

Passenger Satisfaction on Catering Services of Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Ltd. (IRCTC): A Study

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Abstract:-Indian Railways span global volumes in hospitality and catering sectors with services provided to 22 million passengers every day. Improvement of catering services is an on-going process. In its endeavor to provide quality and hygienic food to the passengers, Indian Railways have developed an operationalized and institutionalized mechanism for monitoring of quality and hygiene of catering services through regular inspections at various levels. The passenger satisfaction levels are also regularly monitored through direct feedback and other means to address catering complaints. This study is exploratory in nature, undertaken on a sample of 80 passengers in selected trains to identify the satisfaction levels on catering services of Indian Railways. Both primary and secondary data were gathered during the research. The respondents were selected on random basis from the population. Data were analyzed by using simple statistical tools and results were presented.

Key Words: Hygienic Food, Catering Services, Tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Ltd. (IRCTC) has been set up by the Ministry of Railways with the basic purpose of hiving off entire catering and tourism activity of the railways to the new Corporation so as to professionalize and upgrade these services with public-private participation. Indian Railways span global volumes in hospitality and catering sectors with services provided to 22 million passengers every day. In 2016-17, Indian railways carried 8.101 billion passengers annually or more than 22 million passengers a day. The Railways saw an increase of 0.7 per cent in the number of passengers in 2017-18 as against last year. For the first time in the last five years, the figures of 2017-18 (April-November) indicate a 0.7 per cent increase in passenger's vis-à-vis last year and a 5.13 per cent increase in revenues.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the catering services of Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC)
2. To study the new catering policy in Indian Railways.
3. To study the steps taken by IRCTC to improve the quality of food in Railways.

4. To study the passenger satisfaction levels on catering services of Indian Railways.
5. To make suitable suggestions for improving quality levels of catering services in Indian Railways.

III. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study is restricted to catering services at selected trains namely Rajadhani Express (12433) Duranto Express(12270) Satavahana Express(12713) Pinakini Express (12711) and Ratnchal Express (12718) running via Vijayada division under south central railway.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is compiled based on opinions of the passengers on different quality aspects of catering services offered by IRCTC from the questionnaire. The distributed questionnaire consists of statement regarding satisfaction levels of passengers on catering services. A five degree scale with the columns of Excellent, Very Good, Good, Average, and Poor was used. Data analyzed by simple statistical techniques and presented in diagrams. The data has been collected from both sources i.e. primary and secondary.

Selection of Sample Size and its Justification

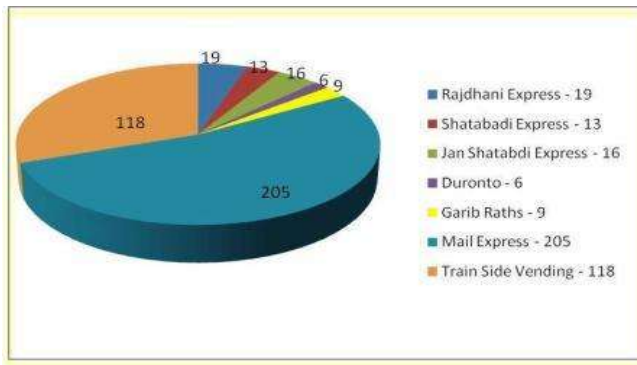
The questionnaire was distributed to 100 passengers in each train and 80 response sheets were taken for final analysis.

V. CATERING SERVICES OF INDIAN RAILWAY CATERING AND TOURISM CORPORATION LTD. (IRCTC)

Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Ltd. (IRCTC) is a Public Sector Enterprise under Ministry of Railways. IRCTC was incorporated on 27th September, 1999 as an extended arm of the Indian Railways to upgrade, professionalize and manage the catering and hospitality services at stations, on trains and other locations.

On Board Catering Services and Static catering units on the Indian Railway Network

Hospitality Services covers on board catering services in the trains, catering services at stations through stalls, food plazas/fast food units & Automatic Vending Machines commissioned at A, B & C class of Railway stations. IRCTC is managing currently 19 Rajdhani, 13 Shatabdi, 16 Jan Shatabdi, 6 Durgam Express, 9 Garib Rath, 205 Mail/Express trains and 118 trains have train side vending facility. The graphical representation of various types of trains is depicted below.



