

Emerging Trend of Tourism in Assam: A Study with Reference to Dark Tourism

Mr. Rishi Chakravarty

Assistant Professor, Assam down town University
E-mail: rishichakravarty@gmail.com

Abstract—Tourism has evolved as an area of significant importance and is considered as the prime determinant of development in a developing economy. The increasing demand for this sector has provided immense scope for sustainable livelihood. Amongst the different niche areas of tourism, dark tourism is as an emerging domain of interest not only from an academic perspective but also for its gloomy historical significance. However, despite its growing attention in different parts of the country, the potential of this sector is yet to be explored in Assam. Adopting interviewing method as a source of primary data collection, this study is undertaken to provide a scope for the upliftment of dark tourism in Assam. At the end of this study, certain suggestions have been provided so that if implemented this emerging area of tourism have the potential to contribute immensely towards the upliftment of the economy of Assam and also as a place of uncountable sacrifices made against injustice and for nation building.

Keywords: Tourism, Dark tourism, Sustainable livelihood, Developing economy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an area of significant importance not only in the field of academic and research but also amongst the contemporary world of services sectors. Apart from the different areas of niche tourism like eco-tourism, medical tourism, spiritual tourism, adventure tourism and so on an emerging concept that has been able to attract the attention of researchers is 'dark tourism'. The concept of dark tourism is significant in itself as it is associated with some unfortunate disaster leading to deaths that might have occurred in the area in the past. The inquisitiveness to know about the gloomy historical significance of the place has made dark tourism an emerging concept amongst researchers and a desired one amongst tourists all across the world.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Seaton (1996) also feels that dark tourism has a rich historical prominence that dates back to the middle ages where he has cited illustrations on a number of tourist attractions that includes graves, monuments, prisons, spots of public executions and so on. He has made specific emphasis on the site of the battle of Waterloo that has been a tourist destination

since 1816 onwards. Shackley (2002) have provided a different perspective to the concept of dark tourism where he feels that dark tourism is beyond visiting sites of atrocities rather is the result of some unfortunate circumstances that have occurred in the past and the result of such circumstances. By this he feels that this niche area of tourism is the outcome of such horrific circumstances. According to Sharply (2005), even though the concept of dark tourism is historically prominent, academic research in this area is an emerging one. In his work, the author has made an attempt to provide an overview of the experiences of different tourist spots considered as 'dark' or 'gloomy' in order to understand the demand for and supply of dark tourism. Preece and Price (2005) undertake their study to explore the motivational factors that make a person visit sites associated with tragic and horrific incidents. They have referred to Port Arthur in Tasmania, Australia in this regard. During the course of their study, the authors found that the historical interest in the site, cognitive and affective learning, and fascination with the abnormal, ancestry links, to experience re-enactment of death or brutality and to express reverence were some of the factors of motivations that made people visit such sites. Stone (2006) feels that it may not be justifiable to relate all sites associated with death and macabre as dark while some sites may be considered as 'darker' than others depending on the characteristics and nature of the incident that might have occurred. He has therefore developed a darkest-lightest framework of supply depending on the perceived product features of dark tourism.

