of respondents	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Up to 25 years	69	15.6	15.6	15.6
	26 to 40 years	178	40.2	40.2	55.8
	41 to 60 years	134	30.2	30.2	86.0
	Above 60 years	62	14.0	14.0	100.0
	Total	443	100.0	100.0	

The above table indicates that, out of the 443 respondents, 69 (15.6%) respondents belong to the age group ‘Up to 25 years’, 178 (40.2%) respondents belong to the age group ‘26 to 40 years’, 134 (30.2%) respondents belong to the age group ‘41 to 60 years’ and the remaining

62 (14%) belong to the age group ‘Above 60 years’ respectively. The maximum number of respondents are from the age group 26 to 40 years, whereas the minimum number of respondents are of the age above 60 years.

The following pie diagram gives us classification of respondents according to the age group.

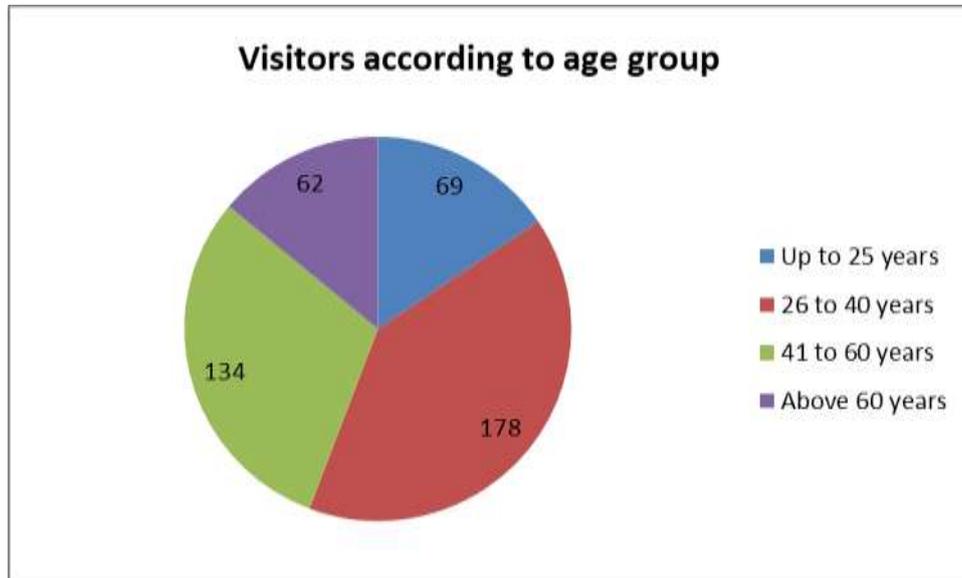


Figure 1 Visitors according to the age group

b. Gender of the respondents

The following table represents the gender of the respondents. The gender is classified into three categories, namely, male, female and transgender.

Gender of the respondents		Number of respondents	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	255	57.6	57.6	57.6
	Female	187	42.2	42.2	99.8
	Transgender	1	0.2	0.2	100.0
	Total	443	100.0	100.0	

There are, in all, 443 respondents, out of which 255 (57.6%) are male, 187 (42.2%) are females and whereas there is only 1 (0.2%) transgender. The maximum number of respondents are male and the minimum being transgender.

The following pie diagram represents gender wise classification.

