

DARK TOURISM IN INDIA: ETHICAL CONCERNS, REGULATORY CHALLENGES, AND COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

Dr. Anila V. Menon*

Abstract

Dark tourism, or thanatourism, refers to travel to places associated with death, tragedy, and human suffering. Globally this is a category of tourism which is in vogue since decades but, the phenomenon remains underexplored in India despite the country's vast heritage of colonial violence, war, martyrdom, religious rituals surrounding death, and natural disasters. Sites such as JallianwalaBagh, the cremation ghats of Varanasi, the Bhopal Gas Tragedy memorial, Bhangarh Fort, and the tsunami memorials of Tamil Nadu illustrate India's layered relationship with grief, spirituality, and memory. This article analyzes dark tourism in India across three dimensions: ethical concerns, regulatory frameworks, and community perspectives. It demonstrates that while dark tourism offers educational and economic potential, it raises profound ethical dilemmas concerning commodification of suffering, exploitation of communities, and misrepresentation of history. The absence of a coherent national framework further compounds management challenges. Drawing upon case studies and global comparisons, the article argues for the creation of a national policy emphasizing dignity, inclusivity, and sustainability, alongside community engagement and responsible storytelling.

Keywords: *Community-Centred Heritage, Cultural Sensitivity, Dark Tourism, Ethical Tourism Practices, Memorial Governance, Tourism Regulation and Legislation,*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is often imagined by people as a celebration. This celebration could be wedding, graduation, fun holiday and many more. People prefer to visit sandy beaches, hill stations, valleys, architectural wonders, and vibrant festivals. Yet, alongside this imagery exists an alternative form of travel centred on tragedy, catastrophe, natural calamities and death.

Dark tourism—a term coined by John Lennon and Malcolm Foley in 2000—describes visits to sites associated with death, disaster, and atrocities.¹ Globally, dark tourism has become institutionalized through memorials such as Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland² known for its terror genocide concentration and extermination camp, Hiroshima's Peace Memorial, Genbaku Dome in Japan³, and the National September 11 Memorial in New York City.⁴ These spaces function both as commemorations of victims and as educational platforms for future generations. These also shows how societies' cope with trauma through heritage.

* Associate Professor, Sultan-UI-Uloom College of Law, Hyderabad

¹ John Lennon & Malcolm Foley, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (Continuum, London, 2000).

² Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, *History of Auschwitz*, available at: <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/history/> (last visited on July 12, 2025).

³ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, *Auschwitz Birkenau – German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp (1940–1945)*, available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/775/> (last visited on July 19, 2025).

⁴ V. Seaton, Guided by the Dark: From Thanatopsis to Thanatourism, 12 *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 234 (2006).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Also known as thanatourism, dark tourism has been extensively studied in the tourism literature across the globe as travel to destinations that are related to death, tragedy, and human suffering. The original ideas of Lennon and Foley theorized about dark tourism as a new phenomenon due to media influence, globalization, and group memory, and suggested that current societies were beginning to respond to past tragedies in a more tourism-driven way. Seaton elaborated this observation with the addition of a long-standing human fascination with death and introduced thanatourism as a link between personal remembrance at one end and systematic tourist consumption at the other.

The concept of the dark tourism spectrum as proposed by Philip Stone is a powerful instrument that allows analysing the difference between entertainment-based attractions and mass death and genocide sites. Tarlow develops this theme by pointing out the emotional, psychological and moral aspects of traveling to places of tragedy by explaining that dark tourism must be handled carefully in order to prevent voyeurism and trivialization.

A considerable amount of literature is dedicated to the ethical aspects of dark tourism. Lugosi and Seaton state that the central ethical issue is to strike the right balance between remembrance and commercialization, and that suffering should not be exploited to make money. Memorials like Auschwitz, which is recorded by both UNESCO and the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, have shown that a rigid visitor policy, storytelling, and a governing body can maintain dignity and still have people interact. International Coalition of Sites of Conscience also stresses the best practices, which anticipate the inclusion of victim narratives, historical objectivity, and community engagement.

Singh and others point to problems on the locations of historical tragedy, such as vulnerability to inadequate infrastructure, interpretive frameworks, and absence of ethical conduct dictums to visitor behavior. This tendency of simplifying complex historical trauma to a tourist spectacle is highlighted by Mishra in his analysis of Jallianwala Bagh. A study conducted by R. Singh on Hindu ritual spaces (cremation ghats in Varanasi) brings the special intersection of spirituality, sacred death, and tourism in India making traditional Western ideas of dark tourism unstable.

