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Dark tourism in Uttarakhand

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Abstract

Dark tourism is a homogenous mixture of history, tradition, catastrophe all in the spectrum of tourism. Dark tourism has many names; among them are thanatourism, grief tourism and morbid tourism. Even though there was no official term for dark tourism till 1996 but dark tourism is not a new practice. The main attraction to dark locations is their historical value rather than their associations with death and suffering. Dark tourism destinations are the sites where some kind of catastrophe has happened so it requires keeping in mind the hard core values, ethics, sentiments and moral of the people. Even though there aren't much places in Uttarakhand labelled as dark tourism sites yet with immense history and unexplored places Uttarakhand has enough potential to boom as dark tourism destination. Already known and pretty famous site is Roop kund where human skeletons were found. Even Kedarnath has been declared as dark tourism site as the devastation there is witnessed by everyone. There are pros and cons to dark tourism and also not being very popular it has to face various challenges.

Keywords: problems, challenges, push and pull factors, thanatourism, tragedies, Kedarnath

Introduction

One of the fastest-developing forms of tourism in India, Dark Tourism, is often described as a form of travel associated with places that have experienced death, mystery, and pain. It is popular amongst people who are interested in history and want to explore the deep and dark untold stories that are buried deep in the past. It is gruesome and scary but has become popular because of its unconventional nature and experience. The term 'dark tourism' was coined in 1996 by Lennon and Foley, two faculty members of the Department of Hospitality, Tourism & Leisure Management at Glasgow Caledonian University.

The word dark tourism has become quite popular in the contemporary world. The term 'dark tourism' is relatively new. The practice it talks about is as old as ancient human culture. There are countless places across the globe known for 'dark tourism'. However, 'dark' here is meant metaphorically and not literally. Dark tourism takes visitors to places associated with tragedy and suffering. It takes us to places that are considered taboo and also have a strange impact on the human psyche. Some of the examples of dark tourist places over world are the gladiator games in Rome, pilgrimage routes to crucifixion and burial sites, public executions in the Middle Ages and in India are Jallianwallah Bagh Amritsar (Punjab), Indus Valley civilisation sites, cellular jail Andaman & Nicobar island (kala pani), Union carbide factory Bhopal, Kuldhara village Rajasthan, Roop kund (Uttarakhand), Taj hotel Mumbai etc. It is sheer curiosity that pushes people to tread the road less travelled to seek answers. One of the ways of understanding dark tourism and dark destinations is by re visiting the places associated with tragedies as dark tourism is imbibed in history and both are profoundly related to one another. In India there is no dearth of monuments which are somehow related to some kind of tragedies so they provide destinations for dark tourism. Even though India is very new to the concept of dark tourism yet India is gaining momentum to establish itself in the concept of dark tourism and so is the case with Uttarakhand. A tourist visiting a dark destination can be driven by multiple feelings and emotions; apprehension, appreciation, modesty, patriotism and earnestness.

Types of dark tourism

1. Grief tourism: The term grief tourism can be related to tourism sites that bawl horrifying tales of dreadful crimes, spiteful vengeance and gory combats. Advertently or inadvertently each individual has undertaken a visit to grief tourism site in his lifetime.

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Hotel Taj Mahal and Café Leopold, Mumbai are the examples of Grief Tourism in India. Most of the people who travel to these destinations are brimming with curiosity, under the disguise of paying homage to the fateful victims.

2. Disaster tourism (natural or manmade disasters): To get first-hand experience on the extent of destruction and misery of the people affected. The most famous destination of Disaster Tourism is the Marina Beach in Chennai. And now even Kedarnath can be listed under this.

3. Poverty tourism: The developing countries of the Asian subcontinents, focusing largely on India fall into the category of Poverty Tourism. Asia's largest slum Dharavi in Mumbai is site of poverty tourism in India. Even though Uttarakhand has done better than its parent state, with a poverty rate of merely 11% still people of far off areas aren't well enough and poverty tourism has enough potential here.

4. Warfare tourism: Classic examples of warfare tourism in India can be battlefield of Panipat in Haryana. And in Uttarakhand there is immense history of warfare and forts associated with it.

People visiting places to experience some kind of paranormal activity also comes under dark tourism, as it is kind of related to some kind of tragedy resulting in death, so bit interesting for dark tourists.