Source: http://www.irctc.com/Company_Profile.html

IRCTC has currently 53 Food Plazas, 13 Fast Food units and 1 Quick Service Food Kiosks, 677 Automated Vending Machine, 2950 Stalls, 3291 Trolleys & Khomchas, 698 Book Stalls, 249 Milk Stall & 7918 Static units spread over 1008 no. of Special A, A, B & C Category of Stations over Indian Railways network.

Present Emphasis of IRCTC

Strategic tie-ups: IRCTC is working towards tie ups in the areas of mobile catering, Rail Neer and product formation.

Static Units: Streamlining of procurement process, standardization of services and automation in base kitchens is the focus area in major static units.

New Rail Neer Plants: For Southern Region, Rail Neer plant is being set up at Pulur near Chennai. Tender has been awarded and physical work for setting up building is in advance stage. For Western region, architect and plant consultants have been appointed for Rail Neer plant at Ambernath near Mumbai.

Modular Stalls: Replacement of all catering stalls with uniform design of modular stalls is proposed to be undertaken and M/s Jindal Steel is working on a prototype which will give longer life and aesthetic look.

Cell Kitchens/Base Kitchens: Plans are to set up another 100 licensee cell kitchens.

Food Plazas/Fast Food Units/Quick Service Food Kiosks: More than 20 food plazas, 20 Fast Food Units and 5 QSFK are in advance stage of planning.

Food Courts: IRCTC is planning to develop food courts at stations with contemporary interior designs.

Indian Railways to bring on board ready-to-eat food companies

RTE meals were introduced in select railway stations and trains in 2016 on a trial basis, but they were being distributed through existing catering service contractors. The railways now want to move to the next stage, allow manufacturers to directly sell through their sales representatives. This is a part of its strategy to ensure clean food for passengers. This can be a huge boost for the RTE food market, which is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of around 22 per cent till 2019. About 22 million passengers travel on trains on a daily basis. Indian Railways provide approximately 1.1 million meals to passengers every day, of which one million meals are provided on board. Last year, IRCTC had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with DRDO for transfer of technology for processed food pouch, so that RTE food can be warmed and eaten straight out of the packet. Besides this initiative, IRCTC is also targeting to provide 100,000 online meal orders per day over the next couple of years through e-catering. Currently, only 7,000 meals are being booked online every day. Around 193 stations and 1,516 trains are covered under the e-catering policy. As part of its catering policy, IRCTC has taken over the operations of 333 of 335 mobile pantry cars that were run by contractors.

According to the new catering policy, launched in February last year, all mobile pantry, food plazas, and base kitchens will be brought under IRCTC. IRCTC has also invited multi-national players such as French food services and facilities management company Sodexo and Travel Food Services (TFS), who operate lounges in airports, to manage its base kitchens. The plan also includes a road-map to upgrade at least 16 base kitchens. This came after a recent Comptroller and Auditor General report said the food articles supplied in railways are unsuitable for human consumption.

VI. NEW CATERING POLICY OF INDIAN RAILWAYS

The Catering Policy 2010, presently in force for management of catering services over Indian Railways was issued in July 2010. The salient features of this Policy include. Shifting management and monitoring of all catering services (except Food Plaza, Food Courts and Fast Food Units) from Indian Railways Catering & Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) to Zonal Railways. IRCTC made responsible for managing the catering services at Food Plazas, Food Courts and Fast Food Units. Zonal Railways to have an effective and transparent contract awarding, management and monitoring system as per provisions of Standard Bid Document. Zonal Railways are responsible for strengthening supervision and monitoring of catering services for maintaining quality and hygiene of the food served to passengers and have been empowered to take corrective actions including imposition of fines on licensees to

mitigate passengers complaints. However, in a paradigm shift, as announced in Rail Budget 2016-17, it has been decided to give back the catering services to IRCTC in a phased manner with unbundling catering services by creating a distinction primarily between food preparation and food distribution. It has also been decided that there will be no complete handing over of catering service by IRCTC to private licensees. Zonal Railways will have powers of supervision and monitoring to ensure quality food is served to passengers.

