



## Emergence of Family Entertainment Options in North Gujarat Area: Case Study of Tapovan Nature Park

### KEYWORDS

Documentation, Government, Quality management, Rural employment, Tapovan Nature Park, Training

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**ABSTRACT** Indian rural consumers are often underestimated. The level of customers' expectations for excitement and quality of experience is increasing at a much greater rate than their willingness to accept the ever increasing entry fee in rural places of leisure and fun. Due to this reason, the operation of a theme park becomes quite challenging. A theme park management demands more services, at a faster pace and with higher quality, and more personalised attention.

The case study of Tapovan Nature Park is a dialogue between the owner of the park and the chief coordinator who discusses about the concepts of quality management, employment of rural populace and emerging avenues for the Park. Here, the author has tried to focus on the relationship between the human resource management environment and establishment of performance standards for delivering better services to the customers in the park. Though the case is set up in a hypothetical background and situation, it is designed keeping in view the students and researchers of Agri-Business Management, Rural Marketing, Human Resource Management, Services Management, Tourism Management etc so that they could understand a situation which is uncommon yet could occur where we might have to deal such situations.

It's a bright sunny morning of April. Though the time is just 9:00 am, mercury is heading ahead speedily. Ramesh Thakar, the middle aged chief coordinator of Tapovan Nature Park, hurriedly sips the last cup of his coffee. He already had two cups full in the early morning. He then shuffles the pages of the project reports submitted by students of Department of Business Management of a University situated in that area. The students had studied different aspects of Tapovan Nature Park and submitted different project reports last week.

Ramesh Thakar is waiting for Mitul Patel, the owner of Tapovan Nature Park with whom he wants to discuss different issues related to Tapovan Nature Park. Mitul Patel, who is known for his punctuality arrives at 9:15 am.

"Good Morning Sir", greets Ramesh Thakar with a smile, "seems that you did not sleep well yesterday night." Mitul Patel replies, "A very good morning Rameshbhai...Ah... yes...I had to work on a presentation on drip irrigation prospects in North Gujarat. I am about to make a brief presentation before some of the farmers of the nearby villages."

Mitul Patel and Ramesh Thakar then starts walking in the maneuvered lawns of the park which is spread in the lush green surroundings of more than 52 acres of land. Mitul Patel is working on yet another similar project situated about 56 kms away from the park, a place called Devnagar. An entrepreneur and hardworking person, Mitul Patel is worried about the unkempt lawns, decreasing water levels and other things beyond his control.

Tapovan Nature Park was a surprise package for the rural population of this area. Before 1999, they had fewer options for outings like movies, public gardens and temples. What was once a barren inhospitable land is today a park with large lakes with glinting waters, gardens, orchards, and amidst it all, innumerable activities to keep the people of North Gujarat and nearby areas entertained. This includes a mini water park with fun rides and a 3D video mini theatre too.

### THE GENESIS

Tapovan Nature Park was first of its kind in the entire North Gujarat Region. Though the motive behind establishing this was a little different, its owner Mr. Patel had innovative ideas

of utilizing his investment in non-fertile land in Roopnagar village of Mehsana District and converting it into a green land with beautiful landscapes. Mitul Patel believes that the largest populace of India is from the farmers' community and it is the responsibility of the citizens to think about safeguarding the environment through we which we can save tomorrow. He also won the best farmer of Gujarat award in year 2002.

A dream that became reality in 1999, the park is now a vigilantly created paradise that uses nature as a partner. From unproductive land, Mitul Patel and his enthusiastic colleagues, harnessed water, leveled the barren land and planted thousands of plantlets to make this an excellent environment which compliments to environmental concern.

Ramesh Thakar says, "Sir, as you know about one lakh and fifty thousand entry tickets were sold in the previous year against our entry fee of Rs. 20. Out of these visitors, about 60% were the repeat visitors who come along with their families and friends again and over again. But sir, we are more concerned about these first timers. At least they should not be dissatisfied."

"Dissatisfied?" asks Mitul Patel surprisingly, "I never heard of any visitor dissatisfied at the Park. And do you think people of our area know what service quality is, what is satisfaction and how it should be rated?"

"Sir, I think now it's the time to think about the quality aspects seriously," replied Ramesh Thakar. He further added, "Everyday we have at least 5 phone calls from government primary schools located in rural areas of Central Gujarat and North Gujarat regarding arrangements of one-day tour/ school picnic. People have started recognizing us, and want to visit us because our place is beyond an ordinary picnic spot." Ramesh Thakar then picks up a project report of a student and says, "Sir, from the survey undertaken by the students of Department of Business Management, Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University, it was found that visitors who live in vicinity of the this village and nearby areas prefer to visit the park very often as this place is a wonderful in terms of family picnic spot, open garden, recreational activities and lot other things which gives them enjoyment. The best part is Tapovan is economical and affordable."

