

# Exploiting Tragedy for Tourism

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## Abstract

People by nature are travelers, if need be, one likes to travel to great distances just see the unknown. This has been our nature for thousands of years. Earlier it was due to the need of shelter, food and protection, and today the need is leisure and to be away for short intervals to escape from the daily hum-drums of the monotony of life. Tourism industry thrives on this human nature. People from time-to-time have opted for different kind of adrenaline rushes to keep their cave-man craving at the behest. And the one of latest in this is “Dark Tourism”. By definition purpose, it means travelling to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death, which may, to a varying degree be activated by the person-specific features of those whose deaths are its focal objects.” The phenomenon raises ethical issues over the status and nature of objects, the extent of their interpretation, the appropriate political and managerial response and the nature of the experience as perceived by the visitor, their residents and local residents. Events, sites, types of visit and 'host' reactions are considered in order to construct the parameters of the concept of 'dark tourism'. Many acts of inhumanity are celebrated as heritage sites in Britain (for example, the Tower of London, Edinburgh Castle), and the Berlin Wall has become a significant attraction despite claiming many victims. India is slowly catching up on this global phenomenon. We still have a long way to go, but there is a start. This paper is a generalized outlook on a personal note on what is being done so far and what options are there available and where we stand as of now.

**Key Words:** Tourism, Indian Tourism, Death, Dark Tourism, Thana-Tourism, History, Travel

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is commonly seen as, and referred to as, an 'industry'. This leads to consideration of defining tourism as an industry, i.e. in terms of the activities of suppliers of particular goods or services. However, defining tourism in terms of the activities of suppliers leads to some difficulty. Today, tourism is one of the world's largest growing and dynamic economic sectors in many countries. The important rates of growth and development, the volumes of outflow of foreign exchange, infrastructure development, new management techniques and the training experience are affecting different sectors of the economy, which are positively contributing to the economic and social development of a country.

The tourism industry generates multiple economic benefits to the receiving countries and to the tourism-sending countries. In the developing countries, one of the main reasons to sustain and promote tourism is the expected economic growth. Thus, tourists spend an important amount of money to buy products in a tourist destination, starting with accommodation, food and beverage, recreational activities and so on, generating a direct effect on business and on the economy measured by incomes that are paying the wages and taxes. At the same time, the tourism businesses have to buy goods and services necessary to satisfy the visitors' needs, and the direct incomes are used further to make investments and to buy other goods and services. These expenses made by the tourism businesses because of the growing number of visitors generate indirect effects through the creation of jobs and wages for other local business offering goods and services to the tourism businesses. Tourism does not only mean traveling to a particular destination but also includes all activities undertaken during the stay.

Human curiosity is insatiable. Humans believe that the need and want to seek out new places, experience unique environments, and encounter foreign societies is essential to our survival. The earth today, however, is different from what it used to be. Today, the world is no longer a place where getting from one region to another is a long, harsh, and enduring journey. In today's world, one can travel from one side of the earth to the other in a matter of hours. This ease of mobility, along with the rapidly improving communication technologies and the globalization of the world's economies, has truly made our world interconnected.

## 2. Tourism in India

India is one of the oldest countries in the world, full of charming and attractive historical sites and challenging and mysterious stories that were laid in the foundation of Indian cities, regions and even buildings. India is the country of contrasts from architectural and cultural perspectives. If you want to amuse yourself with food, culture, language, clothing and various traditions. With the population of over one billion people, India is very

multicultural and each of the twenty eight states in the country has its unique identity that determines and directs its history.

India has fascinated people from all over the world with her secularism and her culture. There are historical monuments, beaches, places of religious interests, hill resorts, etc. that attract tourists. Every region is identified with its handicraft, fairs, folk dances, music and its people. The Departments of Tourism promotes international and domestic tourism in the country. The Tourism Advisory Board recommends measures for promotion of tourist traffic in India. India has a composite culture. There is a harmonious blend of art, religion and philosophy. Though India has been subjected to a series of invasions, she has retained her originality even after absorbing the best of external influences. Religions like Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism etc. has co-existed in India since centuries. India has fascinated people from all over the world with her secularism and her culture. Tourism holds immense potential for the Indian economy. It can provide impetus to other industries through backward and forward linkages and can contribute significantly to GDP. With the increasing globalization and opening of our economy to the world, travel and tourism in India is getting a great impetus. It is of the major upcoming industries, which has a great potential for growth along with earning a huge amount of foreign exchange for the country.