A number of researchers identify the regulatory gap in India. However, in contrast to international memorial sites which have specific legal and administrative bases, Indian dark tourism sites do not have standard operating procedures. As Dhattrak and Madireddy and Rao note, without legislation, there are inconsistencies in management, commercialization, and lack of ethics. Government documents like the statistics of Ministry of Tourism admit the rise of tourism but fail to discuss ethical management of tragedy related places.

The community is an important theme that appears in recent literature. Research indicates that engaging the local communities will make it more authentic, tell stories with respect, and share economic gains in an equitable manner. Cases (Bhopal, Amritsar, and Rajasthan) demonstrate the ability of local stories to maintain integrity in history, as well as create empathy. But researchers warn that communities will be marginalized in the absence of legal protection, despite the growth in tourism incomes.

Altogether, the literature demonstrates that there is a evident gap in India-specific, interdisciplinary research that combines ethics, law, and the community perspectives. Although global scholarship does provide strong theoretical and managerial frameworks, they need to be localized in India. This blank explains the reason the current study targets the creation of a consistent national framework based on dignity, inclusivity, sustainability, and responsible narratives.

This article follows a doctrinal research approach that will be based on the discussion of literature available, legal tools, policy guidelines and decisions by the courts and best practices in the tourism management and protection of heritage at the international level. The main data base is composed of secondary sources, i.e. books, peer-reviewed journals, reports of international organizations, and comparative case studies. The paper is a critical reflection on ethical standards and regulatory methods and offers a consistent model of responsible dark tourism within the context of the Indian market.

OBJECTIVES

This research paper will explore the idea of dark tourism (thanatourism) and its theoretical progression in the global tourism literature, as well as discuss the character and typologies of dark tourism locations in India in terms of historical violence, calamities, religious death practices, and memorial sceneries. It critically evaluates ethical problems of dark tourism in India and especially, the problems of commodification of suffering, dignity of sites and display of traumatic pasts. The paper also assesses current regulatory and governance loopholes in the operation of dark tourism attraction sites, and the contribution of the local communities in maintaining authenticity, influence narratives, and generating a sustainable economic value. Lastly, it offers policy informed recommendations on creating a responsible, ethical, and community-based model of dark tourism in India.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Globally dark tourism studies and research has developed rapidly since the 1990s. Lennon and Foley framed it as a distinctly modern phenomenon, linking it to globalization, consumer culture, and the commodification of death.⁵ Peter Lennon and Michael Foley were among the first researchers to study dark tourism, shedding light on why people are drawn to visit places linked to death, suffering, and disaster. These sites include historic battlefields, locations of natural catastrophes, or areas where mass tragedies occurred. Lennon and Foley highlighted that visiting dark tourism sites isn't always just about personal curiosity or remembering the past. Almost all of these sites are listed as must see places to visit mostly because of commercial interest. But there arose the question as to how to honour these sites and also educate about their destructive past. And also entertain visitors. Philip Stone and Richard Sharpley provided an equally valuable perspective when they assessed dark tourism from the perspective of thanatology, the study of death. They suggested that "dark tourism is not a uniform concept but rather a continuum". At one end, there are dilapidated prisons and ancient ceremonial battlegrounds. The sense of anguish is removed, and the suffering is but a distant memory. These sites are often lovingly curated and made "easy" for the visitors, the

⁵ Philip R. Stone, A Dark Tourism Spectrum: Towards a Typology of Death and Macabre Related Tourist Sites, Attractions and Exhibitions, *54Tourism: An Interdisciplinary International Journal* 145 (2006).

dark past very visibly ignored. On the opposite end, the sheer heaviness of the places is still very present, like Auschwitz or Hiroshima. In these places, visitors can still sense the weight of the tragedy, making the experience much more emotional and reflective.⁶ The objective of tourists and visitors are multifaceted. Some come for seeking adventure whereas others are interested in the historical perspective of the place. Another group of people come with an intention to learn from the place whereas another group will be for seeking spiritual knowledge. According to Peter Tarlow the emotions which are attached to dark tourism are insecurity, gratitude, humility, and resilience.⁷

The issues of managing dark tourism sites was explained by Peter Tarlow. He explained that, although many people visit these places for various reasons which are personal. It can be to learn the historical aspect of the site, reflect on the agony of human or pay their respects. Infact their emotions and reasons are directly connected with the way in which these sites are described. Tarlow stressed on the aspect that is vital to avoid turning tragedy into a place of entertainment. Instead, the focus should always remain on creating an atmosphere of respect and serenity, rather than dramatizing the suffering that occurred there.