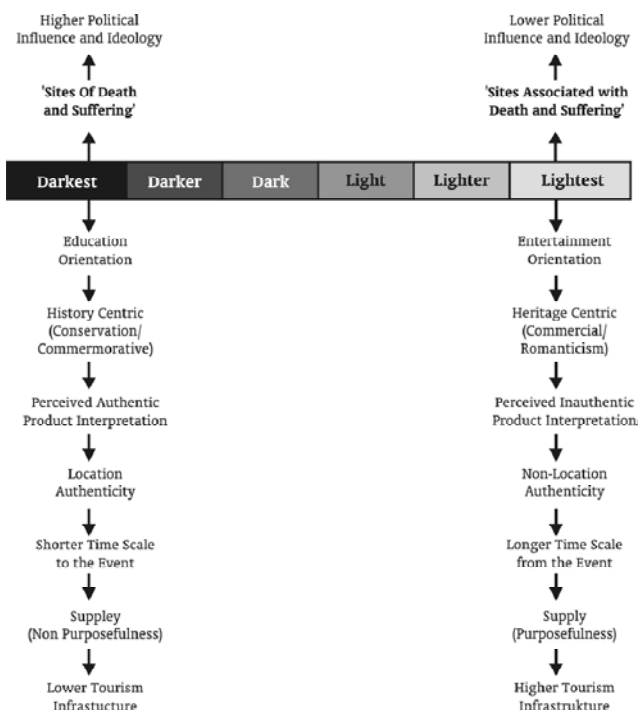


Fig. 1: A dark tourism spectrum: perceived product features of dark tourism within a 'darkest-lightest' framework of supply
Source: Stone (2006). p. 151

Bowman and Pezzullo (2010) made a distinction between sites of picturesque beauty and romanticism with that associated with deaths and macabre. They have highlighted different dark labels that have been provided by earlier researchers to this niche area of tourism associated with deaths and massacre which separates tourists who are attracted to those sites from those who deem inappropriate to visit them. Verma and Jain (2013) have tried to provide a general outlook towards the tragedies associated with places which are considered as 'heritage sites'. Considering dark tourism as a multi-layered structure of 'history and heritage' the authors have highlighted different tourists' sites in India that can be considered as dark. Some of the most prominent sites that the authors have highlighted in their work are:

- Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar
- The Cellular Jail at Andamans
- The Bhopal Gas tragedy
- The Memorial of Smt. Indira Gandhi
- The Martyr's Column at the Gandhi Smriti, (Birla House), the spot where Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated.
- The Kala Amb Tree is a popular sightseeing spot of **Panipat** where three famous battles were fought.

3. OBJECTIVES

From the above literature, it is evident that research on dark tourism is still at a very nascent stage in India and is dormant in Assam. Therefore this study is undertaken with the following objectives:

- To understand the emerging trend of dark tourism and dark tourists spots in selected districts and areas in Assam and
- To provide suggestions for the upliftment of dark tourism in Assam as a source of sustainable livelihood.

4. METHODOLOGY

Adopting a convenience sampling method, an overall 100 respondents were interviewed which consisted of 20 tour operators as well through a well constructed and non-disguised schedule.

5. DARK TOURISTS AREAS SELECTED FOR THIS STUDY

Patharighat (formerly Patharughat): Considered as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of Assam, the Patharughat incident was a black day for Assam. On 28th of January, 1894 around 140 farmers were assassinated in police firing for their protest against the British Raj on tax hike (Shillong times, 2017).

Phulguri Uprising: On 18th October, 1861 around 141 peasants were arrested and over half of them were later sentenced to death by the British Government for their aggressive protests against imposition of tax on betel leaf and opium cultivation (The Deccan Herald, 2011).

Guwahati War Cemetery: Located in the heart of Guwahati city, the War Cemetery is a grave to over 500 World War II soldiers from five different countries viz; India, UK, New Zealand, Australia and Canada (India Express, 2015).

Saraighat War Memorial Park: The park is located in Agyathuri on the Northern Bank of Brahmaputra that was constructed in memory of the great Ahom warrior Lachit Barpukhan and his army against the Mughals in the year 1671 AD (Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority)

In regard to the dark tourism spectrum in figure 1 above, Patharighat and Phulguri can be considered in the 'Darker' side of the spectrum while Guwahati War Cemetery and Saraighat War Memorial Park on the 'Lighter' side of the spectrum.

6. FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

From the study it is found that dark tourism is still at a dormant stage in Assam as 80 percent of the respondents are not familiar with the term. This is due to the fact that not much of research has been conducted in the area and also the level of awareness towards dark tourism is not very significant.

