

# Commercial acceptability of Dark Tourism in India

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## ABSTRACT

*“One sole country under the sun that is endowed with an imperishable interest for alien prince and alien peasant, for lettered and ignorant, wise and fool, rich and poor, bond and free, the one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for the shows of all the rest of the world combined” these words of Mark Twain aptly portray India as the land of rich heritage and inimitable sites.*

Sanskrit orientation of ‘अतिथिदेवो भवः’ (consider the guest as god) to a marketing slogan ‘Incredible India’ the country has promote tourism in India. Since the Second Five Year Plan till date all initiatives have been taken to boost this sector. And the initiatives have favourably resulted in the way that India has jumped 12 places to 40th rank globally in travel and tourism competitiveness list by World Economic Forum also jumped 16 places to 41st rank in the revised World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) rankings. This has happened just because ‘India is a country of all seasons and all reasons’. All these credentials are adequate to define the prominence of tourism across the globe.

But when it comes to the Dark Tourism Sites, are the standings and promotional endeavours remaining at par? A tourism that involves travelling to places associated with death and suffering. The destinations linked to untimely or violent deaths, the spots generally have political or historical significance. Notorious Jallianwala Bagh site; Bhopal Gas Leak Industrial disasters; 2004’s badly beaten Tsunami site few of the Dark Tourist places.

This article will speak about the commercial acceptability, popularity among the people of making pilgrimages to sites of devastating massacres and macabre sites in India..

## PROLOGUE - INDIAN HOSPITALITY

*“If we were to look over the whole world to fine out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power and beauty that nature can bestow-in some parts a very paradise on earth-I should point to India”*

- Max Mueller. (Chauhan et. al., 2014)

The beauty and relevance of Indian tourism can be easily understood from the compliment given by Max Mueller to our nation. Innumerable eras have bloomed on Indian soil from north to south, from east to west and from Harappa civilization to Mughals to Britishers to the epoch of Destination Branding. Such diversified era in Indian history has lead to the epitome of tourism in India.

Undoubtedly, it is a land of beautiful monuments, temples, mosques, etc. whose fame and exotic riches have attracted the tourists from all over the world.

The Ministry of Tourism has undertaken many projects to showcase India as a perfect tourist destination and create a visitor-friendly image of the country. The major steps taken by the Government were the *Atithi Devo Bhavah Campaign* which gave a widespread message of *“honour your guest as he is always equivalent to God”* and the *Incredible India Campaign* which was incredibly successful in creating a colourful and a gorgeous image of our country as a perfect holiday destination

Tourism industry has contributed enormously in the flourishing graph of Indian economy by attracting a huge number of both foreign and domestic tourists travelling for professional as well as holiday purpose.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council’s Economic Impact 2017 following are some eye-opening facts which proclaims that India is marching ahead in the field of tourism:

### Indian Travel & Tourism Industry’s Contributions

Contribution to	Absolute Contribution In the year 2016	Expected Contribution By the year 2027
Gross Domestic Product (Direct)	US\$ 71.7 billion	US\$ 148.2 billion
Gross Domestic Product (Total)	US\$ 208.9 billion	US\$ 424.5 billion
Total to Employment	403.43 lakh jobs	498.68 lakh jobs

Source: *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2017 - India* by the World Travel & Tourism Council

As per Ministry of Tourism, Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India increased 19.5 per cent year-on-year to 630,000 in May 2017. FTAs one-tourist visa increased 55.3 per cent year-on-year to 68,000 in May 2017 (IBEF, 2017).

India’s Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) through tourism increased by 32 per cent year-on-year to reach US\$ 2.278

billion in April 2017, as per data from Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (IBEF, 2017).

India is expected to move up five spots to be ranked among the top five business travel market globally by 2030, as business travel spending in the country is expected to treble until 2030 from US\$ 30 billion in 2015 (IBEF, 2017).

International hotel chains will likely increase their expansion and investment plans in India, and are expected to account for 50 per cent share in the Indian hospitality industry by 2022, from the current 44 per cent (IBEF, 2017).

#### BROAD CLASSIFICATION – EMERGING TOURISM & HOSPITALITY SEGMENTS

As India is the land of diversity so is the Indian tourism. In recent years some unique segments of tourism have got emerged. A conventional approach of travel and tour has got changed from vacations' spending to theme travel & tour. From conventional to these popular and peculiar segments are as follows:

##### Conventional Tourism:

Academically, Leisure tourism is tour in which the main motive is to take break from the monotonous working and to move on vacations. It is often characterized by staying in nice hotels or resorts, relaxing on beaches or in a room, or going on guided tours and experiencing local tourist attractions. Well, it is remarkable that couple of decades before the object used to remain same but people were used to visit their relatives for the same.