Tarlow also pointed out that utmost care should be taken while handling the tourists who are visiting these sites. They must be provided in detail regarding the risks involved. For example, when tourists visit the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, they must follow strict safety protocols to prevent exposure to harmful radiation. At the same time, they receive carefully structured information about the nuclear disaster, ensuring their visit is both safe and meaningful. By combining safety measures with sensitive storytelling, visitors are able to engage with the history of the site in a way that is both educational and respectful, rather than exploitative.⁸

Worldwide the management of such tourist sites have adopted diverse approaches. Auschwitz maintains strict codes of visitor conduct to enforce solemnity and seoberness. Hiroshima emphasizes on how peace should prevail over violence. In Spain, Córdoba's cemetery which is a resting place of "famous families in Cordoba and ghost tours integrate dark heritage into mainstream cultural tourism".⁹

DARK TOURISM IN INDIA

India provides a uniquely complex context. Its cultural relationship with death is shaped by Hindu rituals of cremation, Buddhist meditations on mortality, Islamic traditions of martyrdom, Christian resurrection of the dead and the legacy of colonial oppression. From ancient battlefields like Kurukshetra and Panipat, Jalianwalabagh massacre, to modern tragedies like the 1984 Bhopal Gas Disaster, India's history is dotted with sites of grief and remembrance. Yet unlike Europe or Japan, India has not formally recognized dark tourism as a distinct role within its tourism policy.¹⁰

⁶ Peter Tarlow, Dark Tourism: The Appealing "Dark" Side of Tourism and More, in Marina Novelli (ed.), *Niche Tourism* 47 (Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford, 2007).

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ Tarlow, P. (2005). Dark tourism: The appealing "dark side" of tourism and more. In R. Sharpley & P. Stone (Eds.), *The darker side of travel: The theory and practice of dark tourism* (pp. 47–64). Channel View Publications.

⁹ International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, *Best Practices for Managing Sites of Tragedy* (2023).

¹⁰ Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, *Tourism Statistics at a Glance* (2022).

There are three interrelated questions: (1) What are the ethical issues associated with dark tourism in India? (2) How does India's regulatory landscape address, or fail to address, these issues? (3) How do local communities perceive and respond to dark tourism?

Study on thana tourism in India is limited. Some research examines colonial atrocity sites such as JallianwalaBagh and Cellular Jail as places of resistance and remembrance.¹¹ Other studies critique voyeurism at Varanasi's cremation ghats, where tourists intrude upon intimate rituals.¹² Haunted sites such as Bhangarh Fort have been analyzed in terms of heritage commercialization.¹³ The absence of systematic policy research underscores the gap between India's rich dark heritage and its underdeveloped management.

ETHICAL CONCERNS IN DARK TOURISM IN INDIA

In India, dark tourism involves visiting places connected to tragedy, suffering, or violence from the past. Some well-known examples are JallianwalaBagh, memorials for the Kutch earthquake, Kuldhara village and haunted forts like Bhangarh. These sites can help people learn about history, reflect on what happened, and remember those who suffered. However, they also raise tough questions. Sometimes, suffering is turned into something to sell, or the stories are exaggerated to attract more visitors. This will cause disrespect to the victims and their families, and take away the true connotation and importance of the place. Visiting such sites requires empathy, care, thoughtfulness, and reverence. Since India has a very rich and complex history, and its tourism is growing fast, it is especially important to handle these places with sensitivity and create awareness. A few ethical concerns are as follows.

