

## Exploring the Prospective of Dark Tourism in Pashupatinath: A Hindu Pilgrimage Site, Nepal

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### **Abstract**

*A unique and increasingly pervasive feature within the tourism landscapes in the post-modern world is the special interests of tourists in death and anything associated with death. It is often believed that those who indulge in death and disaster site tours could potentially awaken their spiritual journey. The visitor immersions, in the spaces of death, and the events that have taken place or are re-created, triggers social conscience, or some shared emotion or an experience of involvement, with the death event. Reckoning to this facet, Pashupatinath temple- a place of pilgrimage for the followers of Santana Vedic religion which shows the comprehensive aspect of Hindu death rituals, symbols and processes has been chosen. The study proposes the site as a dark tourism destination and explores the convergence of cultural heritage site, pilgrimage and death rituals in the area that is associated with its characterization- particularly with reference to the witnessing of live open pyre burning death rituals at the cremation ground (ghat) that exclusively showcases the eastern phenomenon of death-spectatorship*

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*exhibited by Hindu death ritual. Despite an immense influence of the site in the tourism industry, the eastern dark tourism potential induced by the site has not been recognized formally by the tourism stakeholders. Even though it is widely consumed by the western visitors as a tourist element. The phenomenon of Hindu death tradition in the ghats of Pashupatinath is inclusive of all the death-related rituals and is a threshold of transition and transgression, a place in between life and death. Henceforth, as the central tenet of dark tourism being “the death”, Hindu death rituals in Pashupatinath could be firmly brought into the realms of dark tourism discourse. The findings are based on the prevalence of push factors that encourages consumption of the proposed site as a dark tourist product in liminal conditions (an in-between position). To be more specific, the practice of intellectualization of emotion, convenience of visits, edutainment elements, practice of moral disengagement. The prospective of dark tourism in Pashupatinath, if entitled to the mere promotion of the crematory site, may send a negative connotation and raise moral and ethical concerns. Hence, tourism stakeholders should consciously introduce the phenomenon as an accompaniment to the popularized mainstream religious and cultural value of the site.*

### **Introduction**

Tourism is a complex phenomenon involving a wide range of people, increasingly seeking for new and unique experiences in order to satisfy the most diverse motives, the reason why the world tourism landscape has been changing in the past few decades (Fonseca, Seabra & Silva, 2016). One of the newly emerged interests is dark tourism. Dark tourism was first coined by Foley and Lennon (1996a, 1996b), who analyzed dark tourism as ‘the presentation and consumption of real and commodified death and disaster sites which has been expanded and exemplified in book form in Lennon and Foley (2000; in Ashworth & Isaac, 2015, p. 1). They also developed their ideas in an influential monograph entitled *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, where they conceptualized dark tourism as a subset of cultural tourism and as something distinct from heritage tourism (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010; Light, 2017, p. 278).

Early dark tourism scholars gave three different perspectives on dark tourism. Firstly, a demand-led approach by Seaton (1996) where the concept of thanatourism was defined as ‘travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death’. Secondly, a supply led perspective by Foley and Lennon (1996) defined dark tourism as “the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites” and later, the sites associated with death, suffering and macabre by Stone (2006) stated that dark tourism is ‘the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre’ (Stone, 2006, p.146). The studied site aligns with the demand-led perspective (Seaton, 1996) and also showcases the features of the dark site (Stone, 2006). However, the supply led perspective (Foley &

Lennon, 1996) is not prevalent in Pashupatinath as of now. The prefix 'dark' in dark tourism, alludes to a sense of apparent disturbing practices and morbid products and experience, within the tourism domain (Stone, 2006, p. 146; in Kunwar&Karki, 2019). The concept of dark tourism sometimes referred to as grief tourism or thanatourism is the intriguing phenomenon by which sites of death and disaster are transformed into sites of popular tourist attraction (Dermody& Brennan, 2014). These spaces of death, and the events that have taken place or are re-created in these spaces, usually also engage or trigger within their visitors some issue of social conscience, or as will be suggested below-some shared emotion or an experience of involvement, with the death event.

The academic study of dark tourism gathered momentum in the early twenty-first century, and is reflecting the growing interest of the citizens of postmodern societies with the sites of death and disasters- an interest that needs deeper research to be understood fully (Powell & Kennell, 2015, p.303). So far as dark tourism in the context of Nepal is concerned, the area remained untouched for so long despite the immense possibility. The discourse only started after the 2015 earthquake and the very idea of dark tourism is premised on selective attention to instances of events that are, in fact, ubiquitous (Kunwar, Aryal&Karki, 2019). Hepburn's (2012,2017) article on dark tourism in the context of Nepal has highlighted different kinds and degrees of suffering in Nepal as the everyday darkness which hints Nepal as a unique dark tourism's potential supplier.

Attention given to events of death, suffering, and atrocity and the development of dark tourism sites is attributed to an inherent curiosity towards mortality and the darker aspects of humanity (Foley, 2009; in Fonseca et al., 2016, p.1; Kunwar & Karki, 2019) as humans have always been curious about the end of life (Titta, 2010; Kunwar & Karki, 2019). It is this very premise of the human condition that lies at the crux of the dark tourism concept. Reckoning to this facet, Pashupatinath Temple- a place of pilgrimage for the followers of *Sanatana*(Eternal) Vedic religion which shows the comprehensive aspect of Hindu death rituals, symbols and processes has been chosen as a part of this study. Travel and tourism being one of the major sources of revenue in Nepal, the cultural heritage and pilgrimage tourism are one of the key contributors from ancient times. On account of religious, cultural, archaeological and natural importance and value, Pashupatinath temple complex has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage Sites list in 1979 and the region is an integrated form of history, religion, culture, art, customs and traditions (PADT, 2019, p.1).

Despite the immense influence of the site in the tourism industry, the eastern dark tourism potential induced by the Hindu death ritual has not been recognized formally by the tourism stakeholders. However, it is widely consumed informally by the western visitors as a tourist element. The existence of crematoria (*ghats*) at

Pashupatinath area is a reminder that all life eventually comes to an end and as mortal finite beings, we shall live so we shall die. Henceforth, as the central tenet of dark tourism being the death, Hindu death rituals in Pashupatinath could be firmly brought into the realms of dark tourism discourse. Death rites are often performed as a ritual not necessarily to mark the passing of the deceased but rather to heal the wounds of families, communities, societies, and/or nations by the deceased. The pilgrimage to sacred sites and ancient places within the context of dark tourism has more to offer in terms of understanding the process of death and meaning-making. The study attempts to understand the convergence of cultural heritage sites, pilgrimage and death rituals at Pashupatinath area and whether travelling to religious sites and witnessing live cremation events of deaths at the cremation ground can also fall under the broader context of dark tourism.

The study focused on answering the following questions: Can the presentation and consumption of open pyre Hindu cremation ritual be included in the dark tourism discourse? What is the cultural and religious importance of the Pashupatinath area? How are the death rituals and cremation performed according to Hindu rituals at Pashupatinath *Aryaghat*? How could cremation be commodified on the basis of edutainment? The general objective of this research paper is to explore dark tourism prospects in the Pashupatinath area. More specifically, the article aims to explore the cultural and religious importance of Pashupatinath area, and to discuss how the death rituals and cremation performed according to Hindu rituals at *Aryaghat* can be brought into the dark tourism discourse in Nepal.

### **Significance of the study**

Death, disaster and atrocities in touristic form are providing potential and spiritual journey which are becoming an increasingly pervasive feature within the tourism landscapes for the tourists/visitors who have a special interest in death and anything associated with death. Pashupatinath area has been a major tourist attraction for Hindus and non-Hindu visitors/tourists due to its antiquities, monuments, socio-cultural practice, religious belief and activities, festivals, norms and values and the cremation ground where open pyre Hindu death rituals are performed. This study has been undertaken with an objective to explore whether Pashupatinath *Aryaghat* exhibits the aspects of dark Tourism or not. The study attempts to understand the convergence of cultural heritage sites, pilgrimage and death rituals at Pashupatinath area and whether travelling to religious sites to witness live open pyre burning death rituals at the cremation ground might fall under the broader context of dark tourism. As there is a difference in cultural and religious value, aspects like engaging entertainment, education/learning, personal connection, suffering, memorial sites, dead and dying between the eastern and the western view of dark tourism and the former is not prioritized in dark tourism academia.

