



# Assessment of Dark Tourism and its Merchandising

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**Abstract.** This research finds the economic impact of dark tourism, focusing on destinations associated with tragedy, death, and suffering. Contrary to conventional beliefs surrounding positive destination branding, this study questions whether dark tourism can emerge as economically impactful tourist destinations. Employing a quantitative approach based on Multi Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA), the research aims to analyze factors and options defining the profitability and sustainability of such destinations. The case study of Amritsar, particularly the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919, serves as a poignant example to understand the economic dynamics of dark tourism. The research contributes original insights into the less-explored economic dimensions of dark tourism, unique perspective on the specific challenges and attractions associated with Amritsar, providing valuable contributions to academic discussions on dark tourism. The study highlights the economic viability of dark tourism, challenging preconceived notions and highlighting the potential for these destinations to be economically impactful. The case study of Amritsar showcases the enduring impact of historical tragedies on a destination and offers insights into effective management practices. The findings suggest that dark tourism can be a lucrative and sustainable sector, provided careful consideration is given to various factors influencing visitor experience and destination management. The research encourages a reevaluation of public perception and policymaking regarding dark tourism, offering a nuanced understanding of its economic implications. Ultimately, this study enriches our comprehension of the complex phenomenon of dark tourism, providing a foundation for further research and informed decision-making in the tourism industry.

**Keywords:** Dark tourism, sustainable tourism, economic benefits, attractions, performance.

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M. Sharma et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Innovation and Regenerative Trends in Tourism and Hospitality Industry (IRTHI 2024)*, Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research 285,

[https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-437-2\\_16](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6463-437-2_16)

## 1. Introduction

Where there is life, there is death. This is a very uncomfortable truth, but it is globally known and accepted. The entire human race is obsessed with death, ritual manifestation and many other customs. In the year 1996 by Lennon and Foley, the term made its entry to the academic forum concerning tourist spaces broadly concerned with death, pain, disaster and suffering [2]. The entire concept of dark tourism is gaining the academic attention, achieving more heed from the media and is also becoming a permeating feature of the popular culture. It goes without denying, the intrigue with the phenomenon is very evident when the total number of visitors are being explored at the sites and the attractions that are there along with the dark tourism. Along with the increase in the interest among the visitors, concerns are also being raised in the literature over the consideration of ethics which are analogous with the dark tourism. Specially, the objections were raised related to the morals which are corresponding to the business of dark tourism. It was accused by many scholars of reification of the dead and kindling espionage [1].

Academic examination of dark tourism has shown many results such as emerging out of various studies across numerous disciplines especially in the section of social science. Being specific, a little research has been carried away in this segment with the viewpoint of business and management. The various researches on dark tourism mainly focuses upon the probe of tourist consumption behavior such as the battlefield studies [1]. The growing interest can be a new trend in the field of tourism as it majorly depends upon the locations, the crimes that have taken place in the past, the suffering, the mass destruction that took place and many more incidents which depict the negative aspects of life. Such a kind of tourism can be a combination of history and consumer aspect of tourism which enables a person to imagine him or herself as a part of history.

Dark Tourism has already become a popular product throughout the entire globe; however, it is still lacking that exposure which it should get. This could be because of the reason of lack of knowledge regards to this particular segment. This has created a space within the research fraternity. However, there exists an ethical problem with the

dark tourism. He described that dark tourism might result to the exploitation for business, entertainment or education sectors [20]. He portrayed the empathetic nature of dark tourism which creates severe challenges to the practitioners [4]. To add to this, he also suggested avoiding the sites with dark culture for various ethical reasons. Dark tourism associated sites can bring negative thoughts and displeasure among tourists but the other dark tourism components such as museums can bring handful experience and quality education in a more designated manner [11].

## **2. Review of Literature**

The tourism industry is such well-integrated that can contribute to the economic and socio-development vehemently for a country or particular destination. On the contrary, it can also have a huge negative impact if not managed properly. The term “Dark Tourism” was first coined to expound the correlation between dark tourism attractions and a typical interest in death, massacre paranormal activities [2]. A debate circling the dark tourism correlates to the fact that whether it is supply driven or forced by the demands. From the supplier perspective, stress is being given on organizations that provide with the experience. However, on the other side, demand is focused on the consumer participation. The supply section tries to define and classify continuously on some specific attributes of the sites of dark tourism and brings up a demonstrative understanding. In argue, there are superfluity of sites and experiences around the globe which could be subjected as the trafficker of dark tourism. This has opened a number of places for consideration under the dark tourism [1]. The maximum of the research and study concerned with this angle opt for a qualitative stance using the case studies. It also includes the theory papers based on concepts. Previous attempts were already made to classify the dark tourism into various shades. There have been attempts to segment them into dark, darker and darkest. These concepts don’t stand tall because of lack of evidence in the empirical format but they can at least assist in drawing up the clear picture and grab the phenomenon [9].