Commercialization of Tragedy

The foremost ethical concern is commodification of tragedy. Memorials such as JallianwalaBagh were designed as solemn places of mourning, the rapid increase in the tourist visiting the site has the potential to trivializing them.¹⁴ JallianwalaBagh is a place of historical tragedy, where hundreds of innocent and unarmed people were killed during the brutal massacre in 1919 under the British regime. Many visitors come to the site seeking to understand this painful part of history and pay their respects. However, instead of being treated as a solemn place for reflection, the atmosphere is sometimes spoiled by souvenir shops, casual photography, and entertainment-focused activities. These untoward and unruly behaviours reduce the dignity of the site and turn it into just another place of tourist attraction. As per Peter Lennon and Michael Foley, the places connected to suffering should be experienced and visited with respect, not as places for fun or collecting mementos. JallianwalaBagh falls into the latter category, where the tragic past is still deeply felt. Peter Tarlow very clearly points out to the fact that such sites must be managed sensibly to prevent disrespect or exploitation. When people take selfies or buy trinkets, it shifts the focus away from remembering the victims toward treating the place as a regular attraction. This not only dishonors the memory of those who suffered but also misses the real purpose of visiting.

¹¹ Pankaj Mishra, Why JallianwalaBagh Is More than Just a Tourist Site, *The Hindu* (Apr. 13, 2020).

¹² R. Singh, Sacred Death and Spectacle: Thanatourism and Hindu Ritual Spaces in India, 14 *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 331 (2019).

¹³ M. Chatterjee, Dark Tourism in India: Opportunities and Challenges, *India Today* (2021).

¹⁴ Incredible India, *JallianwalaBagh, Amritsar*, available at: <https://www.incredibleindia.gov.in/en/punjab/amritsar/jallianwala-bagh> (last visited on Aug. 6, 2025).

Exploitation of Communities

Local communities often bear the burden of dark tourism. In Varanasi, cremation ghats are sacred, yet tourists frequently treat cremations as spectacles.¹⁵ In Varanasi, the cremation ghats along the banks of the Ganges are among the most sacred and spiritually significant places in India. For many, these ghats are a powerful reminder of life's temporariness and an important part of religious rituals that help the soul's journey after death. However, rather than approaching these sites with respect, some tourists treat the cremations as if they were a form of entertainment or a photo opportunity. They try to get some photos for the social media. They stand too close, take casual pictures, or behave as though they are witnessing a performance, the solemnity of the moment is lost. This shift in attitude reflects a growing tendency in dark tourism where places of deep suffering or sacred rites are approached with curiosity but without the necessary sensitivity. Undignified actions converts a much revered ritual into a debacle, which disrespects not only the traditions of the people but also the pious memory of those who have left the world. The ultimate goal behind these to give an opportunity to people to understand and reflect the importance of the aspect. But undisciplined and careless behavior is like mocking at the cultural and spiritual significance of the site. Similar concerns arise at disaster memorials where survivors fear their trauma is reduced to a tourist chronicle.

Visitor Behavior

The influx of Social media has made it easier for people to share what they see and do, but it has also led to more careless behavior at sacred and revered places.¹⁶ People give importance to clicking selfies, making reels for Instagram or tiktok etc. These type of activities are a common site at cremation ghats, as if these places are just fun spots to show off. Instead of observing silence and remaining respectful, many focus on creating videos which will get them likes or views. Instead of remembering the pain and the tearful history with care, such actions make them look trivial. These activities wipe away the importance and existence of the place and shows disrespect for the people who suffered or lost their lives.

Misrepresentation of History

The current trend is to sensationalize an incident or event to attract tourists for example Bhangarh Fort is marketed mainly for its suspected haunting.¹⁷ But in reality is a remarkable piece of Rajput architecture. But now its identity has chiefly been reduced to being "India's most haunted fort." The legends of curses, spirits, and mysterious happenings are constantly highlighted to draw curious visitors, but these tales often drown out the site's cultural and architectural significance.

Once upon a time the fort was a thriving centre with palaces, temples, and elaborate designs that showcased the grandeur of Rajput engineering and aesthetics. Its layout and

¹⁵ PrayagPandits, *ManikarnikaGhat: Where Death Meets Divinity*, available at: <https://prayagpandits.com/manikarnika-ghat-where-death-meets-divinity-unraveling-its-profound-mythological-roots/> (last visited on Aug. 14, 2025).

¹⁶ Peter Lugosi & A. V. Seaton, *The Ethics of Dark Tourism* (Routledge, London, 2018).

¹⁷ International Journal of Emerging Multidisciplinary Research, *Article on Dark Tourism*, available at: <https://ijemr.vandanapublications.com/index.php/j/article/view/1690/1573> (last visited on Aug. 21, 2025).

craftsmanship speak to the legacy of a bygone era, yet this heritage rarely receives the same visibility as the ghost stories attached to it. When narratives become too rooted in sensationalism, there is a danger that the true historical context is forgotten, leaving future generations with only half-truths built for commercial gain.

REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

India is one of the most important tourist destinations in the world. But dark tourism is in its infant stage. The regulatory mechanism is absent which throws up various challenges in the ethical and sustainable development arena. When compared to the mainstream tourism, there are no tailor made national policies or guidelines governing dark tourism sites. These sites are gaining popularity and need to be regulated. There are many impediments which have to be answered.

Absence of National Guidelines

In India, dark tourism has not yet been officially recognized as a separate section of tourism by the Ministry of Tourism. Unlike other important types such as eco-tourism or medical tourism, there are no lucid and clear policies, no training programs, or management systems in place for these sensitive destinations. Hence the way these sites are managed varies a lot from one place to another. At some sites, there are strict rules about how visitors should behave or whether photography is allowed, but in many other cases, there are no guidelines at all. The absence of guidelines can sometimes lead to disrespectful actions by visitors or even unsafe conditions. Additionally, since dark tourism lacks official status. Most often these places don't receive enough funding, proper advertisement as well as promotion, or well-prepared educational materials that could help people understand and reflect on their visits in a meaningful way.

Site-Specific Rules

Every dark tourism site has their own rules and guidelines. For example, Bhangarh Fort, one of the most haunted village, does not allow visitors after sunset. This is to keep the people safe as the local beliefs about spirits roaming at night.¹⁸ Jallianwala Bagh, the site of the tragic 1919 massacre, prohibits commercial activities like souvenir stalls in order to maintain the solemn and sober atmosphere of the memorial. In Rajasthan, the abandoned village of Kuldhara limits access to certain ruins to protect the delicate structures and preserve the mystery behind its sudden abandonment long ago. In the Bhopal Gas Tragedy site in Madhya Pradesh people are denied access to certain areas due to contamination concerns and efforts to maintain the memorial. While these individual efforts are important, enforcement is almost difficult as many visitors don't fully understand why such restrictions are provided. Because of lack of clear guidelines the people do not understand these.

Infrastructure Deficiencies

Poor infrastructure is a major issue in these sites. This in turn affects both visitor safety and their ability to understand the significance of these places. At Kuldhara, for instance, "visitors

¹⁸ Monomousumi, *Bhangarh Fort, Rajasthan: History and Mystery*, available at: <https://monomousumi.com/bhangarh-fort-rajasthan-history-mystery-behind-indias-most-haunted-village/> (last visited on Aug. 28, 2025).

walk through narrow, crumbling pathways and dilapidated walls without any protective barriers or clear signs that explain the village's mysterious past". Bhangarh Fort, has only minimal lighting and it doesn't have information centers. The visitors wander the ruins without any background about the site. The Bhopal Gas Tragedy memorial does not offer enough exhibitions or information boards to help people understand the massive destruction this gas leak caused, and that some areas are still hazardous due to leftover chemical contamination. Even Jallianwala Bagh does not provide detailed explanations or guides to help visitors connect with the tragic events that took place there. Without these essential facilities and pointers, these important sites run the risk of becoming just an ordinary tourist spots, instead of being the meaningful places for learning, reflection, and paying tribute.

Global Examples

World over numerous dark tourism sites offer valuable examples as to how to manage sensitive places with care and respect. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial in Japan offers a well structured educational programs that focus on peace and the dangers of nuclear weapons. This approach allows visitors not only to connect emotionally but also to understand the historical and political context of the site. Auschwitz in Poland is another example where strict rules are imposed on the visitor's behavior and they insist on the use of guided tours, making sure that people approach the site with the seriousness and solemnity it deserves. These global illustrations highlight the importance regarding the combination of clear rules, strong educational efforts, and reverential management is necessary to provide a well deserving experience to the visitor.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

The communities which are in these localities play a vital role in dark tourism because they are directly connected to the places and events that are being visited. Their insights highlight tensions between economic benefits and cultural sensitivities. These communities are often sandwiched between the opportunities that the tourism brings and the risks it poses to cultural values and historic dignity. Most of the time their life styles are also changed because of the incursion of the tourists. Their perspectives are essential for developing tourism practices that are both respectful and sustainable.