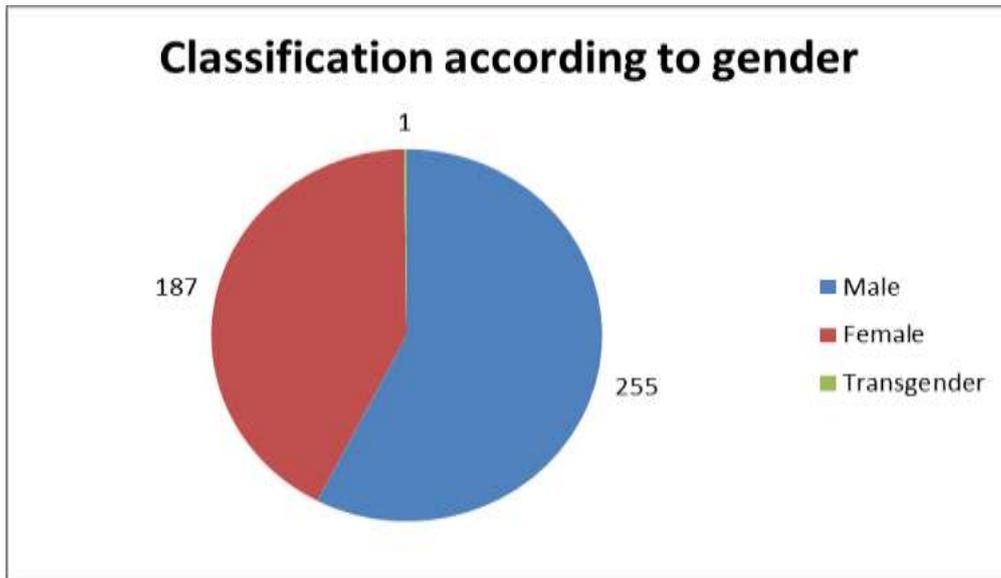


Figure 2 Visitors according to gender

c. Religion of the respondents

The following table represents the religion followed by the respondents.

Table 3 Visitors according to religion					
Religion of the respondents		Number of respondents	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Hinduism	295	66.6	66.6	66.6
	Jainism	28	6.3	6.3	72.9
	Buddhism	43	9.7	9.7	82.6
	Sikhism	22	5.0	5.0	87.6
	Christianity	18	4.1	4.1	91.6
	Islam	37	8.4	8.4	100.0
	Total	443	100.0	100.0	

There is a total of 443 respondents, of which 295 (66.6%) respondents follow Hinduism, 28 (6.3%) respondents follow Jainism, 43 (9.7%) respondents follow Buddhism, 22 (5%) respondents follow Sikhism, 18 (4.1%) respondents follow Christianity and 37 (8.4%) respondents follow Islam. The maximum number of respondents follow Hinduism whereas the minimum number of respondents follow Christianity.

The following pie chart represents religion-wise classification of respondents.

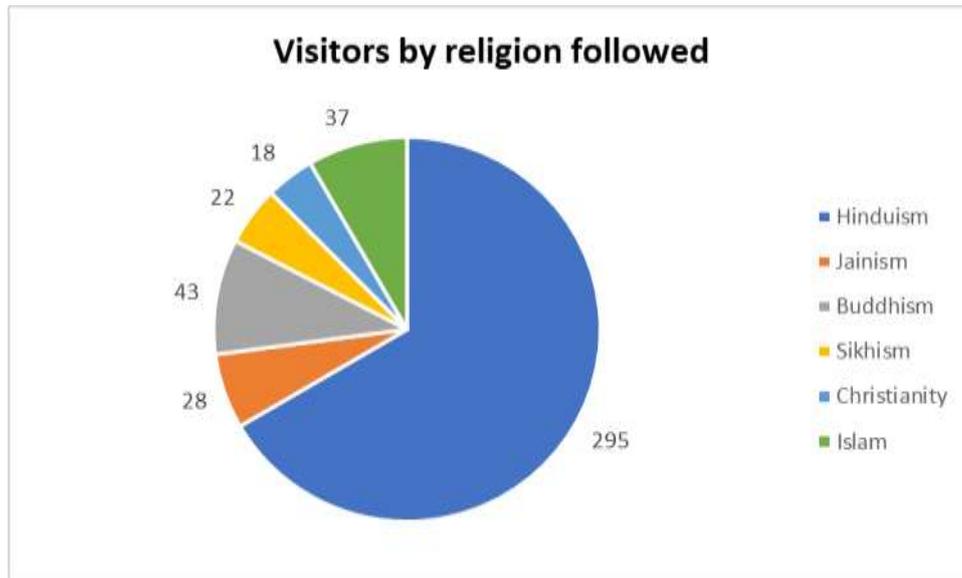


Figure 3 Visitors according to religion followed

d. Occupation of the respondents

The following table represents the occupation of the respondents.