The Pashupatinath *Aryaghat* has been able to attract a number of tourists however it has never been presented as a dark tourist site. The researchers realized the prospective to discuss the broader spectrum of the site prior to presenting it as a dark tourism site. There are several classification frameworks available for dark tourism (Sharpley, 2005; Stone, 2006; Dunkley et al., 2007) which do not adequately address questions as to how a place can draw reverence and voyeurism at the same time, or what constitutes an authentic dark tourist experience. Also, dark tourism has not sufficiently addressed the case of witnessing -live deaths of others as opposed to the vast literature that exists with respect to the commemoration of past deaths (Sharma, 2016).

The death rituals in Pashupatinath is an integral component of this paper because these rituals contribute to generating multiple meanings from the site which can be related to the aspects of dark tourism that have failed to address in existing dark tourism classification frameworks. Although formally labelled as a Hindu pilgrimage and cultural heritage destination, the sites and its spaces of death in the form of cremation grounds has not been analyzed yet and how this experience of encountering death fits into the overall religious experience has not been discussed, hence this can be of much significance in dark tourism discourse of Nepal. The tourist interest in the death-related rituals will be fulfilled by having opportunities for tourists to witness the cremation grounds, popularly referred to as the *ghats*. Furthermore, this paper would also offer scopes to scholars researching dark tourism in Nepal. The findings will offer valuable information to those who wish to carry out research about dark tourism in Nepal. This research paper will also be beneficial to stakeholders to devise plans and policies and direct new avenues for the tourism sector of Nepal. As Minic (2012) quotes that, a journey through history is the way of finding new dark tourism destinations. Of course, without good promotion of various cultural and historical values for tourism, states lose a lot. With promotion of the destination, countries would gain much, but many of them do not make efforts in this field and the result is missing (Minic, 2012). And when it is evident that, the theme of dark tourism is becoming increasingly popular in a time when tourists have new needs and interests. In accordance with these trends tour operators should adapt their supply and with their creativity they to meet market needs.

The research has its own limitations, with regards to dark tourism, it includes religious and pilgrimage sites of Pashupatinath area which also serves as a cultural heritage destination and cremation according to Hindu death rituals in the *ghats* of the site. The study is limited to the study of dark tourism within the study site. The familiarity of the dark tourism concept amongst the respondents was negligible. However, when the researchers explained about the fundamentals of the phenomenon, the practice was quite significantly prevalent in the area. Similarly, due to the covid-

19 pandemic, the travel restriction and rules of social distancing, visitor/tourist at the premises was very low. Likewise, targeted respondents were not available for experience and knowledge sharing.

### **Research methodology**

The theoretical concepts of this study are highly influenced by Nitasha Sharma's (2016) work entitled "Beyond the Shades of Darkness: A Case Study of Varanasi, India", where she puts forward the arguments of showcasing Hindu pilgrimages with death ritual elements as a potential dark tourism destination. And, as a counteractive approach to address the knowledge gap in relation to pilgrimage and cultural heritage based dark tourism perspectives in Nepal, the death rituals at Pashupatinatharyaghat are studied. At first, field work was conducted by the second author while working on Master's Thesis in the year 2020 entitled *Dark Tourism in Nepal: A Case Study of Pashupatinath Aryaghat*. The duration of the fieldwork was 15 days. Later on, other two authors collectively decided to thoroughly review his study and conducted additional fieldwork in the study area in early 2021. The authors are not unfamiliar with the Hindu death rituals and tourist attractions in Pashupatinath.

Hence, the emic perspective of researchers with personal experiences and emotions are reflected in this study, and also the researchers' observation and interaction while assisting foreign colleagues witnessing the live death rituals are taken into reference. During the interaction with foreign visitors, there was a major prevalence of culture shock and cultural confusion amongst the foreign visitors. Oberg (1960; Kunwar, 2017, pp.177-179) has defined culture shock as a "transitory concept precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all one's familiar signs and symbols of social interaction" (Oberg, 1960, p.177; in Hottola, 2004, p.452). Confusion may not be as exciting a word as shock (Hottola, 2004, p.453).

Furthermore, the study is based on explorative research design. The qualitative description focuses on describing and understanding a phenomenon with reference to concept, actions, process and relationship. Wide range of literature has been consulted for prescribed objectives. The researcher collected primary data, unstructured questions, and observation, key informant interview, focus group discussion and interview with different stakeholders (tour guides, local authorities of Pashupatinath, ticket sellers). The tourist guides were interviewed to gain the idea of tourist perception and experience regarding the visit at Pashupatinath area particularly on cremation ground. Both domestic and international tourists who visited the cremation ground were interviewed as per convenience. However, due to the covid-19 pandemic, the flow of international visitors was very low which affected the richness of data.

## Review of literature

The very concepts of dark tourism are grounded in specifically Western ways of thinking about relationships between the living and the dead that may not fit to the other parts of the world where the relationships between societies and their death take different forms. Dark tourism scholarship, so far, has mostly confined itself to western interpretations of rituals and death. Henceforth, reconnoitering into the basic essence of Eastern or non-western death paradigm is of utmost importance.

Dark tourism is getting dynamic with time. Stone's (2011) paper highlights the dynamicity of dark tourism typology and increasing trend amongst scholars to use dark tourism to scrutinize broader socio-cultural considerations, managerial and political consequences, or ethical dilemmas (Stone, 2011). Adding up to that, Minic (2012) interprets dark tourism as a way of specific manifestations of cultural tourism, with the resources such as religious monuments, public monuments, historic buildings, castles and palaces, parks and gardens, forts, archaeological landscapes, industrial archeology buildings. It can be concluded that cultural and dark tourism have direct connection, but dark tourism insists on additional elements which includes the suffering and death (Minic, 2012). In general, dark tourism as a cultural representation of particular death has been referred to as a contemporary mediating institution between the living and the dead (Walter, 2009), whilst Stone (2011, p. 25) suggests, dark tourism provides an opportunity to contemplate death of the self through gazing upon the significant other dead. However, the current literature is finding it increasingly difficult to differentiate among religious pilgrims, secular pilgrims, dark tourists, heritage tourists and pilgrimage, as they all are recognized as part of the growing phenomenon of tourist interest in sites that add meaning to life (Collins-Kreiner, 2016).

Nitasha Sharma's (2016) paper entitled "Beyond the Shades of Darkness: A Case Study of Varanasi, India", focuses on two types of Hindu death-related rituals performed at the cremation grounds and attempts to understand the convergence of pilgrimage and death and how travelling to religious sites and witnessing live events of death can also fall under dark tourism, and how these religious sites exhibit darkness. Her arguments are supported by theories pertaining to the notions of place, sacredness, and authenticity in tourism literature. To start with, she has highlighted Rodman's (2003: 12; in Sharma, 2016) anthropological notion of place and the term "multilocality," which says that a single physical landscape can have multiple meanings for different users. Sharma (2016) borrows Lane's (1988; in Sharma, 2016) axioms on sacred place, one of which states that "a sacred place is an ordinary place, ritually made extraordinary." Furthermore, the definition of ritual from Victor Turner's "The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure", which says that "a ritual is a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and

objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests" (1977: 183; in Sharma, 2016) is an important base of unique portrayal of Hindu death ritual. Sharma (2016) also uses theories on authenticity in tourism literature to elucidate the ambiguities associated in labelling a site as authentic or inauthentic, MacCannell's (1976; in Sharma, 2016) authenticity serves as an important motivation in tourism. Bruner's (1991; in Sharma, 2016) tourists' desire for self-transformation through an encounter with cultures that are authentic, and Gianna M. Moscardo and Pearce (1986; in Sharma, 2016) believes that satisfaction derived from a tour depends on the tourists' search for authenticity, Steiner and Reisinger's (2006; in Sharma, 2016) preferring existential authenticity over object-oriented forms of authenticity. Berger's (1973; in Sharma, 2016) existential authenticity as a special state of being in which one is true to oneself and acts this way as opposed to becoming lost in public roles and public spheres. Author registers the typology of authenticity as: objective, constructive, and existential authenticity where existential authenticity referring to an experience that involves personal or intersubjective feelings activated by the liminal process of tourist activities (Wang, 1999; in Sharma, 2016) matches the experience of witnessing the co-existence of life and death in the Great Cremation Ground (Sharma, 2016) of Varanasi, where multiple feelings are interspersed in a sacred landscape. Varanasi, a holy city in India attracts scores of both domestic and foreign tourists. Situated on the banks of the Ganga River, it is known to be the place for the final transformation of one's life. The west bank of the Ganga River on the eastern side of the city is divided into segments each consisting of a series of steps down to the river, called the *ghats* where several corpses are burned each day. Sharma (2016) analyzed tourist perceptions towards two death-related rituals within the domain of Hinduism that are closely associated with each other. The first type, the Hindu death rituals, referred to as *Antyeshthi* (the last sacrifice), that broadly involves burning the deceased over a funeral pyre, the second is a type of death-related ritual practiced by a group of ascetics, known as the Aghoris, which is considered as an extreme and aberrant cult. These small sects of Hindu ascetics are rigid renouncers and worshippers of the Hindu deity, Shiva. Although these two rituals constitute opposing ways of handling human mortality, they share the same complex of interconnected assumptions about the relationship between life and death (Sharma, 2016). Amongst these two rituals, Nepal's Pashupatinath pilgrimage site only practices the *Antyeshthi* death ritual of Varanasi which have similar attributes with the Pashupatinath pilgrimage site's death ritual. The latter is not practiced in Nepal, hence, the authors have adapted the inspiration based on the former death ritual to portray the potential dark tourism through the involvement of a public display of death in open funeral grounds.

Collins-Kreiner's (2016) Lifecycle of Concepts, asserts that pilgrimage tourism in its traditional way has reached a stagnation point. She states that dark tourism is part of the rejuvenation of pilgrimage, as they both emerge from the same milieu to include the sites of dramatic historic events that hold extra meaning. In her paper she concludes with the prediction that pilgrimage will re-emerge when the many similar segments – particularly, spiritual tourism, heritage tourism, religious tourism, dark tourism and secular pilgrimage – are re-identified as pilgrimage: a mobility for the search for meaning that contains an element of transformation that is often deep and enduring (as they were viewed at the dawn of humanity and for thousands of years).

Sharma & Rickly's (2019) paper entitled "The smell of Death and the smell of Life: Authenticity, Anxiety and Perceptions of Death at Varanasi's Cremation Grounds" explains the encounters with death at dark tourism sites as reminders of one's own mortality affecting one's attitude towards death, perception of self, and even challenging one's personal values. Existentialists assert that anxiety is a condition of existential authenticity, and therefore moments of the existentially authentic experience are not always pleasurable. Dark Tourism is capable of transforming tourists' perceptions about death, engaging tourists' existential anxiety, and leading to an emerging self. These encounters produce experiences, rooted in epiphany, where the transformation of self has the potential to take place. Representations of death at dark tourism sites serve as reminders of one's own mortality affecting one's attitude towards death, perception of self, and therefore attitude about lifestyle choices.

Sharma's (2020) paper entitled "Dark Tourism and Moral Disengagement in Liminal Spaces" discusses how the concept of dark tourism has always raised moral conflicts at a collective and individual level while providing new spaces in which morality is communicated, reconfigured and revitalized. Socio-structural practices at a cremation ground create liminal conditions (an in-between position) favorable for moral disengagement, where the tourist is in a flux and is torn between a set of (current and previously held) moral beliefs. This behavior arises due to an obscuring and fragmentation of human agency during moral disengagement thereby making it possible for tourists to not take ownership of the consequences of their actions. The rhetoric of dark tourism sites, especially through euphemistic labeling, plays an important role in shaping tourist thought patterns which in turn, is likely to govern their actions and experiences.

### **Death in Hindu tradition**

Death is not seen as the end in the Hindu tradition; rather, it is the gateway to another beginning. Death follows life, and rebirth follows death; the individual is only a temporary figure in this cosmic cycle of sustenance. At the funeral rituals, the sanctifier's body is also a kind of actual oblation, in which the body is not to be

devoured, but prepared for the world beyond, where the crematory fire will take him (*Rig Veda* 10.16.5; Samarth, 2018, p.15).

*Burn him not up, nor quite consume him, Agni: let not his body or his skin be scattered,*

*O all possessing Fire, when thou hast matured him, then send him on his way unto the Fathers.*

*When thou hast made him ready, all possessing Fire, then do thou give him over to the Fathers,*

*When he attains unto the life that waits him, he shall become subject to the will of gods.*

*The Sun receives thine eye, the Wind thy Prana (life-principle, breathe); go, to earth or heaven.*

*Go, if it be thy lot, unto the waters; go, make thine home in plants with all thy members. —Rigveda 10.16 (Samarth, 2018, p.15)*

The Hindus divide the body into two: the “*Deha*” and “*Sharira*”. The word “*Deha*” comes from the root “*Daha*” which means to burn. The cremation ceremony of the dead body is called *Daha Sanskara*. The *Sharira* comes from root “*Siryate*” which means that perishes (Ghimire (Poudyal), 1998, p.60). For Hindus, death is the separation of the soul from the body (at the time of the death the soul, which is believed to be residing in the body, throws away the body as one casts off his garment or in other words death could explained as the state of soul, when it changes a body (Ghimire (Poudyal),1998). This transformation is sequentially conducted through various processions called *Sanskaras*. The word *Sanskaras* means to “complete”, “prepare”, “make over”, “fully form” and above all, to purify (*shuddhi*). Every *Sanskara* is regarded as a transformative action that “refines “and “purifies” the living body, initiating it into new statuses and relationships by giving it a new birth (Inden& Nicholas,1977). It is believed that “through the *Sanskaras*, one conquers the earth after the birth and conquers the heaven after death” (Boudhayana Pitrimedha Sutra; in Ghimire (Poudyal), 1998, p.54).The Hindu scriptures teach us to perform the sixteen rites (*Sanskar*) during a human life. *Antyeshti Sanskaris* the final rite performed for the eternal peace of the Soul (Samarth, 2018, p.16). It is a series of rituals performed to mark the death of a person. The rituals consist of washing and preparing the dead for cremation. The intent of the *Antyeshti* ritual is to convert the body into substances that formed the body at birth i.e. water, air, fire, earth, and ether, so that they can return back into the universe at death, completing the cycle of life at an individual level, and keeping the cosmic cycle in motion at a macrocosmic level (Samarth, 2018, p.16).

The last sacrament in the life of a Hindu is the *Antyesti Sanskara* or the funeral with which he closes the concluding chapter of his worthy career. At his departure from this world, his survivors consecrate his death for his future felicity in the next world. This *Sanskara*, being post- mortem, is not less important because for a Hindu the value of the next world is higher than that of the present one (Pandey, 2006, p.234). In this study, the word *Sanskar* denotes that it is a life cycle ritual. The major part of last sacrament is the practice of reducing a corpse to ashes, burning it down which is called cremation (Ghimire (Poudal), p.53). The Hindus have multi-aspects of cremation whereas they mostly practice cremation with the help of fire, i.e., burning the corpse on the open pyre. Notably the hermits, saints and children are buried (Neupane, 2020, p.84). Cremation purifies various impurities through *Agni*(fire). If these *Antyeshthi Sanskar* (Final Rites) are carried out with proper eligible ceremonies, the soul is blessed with eternal peace and gets the opportunity to enjoy the heavenly happiness it desires. The relatives also receive condolence and they gain strength from knowing that their loved one is at peace (Hindu Funeral Rites and Rituals, 2006, p.16). According to the observation of the researchers, the deceased body covered with white cloth is taken out from the stretcher and placed on the *Bramhanal* with its feet touching the water of the Bagmati River, then the deceased body is purified by sprinkling the holy water that comes to *Bramhanal* from the main sanctum of the Pashupatinath temple. The priest chants mantras and hymns during this process. The clothes along with other items are taken off from the deceased body and flown in the Bagmati River. The body is then wrapped with white cloth and then with yellow cloth known as *pitambar* and on top of it with a sacred orange cloth. The body is then taken from *Bramhanal* and placed on a bamboo stretcher. Relatives, near ones, offer flowers and garlands especially of marigolds and give condolences. After that the corpse is tied at three places with a cord made up of *babiyo* (*Eulaliopsis binata*). The corpse is then carried on the stretcher on four sides. Paddy and lava (made from roasting paddy) are spread ahead of the corpse till on the way to the pyre. The corpse is moved around the prepared pyre anticlockwise three times and then placed on top of the pyre heading north. The cord is cut off. The eldest son or the one who lights the pyre gets cleaned oneself, moves three rounds with *dagbatti* (fire), facing south and lights the pyre at the mouth of the corpse. During the process the priest provides guidance and chants mantras and hymns. When the pyre starts burning the Cremator (*Ghate*) covers the pyre with wet straw and adds fire from beneath and side. During this process male mourners shave their hair and change into white clothes, some change the clothes at the places where *kaj-kriya* is performed. Normally it takes 2 to 2 ½ hours for the complete burning of the corpse. The remnants of the pyre are cleaned with water separating *astu*, which is covered with a wet white piece of cloth and kept on a small earthen or bronze container, later on it is flown at Bagmati River or buried at bank of the river. The cremation process is completed after this. During

the observation some corpse's clothes were taken off at the pyre while clothes of most of the corpses were taken off at *Bramhanal*. Likewise, some corpses were brought covered with white, yellow sacred cloth prior to *ghat*.