Moreover, it is noted from the tour operators that people generally prefer places of scenic beauty rather than gloomy atmosphere. Therefore even though the tour operators know about the dark places (as in section 5) they do not willingly recommend such places of 'darkness' to their visitors. Further, most of the respondents are not aware of the dark perspectives associated with the four places. From the discussion with the tour operators, it is observed that most tourists prefer niche tourism like eco-tourism, religious tourism, wildlife tourism, adventure tourism rather than dark tourism.

The tour operators as well as the individual respondents have not seen any brand building advertising related to dark tourism in Assam. Even though the 'Awesome Assam' campaign is associated with the promotion of tourism in general, but it has not been effective in dark tourism promotion.

Moreover, the lack of maintenance, transportation and proper guidance are hindrances towards the upliftment of dark tourism in Assam.

7. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the suggestions and recommendations:

- a. Proper marketing of dark tourism needs to be done so as to increase the knowledge level of the tourists. Proper advertisements should be given in prospective places and branding should be done by Awesome Assam.
- b. For the organizations involved in tourism line and travel agencies also, each needs to develop a proper circle of providing services to the visitors like accommodation, food, providing them guide etc.
- c. There should be teams of people for maintaining these spots. Implementing the maintenance policies on time will keep things up to date.
- d. The tour and travel agency should have proper knowledge on the spots and they should be able to speak on it in such a way that the tourist automatically gets interested on it and look forward to visiting those places.
- e. The ATDC and Directorate of Tourism can approach the State with support of the tour and travel agencies to approach the central for increase of funding and change in their policies for developing states.

8. CONCLUSION

From the study it can be concluded that dark tourism is still in the developing stage and there is a wide scope for its upliftment. It is necessary that proper planning is required for generating awareness among tourists regarding dark tourist spots and the circumstances under which the incident have occurred. Further, in this age of digitalization, social networking can play an important role in uplifting dark tourism in Assam.

References

- [1] Shackley, M. (2002). Dark tourism: the attraction of death and disaster. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 4(2), 183.
- [2] Seaton, A. (1996) Guided by the dark: from thanatopsis to thanatourism. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 2(4), 234-244.
- [3] Sharples, R. (2005) Travels to the Edge of Darkness: Towards a Typology of Dark Tourism, in C. Ryan, et al (eds), *Taking Tourism to the Limits: Issues, Concepts and Managerial Perspectives*, Oxford: Elsevier, 217-228.
- [4]
- [5] Preece, T. T., & Price, G. (2005). Motivations of Participants in Dark Tourism A Case Study of Port Arthur, Tasmania, Australia.
- [6] Stone, P. R. (2006). A dark tourism spectrum: Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions. *Turizam: međunarodni znanstveno-stručni časopis*, 54(2), 145-160.
- [7] Bowman, M. S., & Pezzullo, P. C. (2009). What's so 'dark' about 'dark tourism'? Death, tours, and performance. *Tourist Studies*, 9(3), 187-202.
- [8] Verma, S., & Jain, R. (2013). Exploiting tragedy for tourism. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3(8), 9-13.
- [9] Garg, I.S. (2017). The Tragedy of Patharughat.
- [10] Retrived from
- [11] <http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2017/04/11/the-tragedy-of-patharughat/> at 12.35 AM on 03/06/2019
- [12] Few remember anti-British Phulaguri uprising 150 years ago. (2011, October 25) Retrived from <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/200319/few-remember-anti-british-phulaguri.html> at 12.40 AM on 03/06/2019
- [13] Kashyap, S.G. (2015). Few visitors to World War II cemetery on 70th anniversary of end of war
- [14] Retrived from <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/few-visitors-to-world-war-ii-cemetery-on-70th-anniversary-of-end-of-war/> at 12.45 AM on 03/06/2019
- [15] <https://gmda.assam.gov.in/portlet-sub-innerpage/saraighat-war-memorial-park-agyathuri>