Along with the fascination of Dark tourism there were also many questions which rose in the discussions. The focus of these questions was generally on the ethics of humanity i.e., whether it is right or wrong to think of profits sitting on the pile of

death [12]. This topic has been discussed several times in the last couple of decades among the specialists. The debate expanded to a higher and not only stayed as a point of research in the academic division. World Tourism Organization intervened with some protocols and norms to follow. The major focus was to expand the benefits and minimize the negativity [19].

The (See Fig. 1) below will narrate the different shades of the dark tourism. It will also show the deviation like the darker shades is generally associated with the education and the lighter shades are for the purpose of entertainment [21]. It is notable that the location of Dark Tourism is not constant all the time and can shift to another place also. The different categories come with their basic specifics and are also separated from one another. However, in case of Dark tourism, it could be an amalgamation of various shades which might rise up the heat and cause tensions [10].

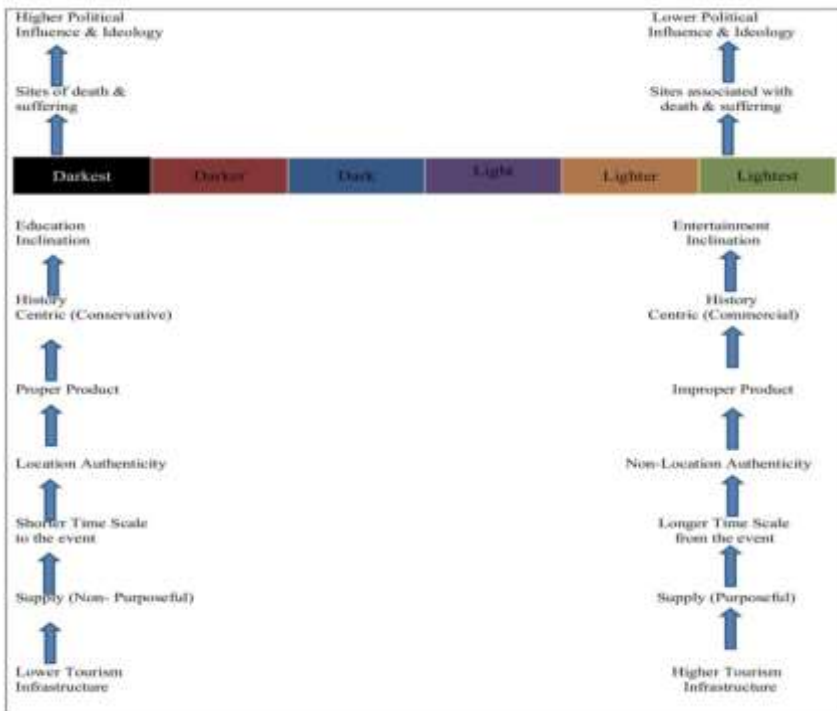


Fig. 1: Diagram represents the different shades of the dark tourism

The amount of research done on Dark Tourism in India is comparatively very less than other countries. Some of the potential research study has been carried out with

particular locations but there are lots of scopes left in this range [13]. Famous researchers like Stone, Seaton & Lennon debated that majority of the content available for the Dark Tourism has the supply side of the industry as its centre of attention. The question and inquiry as to why people are attracted towards the death, mass massacres and atrocities open more room for further studies and exploration [5]. The present literature is a very new development which shows light on the bridge between the ethics and Dark Tourism. Ethical behaviour is gaining more recognition while the visits to places of Dark Tourism. Giving a scant notice to the management concepts which are depicted as prominent blanks in the literature, the research paper also gives an attempt to explore the theories of innovation, marketing, repeat visits and interpretation of the visitors at the sites of Dark Tourism [14]. There have been instances in some parts of the world which were highlighted by the media regards to the inappropriate snaps that were taken and posted in the social media platforms. There are many other examples of this type which has mentioned the soft corner of the human emotions and the way to behave while visiting such a destination. Anita Isalska has written many articles mentioning the parameters to follow while visiting places of dark tourism [15]. She has mentioned the ways to experience the dark tourism places in ethical ways and not to harm the sentiments of various religions or sections of the society. Most of the people would show the accord that this kind of a reluctant behavior is not acceptable and some of them might require a constant monitoring or mentioning of the protocols [16]. Digital narcissism was also observed when people started taking selfies with him or her as the main focus in such places. These pictures don't depict of showing respect rather they are just to create awareness that the person has been to that place[18].