Occupation of the respondents		Number of respondents	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Student	40	9.0	9.0	9.0
	Service	162	36.6	36.6	45.6
	Business	104	23.5	23.5	69.1
	Retired	36	8.1	8.1	77.2
	Homemaker	101	22.8	22.8	100.0
	Total	443	100.0	100.0	

There are total 443 respondents, of which 40 (9%) respondents are students, 162 (36.6%) respondents are at service, 104 (23.5%) run their own businesses, 36 (8.1%) respondents are retired from work life and the remaining 101 (22.8%) respondents are homemakers respectively. The maximum number of respondents are at service and the minimum number of respondents are retired individuals.

The following pie chart represents classification of respondents according to their occupation.

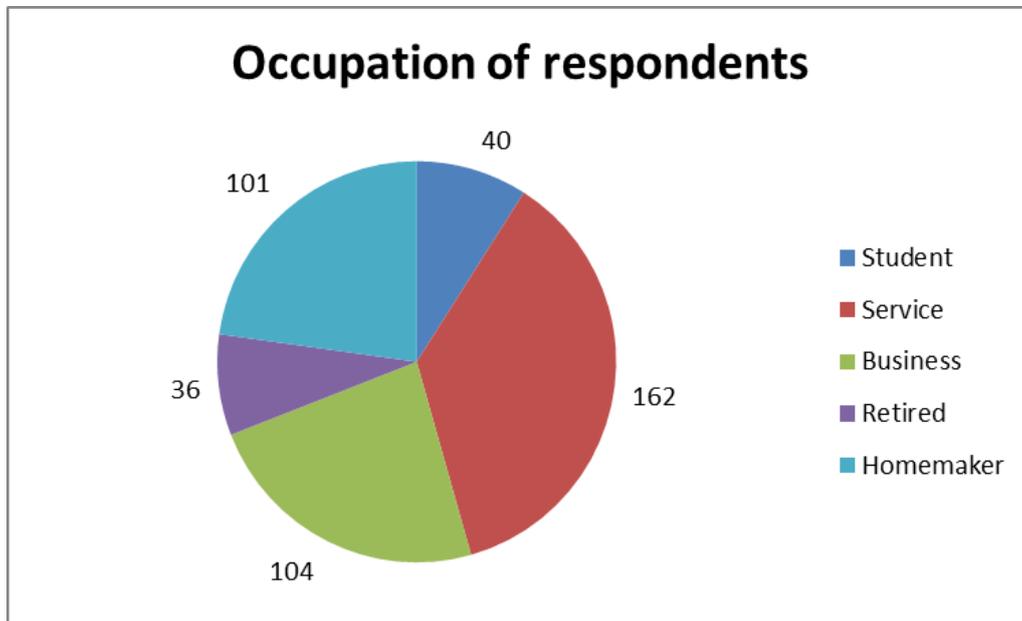


Figure 4 Visitors according to occupation

e. Annual income of the respondents

The following table represents annual income of the respondents.

Annual Income		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below INR 2.5 lakhs	252	56.9	56.9	56.9
	INR 2.5 lakhs to 5 lakhs	103	23.3	23.3	80.1
	Rs.5 lakhs to 10 lakhs	66	14.9	14.9	95.0
	Above INR 10 lakhs	22	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	443	100.0	100.0	

There are total 443 respondents, of which 252 (56.9%) respondents have annual income below INR 2.5 lakhs, 103 (23.3%) respondents have annual income in the range of INR 2.5 lakhs to 5 lakhs, 66 (14.9%) respondents have annual income in the range of INR 5 lakhs to 10 lakhs and the remaining 22 (5%) have annual income above INR 10 lakhs. The maximum

respondents have annual income below INR 2.5 lakhs and minimum respondents have annual income above INR 10 lakhs.