VII. THE STEPS TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF FOOD IN RAILWAYS

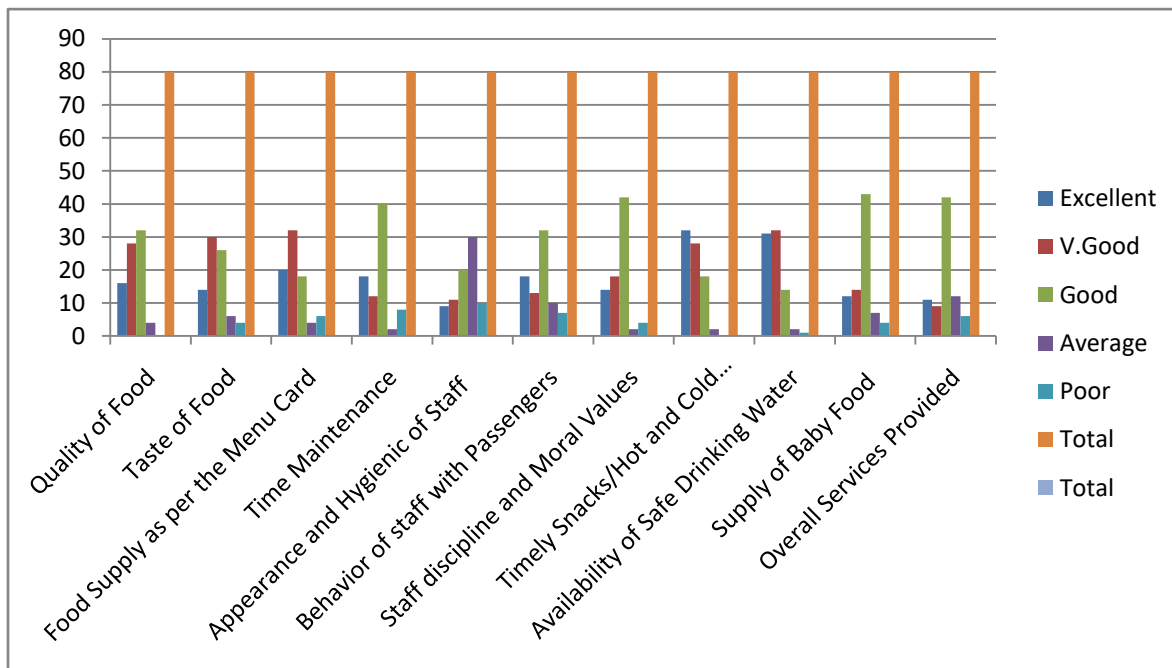
The steps taken to improve the quality of food in Railways inter-alia include: (i) Introduction of station based e-catering at all A1 and A category stations for widening the range of options available to passengers for ordering food of their

choice. (ii) Introduction of precooked food ('ready to eat' meals) in the range of options available to passengers. (iii) Operation of centralized Catering Service Monitoring Cell (CSMC) (toll free number 1800-111-321) for prompt redressal of passenger grievances relating to the catering activities and real time assistance to travelling public. (iv) Imposition of penalties in case of deficiencies detected in services. (v) Operation of all India Helpline (No.138) for rail-users to lodge complaints/suggestions regarding food and catering services (vi) A Twitter handle with the address @IRCATERING has also been made operational to cater to the complaints/suggestions with regard to catering services.

VIII. PASSENGER SATISFACTION LEVELS ON CATERING SERVICES OF IRCTC IN SELECTED SUPER FAST TRAINS

Summary of Passenger satisfaction levels received on catering Services of IRCTC in Rajdhani super fast express (Tr. No. 12433)

Sl.No	Quality Aspect	Option					
		Excellent	V.Good	Good	Average	Poor	Total
1	Quality of Food	16	28	32	4	0	80
2	Taste of Food	14	30	26	6	4	80
3	Food Supply as per the Menu Card	20	32	18	4	6	80
4	Time Maintenance	18	12	40	2	8	80
5	Appearance and Hygienic of Staff	9	11	20	30	10	80
6	Behavior of staff with Passengers	18	13	32	10	7	80
7	Staff discipline and Moral Values	14	18	42	2	4	80
8	Timely Snacks/Hot and Cold Beverages Supply	32	28	18	2	0	80
9	Availability of Safe Drinking Water	31	32	14	2	1	80
10	Supply of Baby Food	12	14	43	7	4	80
11	Overall Services Provided	11	9	42	12	6	80