The below (**See Fig. 2**) diagram shows the diversity perspective of the model of dark tourism consumption. A quantitative number of research areas have shown the demand side examination corresponding to dark tourism. Following the trends, a number of research examinations can take place which will strengthen the knowledge and deepen the education & research pertaining to this field [17]. The concept has been copiously viewed from the perspective of organizations and psychology. The entire phenomenon does possess the strength to create the bonding and also further dig into how the concept of dark tourism can serve as an intercede affair between the

dead and those alive outside the graveyards and other funeral places. Adaptation of a multi-faceted approach can actually diversify the understanding and would also possess a challenge to the current and ongoing beliefs in the literature circle [22].



**Fig. 2:** Diagram represents the diversity perspective of the model of dark tourism consumption

### 3. Research Methodology

The research doesn't have any target audience which indicates that there are no restrictions on the age group, community, income, education or any other demographic traits. A total of 160 respondents, 89 were males and 71 were females. So, there was an equivalent participation of both the genders in the survey. It could be inferred that nowadays; women are actively participating in such research-based works which shows that they are proactive in the social media platforms and are also eager to vote for such research-based surveys. However, it should also be taken into account that not all the 160 responses were recorded. There were 23 applications which were discarded because they were not filled fully. Hence, 137 responses were analyzed and assessed. It was also seen that people from all round the corner of the country have participated in the survey and it was not only restricted to Punjab or Northern India only [6]. Both categories of people was taken into consideration i.e., people who have visited at least one place of dark tourism and that section which has not been to such place yet because both the group could assist us with different types

of information. The group which has already paid visit to dark tourism places can provide us with the discernment about how people actually act reacts and interacts with the surrounding [7]. The group which has not yet visited can throw some light on the reason of not being there or if they haven't been there just by chance then which place, they would prefer to visit in the nearest time. Out of the total, 38 have never visited any dark tourism places yet whereas the rest of them have. The 23 discarded applications are considered to be missing because they have ended the survey without completing the entire set of questions.

The questions have been set in a little different format using the Qualtrics survey tool. This is new and innovative tool used which would segregate questions according to the provided answers. This means when a respondent answer that he/ she have been to a place of dark tourism then he/ she would one set of questions and the other group would get a second set of questions. The pattern has been shown in the next diagram in (See Fig. 3) to help the understanding. After preparation of the questionnaire, it was run through some practice to check whether it was running fine or not irrespective of the selection of choices. Then it was published online through social media and via some personal channels also. The flowchart has been presented below in (See Fig. 3) which would help in a better understanding. Those who participated in the survey were also requested to share it which automatically created a rolling stone effect and increased the number of respondents. Online format improved the participation by connecting with people from different domains and demographics. The online survey helped us to get the results in a quick time because it was very easy for the respondents to submit their views over smart phones. WhatsApp and LinkedIn were the social media platforms that were used gather the responses because these two platforms attract more and more traffic on a daily basis. These platforms helped us to get the survey passed from one to another and gather a greater number of responses [2].

The fast advancement of technology and a low-cost computing has actually created a conducive atmosphere to conduct surveys and research. It is actually beneficial to use social media platforms where in a short time we can reach out to many persons and also follow the anonymity. The questionnaire would actually take around 8-10 minutes to fill which is very feasible for any person and can be very easily done using

a phone. However, we must also consider that these kinds of distribution also have limitations. Not all uses internet connection and not every person is so flair with the technology although if approached in a different way then we can find something very fruitful from him or her. Adding to this, an online survey also gives the highest opportunity for any individual to stop and quit it at point of time without citing any reasons. Irrespective all these, still we felt to move ahead with the online questionnaires because this would provide with more scopes to get views of people who can be located anywhere and give us their unbiased viewpoints. As there is still a practice among the population of distancing due to COVID so it was better decided to go online else than preferring the offline mode (See Fig. 3).