The following pie chart represents classification of respondents according to their annual income.

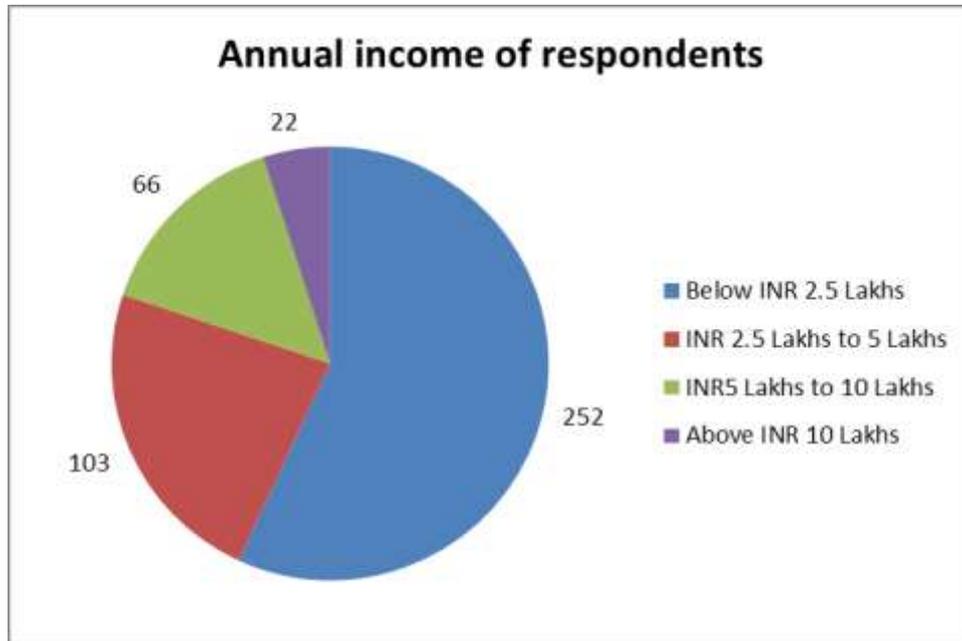


Figure 5 Visitors according to annual income

f. A) Expectation of the respondents about the following facilities (1 to 4)

The following table represents the expectation of the respondents about the given facilities (17.1 to 17.4).

Table 6(A) Expectation of visitors

Sr. no.	Type of facility	Very important	Important	Less important	Not important
17.1	Availability of worship material	43	118	77	205
17.2	Cleanliness and ambience of the premise	384	57	1	1
17.3	Charity work of the trust	185	189	52	17
17.4	Comfort and safety of the stay facility	175	233	27	8

- **17.1:** There are total 443 respondents, of which 43 respondents are of the opinion that 'Availability of worship material' facility is very important, 118 respondents are of the opinion that 'Availability of worship material' facility is important, 77 respondents are of the opinion that 'Availability of worship material' facility is less

important and the remaining 205 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Availability of worship material’ facility is not important. Hence, maximum number of respondents feel that ‘Availability of worship material’ facility is not important.

- **17.2:** There are 384 respondents who are of the opinion that ‘Cleanliness and ambience of the premise’ facility is very important, 57 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Cleanliness and ambience of the premise’ facility is important, 1 respondent is of the opinion that ‘Cleanliness and ambience of the premise’ facility is less important and the remaining 1 respondent is of the opinion that ‘Cleanliness and ambience of the premise’ facility is not important. Hence, maximum number of respondents feel that ‘Cleanliness and ambience of the premise’ facility is very important.
- **17.3:** There are 185 respondents who are of the opinion that ‘Charity work of the trust’ facility is very important, 189 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Charity work of the trust’ facility is important, 52 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Charity work of the trust’ facility is less important and the remaining 17 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Charity work of the trust’ facility is not important. Hence, maximum respondents are of opinion that ‘Charity work of the trust’ facility is important.
- **17.4:** There are 175 respondents who are of the opinion that ‘Comfort and safety of the stay’ facility is very important, 233 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Comfort and safety of the stay’ facility is important, 27 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Comfort and safety of the stay’ facility is less important and 8 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Comfort and safety of the stay’ facility is not important. Hence, maximum respondents are of the opinion that this facility is important.