Types of dark tourists

Even the traveller itself can be classified into different kind of dark tourists as it was stated by Cooke and Dickson in 2006. The authors presented a classification based on five categories that classifies the dark tourist:

- Opaque
- Dark
- Die-hard dark
- Pitch black
- Too dark

Reasons behind dark tourism

When it is about tourism, every tourist has his own reason behind the kind of tourism he/she prefers, be it religious tourism, adventure tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism etc and Uttarakhand is anyway considered as —Devbhumi as Char Dham Yatra is very much important in every possible aspect be its contribution in state GDP or be it people's sentiments.. So is the case with dark tourism, people prefer it because they feel attracted, excited, nostalgic towards the tragedies in history or it's human psyche to be curious about tragedies and reasons behind those tragedies.

People who have served in any war and war like situations find it difficult to survive in peaceful environment so it might be pleasure in pain that's why they would prefer dark tourism.

Human have tendency of visiting their dead ancestors and keep them in their memories so is the case with historical happenings and the soldiers who have sacrificed their lives for our country.

Some are very much interested in expanding their knowledge about such places with some kind of tragedies. For a few, heritage serves as the motivation to visit the sites associated with Dark Tourism.

The push and pull factors play the crucial role. Push factors are internal as people when get bored with their monotonous life and need some kind of break from their daily chores then they go for some kind of tourist place and enjoy the things. When we talk of pull factors then it is about the place and what that place provides to the tourist. Push factors may or may not change as tourists attempt to find a destination to meet their individual travel needs and expectations. However, pull factors will vary by dark tourism location. Today's traveler is always on the pursuit of seeking opportunities of learning the aftermaths of the tragedy and understanding the root cause of the occurrences. The dark destinations thus fuel in up keeping the fundamental value of education and promote the site with the essence of educational mission. Psychology and frame of mind of an individual plays an essential role in the selection of dark tourism destinations.

1. Sites such as graveyards could be fascinating and prospective areas for possible retrospective and spiritual purposes.
2. Thrill and risk seeking lures tourists who like adventure, excitement and curiosity.
3. Need to get acquainted with the knowledge of a place that has experienced a tragedy like mass murder, again curiosity play a key role here.
4. Self-discovery and learning about such sites to boast about them later in social groups.
5. Urge to visit sites that have immortal memories linked with people or even stories about haunted mansions etc.
6. Other religious reasons.

Understanding dark tourism through people's perception

Avid traveller Nitya Sriram, a senior programme officer at a civil society organisation in Delhi, says that she has always approached a tourist destination from a historical point-of-view to understand what went wrong. She said —We don't think of it as dark tourism when we travel. After I heard the term, I looked back at my travels and realised I have indulged quite a bit in dark tourism. Almost every monument in Delhi has a dark tale to tell. And then there are places like Jallianwala Bagh and the Holocaust museum...|

Dr Roshan Jain, a senior psychiatrist at a multi-specialty hospital in Bengaluru, says that death is the only constant — the only thing that is confirmed the moment one is born.

—Everyone fears death and anything that reminds of it. Perhaps, our subconscious acceptance of mortality drives us to yearn for a glimpse of what death is. This compels us to observe places of devastation — to better appreciate the powers of nature.|

Dark tourism sites in Uttarakhand

As there are not much places explored regarding dark tourism so there remains very few places labelled as dark tourism sites which are as below:-

1. Lambi Dehar Mines, Mussoorie

Though Mussoorie is counted amongst the most beautiful hill stations of India, but it also shelters a scary site known by the name of The Mine of Death. In 1990, around 50,000 workers died a horrible death due to their wrong mining practices. From then onwards, the nature has took over these spooky mines by growing trees and shrubs in the surrounding area and the houses of the workers who used to

live nearby. The locals have recounted about the bawls of people at night along with other paranormal activities. Adding to the apocalyptic aura of this place, many car accidents and a helicopter crash have also occurred near the mines.



Source: Google

Lambi Dehar mines is the Ghost mines in Mussoorie

2. Roop Kund Lake

Popularly known as Skeleton Lake is located at an elevation of over 5,000 metres above sea level. It is home to around 200 human skeletal remains. The presence of so many skeletons in such a small area remained a mystery until scientists recently concluded that the skeletal remains belonged to people from the ninth century who must have been hurt by something and died, probably a glacial storm. The lake remains frozen for most part of the year but when the lake melts remains of flesh, hair and skeletons are found here.