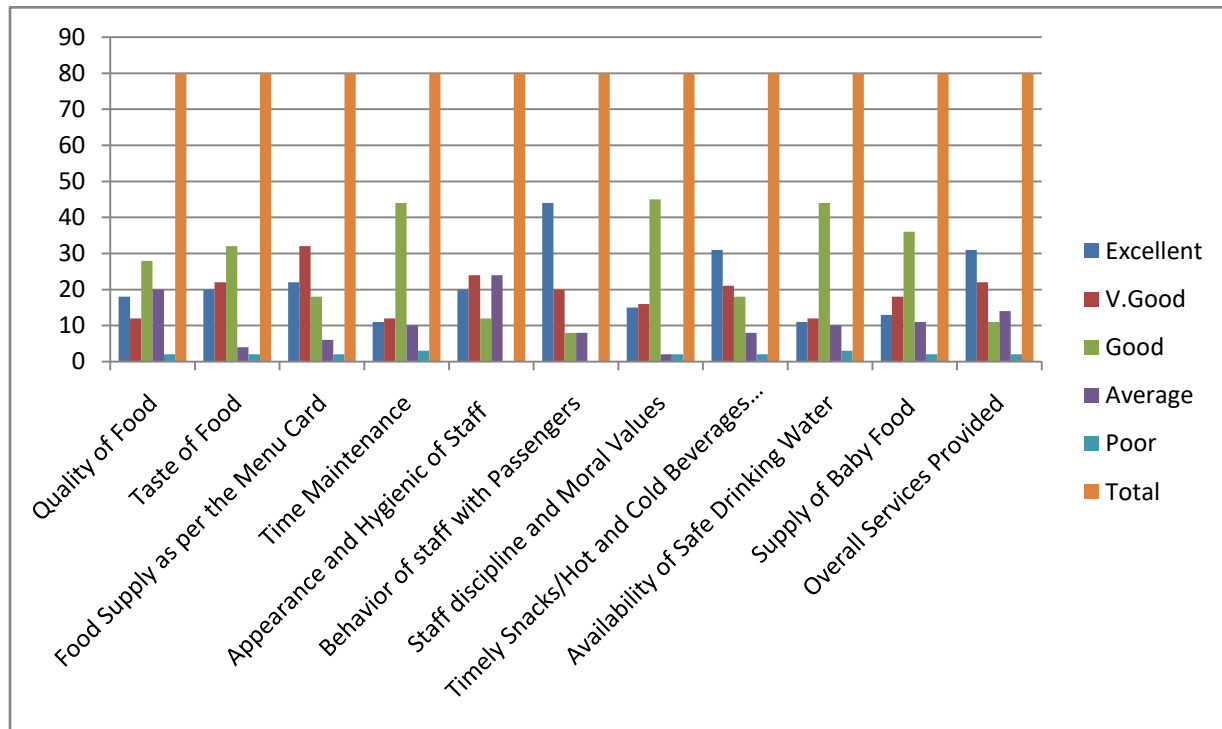


Analysis: Most of the respondents are satisfied about timely snacks/hot and cold beverages supply and safe drinking water but on appearance and hygienic of staff, majority of

respondents are dissatisfied. On overall services majority of respondents are having good opinion.