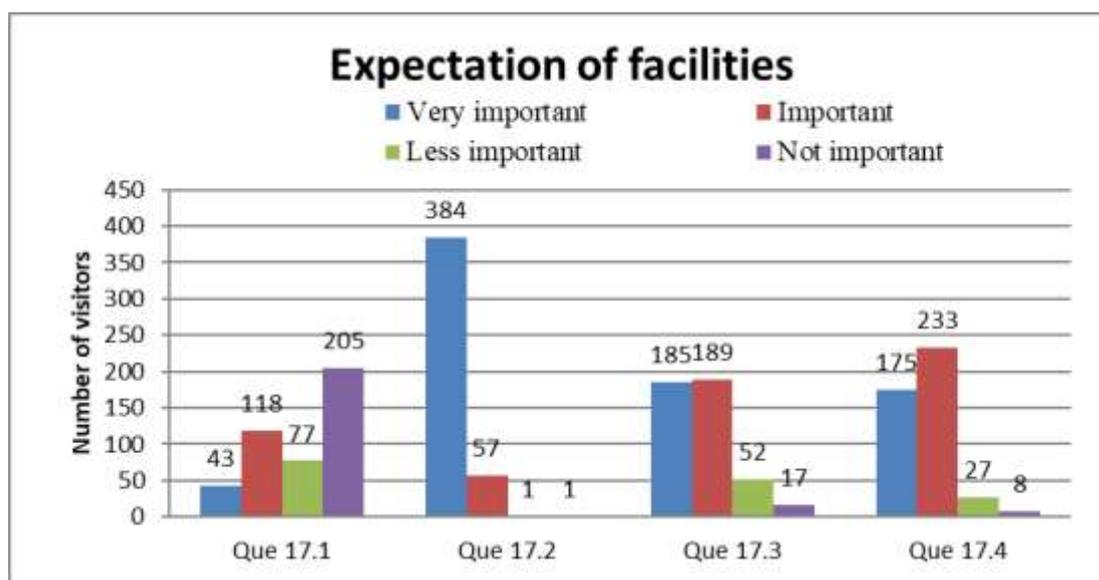


Figure 6(A) Expectation of visitors

B) Expectation of respondents about following facilities (Q 17.5 to 17.8)

Table 6(B) Expectation of visitors

Sr. no.	Type of facility	Very important	Important	Less important	Not important
17.5	Crowd management and assistance service	331	109	3	0
17.6	Ease of access to the centre and parking	194	206	34	9
17.7	Hygiene of the washroom facility	381	59	3	0
17.8	Treatment from the staff (security personnel, priest, office etc.)	264	145	30	4

- **17.5:** There are 331 respondents who are of the opinion that ‘Crowd management and assistance service’ facility is very important, 109 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Crowd management and assistance service’ facility is important, and the remaining 3 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Crowd management and assistance service’ facility is less important. Hence, maximum number of respondents are of the opinion that ‘Crowd management and assistance service’ facility is very important.
- **17.6:** There are 194 respondents who are of the opinion that ‘Ease of access to the centre and parking’ facility is very important, 206 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Ease of access to the centre and parking’ facility is important, 34 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Ease of access to the centre and parking’ facility is less important ,

and the remaining 9 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Ease of access to the centre and parking’ facility is not important. Hence, maximum number of respondents are of the opinion that ‘Ease of access to the centre and parking’ facility is important.