#### EMERGING TOURISM & HOSPITALITY SEGMENTS

- a. **Rural Tourism:** The aim is to develop interest in heritage and culture; & promote visits to village settings to experience & live a relaxed & healthy lifestyle
- b. **Medical Tourism:** Tourists seek specialized medical treatments, mainly Ayurvedic, spa & other therapies. The primary purpose is achieving, promoting or maintaining good health & a sense of well-being. In Uttar Pradesh, Chitrakoot is becoming popular for this.
- c. **Ecological Tourism:** Vast variety of flora & fauna in various states is a major factor behind their growing popularity as tourist destinations. Thenmala in Kerala is the first planned ecotourism destination in India.
- d. **Adventure Tourism:** A wide range of adventure sports are covered under this category with specialized packages. The activities include mountaineering, trekking, bungee jumping, mountain biking, river rafting & rock climbing. Roopkund Trek, Uttarakhand, Shimla to Leh having a motor biking is few of popular places.
- e. **Pilgrimage Tourism:** India, a secular country, allows every individual to worship in his or her own way. And just because of this segment is one of the biggest contributors to tourism industry. Kailash Mansarovar to Ajmer Dargha all have been flourished and been taken care by the state.

- f. **Heritage Tourism:** Tourists visit India for its cultural heritage in various cities. The country's rich heritage is amply reflected in the various temples, majestic forts, pleasure gardens, religious monuments, museums, art galleries, urban & rural sites. Rock Garden, Rose Garden, Sukhna Lake View all in Chandigarh is one of the instances.

Alike these there are many other streams and sub-streams of tourism. Each having its own importance and acceptability. But one of the very unique segments of tourism which makes its distinct from others is, Dark Tourism.

In all the segments of tourism people do get ready to move with happy-go mindset and even after returning they carry pictures of happiness in their memories. But the segment focused in this paper is completely conflicting. People do visits with a grief and to honour a tribute. Nothing like graveyard because it's a place built by the man as to homage. These dark tourist places are more than the graveyard, the places of tragedies.

#### Dark Tourism – The Attraction of Death and Disaster (Lennon et. al., 2000)

Dark tourism is nothing but a mixture of history, heritage, tragedies and tourism. Dark Tourism according to Lennon and Foley is about a large number of sites associated with war, genocide, assassination and other tragic events that have become significant tourist destinations.

There are many people eager to explore as to what happened to the victims of a tragic incident or at haunted places. These are the places that are associated with a black past like death, atrocity, disaster, tragedy or destruction, having sinister past. The eagerness to know about such tragedy stricken places attract people from every part of the world which forms the basis of the term DARK TOURISM.

Dark tourism gives an extra meaning to our common past. Dark tourism sites are not just a historical lesson to visitors, but also represent and open up emotional channels to dark moments in our shared history (Sharpley & Stone, 2009).

#### DARK TOURIST SITES OF INDIA

Since India is a land of diverse cultures, religions, festivals, etc. almost every type of tourism exists here. Even though the Dark tourism has not gained the deserved popularity in our country, still there are immensely popular and important dark tourist spots. To mention few are as mentioned below:

- **Amritsar:** the *Jalianwala Bagh* attracts nearly more than 10000 visitors each day. The site witnesses the massacre that occurred in 1919 under the British Rule.
- **Andaman and Nicobar Islands:** the 100 year old *Cellular Jail at Andaman* also attracts curious visitors daily.
- **Panipat:** the *Yudh Bhoomi* where famous battles fought here turned the face of Indian history wherein the Marathas were conquered by the Britishers.

- **Bhopal:** the Methyl Gas leakage in the *Union Carbide India Limited* is one of the worst Industrial Disaster of the world. It killed nearly 8000 people and left thousands permanently disabled. So from then onwards many visit the site to pay homage to the deceased and injured.
- **Agra:** The *Taj Mahal* - this white marbled monument holds a position in one of the wonders of the world which was built by Shahjahan in the memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal. It is their burial ground.
- **Mumbai:** Mumbai has always been a hub for tourist from all over the world. But post 26/11 attacks it has attracted tourist of new kind. People visit the *Taj Hotel, Gateway of India, the Nariman House* to see the destructions caused by the terrorist on 26/11.
- **Delhi:** the *Gandhi Smriti*, the spot the Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated hold its relevance.
- **Allahabad:** Company Garden - also known as *Chandrashekhar Azad Park*. It is renamed after freedom fighter Chandra Shekhar Azad, who sacrificed his life here, during the Indian independence struggle in 1931. (Alfred Park-Allahabad)

*These are just few to mention and the list is far from exhaustive.*

#### SCOPE OF DARK TOURISM IN INDIA

In recent time this sector has contributed immensely in terms of National Income thereby generating huge employment opportunities. With the changing paradigms in Indian tourism, many new and neglected areas of tourism has emerged, Dark Tourism being one of them.