There is an intense period of mourning immediately following the cremation which lasts thirteen days. The performance of *Kriya* is one of the crucial Sanskaras, or rites of passage, that mark the journey of a Hindu through life and engage not just the recipient but the whole family. Traditions vary, but there are often said to be 16 rites of passage. The first is conducted before birth; the last involves a series of rituals after the soul has left the body to help it complete its transformation from a *preta*, or disconnected spirit, into a *pitri*, or honored ancestor. Typically, the mourners who sleep at the *Kriyaputri Bhawan* (mourner's house) are the sons, daughters and daughters-in-law of the deceased, who engage in the strictest austerities and greatest number of rituals (*Hinduism Today*, 2014). Mourners are considered impure, which does not mean bad but rather a state of vulnerability and distress. It is an unsettled period when the spirit of the deceased is still attached in a subtle sense to the living, and neither the living nor the dead have quite moved on. Working to purify the body aids in purifying and focusing the mind. A person who is ritually impure also is not in the right condition to make divine offerings, so purification and prayer bring them to a state where they will be able to do that again. It should be noted that mourners at the *Kriyaputri Bhawan* are near Pashupatinath temple but not inside the temple complex, where mourning would not be conducted. Hindus often try to stay near sacred sites during mourning, but funerals and mourning don't occur inside temples. The mourning goes on for twelve days. The picture of the deceased is placed and a lamp is lit in front of it. The family members must ensure that the lamp is on during this time. It is believed that during this time the soul is still wandering. On the thirteenth day a big ceremony is arranged as per the ability of the family. People are invited and delicacies are made. A puja is arranged for the departed soul. With this the *kriyakaram* (death ritual also called *kriya karma* in Nepali) ceremony comes to an end. Each region has different variations to these ceremonies. However, the overall ceremony is almost the same for all (Bhatt, 2013).

The rituals of *sraddha* are a way to pay a tribute and gratitude to the ancestors. It is believed that if the rituals are performed with full faith, love and respect, the ancestors get happy and blessed with all the good fortune. It is stated that by offering this puja to the forefathers and departed dear ones, their souls feel gratified and they bless the person with happiness and prosperity. The *shraddha* is performed during the lunar days of the *Ashwin* month. The *sraddha* is performed only at noonday, usually on the bank of a river or lake (Chowdhary, 2017). Conceptually, it is a way for people to express heartfelt gratitude and thanks towards their parents and ancestors, for having helped them to be what they are and praying for their peace. It also can be thought of

as a “day of remembrance”. It is performed for both the father and mother separately, on their respective ‘*tithi*’ - death anniversaries as per Hindu calendar - Bikram Sambat. In addition, it is performed for the entire community of ‘*pitri*’- both from paternal and maternal side -collectively during the *pitrupaksha* or *shraddhapaksha* (Fortnight of ancestors), right before Shraddha Navaratri in autumn (Prashad, 1995). The ritual is observed at the bank of the Bagmati River at Pashupatinath area opposite to the *ghats*.

### **Rudiments of Hindu death ritual in Pashupatinath**

The *ghat* is the funeral or crematorium site situated at the bank of the river, the confluence of river where the last rites especially of Hindus are performed in order to burn the deceased body and flow the residual ash into the flowing water (Neupane, 2020, p.82). The most significant role of the *ghats* is observed during the funeral rites. There are several ghats for the cremation and funeral rites of the deceased constructed on the bank of the Bagmati River which falls under Pashupatinath area. *Ghats* are the abode of *Ghate-Vaidhyastoo*. The meaning of the words comes from merger of two words, *Ghate* means belonging to the cremation ground and *Vaidhya* means doctor or traditional physician, whose main duty is to forecast the death although his announcement has no legal value. He lives near the cremation ground (Ghimire (Poudyal), 1998, p.61).

The *Aryaghat* is situated on the eastern side of the Pashupatinath temple and the *Bhasmeswarghat* on its southern side are the famous ghats of this Pashupatinath Area. The *Aryaghat* is the main crematory site of Kathmandu valley and the most sacred one to the Hindus due the presence of the holy river and Lord Pashupatinath. There are two pyres at *Aryaghat* among which pyre one is near *Bramhanal*. There is a tradition of placing the corpse at *Bramhanal* and purifying it with holy water and then bathing the corpse at Bagmati river water prior to fire cremation (*Pashupatinath kshetrako Sanskritik Sampada*, 2020). There was a tradition in the past, members of the royal family used to get cremated with state honors at no. 1 pyre of *Aryaghat*. Till date these pyres are considered special. Likewise, no. 2 pyre was for Rana rulers and their family members’ cremation. The cost of cremation is more in comparison to *Bhasmeswarghat* as it takes around 15000 Rs for cremation at no. 2 pyre of *Aryaghat* which is higher than that of *Bhasmeswarghat* (*Pashupatinath kshetrako Sanskritik Sampada*, 2020).

**Table 1.1: Cremation per day**

S.N.	Description	Approx. Number	Remarks
1	By wood	15 to 20	
2	Electrical cremation	10 to 12	

Source: Administration Office, PADT (2020)

An average of 15 to 20 cremations are conducted on a daily basis by wood, while the electrical cremations are also being conducted. Due to the recent covid-19 pandemic, the pattern of cremation has changed slightly. The covid-19 related death cases are cremated at electrical cremation while number of cremations at the ghat has increased to an average of 30-45. On the 24th of January 2016, Pashupatinath Area Development Trust inaugurated the first functioning modern electric crematorium in Nepal at the traditional cremation site near the Pashupatinath temple, at the bank of holy river Bagmati (Hadders, 2017). Cremating a body in an electric crematorium is much cheaper (Rs 3,000) in comparison to cremation at ghat. It also consumes less time as it takes about 45 minutes to burn a body in the electric crematorium. The crematorium building has a cooling store that could hold up to 20 bodies and separate rooms with hot showers for the mourners. The facility has two incinerators (*The Kathmandu Post*, 2016).

**Table 1.2: Room facilities for Mourners (Kriyaputri )**

S.N.	Description	Approx. Number	Remarks
1	With attached toilet	24 rooms	
2	Without attached toilet	10 rooms	

Source: Administration Office, PADT (2020)

*Bhasmeshwarghat* is on the southern side of *aryaghat* and has 10 pyres. It takes about 10000 Rs for cremation of the corpse at *Bhasmeswar ghat*. There is a belief that the dead one will be free from all the sins and liberated when the smoke and ash rises and falls on the *Bhasmeswar Shivalinga* during cremation of the corpse (Pashupatinath Kshetra ko Sanskritik Sampada, 2020). Since the historical period, people of various castes who have been residing in the Deopatan area have their own ghats for cremation and death rituals. For e.g. *Pingalaghat* (destroyed during road expansion), *Rajeswari ghat*, on the opposite side of *Ramghat*, *Sitaghat*, *Laxmanghat*, *Satrughanghat* etc. In Present context, these funeral grounds are rarely used by those communities. Nowadays these communities also perform their death rituals at *Aryaghat* and *Bhasmeswarghat* (PashupatinathkshetrakoSanskritikSampada, 2020).

The *Bramhanal* is a flat stone slope where the deceased is laid down in such a manner that the feet are touching the water of holy Bagmati River. The water offered to the main shrine exits and flows down through the *Bramhanal* touching the body placed there and into Bagmati River. Laying body at the *Bramhanal* and offering the holy water is considered an act of liberation for making deceased soul free from terrestrial world.