Mitul Patel who is carrying a project report shuffles a few pages, all of a sudden a leaflet drops down. Mitul Patel picks it up, and gives a prolonged look on the strategy suggested for school picnic/ school tour. (See Exhibit 1)

**Exhibit 1: Tour Itinerary suggested by Student of Department of Business Management**

Maximum 50 children per tour group
Age group: 7 – 12 yrs- Rs- Rs.40000/- including 5 teachers and 2 peons Age group:13 to 17 years- Rs 48000/- including 5 teachers and 2 peons ( For numbers exceeding 50 in each group, there will be addition of Rs.100 per person)
Package includes
Two way Journey by Luxury coach bus Stay for 3 days/2 nights on quadruple sharing basis in dormitories All meals, (early morning tea/coffee/milk ; breakfast & tea; lunch; evening snacks; dinner) pure veg only. Local sight seeing.
Daily activities in Park.
1. Yoga Classes 2. Guided tour to Roopnagar village 3. 3 -D movie/ Educational movies 4. Recreation at Park 5 Boating in the Lake
Evening Entertainment Programs
Rural folk dance (Bhavai), music (Dayro), campfire & lot of fun filled games.
Rural games to be played
1. Bullock cart and tractor Rides 2. Kabaddi 3. Langadi 4. Kho-Kho 5. Bullock Ploughing

“Rameshbhai, have a look” suggests Mitul Patel to Ramesh Thakar. He further adds, “It’s really interesting, though, I think Rs.40,000 won’t be an affordable figure for local schools located in our area. But...I should say Rameshbhai; the tour itinerary is worked out very well by the students.” Ramesh Thakar, “Yes sir, the students were allowed for the entire semester to visit our Park. They used to visit us in a group of 3-4 and prepared different project reports on the operation and management of Tapovan Nature Park.”

**Highlights of Operations and Management:**

The operation and management of Tapovan Nature Park is becoming continually more difficult and competitive. The level of customer’s expectation for excitement and quality of experience is increasing at a much greater rate. There are many alternatives available for people of the nearby areas to visit on holidays i.e. Water Parks, Multiplexes, Temples or friends and relatives. As a consequence, Tapovan Nature Park needs to provide better services at a faster pace and with higher quality. But one thing pinches all i.e. over-crowding of visitors during festive seasons and weekends, reducing staff, absenteeism and falling rate of seasonal employees.

At the park, a relatively small full-time staff is appointed to provide year-around management and technical functions, and several seasonal employees on contractual basis provide operational and customer support services during the operate season.

**Exhibit 2: Profile of People working at Tapovan Nature Park**

Nature (type of work/job)	Numbers of people employed	Education level
For Rides/ boats and Maintenance:	15	Contractual basis, illiterate and maximum education upto Standard 8.
For Cottages	5 for room Service ( attendants) 1 Receptionist	Receptionist: Graduate but not professionally qualified Attendants: illiterate and maximum education up to Standard 8
For Maintenance of Marriage Hall and Party plot	2 persons on daily wages	Illiterate
For Nursery	5 Gardeners	Illiterate/Can read and write
Owner	Mitul Patel	Bachelor of Arts
Chief coordinator	Ramesh Thakar	Master of Commerce
Resort Manager	Pankil Vaghela	MBA (Marketing)
Restaurant Manager	Harsh Vyas	MBA (Marketing)
Office and Administration Staff	15 persons	12 <sup>th</sup> grade to Graduation (only two Bachelor of Commerce with knowledge of Tally accounting Software)

There are several independent variables, that affect park operation but which cannot be controlled by management. The independent variables include the state of the economy, the time of season, and weather conditions. These factors, together with the scheduling of special events or attractions and the long-term effectiveness of the park’s staff, determine the gate revenue. Therefore gate revenue is considered to be an independent variable with respect to the near-term management of park operation. Entry fee for adult is just Rs.20 and for a child below five years there is no entry fee.

Another significant independent variable is unscheduled equipment maintenance and repair. If an attraction or customer service facility fails, it is necessary to close that area until repairs are completed. There are at least three important factors, called performance measures, which park management attempts to control at Tapovan Nature Park. The first measure, in-park revenue, refers to the income derived from the in-park purchase of goods and services by park customers. The revenue received from a customer purchasing lunch or renting a cottage is an example of in-park revenue.

Ramesh Thakar then picks up one more project report and says, “Sir, students have suggested one more important thing. According to them the primary aim of the Park should be an attempt to maximize in-park revenue. The second performance measure, called operating costs, refers to the costs associated with operating the park i.e. 1) facility operating costs and 2) labour costs. The facility operating costs are usually fixed at or near some average value, which is predicted, based upon historical records. Our park’s labour costs are heavily dominated by the wages paid to the seasonal operating staff, many of whom are part-time/contractual employees. This labour cost represents the single largest controllable operating expenses.”