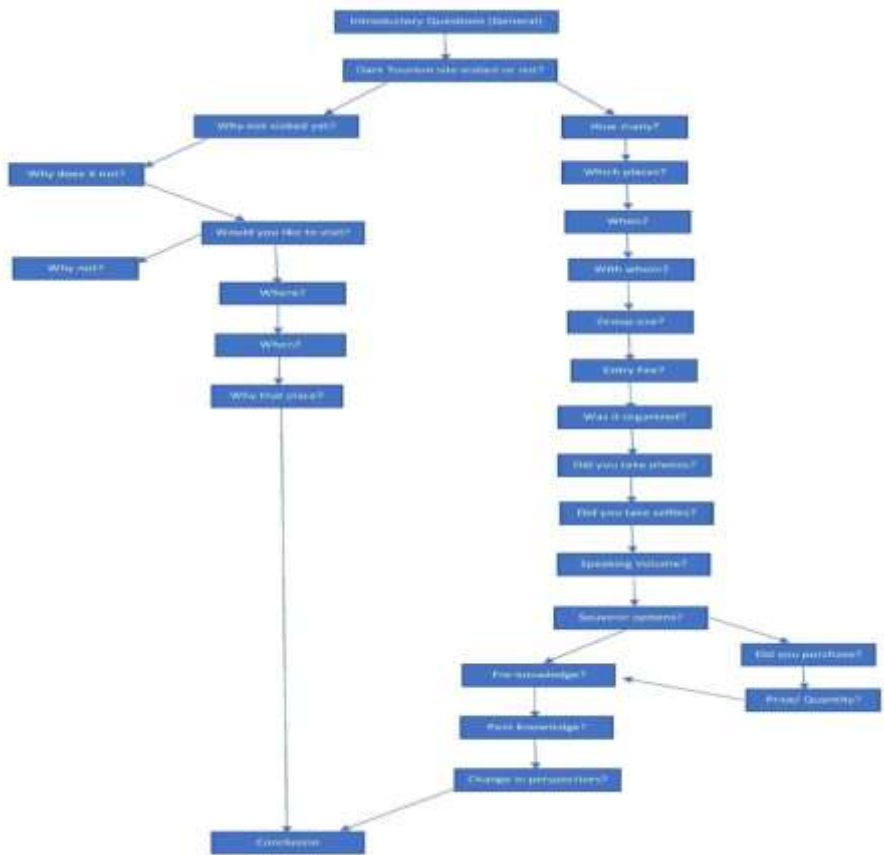
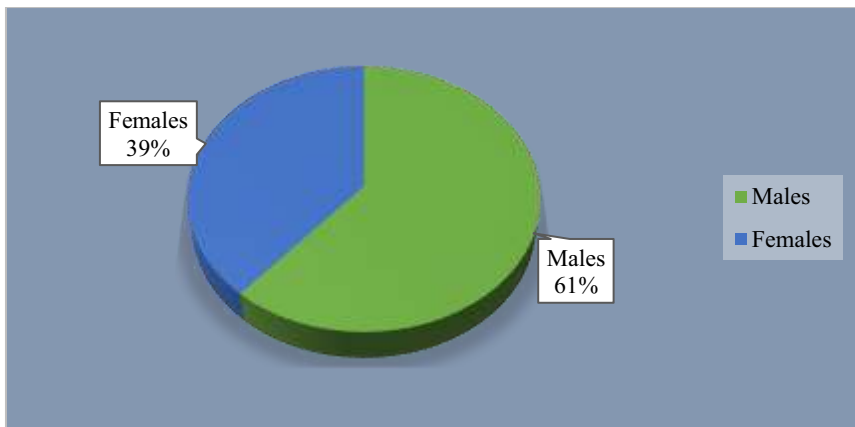


Fig. 3: Diagram represents the research flow chart and questionnaire



#### 4. The Statistics

A sum total of 137 responses were taken into account as 23 responses were filled improperly. Out of this 137, 76 responses were filled with the LinkedIn platform however the rest of 61 were filled with via WhatsApp. The left out 23 responses were not at all considered for calculation because till the completion the views might have varied. The below (See Fig. 4) diagram represents the blend of the gender who participated in the survey.



**Fig. 4:** Diagram represents the blend of the gender who participated in the survey

We could find that males were 84 and females were 53 which stand at 61% and 39% respectively. We could see that the female participation is increasing as they are more active in social media platforms and also eager to participate in such surveys which also mark a significant contribution towards the society.

The next question was related to the age of the respondent which we have tried to depict with bar graphs and tried to categorize as per age group to see the involvement of which group is more. We were able to analyse that the dark tourism places are of more interesting to the people who are above the age of 60. This might have a different to explore all the way. As and when a person retires, the history and the literature attract him or her more than any other age because they get more engrossed in the books and other articles. The mid-age is driven by several other daily activities and hence the dark tourism or the knowledge of books gets missing from their

dictionary. The youths of this generation showed a fair involvement in the survey which points out that they are quite aware of it and also seek interest in (See Fig. 5).

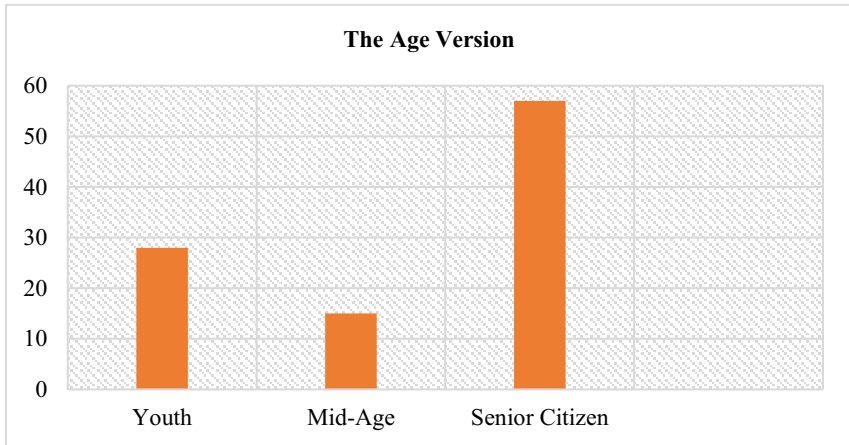


Fig.5: The Age Version

The respondents were then asked about the highest level of education that they had finished. Below in (See Fig. 6) is the metrics represented in the graphical format. Majority of the responses showed that they have completed the master’s degree in various fields. We could not find any person below the basic education. From this we could analyse that might be those are the persons who did not complete the survey and left before.