### Statistics of visitors in Pashupatinath

Pashupatinath temple has been a major destination for pilgrims from a very large period. Hindu pilgrims from various parts of Nepal, India and other parts of the world have been visiting Shree Pashupatinath temple from the time of existence of the temple. Thus, there are many tourists who visit the area for religious as well as non-religious purposes. It is estimated that around 25- 35 thousand people visited the area daily on a normal day. On Saturdays the number of visitors would reach between 35 thousand to 45 thousand. However, during festivals like *Shiva Ratri*(the festival of Lord Shiva- Shiva's night observed in February- March), New Year, *Shrawan (July-August)* and *Haritalika* the number of visitors grew exponentially. In the early stage of covid-19 pandemic the visitors of the Pashupatinath temple were not allowed to enter the Pashupatinath temple core premises, the restriction lasted for almost 10 months. However, it was found that there were a number of visitors who visited the Pashupatinath area for various purposes like cremation, exercise, meditation and to gain spiritual energy.

**Table 1.3: Visitors in Pashupatinath area**

S.N.	Description	Approx. No.	Remarks
1	Daily	25-35 thousand	Before Pandemic (Pandemic)
2	<i>Shiva Ratri</i>	5-7 lakhs	“
3	New Year	2-3 lakhs	“
4	<i>Shrawan</i> Monday	1.5-2 lakhs	“
5	<i>Haritalika (Teej)</i>	3-4 lakhs	“
6	Saturday	35-45 thousand	“

Source: Administration Office, PADT (2020)

Among the visitors, non-Hindu visitors/tourists visit the temple during 1000 hrs to 1200 hrs in the morning and 1400 hrs to 1700 hrs noon. Majority of such visitors come in groups and guides help them in providing necessary information. A normal tour includes 45 minutes to 1 hour, among which the majority of the time is taken

to answer the queries. As per the Focused Group Discussion (FGD), some the major queries that the tourist generally ask are listed below:

- a) Can we visit the main temple? Can we take photos?
- b) Why white- and orange-colored clothes put on the dead body?
- c) Why are dead bodies burned on open pyres?
- d) How long does it take to burn the body? Are dead bodies chopped and burned?
- e) Why do they put fire on the mouth of the dead body? Why only males lit the fire on the pyre?
- f) Would they have rebirth?

**Table 1.4: Visitors (Excluding Indians and Nepalese) in Pashupatinath area by Month (2014-2018)**

Month	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
January	8592	9148	5960	6673	8045
February	12705	13167	6207	7503	10711
March	15066	14652	6463	11067	16073
April	17178	15777	8567	14204	22255
May	10266	1685	8447	8506	11214
June	5590	1786	7413	4319	5837
July	8444	3476	5604	4752	6729
August	12556	2501	5375	7053	10658
September	14758	4998	8047	9835	12131
October	28428	3994	13091	22709	27150
November	21997	4197	12918	18814	21926
December	10593	3299	7319	8745	10582
Total	166173	78680	95411	124180	163311

*Source: Administration Office, PADT (2020)*

Pashupatinath temple has been the center of attraction for the majority of the tourists as per the participant of FGD. Key Informant also supported this view, stating that majority of the tourist either religious, cultural, heritage, traveler and hippies visit Pashupatinath temple area. Tourists especially Hindus are attracted to worship Jyotirlinga of the Pashupatinath temple, while non-hindus were found fascinated by the artifacts, heritage, religious and cultural activities. Participant 3 stated that there had been few cases where tourists were specific on viewing the death rituals in the *Aryaghat*. They would cancel the trip if *Aryaghat* did not have any ongoing cremation process.

### **Commodification of the Hindu death ritual**

The notion of darkness is a socially constructed rather than an objective fact constructed by some tourist scholars (Jamal & Linda, 2011). The action of Modernity-operated to break down the barriers between the sacred and the profane, the closed world of the cemetery and the outside world of commerce and spectacle with the rise of mass tourism, the metropolitan cemetery, with its collection of illustrious corpses, became a sight to see just like any other monument (Rojek, 1991). Sharpley (2005) considered two primary bases when analyzing dark tourism: the tourist as a consumer and the site/attraction as the object of consumption. In the context of tourist's motivation of the site, conferring to Stone's (2006) shades of darkness, on the darkest end are the locations where actual death and suffering took place. On the opposite, lightest end, are the locations just associated with death and suffering.

The findings from discussions, interactions and interviews with Focused Group and Key Informants revealed the cremation ground (*ghat*) among the major tourist attractions at Pashupatinath area caters the authentic curiosity of death in the visitors. During the fieldwork, the respondents agreed that the tourists were attracted to the open pyre burning death rituals that are taking place in the Pashupatinath *Aryaghat* area. Participant 1 stated that he had seen some of the tourists had cried while watching the funeral process. Similarly, participant 3 stated that some of the tourists remember their parents and become emotional. While some of the tourists simply gaze at the funeral the entire time without uttering a word. Participant 2 stated that some of the tourists who visit the cremation are with prior knowledge about the cremation, hence they like to observe such activity, and in few cases, they have seen them donating a huge amount to the *Yogis*, *Sadhus* (Holy men), beggars etc.

Similarly, the researchers interviewed the regular visitors of the Pashupatinath area, who shared that their main motivation of visit was to view Pashupatinath temple, morning walk, observe the cremation and indulge in spiritual activity. In response to the open pyre cremation observation, almost all the respondents stated that they felt sad when they viewed the cremation site. Similarly, a western visitor explained about

feeling horrified by the cremation site and stated that he had never visited the open cremation ritual. This can be the result of culture shock. In a new societal and cultural context, much of people's old knowledge is useless, if not misleading. So far as cultural confusion is concerned, it focuses on both the problems part of the adaptation process and on the frequently simultaneous presence of enjoyment, success, and learning. It acknowledges the reality of mixed emotions and oppositional developments instead of clearly definable stages of emotional dominances, thus including the complexity and diversity of individual's tourist's responses (Oberg, 1960, p.177; in Hottola, 2004, p.452). Especially in the Third World, a tourist may also encounter a "life shock". As defined by Bock (1970; in Hottola,2004), this is a sudden and direct exposure to the less desirable facts of human life ...ageing, death, disabilities and disease are particularly disturbing when they are first encountered in an unfamiliar setting.

On the contrary,one of the native visitors stated that death is a regular part of the human cycle. One of the respondents was at the Pashupatinath area to cremate his maternal uncle and he felt sad to see his maternal uncle being burned in a pyre.

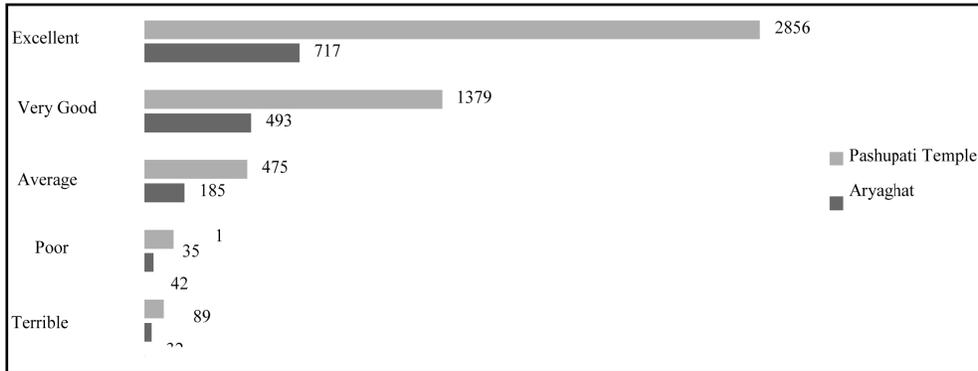
Cremation being one of the major activities in the Pashupatinath tour package, the soaring online views of the video on YouTube justifies the visitors' interest in crematoria. Some travel websites have already begun promoting Pashupatinath *Aryaghat* along with other crematoria at Pashupatinath area as a separate tourist package.The participants of FGD believed that the site could be one of the major tourist attractions among the visitors, even if promoted separately. The Tripadvisor (the travel website that provides reviews and other information for consumers about travel destination around the world) has enlisted the crematoria of Pashupatinath temple in its Travel website as *The Crematoria, Kathmandu Nepal* in its website. It has listed the Pashupatinath temple and crematoria as 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> of 178 things to do in Kathmandu respectively. There are 1,469 reviews (from March 2011 to March 2020) for *The Crematoria, Kathmandu Nepal* on the Trip advisor's website.