Summary of Passenger satisfaction levels received on catering Services of IRCTC in Duranto super fast express (Tr. No. 12270)

Sl.No	Quality Aspect	Option					
		Excellent	V.Good	Good	Average	Poor	Total
1	Quality of Food	18	12	28	20	2	80
2	Taste of Food	20	22	32	4	2	80
3	Food Supply as per the Menu Card	22	32	18	6	2	80
4	Time Maintenance	11	12	44	10	3	80
5	Appearance and Hygienic of Staff	20	24	12	24	0	80
6	Behavior of staff with Passengers	44	20	8	8	0	80
7	Staff discipline and Moral Values	15	16	45	2	2	80
8	Timely Snacks/Hot and Cold Beverages Supply	31	21	18	8	2	80
9	Availability of Safe Drinking Water	11	12	44	10	3	80
10	Supply of Baby Food	13	18	36	11	2	80
11	Overall Services Provided	31	22	11	14	2	80

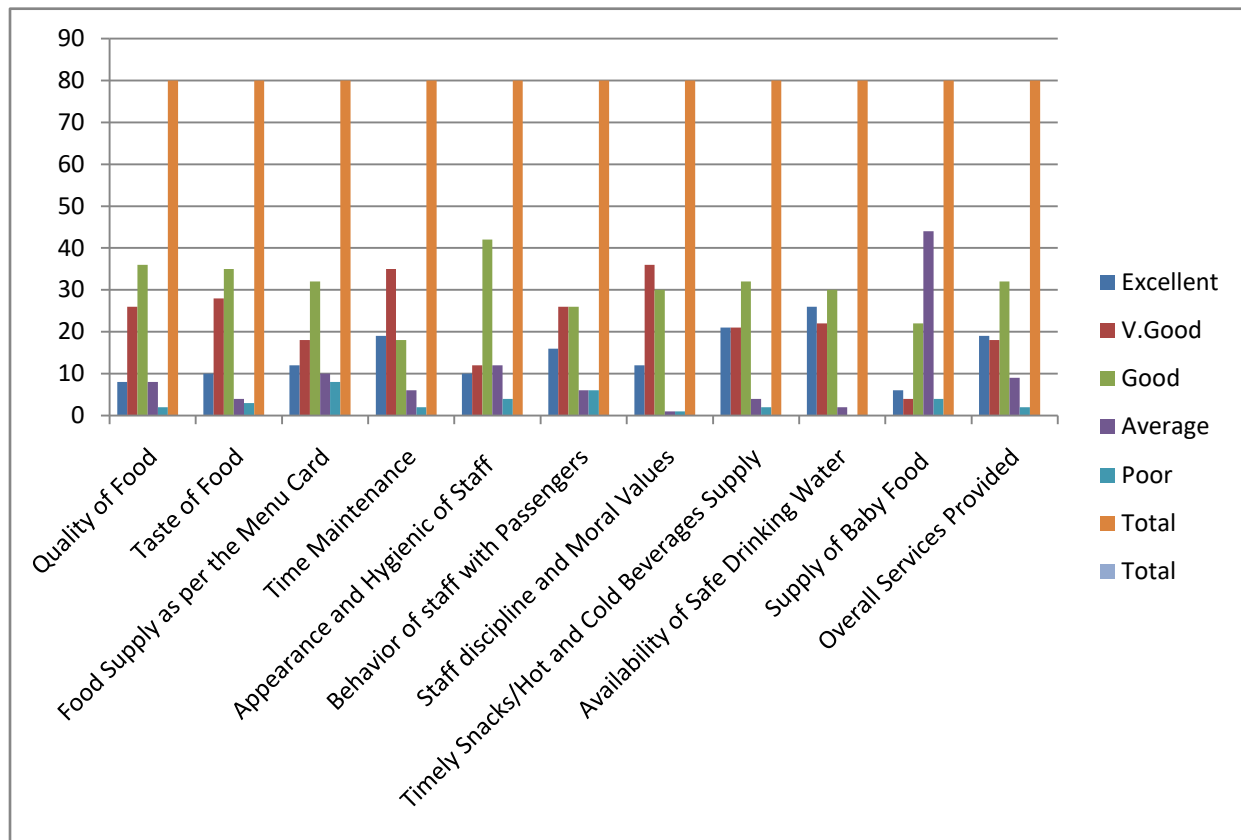


Analysis: Majority of respondents are satisfied about behavior of staff with passengers and staff discipline and moral values. But considerable number of passengers are

having dissatisfaction on appearance and hygienic of staff. On overall services majority of respondents are having good opinion.