Source: Google

Roopkund is a high altitude glacial lake in the Uttarakhand state of India. It lies in the lap of Trishul massif. Located in the Himalayas, the area around the lake is uninhabited and is roughly at an altitude of 16,470 feet, surrounded by rock-strewn glaciers and snow-clad mountains

3. The Savoy Hotel, Mussoorie

Another eerie location in Mussoorie is Savoy Hotel. When a hotel is considered, thoughts like luxury, happiness come to mind but this hotel is much different from all others as there is a mysterious story attached to it. Based on the English Gothic architecture style, this hotel is spread over an area of

11 acres. The horror story of this hotel dates back to the summers of 1911 when a 49 year old lady, Miss Frances Garnett-Orme was found dead in a hotel room. The strange thing was that her room was locked from inside, giving rise to the suspicions on her associate Miss Eva Mountstephen but nothing was proved against her. It is said that the ghost of Miss Garnett still haunts the Savoy Hotel. This mysterious death also served as a plot to the first detective novel-The Mysterious Affair at Styles by Agatha Christie.



The Savoy, is a historic luxury hotel in the hill station, Mussoorie, in Uttarakhand state of India, owned by the ITC Hotels.

Established in 1902.

4. Abott Mount near Lohaghat

Located in the Champawat district in Uttarakhand, Lohaghat has won attraction as one of the spookiest places in India. On the Abbott Mount is a bungalow, called Abbey, where, reportedly, people have encountered mysterious incidents. Resembling a British architecture, this white bungalow built by Mr Abbott, stands aloof, in a quite and peaceful surrounding. This infamous place is apparently feared for evil spirits too.



This infamous place is a bungalow on the Abbot hill called ABBEY in the Kali Kumaon region of Champawat district of Uttarakhand state.

5. Kedarnath Most of the destruction at Kedarnath was caused by a sudden rapid melting of ice and snow on the Kedarnath Mountain, 6 km (3.7 mi) from the temple, which flooded the Chorabari Lake (upstream) and then Kedarnath. The temple was flooded with water resulting in several deaths due to drowning and panic-driven stampede.



Kedarnath Temple is a Hindu temple (shrine) dedicated to the Hindu God Shiva. The temple is located on the Garhwal Himalayan range near the Mandakini River in Uttarakhand

Why dark tourism hasn't grown as expected in Uttarakhand?

Lack of knowledge about dark tourism is one of the main reasons behind restricted growth of dark tourism in Uttarakhand.

- 1. Lack of promotion:** Marketing of dark tourism should be done properly, using social networking sites as internet and smartphones play the key role and people do check their phones and social media accounts quite often, so it is pretty easy and smart to use them for the marketing and promotion of dark tourism by giving advertisements of the sites. Thus enhancing their interest in visiting such sites.
- 2. Accessibility lack and less connectivity:** Uttarakhand has a total geographical area of 53,483 km², of which 86% is mountainous, so even though there is so much to explore regarding dark tourism yet we see no growth meanwhile religious tourism, cultural tourism, eco-tourism all are growing and are very much explored. This mountainous region makes it a bit difficult to explore new areas with ease as connectivity to these areas isn't even good shape, best is far cry. Roads can be seen at their worst during monsoon season, people in these areas do not get the daily needs when the roads connecting their villages get blocked due to heavy rain. And even during winters snowfall plays the same role for some villages. Maybe with time, when connectivity to these offbeat places will get smoother, dark tourism may see growth.
- 3. No support from locals:** AS it is a whole new concept in tourism sector and not much people are even fully aware of this concept and they somehow consider it a taboo not knowing they would be doing it unknowingly for a very long time. But people till now would be maintaining a distance from it as it is not the traditional kind of tourism. And the Psychology of people to stay away from places related to death is one of the reasons locals maintain a distance from dark tourism.
- 4. Lack of funds:** Even though dark tourism is becoming pretty popular yet it hasn't gained the popularity needed, mostly because government hasn't paid much attention to it. Providing funds is one of the best ways to promote dark tourism, because that ultimately going to attract people to invest in here more. Due to lack of

funds Lack of infrastructure development which results into lack of demand.