According to the travel review of the tourist about the place, one of them had stated that

*Emotional place, all kinds of Hindu death ceremonies done in this place, You should have a strong heart if you want to see burning dead bodies.*

*To witness the ancient ceremony of burning a loved one on a funeral pyre was so humbling.*

**Reviews of Pashupatinath temple and crematoria**



(Source: Tripadvisor.com, 2020).

The above graph shows that there has been at least 30 percent of visitors/tourists who had visited the cremation site, and posted their reviews. The total review of Pashupatinath temple has been 4,934 while Pashupatinath *Aryaghat* has 1,469 reviews. In 2020 (i.e. from January to March) total 11 visitors/tourists posted reviews on Tripadvisor’s travel website. According to the reviews, it was found that the tourist respected the Hindu faith and ritual and also mentioned it as a sacred place. They found it useful to know the culture and traditions of Hinduism and the cremation site is a must visit for a lifetime experience. They were fascinated by how the funerals were happening where numbers of people were mourning at the same time at different venues.

However, few of the tourists felt uncomfortable at seeing the cremation and even noticed the difference of wealth during the cremation process. One of the reviewers was saddened to see the funeral of a young child. To fully understand the process, the reviewer recommended taking a guide with proper knowledge, who will familiarize them with the knowledge about the death rituals. Similarly, there are number of videos that has been made and uploaded in YouTube. A list of some of the videos, its view and its analysis are listed below:

**Table 1.5: Analysis of YouTube video**

<b>Video Title</b>	<b>Channel</b>	<b>Number of Views</b>	<b>Like</b>	<b>Dislike</b>	<b>Only Funeral Activities</b>
Hindu Cremation Ceremony, Pashupatinath temple	Kara and Nate	224,917	1700	161	No
Hindu Cremations at Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu	Lixinan	4,903,001	7700	3200	Yes
Kathmandu Hindu Cremation Ceremony at Pashupatinath temple in Nepal	Tess the Travel Addict	766,476	1400	438	Yes
Hindu Cremations at Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu Nepal	World on Video	349,699	447	486	Yes
Cremation Dead Corpse Body, Pashupatinath temple, Kathmandu	OzgurCagdas	152,861	267	109	Yes
Hindu Cremations at Pashupatinath temple in Kathmandu	ShivamAnbe	732,613	1900	1500	Yes
Pashupatinath temple in Nepal- Cremation Ceremony	Mark K.	84,297	46	91	Yes

Video Title	Channel	Number of Views	Like	Dislike	Only Funeral Activities
Pashupatinath temple, Nepal. Hindu Cremation	Phillip Powell	515,917	828	296	Yes
Pashupatinath temple January, 2017	Strandphoto1	4,929,901	2600	2300	Yes

Source: YouTube, 2020

It was found that a number of videos regarding the funeral site of Pashupatinath area have been uploaded with a high number of viewers as well. However, the participants of FGD are against promoting it as a dark tourism site. Participant 5 stated that Pashupatinath temple has been one of the sacred places for Hindu religion, promoting only the cremation area as dark tourism will have a negative impact on the belief of the people. It may further impact the religious and cultural significance of Pashupatinath temple.

The stakeholder was also with a similar view who opposed the idea of cremation ground being a tourist attraction. He questioned the morality of the people who visit the site for the purpose of entertainment. He further stated that the relatives and kin of the deceased are in deep sentiments, shock, in tears and grief. In such environment, the tourist who visits the site may intrude and make the mourner irritative who may interpret it as disrespect, which may result in clashes. The commodification of the *Aryaghat* might result in an influx of tourists particularly to view the death rituals. He questioned how someone's tears of grief can be a source of entertainment to others. He put forward the idea of adding more electric crematoria, which he suggests might decrease the demand of conducting funerals in open pyre burning in the days to come along with the increasing interest of the people towards electric crematoria rather than open pyre. He is with a view that Pashupatinath is a symbol of faith and belief for millions of Hindus worldwide as well as a center of attraction to others having socio-cultural and religious value a part from being rich in heritage, archaeology and artifacts under such circumstances overcrowding to see a death ritual in the form of dark tourism will be perceived negatively by the society. He further opines that understanding the death ritual is not enough to know about life and death in Hindu religion, as one must have the knowledge of other 15 Sanskars to have complete understanding about life and death. He thinks instead of promoting *Aryaghat* as a dark tourism site, the whole Pashupatinath could be promoted with religious and spiritual message.

Furthermore, to add upon the discussion of Hindu death rituals being a matter of global interest. We can take reference of celebrity and VVIP's cremation process and their global coverage in mass media. The year 2001 was a tragic one for Nepal and the royal family. Ten members of the royal family died at the Narayanhiti Palace massacre on June 1st. The funerals of the royal family members were covered by national and international media, while many of them were broadcasting live. Nepal Television of Nepal and BBC had covered the whole process live. Even today such an archive of the video is available on YouTube. The analysis of the view of such video is enlisted below:

**Table 1.6: Analysis of YouTube video of Royal Family Funeral**

Title	Channel	View
Cremation ceremony for slain Nepalese royal family (with sound)	AP Archive	1248,384
Royal Family Funeral	Aaron Ginoza	98,549

*Source: YouTube, 2020*

Similarly, a number of national leaders and renowned persons were also cremated at the Pashupatinath Aryaghat which has further promoted the cremation area. The funerals of renowned personalities has been triggering an influx of visitors in the *Aryaghat* area to view the funeral and rising number of audiences who observe it via mass media. It is evident through these instances that the visitors eager to experience dark tourism locations might want to see the reality behind the media images or may even have a personal connection to the location or individuals associated with the location. Either way, the fascination with dark tourism locations has raised several ethical dilemmas over the years (Foley & Lennon, 1996).

### **Emotions triggered by the acts of memory**

Death rites are often performed as a ritual not necessarily to mark the passing of the deceased but rather to heal the wounds of families, communities, societies, and/or nations by the deceased's passing (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2009). Mourners visit specific grave sites and usually perform meditations for the dead. Pilgrims had a personal connection to specific burial sites in some way, whether it is a religious connection to the individual or they served as a personal hero (Raine, 2013).

Pashupatinath area holds a number of death rituals daily with an average of 15-20 funerals. In reference to how the ritual impacts the insider who has lost their loved ones, emotional turmoil is severe while participating in the different funeral rites. The rituals also provide an opportunity for a meaningful memorial of their deceased loved ones, and experiencing déjà vu of lighting the pyre as well. Similarly, a 13-day

practice of mourning is conducted by the close relatives of the deceased person in the *Kriyaputri Bhawan* (House) and a number of relatives and friends visit the mourning members to provide sympathy and pray for the dead. Such practice provides ample time to remember the deceased person.

For an outsider, a dark tourism site such as a cremation ground can be considered as a complex, culturally contested and ideologically laden liminal place. Such a liminal, threshold place may offer freedom and peace for some, but are likely to cause anxiety, constraint or threat for others. Seaton and Lennon (2004) argued that dark tourists often exhibit a certain emotional state akin to a pilgrim. Therefore, visiting the site can be a fulfilling experience for them. It is also likely for dark tourists to develop empathic responses after visiting a dark site (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). When one develops empathy, they are more likely to be able to relate and understand others, and more capable of forgiveness (Hodgson & Wertheim 2007). One of the reviewers of tripadvisor.com had stated that the burning pyre, especially that of a child, had made him uncomfortable. To justify it with the field-based experience, during an interview with a visitor, when asked about the perception of *Aryaghat*, the respondent shared about the feeling of empathy that is generated while observing and participating in the memorial process. Similarly, the FGD session brought up the prevalence of tourists' connection to the dead or death ritual after seeing the death rituals and mourning of the people. Apparently, it can be said that individuals will realize an emotional connection to known or unknown death.

In response to tackling the distressing emotions like anxiety, constraint or threat for others. An individual is most likely to introduce a defense mechanism to 'an emphasized focus on facts, logics, and abstract reasoning to assert control over and reduce unpleasant emotions associated with internal or external events' (Cariola, 2017). This Psychodynamic defense mechanism of accepting the reality and taking the lesson through the experience of the others can be called as intellectualization of emotion. To those who fail to do it, suffering from the inability to show or verbalize emotions has been also identified as a defining symptom of alexithymia. Alexithymia literally means "no words for emotion" and represents a disorder which involves difficulties in expressing emotions (Sifneos, 1972; in Cariola, 2017).