Cultural Sensitivity

Most often visitors can unintentionally cause discomfort or offense when they treat tragic or sacred sites casually. Their actions can be an insult. For example in Amritsar, families express distress when tourists treat JallianwalaBagh as just a sightseeing location, disregarding its solemn significance as a site of massacre and remembrance. Similarly, in Varanasi, priests and localities are perturbed when tourists take photos of cremation rituals along the ghats, which are religious, personal and sacred acts. Such behavior can disrupt the spiritual atmosphere of the site and diminish its historical and emotional meaning. Communities stress the importance of educating visitors about appropriate conduct to maintain respect for traditions and memories.¹⁹

¹⁹ S. P. Dhatriak, *Ethical Considerations in Indian Dark Tourism* (2020), available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/> (last visited on Sept. 2, 2025).

Economic Opportunities

Cultural sensitivities versus economic benefits are important in dark tourism. “Vendors, guides, and small businesses at sites such as the Kargil War Memorial, Jallianwala Bagh, and Kuldhara rely on tourism for their livelihoods”.²⁰ Tourism creates jobs, encourages entrepreneurship, and supports the local economy. For many residents, visitor flows translate into direct income and social development. However, the challenge is to ensure that economic gains do not come at the cost of disrespecting local customs or the history of these sites. There should be a proper balance between financial benefits with ethical tourism so that it leads to sustainable development.

Concerns about Misrepresentation

Local communities also worry that the stories and histories of their sites are exaggerated or distorted for tourist appeal. At abandoned sites like Kuldhara and haunted forts such as Bhangarh, legends are sometimes sensationalized, which overshadows authentic history. Residents fear that such misrepresentation trivializes the significance of these places, reducing them to entertainment rather than sites of remembrance. Misinterpretation of local history can lead to resentment among communities who feel their heritage is being exploited for commercial gain rather than honored.²¹

Advocacy for Involvement

Communities increasingly demand participatory governance in managing dark tourism sites. They want to be involved in decisions about how sites are presented, how visitor flows are managed, and how benefits are shared. In Bhopal, for instance, locals stress the importance of incorporating survivors’ voices when interpreting the tragedy for visitors. In Jallianwala Bagh, residents advocate for careful management to ensure the memory of victims is preserved.²² By including local communities in planning and decision-making, tourism can be made more respectful, educational, and sustainable. Participation ensures that economic benefits do not overshadow ethical considerations and cultural respect.

CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

Dark tourism in India is an intersection of history, memory, culture, and commerce. India’s vast and diverse history offers an exceptional collection of sites which can be classified under dark tourism. Jallianwala Bagh is an instance whereby many local families feel anxious about the treatment of the site by tourists who foolishly take selfies, chat, and treat the site like a park. They forget that it is a site which needs reverence as it is a memorial for the hundreds of people who lost their life during the massacre of 1919. In Varanasi, similar incidents take place. Tourists take photographs of cremation rituals and take selfies with the local priests and families. The unrestrained circulation of these photographs on social media desensitizes these sacred traditions, converting an instance of loss and mourning into a parade.

²⁰ M. Madireddy & R. N. Rao, Potential Assessment of Dark Tourism in India, *International Journal of Management* (2018).

²¹ S. Singh et al., Dark Tourism in India: Challenges at Sites of Historical Tragedy, *HMCT Research Journal* (2016).

²² S. P. Dhatriak, Ethical Considerations in Indian Dark Tourism (2020), available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/> (last visited on Sept. 9, 2025).

The villages of Kuldhara and the Bhangarh Fort are surrounded by myths and ghost stories. These myths are again improvised to suit the situation and more points are added whenever necessary so that people find them more interesting. Most of the people living nearby feels that the rich history of the villages have become a source of entertainment and has lost its historical value.

One of the key ways to move in the direction of ethical dark tourism is including the local communities in planning such destinations. When local citizens are involved in the decisions about planning, the manner in which a destination presents itself to travelers can more accurately represent its actual significance. In Bhopal, for instance, survivor input has played a crucial role in determining how the tragedy has been remembered. Their presence makes sure that the memorial does its job: educating tourists to the tragedy and remembering its martyrs, without making it a commercial outlet. Likewise, in Amritsar, local opposition has underlined the importance of keeping JallianwalaBagh as a memory space and not an entertainment complex. This method not only provides the host population with a feeling of ownership and pride but also serves to ensure that the tourists are encouraged to act respectfully and appreciate the underlying significance of the location.