Summary of Passenger satisfaction levels received on catering Services of IRCTC in Satavahana super fast express (Tr. No. 12713)

Sl.No	Quality Aspect	Option						
		Excellent	V.Good	Good	Average	Poor	Total	
1	Quality of Food	8	26	36	8	2	80	
2	Taste of Food	10	28	35	4	3	80	
3	Food Supply as per the Menu Card	12	18	32	10	8	80	
4	Time Maintenance	19	35	18	6	2	80	
5	Appearance and Hygienic of Staff	10	12	42	12	4	80	
6	Behavior of staff with Passengers	16	26	26	6	6	80	
7	Staff discipline and Moral Values	12	36	30	1	1	80	
8	Timely Snacks/Hot and Cold Beverages Supply	21	21	32	4	2	80	
9	Availability of Safe Drinking Water	26	22	30	2	0	80	
10	Supply of Baby Food	6	4	22	44	4	80	
11	Overall Services Provided	19	18	32	9	2	80	

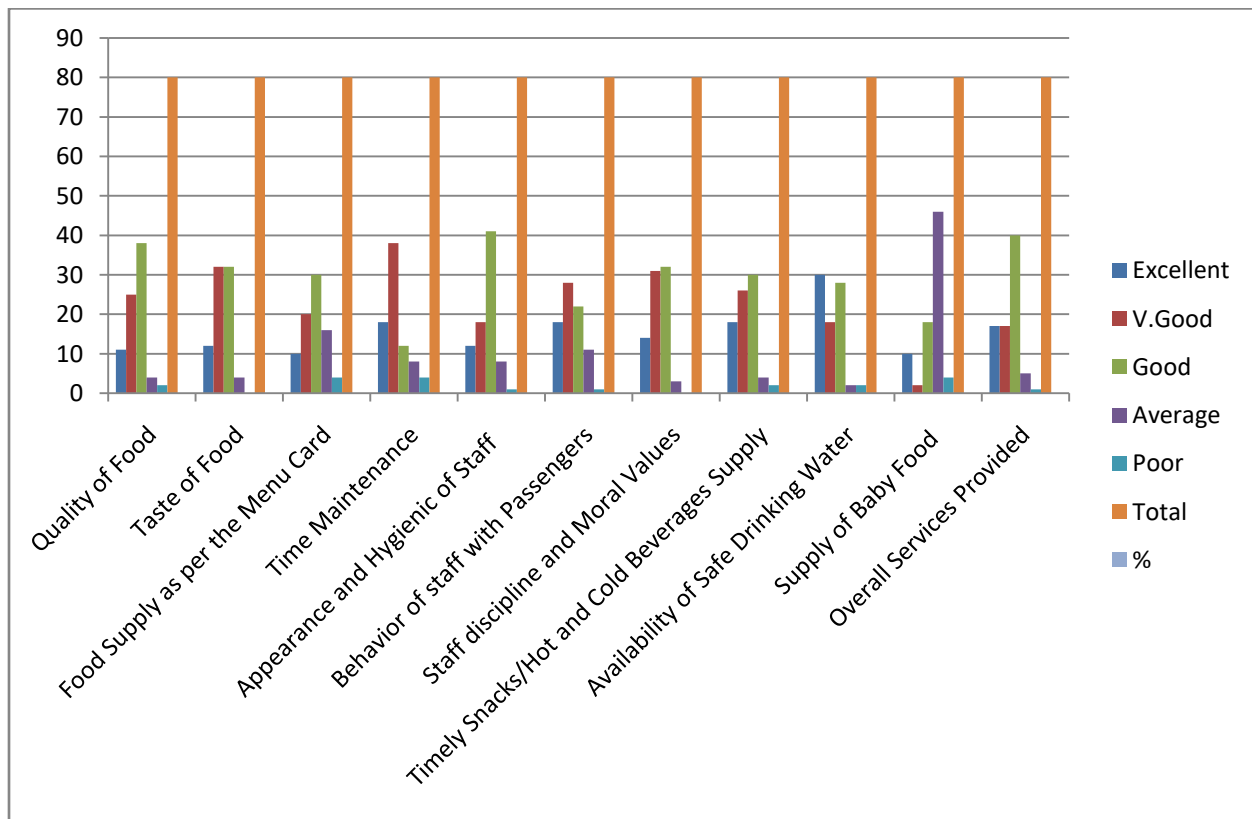


Analysis: Complete satisfactions expressed by majority of respondents on availability of safe drinking water and timely snack/hot and cold beverages supply. On supply of baby food

considerable number of respondents is expressed dissatisfaction. On overall services, majority of respondents are expressed good opinion.