### **Site authenticity**

Pashupatinath cremation ground is the first preference of Hindus residing at Kathmandu valley as this area has historical, religious, and socio-cultural values and practices. The cremation ground holds cremation according to Hindu rituals of the deaths that have occurred at various places. Though it is not the actual site where the death or suffering has occurred but it represents final rites of both natural and unnatural deaths like mass casualties (for e.g. earthquake victims, 2015, insurgency

related, Ojha, 2019), violent death/massacre (for e.g. Royal massacre including King Birendra, 2001) etc.

The cremation ground at Pashupatinath area, inclusive of all the death-related rituals, is a threshold of transition and transgression, a place in between life and death. The deceased will be free from any sins and his soul will be in salvation when the funeral rites of the deceased are performed according to HinduSanskara (AntyesthiSamskara) rituals at this particular cremation ground.

Based on Casey's (1996) writings, Feld and Basso (1996, p. 9), suggest that place is the most fundamental form of embodied experience – the site of a powerful fusion of self, space, and time. Tourists derive meaning by participating in the site, the activities there and, through this; they understand both themselves and the landscape in different ways. Therefore, the 'lived experience' of an event or site informs its meaning. This includes the psychological motivations woven together with the body acting as a 'living envelope' of all our intentions (Bullington, 2013, p. 29). As such, the interpersonal dimension of existential authenticity involves attention to the body and the senses and emotions of dwelling in place (Belhassen et al., 2008; Buchmann et al., 2010; Kim & Jamal, 2007; Rickly-Boyd, 2013).

At the cremation grounds, the smoke from the burning wood pyres overtakes every other smell. Most tourists are unable to describe this smell of death, which is a mix of the sandalwood or general wood, clarified butter or 'ghee' (that is used on the dead body), flowers, smoke, ash, incense sticks and that of the human flesh. The common description of the smell was 'engulfing', 'consuming', 'over-powering', and anything but pleasant, yet also having a sacred or an authentic character. One tourist described the persistent smell of ashes and the smoke from the cremation grounds as 'overwhelmingly sensual', 'deeply etched in his mind', and that moving away from the cremation ground made him 'understand the difference between the smell of death and the smell of life'. Thus, it is through one's body and its interaction with Pashupatinath as a place that basic ideas about life and death are affirmed. However, in relation to one's own perception and anxiety about death, notions of spirituality, religion, morals and ethics come into play.

Gazing at death in a funeral ground is complex as it is situated in a landscape known as an important religious destination for the Hindus and every ritual performed at the funeral ground symbolizes multiple meanings. Not only a Hindu believer encounters the death rituals and takes away diverse meanings from it, but tourists from other cultural backgrounds do so as well. In dark tourism or than a tourism literature, extreme than a tourism also involves a connection with live events: witnessing death and deprivation or associated rituals as they happen (Dunkley et al., 2007), examples of which include observing public executions and attending burials, such as

the Bali cremations (McLaren, 1997). Unlike other Dark tourism sites where tourists would both learn and relish, Pashupatinath cremation area is the site that helps to witness live cremation through which the visitors will gain knowledge of Hindu death ritual and experience emotions and sentiments that will be heart rendering.

### **Incidental visitors**

Raine (2013) discovered a group of tourists in her study that were classified as sightseers, retreaters, and passive recreationalists. These individuals were themed as incidental because the natures of their visits were often unplanned and they were visiting the site for reasons other than to experience events related to death and burials. These visits were of interest to sightseers because of the general interest in the area and retreaters wanted to experience the location for reasons of escape from stresses of everyday life (Raine, 2013). These circumstances could coincide with the visitor's spectatorship of the open pyre dead body cremation in Pashupatinath. Furthermore, coinciding the aforementioned phenomenon, Dunkley's (2005; in Karki, 2020) convenience model as one of the various inspirations that may hasten visits to dark tourism destinations is quite relevant to the case of Pashupatinath. The primary motivation of the visitor is the heritage component, however, special interest tourism like dark tourism can intersect with the mainstream tourism forms as a matter of convenience (Dunkley, 2005; in Karki, 2020). There were several sharings during the fieldwork where it was found that the visitors who visit the Pashupatinath area were brought to the cremation site during their heritage tour. It was a part of the tour experience. Majority of such tourists have low knowledge about the overall death rituals, as well as their queries about the rituals are mostly naïve. However, after bringing them to the *Aryaghat* area, they are more curious to learn/know about it. But in some cases, visitors even have the pre-knowledge about the death rituals and pay for viewing it. They enquire about whether the funeral rite is being carried out or not, which shows their interest about the death rituals in the Pashupatinath area.

### **Edutainment**

Educational elements encourage tourists to be "aware" as well as increase satisfaction and the subjective meaningfulness of a tour. Here it is noteworthy to mention the newly invented concept that is 'edutainment' combined by two components of dark attraction and entertainment (Roberts, 2018; Dale & Robinson, 2011) perceived by the tourists through gazing (Urry, 2002) or seeing and photo taking of the events. Seeing is believing is the motto of dark tourism (Shim, 2014) This is the way of consuming the others' culture and tradition. The potential of edutainment has been highlighted by Walter (2009) where he states that, "Body Worlds, though ostensibly edutainment can also function as a *memento mori*" (Walter, 2009, p.49). Farmaki (2013) shows that education, remembrance and the strengthening of a national identity are key drivers

for a visit to dark sites. Henderson (2000) recognizes that visitors of dark tourist sites can be motivated by a quest for knowledge. Also, some kind of cultural interest, including history, represents an important motivation for the overall satisfaction of travel (Crompton, 1997; Pearce, 1983). Dark tourists could be classified into tourists as information seekers and hobbyists. These individuals are at burial sites and graveyards to explore and make discoveries. Often, they are there for educational purposes and might not engage with the site as a burial ground; usually they are emotionally detached and only visiting for a pleasurable experience (Raine, 2013). For example, hobbyists may be a photographer taking photos of the location because of their hobby of photography rather than their connection to death and disaster at a specific location. Pashupatinath *Aryaghat* provides an opportunity for the visitor to learn about the culture, tradition and practice of death rituals according to the Hindu religion. It provides them with an opportunity to learn about the cosmology and belief of Hindus regarding death as well. Each tradition and step that are taken during the death ritual represents some meaning which might attract the tourist to learn more. There are a number of photographs and videos that are uploaded in various social medias and websites about the *Aryaghat* where they have analyzed and interpreted the overall death rituals. This shows that *Aryaghat* provides a unique learning experience for the tourist.

Education can offer a form of catharsis, and Seaton (Seaton, 1996), in his study of dark tourism concludes that the observation of death as the goal of achieving catharsis is not a new concept. Visits to sites of death and suffering and tributes, allow for visitors to better understand death. Direct experience of visiting dark tourism sites, provides actualization of events associated with great suffering. The number of sites connected with suffering display the need for the educational function, so people could learn by example of previous errors. Therefore, dark tourism exhibits are rightly promoted and justified as an educational component.

Chronis (2005) recognizes that areas of suffering can be symbolically transformed and used by tourists to boost patriotism and national unity. Because of this, death and suffering could be seen as attractive factors in order to learn and maintain the memory with the tourists. Certain tourists visit such sites as a socially acceptable way of expressing interest in death and suffering, while some come to learn about the history that is associated with an event. Visitation of the Pashupatinath *Aryaghat* provides people with a knowledge that death is imminent and when one is born, at some point of time, he has to leave the world. A man is born empty and leaves the world empty handed which is evident from the death rituals. The body that is made of the five elements is released back to the universe. However, the view is in contrast with one of the stakeholders, who stated that learning about the death rituals only would not be sufficient to understand and learn the Hindu culture, which consists of a total of 16 rituals.