It is anticipated that by the end of 2019, the Indian Tourism industry will become the second prime employer in the world, employing over 40 million people. It will also continue to be a noteworthy contributor to India's revenue & foreign exchange reserves. Furthermore, the economic development will also trigger more demand for local people. This cyclic echelon shall keep on increasing day-by-day.

### **3. Dark Tourism**

Dark tourism is a multi-layered mixture of history and heritage, tourism and tragedies. Humanity has been interested in the end of life since the time of pilgrimages. Dark Tourism according to Lennon and Foley (2000) is about a large number of sites associated with war, genocide, assassination and other tragic events that have become significant tourist destinations such as Auschwitz in Poland has become a major attraction for tourists that want to visit Nazi death camps. Furthermore dark tourism sites present governments and other authorities with moral and ethical dilemmas. Recent tragic history often confronts the dynamics of commercial development and exploitation. Complex issues are raised surrounding the extent and nature of interpretation the appropriate political and managerial response and the nature of the experience perceived by visitors, local residents, victims and their relatives.

Basing on Lennon and Foley (2000) interpretation of dark tourism, dark tourism covers a huge area of attractions that has death and disaster hence the title of John Lennon and Malcolm Foley's book titled 'Dark Tourism : The Attraction of Death and Disaster'. But in actual fact, not all sites or attractions that is related to death and disaster can be classified under dark tourism. This brings the concept of the tourist gaze to mind, that not every persons view on a single attraction is the same and therefore differs from one another. This is also stated by John Urry (2002) that there is no single tourist gaze as such. It varies by society, by social group and by historical period. Such gazes are constructed through difference. As Urry notes that tourism is constructed on the basis of difference. All tourists seek experiences which are in some way differentiated from their everyday lives and work: tourism results from a distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary. In recent decades the ways in which tourists encounter difference has diversified considerably with the emergence of post-modern (or post-mass) tourists. Such individuals – in particular the new middle class and independent travelers – have increasingly rejected mass tourism in favour of more specialized and small-scale tourism experiences. These post-modern tourists also tend to intellectualize their leisure activities, so that tourism is increasingly linked with learning and discovery.

Iso-Ahola (1982) looked at motivation in terms of escape seeking (again mainly in the context of pleasure tourism). Jafari (1987) originally argued that "there is already a wide range of literature dealing with such motivational propositions, but no common understanding has emerged," the point is still valid. This reflects a notion that can be found even in disciplines such as psychology on which tourism researchers often rely for their theoretical background (Iso-Ahola 1989).

### **4. Attraction towards death, disaster and macabre**

As mortal finite beings, as we shall live so we shall die. It is this very premise of the human condition that lies at the crux of the dark tourism concept. It could be argued that we have always held a fascination with death, whether our own or others, through a combination of respect and reverence or morbid curiosity and superstition. However, it is (western) society's apparent contemporary fascination with death, real or fictional, media inspired or otherwise, that is seemingly driving the dark tourism phenomenon. Further to this, Marcel (2004) noted the range and diversity of dark tourism supply when she examined whether 'death makes a holiday', and

consequently suggested that dark tourism is the dirty little secret of the tourism industry. Nevertheless, before the democratization of travel dark tourism had a number of precursors, and indeed death has been an element of tourism longer than any other form of tourism supply, often through religious or pilgrimage purposes.

Early examples of dark tourism may be found in the patronage of Roman gladiatorial games. With death and suffering at the core of the gladiatorial product, and its eager consumption by raucous spectators, the Roman Coliseum may be considered one of the first dark tourist attractions. Other precursors to dark tourism may be seen in the public executions of the medieval period up until the nineteenth century. As public spectacles, executions served as visible reminders of deterrence and retribution.

Yet with the advent of more formalized arrangements to accommodate visiting voyeurs, public executions increasingly took on the characteristics of a spectator event. Indeed, execution sites such as Tyburn in London boasted specially erected grandstands to offer better vantage points to see the condemned die. In a similar vein, this fascination with 'Other Death' may be seen in the alleged first guided tour in England, whereby in 1838 a railway excursion in Cornwall took in the hanging of two convicted murderers (Boorstin 1987). Other early examples of dark tourism may be found in the guided morgue tours of the Victorian period, the Chamber of Horrors exhibition of Madame Tussauds, or in 'correction houses' of the nineteenth century where galleries were built to accommodate fee-paying visitors who witnessed flogging as a recreational activity.