“Wait a minute,” Mitul Patel interrupts “We are constantly trying to keep labour costs as small as possible. Hence, we survived even the odd times.” “I agree with you, sir” nodded Ramesh Thakar and adds, “along with this, the third performance measure, called customers’ perceived quality of service experienced by customers. Since the growing popularity

of Tapovan Nature Park depends heavily on word-of-mouth advertising and repeat customer business especially from the nearby rural areas, it is essential for management to offer everything they hear about the park from their friends and relatives. And you must have heard about the Pareto principle?"

Mitul Patel asks, "What's that?" Ramesh explains, "Sir, it's a theory which states that 80 % of our revenue is the outcome of 20% of our loyal customers. It is widely recognized that it is both cheaper and more profitable to retain customers than to search for new customers. As regular customers place repeated and unswerving orders they ultimately cost less to serve."

#### CHALLENGES FOR TAPOVAN:

Both Mitul Patel and Ramesh Thakar now sit on a wrought iron decorated bench affixed near the landscape in the Park. They further discuss regarding the park activities.

Ramesh Thakar says, "Sir, one of the reports states that the challenges for Tapovan Nature Park is to develop ways of addressing the 'quality problem' which are appropriate to the needs of a sector whose principal asset is people and where the application of the skills and knowledge of those persons whom it employs is the key differentiation between 'good' and 'bad' service."

Mitul Patel, pointing his chin asks, "But Rameshbhai, you know we have customers flowing from rural areas and semi-urban areas only. Do they really need to be delivered quality based service? We all know that they will be very happy if we still lower down the fares of each ride as well as the entry fee. I don't think they really need value for money."

"Sir, I have gone through the project reports and I really feel that we should change ourselves in the way we deliver our services", replies Ramesh Thakar. He further adds, "Sir, rural people now spend Rs. 100 per person for a movie at multiplex theatre and that is the reason we have four multiplex theatres in North Gujarat area. All restaurants are overcrowded on weekends; this shows the changing habits and perception of rural population towards leisure in this region."

Ramesh Patel with his eyes wide open asks, "But, Is there a way to integrate multiple systems together from the front gates to the back-office of the Park in order to improve efficiency, cut costs, enhance the customer's experience, and increase revenues?"

Ramesh Patel replies with a smile, "Sir, in contrast to machines, people are extremely good at dealing with complexity. However, this ability to deal with complex situations and make sensible decisions in the absence of complete data becomes important only when the people involved have become skilled, educated or trained for the task at hand. And we know our employees are not quite trained. In fact, we never thought of training them. We never thought we would have to deal with service quality aspects someday."

"But, where to start from, Rameshbhai?" asks Mitul Patel

"As the first option we have to identify the following". Ramesh then shows a project report of a student who had suggested the following outline for Tapovan. (See Exhibit 3)

#### Exhibit no: 3 Key Tasks as suggested by Students

- 1) Identification of key tasks- Garden, Fun rides, Cottages and Restaurants
- 2) Identification of those tasks that can be reduced to flow diagrams
- 3) Statements and general descriptions of those tasks that cannot be reduced to flow diagrams.
- 4) Identification of those tasks which are routine or frequently repeated and thus susceptible to standard performance measure.

formance measure.

"Hence Sir, according to the first step we will have to break up our everyday operations into key tasks and non key tasks."

"The fun rides, the park and the cottages are the key activities. Giving the space for rent for wedding receptions and seminars and conference is a secondary one. Right?" replies Mitul Patel.

"You are correct." nods Ramesh Patel and continues, "The demands of the quality management could be satisfied by the outcomes of this stage of the approach through the production of: documentation of those processes that can be represented as linear flows, including control points and performance measure generic description of those processes that cannot be represented as linear flows but are 'routine', including control points and performance measures

A statement of those processes that cannot be represented as linear flows and are 'non-routine'.

"But why should we document the whole process?" Asks Mitul Patel, "we all know what has to be delivered and at what time?"

"I agree with you", states Ramesh Thakar and adds, "Documented processes help in the following ways" He then shows the benefits to Mitul Patel from one of the project reports of the students. (See Exhibit 4)

#### Exhibit no 4: Benefits of Documented Process to Tapovan Nature Park

- We can make optimum utilization of the process when they are documented.
- Processes do not become a task of a typical employee here – any new employee knows how to do the work.
- Key activities run smoothly when responsibilities and accountability is clearly assigned to each individual employee
- Defects are easier to capture and eliminate at the earliest stage.
- Prescribed corrective actions can be taken as soon as defects occur.
- Written changes in procedures and policies reduce ambiguity and increase change control in the environment.
- unswerving process measures help gauge if everything is going well.
- Better understanding of processes ensures compliance in service delivery.