### **Moral disengagement**

Dark tourism, despite its typological, interpretative, political, and moral dilemmas has death both real and representational at its core and dark tourism sites, being emotionally charged spaces, are often referred to as places of symbolic and sacred consumption of death. As tourism spaces, different cultural values and norms interlace in these sites. Some values are treated as absolute because they are rooted in an individual's moral and ethical principles. As such, these are often non-negotiable and thus are protected from trade-offs with other values (Tanner &Medin, 2004; Tetlock, Kristel, Elson, Green, & Lerner, 2000). This occurs to both locals as well as tourists, hence there might occur moral dilemmas and trade-off scenarios. Over the years, psychological studies have demonstrated the centrality of moral identity in determining moral action while investigating the relationship between moral judgments, moral behavior, and emotions (Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, &Felps, 2009; Frimer& Walker, 2009; Haidt, 2001; Hoffman, 2000; in Sharma, 2020). However, when it comes to understanding how individuals engage in cognitive strategies to change meanings in a particular situation or use psychosocial maneuvers to disengage from immoral behavior, it is the process of moral disengagement which seems to offer an explanation. A psychological mechanism that plays an important role in unethical decision making is moral disengagement that operates at both individual and collective levels (Bandura, 1999; in Sharma,2020).

Moral disengagement refers to the cognitive deactivation of moral self-regulatory processes in decision making. It mediates the relationship between the moral principles that individuals hold and their behavioral transgressions. Through this process, unethical decisions can be made without individuals feeling apparent guilt or self-censure (Bandura, 1999; in Sharma, 2020). In the context of tourism, the moral disengagement mechanisms are useful in explaining how tourists reconstruct their actions to appear less immoral resulting in shifting of ethical boundaries (Sharma, 2020). Associating this context to the dark tourism consumption in the cremation grounds that offers a liminal space for tourists to exercise their moral agency in an inhibitive form, as well as proactive form and that transgressive behavior (Sharma, 2020). Analyzing the moral mechanisms involved in tourist consumption of death-related rituals in Pashupatinath, it was observed that the experience differs from person to person. Many of the visitors validated their consumption of the death ritual as the universal phenomenon of knowing about death before actually dying, and discussed the opportunity of sensitization of real grief through the grief of strangers. Many of the visitors called the process an awakening process of inevitability of death. Additionally, quoting Sharma (2016) about the pull factors of Hindu death rituals that keeps aside the morality and applies moral disengagements amongst foreign visitors to Hindu crematorium, 'the proximity of death is so alien to Western visitors

that it exerts a hypnotic pull, and many people find themselves lingering a long while, talking in hushed voices as they peer at the flames. There is something compelling about seeing death as a public event in the burning *ghats*' (Sharma, 2016). In due course, the cremation grounds can transform tourists' self-perceptions and lead to a discovery of one's own unrealized perceptions about life and death. This is evidenced by narratives of the tourist who had reviewed in the tripadvisor.com, who opined that the cremation site made him realize about the death and was deeply saddened when he saw a dead body of a child. One of the respondents stated that life and death is a normal cycle.

### Conclusion

The concept of dark tourism refers to the intriguing phenomenon by which sites of death and disaster are transformed into sites of popular tourist attraction (Dermody & Brennan, 2014). These spaces of death, and the events that have taken place or are re-created in these spaces, usually also engage or trigger within their visitors some issues of social conscience, or as will be suggested below-some shared emotion or an experience of involvement, with the death event. Death, disaster and atrocities in touristic form are providing potential and spiritual journey which are becoming an increasingly pervasive feature within the tourism landscapes for the tourists/visitors who have a special interest in death and anything associated with death. It is this very premise of the human condition that lies at the crux of the dark tourism concept. Reckoning to this facet, Pashupatinath Temple- a place of pilgrimage for the followers of *SanatanaDharma* (eternal religion) which shows the comprehensive aspect of Hindu death rituals, symbols and processes has been chosen as a part of this study.

Pashupatinath area has been a major tourist attraction for Hindus and non-Hindu visitors/tourists due to its antiquities, monuments, socio-cultural practice, religious belief and activities, festivals, norms and values and the cremation ground (*ghats*) where open pyre Hindu death rituals are performed. The exclusive element of live death ritual possessed by Hindu death ritual has captivated the western visitors and is widely consumed by visitors and promoted by travel companies as a tourist attraction without formal recognition. Despite the immense influence of the site in the tourism industry, the eastern dark tourism potential induced by the Hindu death ritual has not been recognized formally by the tourism stakeholders. As the central tenet of dark tourism being the death, Hindu death rituals in Pashupatinath could be firmly brought into the realms of dark tourism discourse. The existence of *ghats* at Pashupatinath area is a reminder of death and its inevitability. Henceforth, the pilgrimage to the site with the ancient history along with the dark tourism attribute has more to offer in terms of understanding the process of meaning-making by tourists. This study attempts to understand about the convergence of cultural heritage sites, pilgrimage, death rituals and tourists' sightseeing at Pashupatinath area and discusses

the potentials of categorizing the acts of witnessing live cremation events of deaths at Hindu-religious sites under the broader context of dark tourism.

The phenomenon of Hindu death tradition in the *ghats* of Pashupatinath is inclusive of all the death-related rituals and is a threshold of transition and transgression, a place in between life and death. The findings are narrowed down to the aspects of dark tourism like emotional feeling, personal connection, death and suffering, and unique learning experience. There is a difference in cultural and religious values, aspects like engaging entertainment, education/learning, memorial sites and dying and dead between the eastern and the western view of dark tourism. Overall, the key themes of recognizing the dark tourism attribute of Pashupatinath is emphasized as a conclusion.

While deliberating on the emotional facets of visiting cremation grounds, it surely is considered as a complex, culturally contested and ideologically laden liminal place. It may offer freedom and peace for some, but are likely to cause anxiety, constraint or threat for others. In response to tackle the distressing emotions, an individual is most likely to introduce a defense mechanism to 'an emphasized focus on facts, logics, and abstract reasoning to assert control over and reduce unpleasant emotions associated with internal or external events' (Cariola, 2017). This psychodynamic defense mechanism of accepting the reality and taking the lesson through the experience of the others can be called as intellectualization of emotion.

The other phenomenon that encourages sites consumption as a dark tourist product are the incidental visitors (Raine, 2013) whose visits to the sites are often unplanned and their visit to the site is for reasons other than to experience events related to death and burials. As a result, the accidental visitors turn into dark tourists as death rituals are processes that anchor every human being. Henceforth, they participate in the spectatorship. Another model that coincides along with it is the convenience model (Dunkley, 2005; in Karki, 2020), which suggests that, irrespective of the primary motivation of the visitor being the heritage component, the special interest tourism like dark tourism can intersect with the mainstream tourism forms as a matter of convenience.

Additionally, dark tourists could be classified into tourists as information seekers and hobbyists. These individuals are at burial sites and graveyards to explore and make discoveries (Raine, 2013). For a hobbyist, maybe the photographs are more significant than their connection and emotion of death rituals at Pashupatinath *Aryaghat*. In contrast, for someone with the quest, it is the opportunity for the visitor to learn about the cosmology and belief of Hindu regarding death. Each tradition and steps that are taken during the death ritual represent some meaning which might attract the tourist to learn more. There are a number of photographs and videos that are uploaded in various social media and websites about the *aryaghat* where they have

analyzed and interpreted the overall death rituals. This shows that *aryaghat* provides a unique learning experience for the tourist. The amalgamation of both offerings at one site is called edutainment.

Dark tourism, despite its typological, interpretative, political, and moral dilemmas has death at its core and dark tourism sites, being emotionally charged spaces, are often referred to as places of symbolic and sacred consumption of death. In order to defend the moral dilemmas of dark sites the visitors tend to practice moral disengagement. Associating this context to the dark tourism consumption in the cremation grounds that offers a liminal space for tourists to exercise their moral agency in an inhibitive form, as well as proactive form and that transgressive behavior (Sharma, 2020). Analyzing the moral mechanisms involved in tourist consumption of death-related rituals in Pashupatinath, it was observed that many of the visitors validated their consumption of the death ritual as the universal phenomenon of knowing about death before actually dying, and discussed about the opportunity of sensitization of real grief through the grief of strangers.

Despite all these prospective of dark tourism in Pashupatinath, the mere promotion of the crematory site may send a negative connotation to the site and raise moral and ethical concerns. Hence, tourism stakeholders should consciously introduce the phenomenon as an accompaniment to the popularized mainstream religious and cultural value of the site. Furthermore, the Hindu death ritual site that offers authentic death related experience should be brought into dark tourism scholarly debates. As a final point, this paper intends to offer new avenues to scholars working on dark tourism in Nepal. The findings will offer valuable information to those who wish to carry out research about dark tourism in Nepal. This research paper will also be beneficial to stakeholders to devise plans and policies.

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