However, dark tourism over the last century has become more widespread and varied. Smith (1998) for example, suggests that sites or destinations associated with war probably constitute the largest single category of tourist attractions in the world. Yet war-related attractions, though themselves diverse, are a subset of the totality of tourist sites associated with death and suffering (Dann 1998).

Our appetite for consuming death is associated to a much older fear to be killed. This, of course, raises interesting questions: Is thana-tourism a cultural entertainment or a new type of repressed sadism? Why are people being captivated by the disaster and suffering of others represents one of the most striking aspects of dark tourism Even though a countless studies have focused on mass death as a form of cultural entertainment in tourism and hospitality fields, few research has emphasized on the anthropological roots of dark tourism or thana-tourism highlighting its connection with ethnocentrism and nationalisms.

What is important to discuss here, is that death represents a nothingness which remains beyond the human understanding, a mystery that is symbolized in diverse ways. Experiences are often very hard to grasp and evolve depending upon the context. Sheng & Chen (2012) paid attention over the five key factors that may very well determine the museum attractiveness:

a) Easiness and fun, b) Cultural entertainment, c) Personal identification, d) Historical reminiscence, and e) Escapism.

On one hand, these staged spaces are aimed at creating a thematic allegory based on certain event (the quest of history) to receive a specific discourse that is very close to ideology. On another, museums allow combining emotional and spiritual factors to create the tourist experience. Why people are being captivated by the disaster and suffering of others represents one of the most striking aspects of dark tourism. Even though in recent years, a countless valuable studies have focused on mass death as a form of cultural entertainment for West in tourism and hospitality fields (Lennon & Folley, 2000; O'Rourke, 1988; Seaton, 2000), few researches have emphasized on the anthropological roots of dark tourism or thana-tourism. More interested to analyze the phenomenon from a managerial perspective, the existent body of knowledge ignores the role played by the sacralisation of the dead in the process of anthropomorphism that ultimately ends in exhibiting a place of staged-authenticity. This raises an important question: how to feel and remind the suffering of others?

## 5. Dark Consumerism

People have always been drawn to tragedies. No one really knows what draws human being to such locations. Nevertheless, this activity has now an official name, Dark Tourism. Other names for this activity are Thana-Tourism and Greif-Tourism. The egocentricity of the society made it an easy target for the transition to a consumer society. Consumerism is a social and economic order that encourages the procurement of goods and services in ever-greater amounts. Since consumerism began, various individuals and groups have deliberately sought an alternative lifestyle. Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual contentment and our ego satisfaction in consumption. We need things consumed, burned up, worn out, replaced and discarded at an ever-increasing rate.

Today the fatal attraction sites have become commercialised and commoditized. As the interest in death, disaster & atrocity has become a growing phenomenon. Dark tourism signified a fundamental shift in the way in which death, disaster and atrocity are now being handled by those who offer associated tourism products, but if dark

tourism is marketed and promoted in a similar vein as 'traditional heritage', then we are in danger of misrepresenting the darker elements of history, which in turn may have profound implications for society at large.

## 6. Dark Tourism & India

Tour operators say the newest phenomenon in travel involves guided rounds of the sites of historical significance, mostly those which have witnessed death, destruction and tragic drama of some sort. A preoccupation with such dark experiences has given this form of tourism its name "Dark Tourism".

Some of the Major Tourist Sites in India especially with reference to Dark Tourism:

- **Amritsar:** nearly 10,000 people visit the Jallianwala Bagh each day. But the site of the massacre that occurred in 1919 under British rule is not too far from the Golden Temple, where more than 1,00,000 visit the Golden temple every day, which apart from being one of the most prominent Sikh Gurdwara in the world located in the city of Amritsar, built by the fifth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Arjan Dev, in the 16th Century, it is also (in)famous for the Operation Blue Star which was an Indian military operation which was staged from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> of June in 1984, ordered by Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India to remove Sikh separatists from the temple.
- **Andaman & Nicobar Islands:** The Cellular Jail at Andamans which became 100 years old on March 10, 2006, also gets its share of curious visitors on a daily basis.
- **South Mumbai:** Post-26/11, Mumbai has seen the arrival of a new kind of tourists. Travelers flock to this place to view the monuments like Taj Hotel, Gateway of India, Cama hospital and Nariman house, which were under terror attacks on 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2008. Local tourists and foreign travelers' inflows to Mumbai have been on increase on account of this new found tourism. Bullet marks on walls, windows and roofs, damaged regions and reinstated structures are all very inviting for the tourists visiting here. Tourist guides and agencies give elaborate descriptions on the events and showing various places under the siege. One can even get details of the past terror and bomb attacks at this place from these guides.
- **Gandhinagar:** Akshardham is one of the largest temples in the Gujarat On 24<sup>th</sup> September, 2002, two heavily armed attackers arrived at around 4:30 PM. They scaled the fence and opened fire, killing a woman and a temple volunteer immediately. About 600 devotees were in the temple at the time. By the end of the attack, 29 devotees were killed and another 79 devotees were wounded. Apart from the 25 people killed in the first assault, 1 state police officer and 1 commando also died in the action. The popularity of the temple escalated especially after the 2002 attack.
- **Panipat:** The three famous battles fought at the city were turning points in Indian history. The Kala Amb Tree is a popular sightseeing spot of Panipat situated near the city, where the 3<sup>rd</sup> battle was fiercely fought. This war resulted in the worst defeat of Marathas in their history. This war led to a power vacuum which later led to the British conquest of India.
- **Dharvi Slums, Mumbai:** Immortalized by the Oscar winning movie "Slumdog Millionaire", it is not only the largest slum in India but in entire Asia. Home to almost 1 million people, this slum not only greets visitors with stomach turning odour, presence of piling garbage and human waste, but also endless displays of poverty, disease and depressing living conditions.
- **Bhopal:** The Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) pesticide plant in Bhopal leaked gas methyl isocyanate on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of December in the year 1984, making it one of the world's worst industrial disasters. Over 500,000 people were exposed to methyl isocyanate gas and other chemicals. Around 8,000 died within two weeks and another 8,000 or more have since died from gas-related diseases. A government affidavit in 2006 stated the leak caused 558,125 injuries including 38,478 temporary partial and approximately 3,900 severely and permanently disabling injuries. Since then, every year, on the occasion of the disaster's anniversary, thousands of people (activists & social change agents, etc) come to Bhopal to voice their opinion and pay homage to the dead and the survivors.
- **Other Significant Places/Sites:**
  - The Shaheed-e-Azam Sardar Bhagat Singh Museum at Khatkar Kalan, Punjab.
  - The Martyr's Column at the Gandhi Smriti, (Birla House), the spot where Mahatama Gandhi was assassinated
  - The Memorial of Smt. Indira Gandhi, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Prime Minister of India who was assassinated on October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1984, at her 1, Safdarjung Road, New Delhi residence.
  - The stone mosaic & the seven pillars, each featuring a human value surrounds the site of the blast that stands at the location where Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated in Sriperumbudur, near Chennai.
  - The Taj Mahal, which is a white marble mausoleum located in Agra built by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his third wife, Mumtaz Mahal.

And may more such place where death and curiosity have become synonymous with each other continue to draw throes of visitors to their doorsteps. And keeping in mind the Indian flavor, is the tourism and travel industry pay more attention towards this arena, surely they can heap profits from the pervasive nature of human beings to a very good extent.

## 7. Conclusion

Deaths, disasters, carnage and atrocities in touristic form are becoming an increasingly pervasive feature within the contemporary tourism landscape, and as such, are ever more providing potential spiritual journeys for the tourist who wishes to gaze upon real and recreated death. It can be morbid. It's always a bit of voyeuristic. But it seems like a fundamental human urge, like drivers slowing down to gawk at a gruesome accident. In the same way, certain classes of tourists have developed recently who often feel a profound need to see the aftermath of a disaster and devastation wherever in the world they strike. The result is a form of travel increasingly coming to be known as 'Dark Tourism'. India is slowly catching up, but still a lot more is to be done, if the desired results are to be achieved. But one should also keep in mind the negative side of this. Apart from the environmental and cultural-heritage side of this kind of perversion, one should also look into the affects and effects of it, in socially dynamic society such as India's.

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