Fig. 6: The Qualification Level

The above (See Fig. 6) showed a good equation which symbolizes that the education level of the country is also on a raise. The next was to find out with whom the people preferred to travel in the dark tourism places in (See Fig. 7). This is a sensitive matter because it shows the intention of a traveller. The composition of the group identifies the focus and it carries a huge significance.

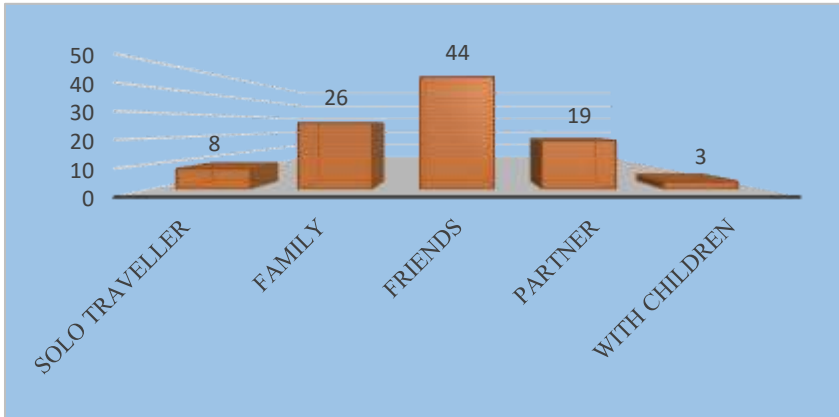


Fig. 7: Composition of the Group

It is very important to actually find out the region or part of the country which is more inclined towards the dark tourism places. Hence, it was necessary to find out from which places these people belong to check the sense of awareness among the population. Following is the data in (See Fig. 8) that resembles which section of the country is more interested towards the dark tourism sites.

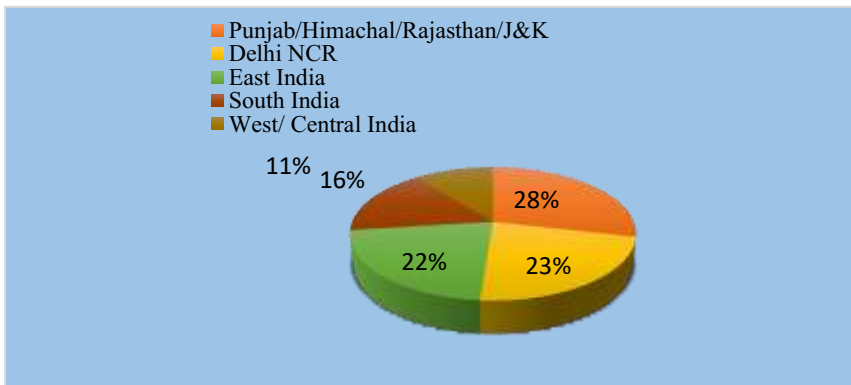
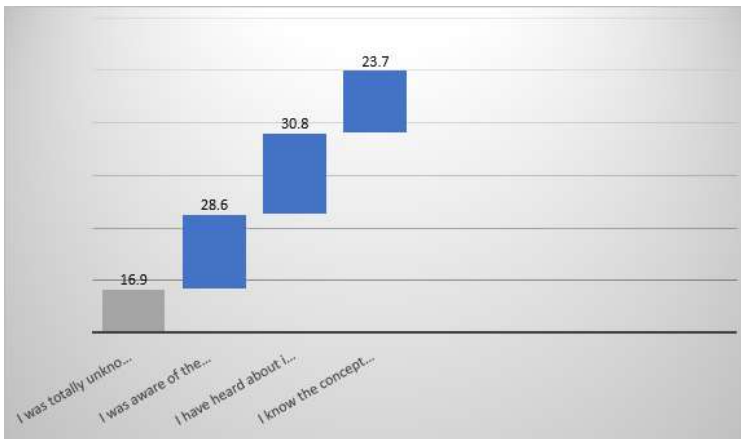