Dark tourism infrastructure and management in India are mainly inadequate. Unlike eco-tourism or medical tourism, India does not have standardized national policies on dark tourism at present. At most of these locations, the visitor are welcomed with poor signage, limited or no educational resources, and unsafe conditions, and it makes it difficult for the visitors to connect with the history at an intellectual level. Without specific visitor protocols or safety regulations, most visitors use these places to use it as a background for their photographs.

There are lessons foreign models can provide. Memorials such as Auschwitz in Poland, Hiroshima in Japan, or the 9/11 Memorial in America have guided tours, set codes of behavior, and provide packages that enable the visitor to internalize the seriousness of events that transpired there. India can borrow some of those for its own circumstances but be careful not to disrespect local religious, cultural, and spiritual sentiments. Offering guided tours, unambiguous behavioral standards, and well-planned information boards will have a significant impact on how people visit such significant places, allowing them to think about the past instead of just watching it.

In the long run, dark tourism in India has the potential to foster greater social responsibility and historical awareness, if managed with care. It offers visitors an opportunity not only to witness history but to understand the suffering and resilience of the people behind it. With thoughtful planning, clear ethical frameworks, and active community involvement, India's dark tourism can evolve into a meaningful journey—one that goes beyond selfies and legends to honor memory, promote learning, and preserve dignity for generations to come.

CONCLUSION

In India, the future of dark tourism really depends on finding the right balance between ethics, education, and community involvement. It is really essential for visitors to distinguish and understand that places like JallianwalaBagh, the cremation ghats of Varanasi, and the

Bhopal Gas Tragedy memorial are not places of amusement and click photographs. They are spaces for memory, reflection, and learning, wherein the history teaches a lesson.

There is no doubt that dark tourism brings in revenue to the country. When more tourists visit these sites it creates more livelihood opportunities for the people living in and around these sites like artisans, guides, home stays eateries etc. Take Kuldhara and the Kargil War Memorial, for example; they show how tourism can provide essential income and growth for local residents. But what has to be understood and implemented is that these economic advantages do not come at the expense of sensitivity and sanctity of the place. Sustainable development in this area should strive for a thoughtful balance communities benefit and the dignity of the sites remains intact.

Active involvement of local communities is an important factor in keeping dark tourism authentic. The local residents are the right people who can help in showcasing the site to the world, managing the site and guiding the visitors. In places like Bhopal, Amritsar, and Rajasthan, the contributions of local communities have played an important role. Their valuable inputs and suggestion helped to keep the narratives regarding the place intact and accurate. It also helped in establishing suitable guidelines for visitor conduct and the upkeep of the area. The people take pride in preserving their heritage as well as maintain the empathy.

Equally crucial is handling the infrastructure and management issues which acts as a hurdle for the development of dark tourism. Many sites still fall short in terms of proper signage, safety protocols, and guided experiences which has the potential to increase the visitors' understanding of the history of that place. International examples like Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and the 9/11 Memorial illustrate how organized tours, clear visitor guidelines, and well-crafted educational programs can lead visitors toward thoughtful reflection. India can certainly adopt similar strategies, but it's important to adapt these models to resonate with its unique cultural, spiritual, and historical landscape. By merging local insights, strong ethical standards, and thoughtfully designed infrastructure, India can cultivate a dark tourism sector that educates visitors, honors its past, and uplifts communities—all while maintaining dignity and respect.

The time has come wherein there is a need for clear legislation to regulate dark tourism in India. As of now there are no formal rules or consistent standards governing how these sites are managed. This legal gap often leads to inconsistent management, with some places left poorly maintained or visitors engaging in disrespectful behaviors. Enacting proper laws could make a huge difference by setting clear expectations—for example, requiring that tragic sites be treated with dignity rather than turned into commercial attractions. It could also establish safety protocols, mandate the availability of educational resources, and ensure local communities have a say in how sites are run. Proper legislation would create a more consistent and responsible approach, safeguarding India's history and cultural heritage while still allowing communities to benefit through tourism.

By carefully weaving together ethical management, well-thought-out infrastructure, strong educational efforts, and active community engagement, India has the opportunity to turn its

dark tourism sector into something truly meaningful. Rather than being a superficial attraction or a source of controversy, dark tourism can become a platform that helps people connect to the past, reflect on human experiences, and leave with a deeper sense of empathy, respect, and understanding—while local communities grow socially and economically in harmony with this vision.