"Sounds interesting," says Mitul Patel.

"And Sir, we should be worried more as we still do not have our organization chart prepared" says Ramesh Patel.

"But we are not organised," emphasis Mitul Patel, "We started our Park just for conservation of nature and not for profit motive. But all of sudden visitors started flowing in and we need to go for all sorts of reshuffling and the stuff? It is a really cumbersome process."

"Sir, we need not be an organization of 100 people to implement Quality Management Services. Have you not even observed a small barber shop providing excellent services to the customers so they turn out to be loyal customers? That is his way of quality management should be our way" replies Ramesh with his chin up.

"I think you are right Ramesh," agrees Mitul Patel, "I never thought of something which enhances the quality of my Park. But I think these project reports talks of our real situation. They have provided an indicator of what has been done now."

"Sir, we need to prepare our organization chart first, which will in fact help us to identify the roles and responsibilities at the Park and give a clear understanding of the job for the person who is new to the system. And Sir every year we have some employees who leave us. Hence we need to go for continuous training. Moreover, we can employ the rural youth of Roopnagar village. The census report of 2011 indicates that the population of Roopnagar is 8,600 people."

"Okay and what after defining the skill of each job?" asks Mitul Patel.

"Each of the skill types, and their level of development and importance to the operation of the park, will have an impact on the type of quality management services appropriate and the potential success of the skills-based approach. This categorization will further provide a basis for deciding the extent to which a planned education and development programme can be used to enhance performance and, therefore, the type of Quality Management System to support it."

Finally both of them glance the duplicate copies of a project report where the following actions to be taken by Tapovan Nature Park are listed by a group of students

#### **Exhibit no 5: Actions Needed at Tapovan Nature Park**

Tapovan Nature Park: Why Action is needed

1. Tapovan Nature Park can have significant economic and employment potential for rural areas, both directly through jobs in the Park, and indirectly through supportive sourcing industries such as construction, agriculture, fishing, food processing, furniture, handicrafts, transport, utilities, arts, and other services.
2. Tapovan can provide a significant number of jobs to workers with little or no formal training, and it can offer opportunities to people facing social and professional skills disadvantages such as women and youth. The only preparation required is to be a little more organised in terms of job description of each position.
3. Tourist location like Tapovan Nature Park will also develop a wide range of services such as infrastructure, water utilities and roads to facilitate the provision of services, which can also benefit local communities.

Both Ramesh Thakar and Mitul Patel look a bit relaxed with bright faces. They now actually know what strategic action is required on an instantaneous basis. Though Mitul Patel had never approached government of Gujarat for any assistance during the development of Tapovan Nature Park, the following highlights in one of the project reports was an eye-opener.

#### **Exhibit no 6: What can Government do for the growth of such sectors?**

- 1) Develop policies that harness benefits from tourism to empower rural communities, protect natural resources, and promote social cohesion and cultural identity.
- 2) Ensure that tourism policies are based on the broad participation of local communities and that they promote rural employment and local ownership over the natural resources that make those areas valuable touristic destinations.
- 3) Include local communities and stakeholders in tourism initiatives, from planning to implementation, to ensure fair and sustainable economic returns.
- 4) Support the creation of tourism-oriented micro, small and medium-sized enterprises among others, by facilitating access to finance through credit and loans for rural entrepreneurs, particularly the poor and other disadvantaged groups.
- 5) Provide specific support to tourism cooperatives, which promote economic advantages through the pooling of resources, knowledge and skills, sharing of risks and benefits, while enhancing community ownership and autonomy.
- 6) Encourage and provide incentives for major tourist businesses to make basic infrastructure, including water and power utilities, available to the communities in which they are operating, thereby allowing the rural poor to benefit from large-scale tourist endeavours while creating a friendlier environment for tourists.
- 7) Integrate local transport services, such as personal taxis, rather than offering separate and expensive hotel-run shuttles and services. Utilizing and developing a local transport industry directly generates employment and income.
- 8) Support rural employment through the development of job outreach programmes that raise awareness among rural populations about job prospects theme parks providing rural employment and assist local residents with finding and retaining jobs this sector.
- 9) Evaluate and monitor the environmental impact of major tourism developments and use local labour to protect and maintain the environment.

The conversation of both of them is interrupted with a loud mobile ringtone of an old gardener with a wrinkled face, working on the lawn of a landscape nearby. Both Ramesh Thakar and Mitul Patel smile at each other and depart. Walking toward his office, Mitul Patel lifts up his head, glances towards the sky and start brooding over some matters...