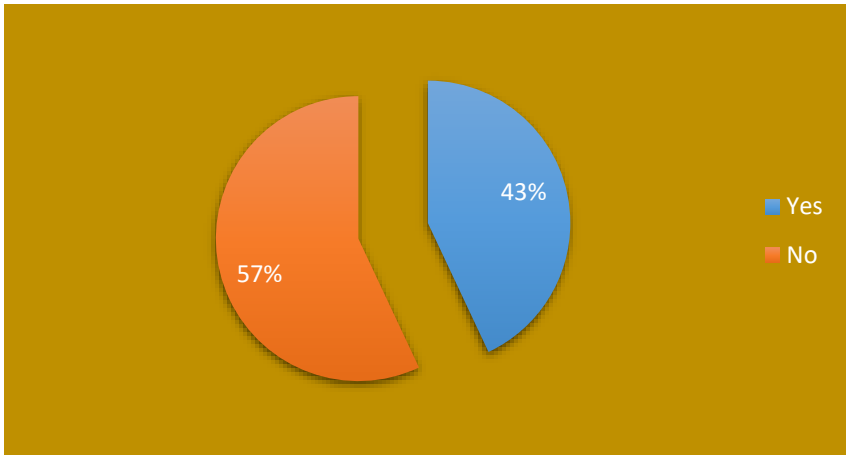
Fig. 8: Awareness of the Location

From the above (See Fig. 8), it is easily depicted that maximum of the country is well aware of the location of Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar and majority of the respondents have visited the place. The next question was very important with the context of the literature of the dark tourism site and how many have the in-depth knowledge of it in (See Fig. 9). Many times, we find tourists hover to places without having a proper knowledge about the site. For a scenic beauty spot, it is fine but for a place holding significance of history is not justified specially in case of dark tourism. That is the reason this question was a must ask. The responses were recorded as follows in (See Fig. 9).



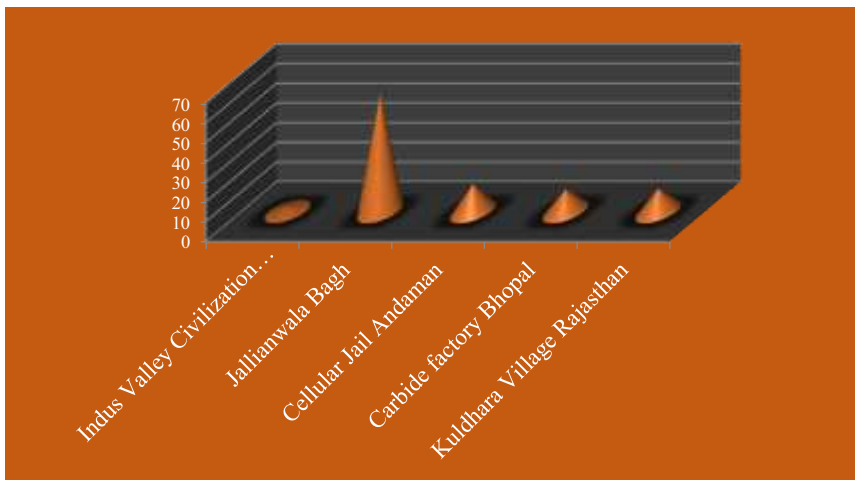
**Fig.9:** Knowledge about the site

Below mentioned (See Fig. 10) shown how many people said “Yes” with regards to the visit to the site of the dark tourism place that is the point of our research in this paper. The answer “No” was also received but the count was higher with the former. As already clear from the above pictogram that the concept of Dark Tourism is still not that famous with the population, still knowingly or unknowingly many people have visited the place and gained some amount of knowledge related to it. With the current rate of education in the entire country, this is a commendable statistic that was achieved. We can definitely be rest assured that the people who have gone through the survey without any knowledge pertaining to it must have studied about the topic after their own responses. This is a topic that can pull a lot of interest and much of it is unexplored till date in (See Fig. 10).



**Fig. 10:** Visit to the site of the dark tourism place

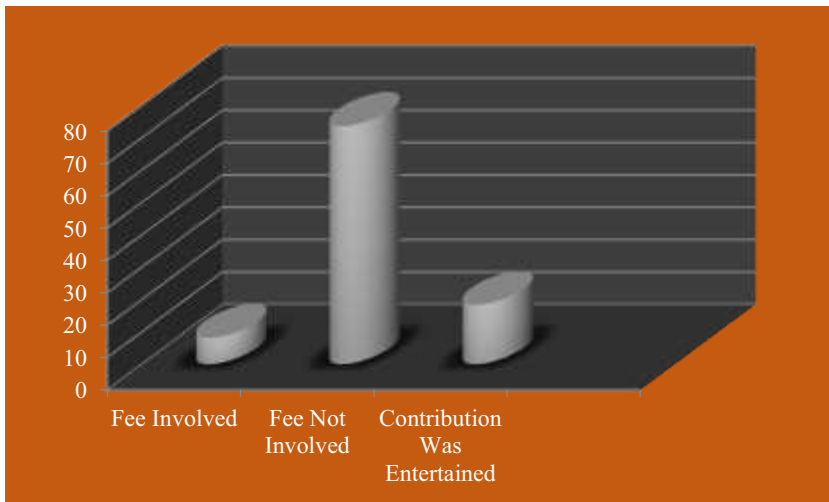
The next question is of course a subset of the main question set that was asked to the respondents in (See Fig. 11). They were given a choice five different sites of dark tourism and were asked about which of them comes to their mind first when they think of dark tourism. The answer was quite relevant to the study because maximum of the people has voted for Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar. The credit might go to the history books, but the result was quite satisfactory when it comes to the research.