There is no doubt that a person is influenced by social and cultural activities or happenings. A tourist may get persuaded and one's perception of travelling may relate to one's perception of the World. However, there are so many things or people, from whom a traveller gets carried away and these inspirations work as motivators to travel a particular place. The environment and other activities make a person what he is. Not even two persons have the same psychological acceptance to something or someone. In other words, a person's demand depends upon the type of behaviour and intellect that one carries. But, what does it make people to travel (Singh, et. al. 2016)

Understanding the motivations of tourists participating in the 'dark tourism' is of great importance, especially due to the sensitivity of the subject matter they visit. Some of the 'dark tourism' is slowly decaying, and visitors play an important role in their preservation.

Without proper management, the influx of tourists may further distort the location or cause more conflict with local residents. The knowledge of the dark tourism can also provide the necessary means and methods for proper regulation of relations with different stakeholders. Frequently assumed that the interest in death and disaster comes only from the morbidity of dark tourists, but also it is involved a number of factors

ranging from the interest for history and heritage, education and reminders of the past and the suffering (Georg, 2012)

Since it is a bit neglected area, the scope for expansion is immense.

- **Source of income and employment:** *It can be a great source of income and employment generation thereby elevating poverty and sustaining human development.*
- **Foreign exchange earning:** *travelers all around the world are keen and eager to know about the history of any nation and history is often associated with tragedy, massacre, killing, etc. thus the dark tourism can help to attract the foreigners and thus creating a favorable balance of payment of the country.*
- **Preserving the heritage and culture:** *exploring the sites of dark tourism helps to preserve the heritage and culture to the nation. As many tourists will visit the spots as many new research will be conducted and the history and the importance of the place will be revived. Mostly dark tourist places hold a very important and significant place in the country's history.*

Today the fatal attraction sites have become commercialized 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. (Verma, 2013)

#### CHALLENGES IN DARK TOURISM

Various domains of tourism are very popular in our nation because India is a land of varied culture and religions. But the dark tourism could not gain as much popularity as it deserves. There are many challenges and problems behind its neglected existence.

Some of the challenges faced are as under:

- **Neglected dark tourism sites:** *as the term dark tourism is not quite popular and the word dark itself portrays a negative image the tourist are not happily influenced by the title. It is due to this fact that the sites are also neglected and losing its importance in current time.*
- **Poor maintenance:** *the spots should be beautifully and properly maintained so as to attract the tourist. But the negligence lead to improper maintenance.*
- **No promotional plans:** *in India dark tourist spots lack publicity as layman is not much aware of various sites. So a proper promotional strategy should be implemented to focus on the dark tourism specifically.*
- **Improper services for tourists:** *basic public amenities are not provided in distant dark tourist sites which distracts the visitors from visiting these places.*

- **Poor accessibility:** as these places are not widely known there is no proper means of communication and transportation available to access these sites.
- **Lack of government support:** since the tourism sector gets a very low share of the government revenue, the growth of this sector is sustained in totality.
- **Branding Image of India:** The image of India all over the world is of a Cultural destination i.e. it is famous for its cultural, regional and religious spots. But, India is also a place where dark tourism exists. The image of India as “Dark Tourism destination” should also be promoted along with cultural and religious publicities (Singh, 2016).
- **Education:** educating the young generations about the historical and tragic part of their country can help immensely in speeding and gearing up this sector.
- **Promoting India as a “Destination of Variations”:** India is being considered as a Cultural destination and it must be promoted as dark tourism destination also. Moreover, not only as a place for “Dark Tourism”, it is a place where different domains of Tourism exist. So, efforts should be done to change the image of India from only cultural destination to a destination of variations (Singh, 2016).

### INITIATIVES TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES

In India, tourism is a late started industry. After the independence, the Government started taking plans to organize and develop the tourism destinations scattered all over the country. Now tourism in India is in such a position which is desirable countries economy.

As the tourism as a whole as developed dramatically in recent years now the government should focus specially on the dark tourism because it will start a new era in this industry.

Some steps taken for promoting dark tourism are as under:

- **Marketing:** a proper advertisement program should be made to cater particularly to this specific area of this sector. It will create awareness and will attract tourist both locally and globally.
- **Developing proper amenities:** special care should be given to maintain the service amenities so that the tourist don't find it difficult to arrange for accommodation, fooding etc.
- **Regular maintenance of sites:** the dark sites should not be left as it was in ancient times but proper care

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