

Journal of
Tourism & Adventure

Thanatology Tourism in Nepal Himalayan Region: A Case of Langtang

Neeru Karki

Lecturer, K and K International College, Kathmandu
neeru.karki@gmail.com

Article

Received 11 August 2020

Revised 27 August 2020

Accepted 2 September 2020

Keywords

Thanatology tourism, disaster, commoditization, remembrance, darventure

Abstract

On 25th April 2015 at 11:56 am local time, a devastating earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter scale shook Nepal. It is considered as one of the most fatal disasters in Nepal, ensuing aftershocks, avalanches and landslides triggered in the aftermath killed over 9,000 people. The most damage occurred when the earthquake triggered a destructive avalanche composed of ice, snow and soil, burying the entire Langtang village- a huge settlement of the popular adventure tourism destination of Nepal and killing at least 253 people. This study envisions to explore the scopes of special-interest dark (thanatology) tourism in the post-disaster scene, and it is used as a vehicle for self-reflection and education. This paper also explores the tourism prototype for an adventure tourism destination that has been severely impacted by a disaster. The paper adapts sociological theory, experience, and participant observation to complete a vanity ethnographic study of a “post-disaster tour” in the Langtang area. The tools and techniques of data collection derived from qualitative methodological approaches such as case study, semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, participant observation, content analysis, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and house to house visit.

Corresponding Editor

Ramesh Raj Kunwar
kunwar.dr@gmail.com

The findings show how the adventure tourism hosts bounced

back and depicted resiliency through unified reconstruction. Langtang's post-disaster touristic setting instigates a unique paradigm in the tourism sector that can go parallel with the adventure tourism engagements. The model is represented through the amalgamation of dark tourism (Dark) and adventure tourism (Adventure), which forms a phenomenon that is named "darventure" (Kunwar,2019) tourism. The 'darventure' tourism features the elements of both thanatology and frontier thrills at the same place. Dark tourist and adventure tourist experiences can coexist in Langtang, it creates a unique tourism prototype that complements both practices and can be offered as 'darventure' tourism.

Introduction

An inclusive definition of tourism does not only entail the act of touring, along with the construction of a worldview that renders the word 'tourable'....Tourism discourses are sets of expressions, words, and behaviours that describe places and peoples, and turn sites into easily consumable attractions (Salazar, 2006,p.326-327; Wintersteiner &Wohlmuther, 2013,p.35; in Kunwar, 2018,p.86).The concept of pleasant diversion in pleasant places is changing and broadening into new market demanding, more complex and even unusual (Wight, 2006; in Fonseca et al., 2006) dynamics. Dark tourism is the youngest subset of tourism. It entails the impulses of special interest tourism propounded by Trauer (2006; in Wen & Wu, 2020) which defines the provision of customized leisure and recreational experiences driven by individuals' and groups' unique interests (Derrett, 2001; in Wen & Wu, 2020). Similarly, dark tourism is distinctively linked with history and heritage; tourism and tragedies is more than a simple fascination with death, it is also a powerful lens that allows contemporary life and death to be witnessed and relationships with broader societies and culture recognized (Stone, 2013; Allman,2017).

"Dark tourism" is academically known as thanatourism. Dark tourism has been studied first by Seaton (1996) as thanatourism. Later on, this became an academic subject through the study of Lennon and Foley (2000). This study surrounds three definitions of thanatology (dark) tourism defined by Seaton (1996), Foley & Lennon (1996) and Stone (2006). 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' (Seaton, 1996). Foley and Lennon (1996) defined dark tourism as "the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites". Stone's (2006) definition states that dark tourism is 'the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre' (Stone, 2006, p.146). These definitions have three different emphases on dark tourism. A demand-led approach by Seaton (1996, 2009; in Light, 2017b), a supply led perspective by Foley and Lennon (1996; in Light, 2017b) and sites associated with death, suffering and macabre by Stone (2006; in Light, 2017b).

Dark tourism as an umbrella phenomenon also includes natural disaster tourism (Rucińska, 2016), disaster tourism (Fonseca, Seabra & Silva ,2015) and post-disaster tourism (Biran, Liu, Li, & Eichhorn,2014). The concept of disaster has been focused as one of the major aspects of dark tourism therefore in this study disaster, natural disaster and post-disaster scenario has been presented as a subset of dark tourism. Fonseca, Seabra, and Silva (2015, p.2) describe disaster tourism as the practice of travelling to areas that have recently experienced natural or man-made disasters. Individuals who participate in this type of tours are typically curious to see the results of the disasters and often travel as part of an organized group (Fonseca et al., 2016, p.2). Information about disasters and their effects draws human attention and also plays an important informative and educational role.