**Fig. 11:** Thinking of Dark Tourism Places

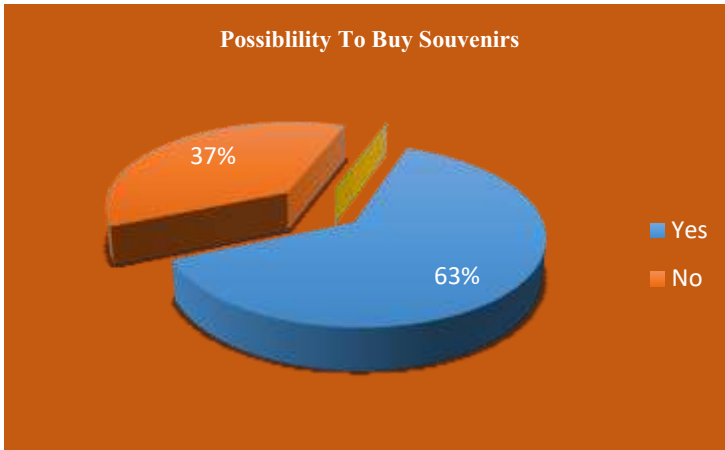
The Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar (dark tourism site) received more than 60% of the entire response. This is clear indication of the popularity of this place with regards to the massacre that took place more than a century ago.

One more significant question was asked to them that whether they were charged any fee or not. It is ethically incorrect to earn profit from any place of dark tourism but at the same time it also should be taken into account that a continuous restoration work must be done in such places. That can be a viable reason of charging fees to enter such places. However, it must be mentioned that Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar does not charge any fee from its visitors, so the majority have responded with “NO” in (See Fig. 12).



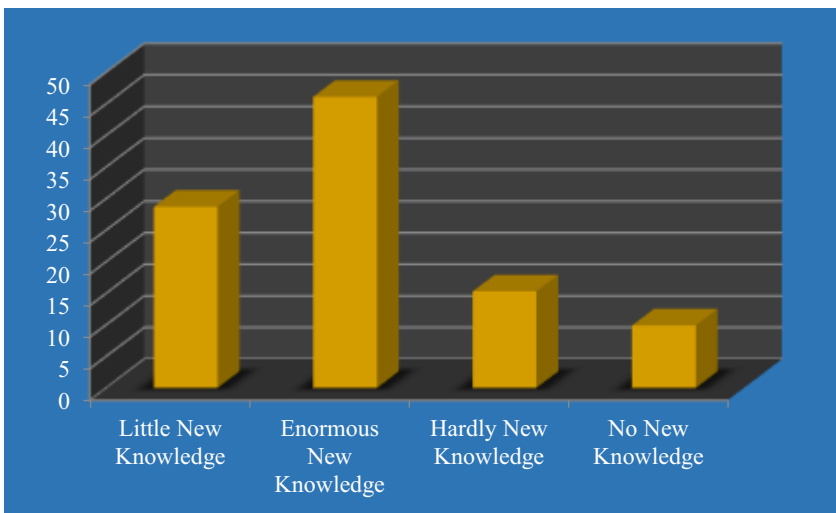
**Fig. 12:** About Contribution

The next query was about the possibility to buy any souvenir in (See Fig. 13). This question had a direct and closed end reply option and went well with the respondents also. There are many tourists who look out for souvenirs and this was meant especially for them. A souvenir helps a tourist to remember the site for a lifetime and also helps to build the economy of that place. It can be anything, a small book or diary or it can be any object also.