Summary of Passenger satisfaction levels received on catering Services of IRCTC in Pinakini super fast express (Tr. No. 12711)

Sl.No	Quality Aspect	Option						
		Excellent	V.Good	Good	Average	Poor	Total	
1	Quality of Food	11	25	38	4	2	80	
2	Taste of Food	12	32	32	4	0	80	
3	Food Supply as per the Menu Card	10	20	30	16	4	80	
4	Time Maintenance	18	38	12	8	4	80	
5	Appearance and Hygienic of Staff	12	18	41	8	1	80	
6	Behavior of staff with Passengers	18	28	22	11	1	80	
7	Staff discipline and Moral Values	14	31	32	3	0	80	
8	Timely Snacks/Hot and Cold Beverages Supply	18	26	30	4	2	80	
9	Availability of Safe Drinking Water	30	18	28	2	2	80	
10	Supply of Baby Food	10	2	18	46	4	80	
11	Overall Services Provided	17	17	40	5	1	80	

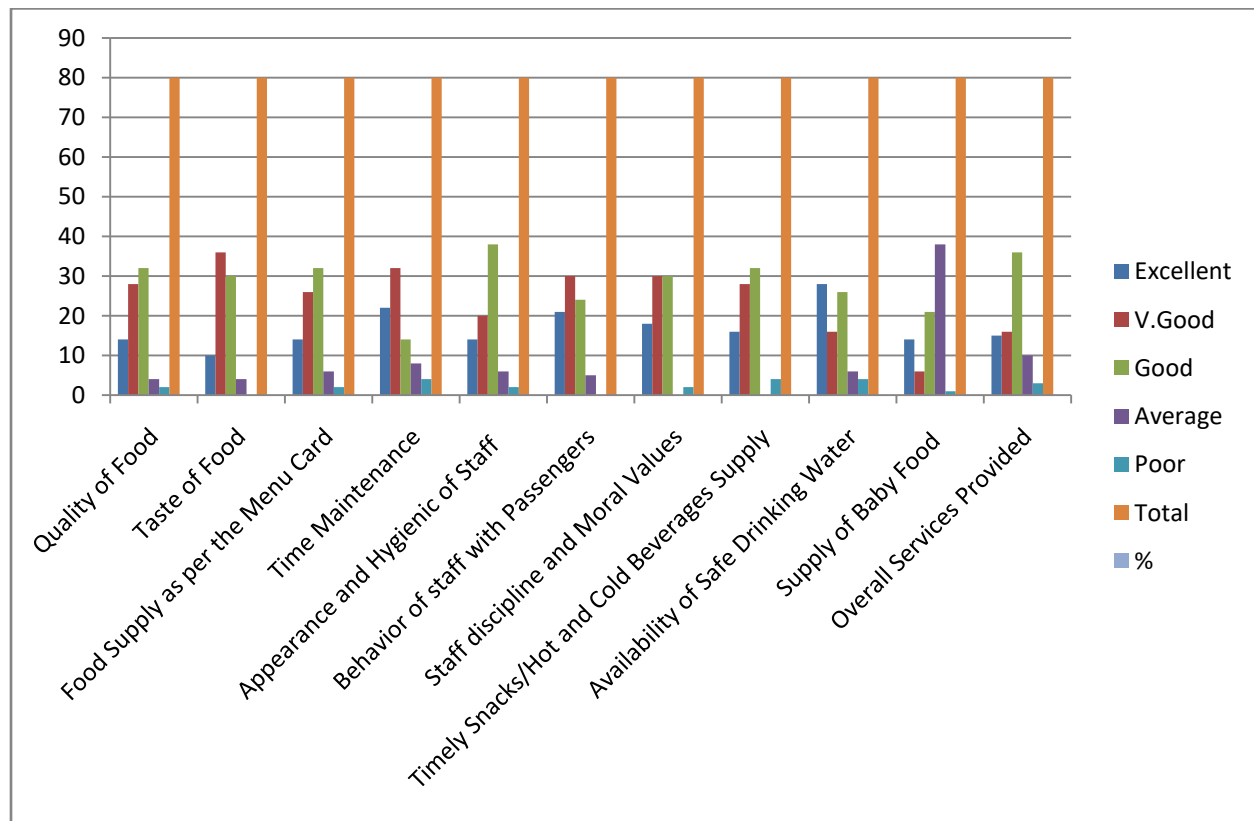


Analysis: on availability of safe drinking water, majority of respondents are completely satisfied. But on availability of

baby food majority of respondents are dissatisfied. Majority of respondents are expressed good opinion on overall services

Summary of Passenger satisfaction levels received on catering Services of IRCTC in Ratnachel super fast express (Tr. No. 12718)

Sl.No	Quality Aspect	Option						
		Excellent	V.Good	Good	Average	Poor	Total	
1	Quality of Food	14	28	32	4	2	80	
2	Taste of Food	10	36	30	4	0	80	
3	Food Supply as per the Menu Card	14	26	32	6	2	80	
4	Time Maintenance	22	32	14	8	4	80	
5	Appearance and Hygienic of Staff	14	20	38	6	2	80	
6	Behavior of staff with Passengers	21	30	24	5	0	80	
7	Staff discipline and Moral Values	18	30	30	0	2	80	
8	Timely Snacks/Hot and Cold Beverages Supply	16	28	32	0	4	80	
9	Availability of Safe Drinking Water	28	16	26	6	4	80	
10	Supply of Baby Food	14	6	21	38	1	80	
11	Overall Services Provided	15	16	36	10	3	80	



Analysis: Majority of respondents are very much satisfied about availability of safe drinking water but most of the

respondents are dissatisfied about availability of baby food. On overall services, majority of respondents are satisfied.

IX. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING CATERING SERVICES IN INDIAN RAILWAYS

1. Sale of a-la-carte items on trains shall be done only through e-catering to address the passenger complaints on overcharging and also to ensure availability of standard meals during travel.
2. The standard meals to be priced in the multiples of Rs.10 to prevent overcharging.