- **17.7:** There are 381 respondents who are of the opinion that ‘Hygiene of the washroom facility’ is very important, 59 respondents who are of the opinion that ‘Hygiene of the washroom facility’ is important, and the remaining 3 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Hygiene of the washroom facility’ is less important. Hence, maximum number of respondents are of the opinion that ‘Hygiene of the washroom facility’ is very important.
- **17.8:** There are 264 respondents who are of the opinion that ‘Treatment from the staff’ facility is very important, 145 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Treatment from the staff’ facility is important, 30 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Treatment from the staff’ facility is less important, and the remaining 4 respondents are of the opinion that ‘Treatment from the staff’ facility is not important. Hence, maximum number of respondents are of the opinion that ‘Treatment from the staff’ facility is very important.

The following bar chart represents the expectations of the respondents.

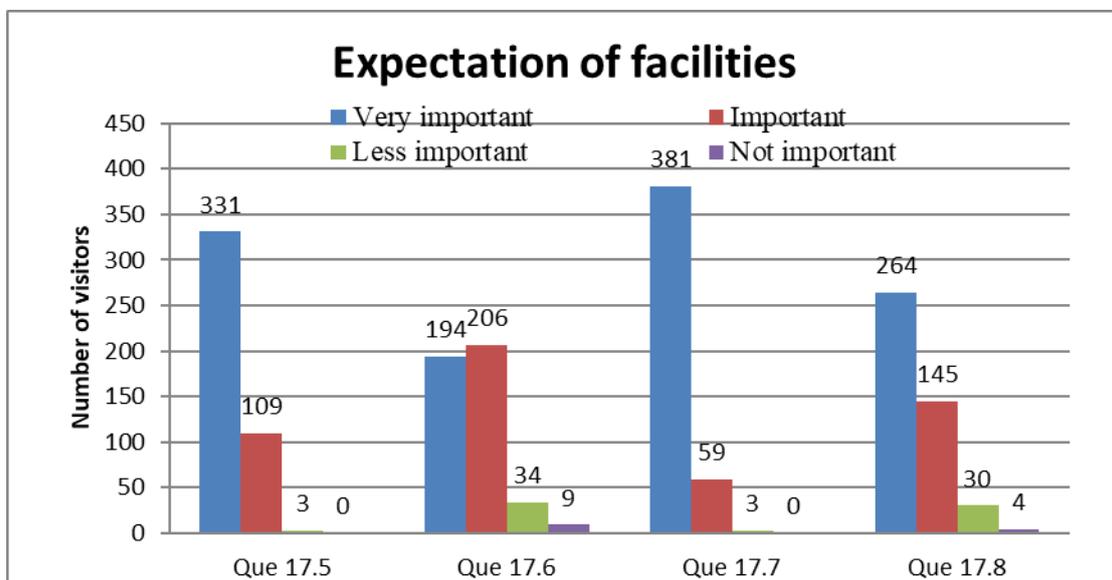


Figure 6(B) Expectation of visitors

VII. CONCLUSION

A majority of the visitors assigned highest importance to ‘Ambience and cleanliness of the premise’, ‘Crowd management system’, ‘Hygiene of the washroom facility’ and ‘Treatment from the staff’. This means that the management personnel of the religious tourist centres must focus on deploying staff on the following:

- i. Keeping the premise clean and decorated with items such as Rangoli, paintings etc. to keep a pleasant ambience inside the centres.
- ii. Ensuring the management of crowd in an effective manner so as to maintain the discipline and decorum of the holy place and prevent stampede- like situation during festivals.
- iii. Provision of adequate washroom units and assigning dedicated staff to take care of the hourly cleaning of such units.
- iv. Provide adequate training to the staff, volunteers, priests etc. to converse politely with the visitors. Directing or requesting the visitors verbally would do good in enhancing their experience. The staff must refrain from any rude and/ or violent contact with the devotees.

The above-listed provisions, if implemented effectively through proper staffing will ensure the provision of good-quality facilities to the devotees leading to higher number of satisfied devotees. This may attract more visitors due to positive mouth-to-mouth publicity and thereby, generate additional revenue for the trust.

VIII. REFERENCES

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