**Fig. 13:** Possibility to buy souvenirs

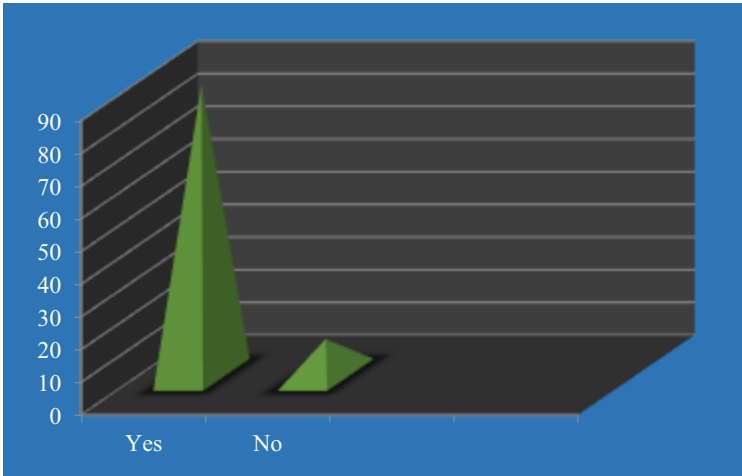
The next was a keen question about the knowledge enhancement of the tourist who has visited the spot. The following was the result for the same in (See Fig. 14).



**Fig. 14:** Knowledge enhancement of the tourist who has visited the spot

The most sensitive and infectious question's feedback lies beneath.

“Have you taken selfies”? (See Fig. 15) The answer was something expected in today's date, but it is also very shocking that a site of dark tourism must prevent people from taking such pictures [3][8].



**Fig. 15:** Have you taken selfies?

## 5. Conclusion and Future Scope of the Study

Research was carried through to assess the potential of Dark Tourism development all over India looking on to the economic and the ethical critics and dilemmas that often run parallel with respect to the Dark Tourism. Questions were set after giving a deep thought and the data was gathered in multiple ways. The theoretical substructure was developed to obtain the background information and get a clear picture on the concept of Dark Tourism. The positive and negatives features of Dark Tourism were also considered while performing the research.

The research has shown that Dark Tourism is an upcoming form of tourism which has not gained popularity since ages but now taking its right shape. Not only that but it is gaining significant amount of attention in the field of research. There are certain shades of Dark Tourism which when considered can be grouped and managed in a more designated manner. The concept is still in its early stages and is spreading its wings with more documentaries and books. There is a big chunk of mass that have never visited the places of Dark Tourism but has the wish to visit one day. This implies that the popularity is likely to increase in the coming days. We could infer that the chosen place of research was actually the most visited place among all that



can be listed as Dark Tourism spots all round the country and the rest of the spots are still remaining unexplored comparatively.

One major ethical critic is the behaviour of the tourists in such places which is a concern till date. Disrespectful attitude in such places is highly intolerable i.e., volume of speech, taking of selfies. These must be checked by the tourist themselves while paying the visit. The decency in the dressing sense is highly recommended. The visitors must read and gather some knowledge before visit which will help them to understand the place in a more emotional way which will enrich the culture and heritage of the country and help the population to contribute more to the society. In conclusion, this study delves into the economic dimensions of dark tourism, utilizing a quantitative approach through Multi Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) and a qualitative methodology centered around the case study of Amritsar's Jallianwala Bagh massacre. The findings challenge conventional perceptions, revealing that dark tourism can indeed emerge as economically impactful destinations when managed strategically. Comparisons with existing studies underscore the unique contribution of this research, which combines MCDA as a sustainability analysis tool with a comprehensive case study approach. While other studies have explored the socio-cultural aspects of dark tourism, this research fills a gap by providing original insights into the economic viability and challenges faced by such destinations.

The future scope of this study lies in expanding the geographical and historical scope of case studies, exploring diverse dark tourism destinations globally. Additionally, further research could investigate the long-term economic sustainability and community impacts of these sites. As dark tourism continues to gain popularity, understanding its economic dynamics becomes increasingly crucial for both academic discourse and practical destination management.

This study advances our understanding of the less-explored economic facets of dark tourism, offering valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and industry stakeholders. By examining the case of Amritsar, it opens avenues for broader discussions on the economic implications of managing and promoting destinations associated with tragedy, death, and suffering.

**Acknowledgment:** The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the individuals and institutions that contributed to the successful completion of this research on Dark Tourism and its Merchandising. First and foremost, we extend our appreciation to the ITM Vocational University in Vadodara, Gujarat, India, where Atanu Bhattacharya serves as the Associate Professor and Head of the Department at the School of Hospitality & Tourism Management. The support and resources provided by the university were instrumental in the research process. We would also like to thank Swami Vivekanand Subharti University in Meerut, India, where Vikas Sharma is affiliated. The academic environment and facilities at the university contributed significantly to the overall quality of this study. Furthermore, our gratitude extends to Chandigarh College of Hotel Management, CGC Landran, Mohali, India, where Dr. Rajeev R Mishra serves as the Director/Principal. The collaboration and insights from the college played a crucial role in enhancing the depth and breadth of our research.

**Disclosure of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to the research on Dark Tourism and its Merchandising. This study was conducted with academic and professional integrity, and no external influences have impacted the objectivity of the findings presented in this paper. Any potential conflicts of interest have been transparently addressed to uphold the credibility and reliability of the research.

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