3. In order to provide choice to passengers, Zonal Railways and IRCTC should promote the sale of Read to Eat (RTE) food items on Maximum Retail Price.
4. Rationalization of prices to check overcharging and revision of catering rates in line with inflation.
5. Adequate supervisory powers over IRCTC to the Zonal Railways.
6. To be a customer friendly company through constant innovation, technology driven and human resource development.
7. Optimize resources, increase manpower productivity through quality product vending and innovative marketing strategies.
8. Upgrade and consolidate catering services in the organized sector.
9. Expand areas of core competencies, enhance business opportunities through efficient public - private partnerships to maximize generation of resources.
10. Imbibe strong and ethical work culture through teamwork, build and reposition Indian Railways in the emerging services sector.
11. Evolve high standards of business ethics, quality management and effective cost control measures.
12. Provide tea/coffee kits to passengers on all trains as provided on premium trains. Meals may be provided as an option on the Rajdhani and Duronto train.
13. IRCTC should be prohibited completely from licensing out catering to private players and increase revenue.
14. IRCTC may be allowed to outsource operations like support staff, service staff, cooks, transportation, packaging etc. But, it should deploy its managers on board to supervise services.

15. Concern for the environment and heritage.

X. CONCLUSION

The Indian Railways (IR), more than 150 years old, is among one of the largest and oldest systems in the world, fondly called by railway persons as the 'Lifeline of the Nation'. With an extensive network spread across the country, Indian Railways plays a key role in the social and economic development of India. IRCTC aims to provide hygienic, good quality affordable food to the traveling public by adopting best trade and hospitality industry practices. It has an inclusive approach where from the least advantaged passenger to the relatively affluent will be provided catering services in a socially responsible manner. IR shall have the mandate to frame an efficient quality assurance programme to ensure good quality and hygienic food to the passengers. Progressively ISO 22000 Standards & relevant international standards in vogue from time to time will be implemented for all major contracts/units.

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