- 5. Lack of tourist services at the destinations:** Dark tourism sites haven't been explored so the services there aren't available as they are in other much explored sites. And lack of interest of stakeholders in developing it as a proper tourism product.
- 6. Supportive government policies:** Government must think of providing supportive policies particularly for dark tourism so it would attract people.
- 7. Lack of research over topic:** There is no particular research done over dark tourism in Uttarakhand which ultimately leads to very less to no knowledge about it amongst people.

Problems faced by dark tourism

- Change or affect the image of some of the destinations, which previously promoted as different type of tourisms (e.g.- education tourism)
- Knowledge and experience of visitors and tourists on dark tourism and sites are both theoretically fragile and limited.
- Visitors/tourists understood it as different form of tourism either education in museum or recreation in park or garden or others.
- Whereas young, non- locals, tourists with lower level of education are not interested in it.
- Very few/limited research, since it is a new field.
- Tourism product itself is not clear and services need to be defined as it sometimes conflict with others.
- New and different form of tourism, need more time to generate common understanding.
- There are very little chances of victims or local people getting benefits directly. In order to promote this sort of tourism huge investment or attention of government is needed.

Pros of dark tourism

- Drawing attention of large mass of tourists as zones of war/disasters as into tourism destinations.
- Attracting global communication media and academicians, researchers.
- The research has shown that tourists mainly elderly locals, persons connected to the incidents or having higher level of education.
- New research areas for those interested in related fields.
- Possibility of combining it with other tourism activities such as education tourism, pilgrimage etc.
- Through dark tourism, war/ disaster zones can be revived and recovered.
- It can generate interest of the tourists and public especially youths, on the destination- memorial sites and disaster/ war zone if executed respectfully will generate revenue/benefits to victims and local people and also provide awareness and education of the incidents and disasters.
- Tourism is always about exploring new places, it can be in the form of volunteerism as well.

CNS of dark tourism

Dark tourism sometimes considered as unethical and the most common criticism that dark tourism has to face is that it exploits human suffering. According to critiques, operators would exploit such sensitive sites to make money

or simply to provide entertainment. This will disrespect the victims of the event. So this kind of behavior is termed as unethical.

According to IUPUI associate professor of tourism Suosheng Wang, —We cannot simply say dark tourism is a good or a bad thing, which wholly depends on how dark tourism is organized and how the local communities think of developing dark tourism at dark sites, Wang said. —On one hand, the original purpose of dark tourism sites is for visitors to memorialize the victims and receive education to ensure the ‘never again’ hope. This is why most of these sites are presented as sites of remembrance for heritage, education or history. On the other hand, after a disaster, dark tourism can put local people in a painful or uncomfortable situation, he said.

—In the transition from a place of past disaster to a place as a dark tourism destination, death is presented as entertainment, Wang said. —Such dissonance is an integral and unavoidable characteristic of dark tourism, and the stigma of death and tragedy may be distasteful to the local residents.

Although dark tourism will be benefitting the economy but there a very fine line to walk between memorializing the dead and exploiting human suffering for financial gain.

Conclusion

Dark tourism has seen increase in number of tourists. Human being, full of curiosity and with a nature of pride in their history has a tendency of looking for historical things. Some find pleasure in pain by visiting such sites. Some solely want to expand the horizon of their knowledge. Some really want to experience it and see it with their own eyes. With every different reason, a new tourist gets attracted towards dark tourism.

Dark tourism has immense potentialities in Uttarakhand, as Uttarakhand minister Satpal Maharaj (serving as the current tourism, cultural and irrigation minister in the cabinet of Government of Uttarakhand) already has declared Kedarnath to be a dark tourism site. It gives much needed hope to dark tourism in the state.

Government must provide adequate funds, facilities for promotion of dark tourism as it will eventually benefit the economy of the state which happens to be very much dependable on tourism. Lack of dark tourist sites in Uttarakhand does not denote that Uttarakhand has no enough potential for dark tourism but it basically highlights the lack of knowledge about dark tourism. With more funds and policies provided by government and more public and private investment in dark tourism, it has enough potential to boom in Uttarakhand.

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