Langtang-a high-Himalayan valley which endured the wrath of an earthquake-triggered avalanche in 2015 was selected as a study site. Located in Rasuwa District of Nepal that lies between 27° 55' to 28 ° 25' N latitude and 85 ° 00' to 85 ° E longitude. The Langtang Valley starts from an altitude of 1,500m beside the road at Syabru Besi, disappearing up a narrow, forested gorge. The valley ascends steeply, and gradually widens before emerging into wide open spaces at Kyanjin Gompa (3,850m) (Horell, 2017). The narrow valley running east to west, wedged between dramatic 6,000 to 7,000m snow-capped peaks, the highest of which is 7,227m Langtang Lirung, to the south are the Chimse Danda (ridge), crossed by the Ganja La pass (5,122 m), and Jugal Himal, culminating in Dorje Lhakpa (6,989 m). It is situated inside Langtang national park (LNP) the fourth national park in Nepal and was established in 1976 as the first Himalayan national park which is famous for the endangered wildlife such as red panda, musk deer, Himalayan *langur* and *goral* (Lamsal, 2019) .Prior to the earthquake, the Langtang valley was home to around 500 people and an important site for Tibetan Buddhism. The era 1970s marked Langtang's transition from pastoral a yak-herding community to a tourism-based economy. Langtang is Nepal's third main trekking region (Horell,2017) and is a priority of off the beat trekkers who seek wilderness.

Nepal earthquake 2015 and its impacts in Langtang

Nepal experienced a disastrous earthquake (7.8 magnitudes) on 25 April, 2015, it is found to be one of the fatal disasters in Nepal (The US Geological Survey, 2015). The epicentre was in Barpak Gorkha district of Nepal – about 80km north-west of Kathmandu valley. The quake lasted approximately 50 seconds affecting 32 districts out of which 14 districts were heavily affected(Subedi, 2018). Earthquake and ensuing aftershocks, avalanches and landslides triggered in the aftermath killed over 9,000 people and over 1 million rendered homeless. It severely hampered the tourism industry(Kunwar, 2016, p.13). The negative repercussions of the disaster in Nepal's tourism industry are likely to be translated into a reduced number of tourist arrivals, in the year 2015 there was a decrease in tourist arrival by 32 percent compared to

2014, the total number of the visitors in the year 2014 was 7,90,118 whereas it dropped it to 5,38,970 in the year 2015 (*Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2015*). In earthquake 2015, Langtang was doubly devastated. The earthquake struck, landslides and avalanches came down throughout the valley, including a massive co-seismic avalanche that began on the southern slopes of Langtang Lirung (7,234m). The avalanche is said to have released half the force of the Hiroshima atomic bomb, causing the single most concentrated loss of life anywhere in Nepal (Kargel et al., 2016). The tremendous force of avalanche brought giant boulders, much of the glacier and entire frozen lake and an estimated 40 million tons of rock and ice was funnelled down the couloirs, straight onto the Langtang village (Langtang Valley Assessment; in Lamsal, 2019). The shaking also dislodged five different snowfields and hanging glaciers sitting two thousand meters above the village. A resulting landslide swept down the steep mountainside, picking up rock, ice, and snow along the way, until, fatefully, it took out the main settlement. The avalanche buried the entire village, more than half the community's population of 500 were killed in 2015 (Lord & Galen, 2017). It accounted death of 253 individuals at the same spot, out of the 175 were valley members, 27 tourism staffs, 10 Nepal army staffs and 41 foreign trekkers. The survivors in Langtang were evacuated to Kathmandu, where some lived for more than a year before returning to the valley to rebuild and restore their livelihoods.

The history of earthquake and landslide danger in Langtang is one of continuous negotiation, adaptation, and uncertainty, rather than a punctuated equilibrium that an isolated focus on major events like the 1934 and 2015 earthquakes would portray (Lord & Galen, 2017). However, notwithstanding the foregoing experiences of *sanghul* (local name of an earthquake) and the warnings from the geologists about the potential burst of ice lake, the community continued their settlement in a risk zone that further intensified the damage.

Rationale of the study

This work attempts to explore the flexibility of the tourism industry after a catastrophe, noting that the post-disaster scenario is the 'opportunity', 'signs of hope' and 'rebirth' (Miller, 2007, p.15), rather than an incident of decline. Furthermore, this study tries to identify the potential of dark tourism in Nepal's post-disaster setting. This paper also tries to reflect upon the efforts of the tourism hosts and the stakeholders to revive the tourism industry in the aftermath of the devastating experience. The reason for selecting Langtang as a site is because Langtang became a disaster site after the Nepal earthquake 2015 and is symbolic to a new reality that continues to affect the post-disaster scenario throughout Nepal. Based on a case study of Langtang, this study discusses the aspects of popular mountainous adventure tourism destinations becoming a disaster tourism attraction and seeks to add a new dimension to the dark tourism literature.

This paper sheds light upon the importance of disaster education and highlights the role of dark (disaster) tourism in drawing human attention towards disaster and playing informative and educational roles. In this backdrop, to explore the potential of dark tourism's educational role in Nepal's post-disaster setting, an adventure tourism destination with disaster experience. Adventure, itself is an area of thrills and death risks and a form of what Lyng (1990, 2005; in Priest & Bunting, 1993) calls "edgework" and attempt to negotiate that razor's edge between life and death, order and chaos, control and uncertainty, as such offers a consumption experience that is extraordinary and redolent with rich symbolic resources (Priest & Bunting, 1993). This paper merges death dynamics of adventure and dark tourism and attempts to suggest contextual tourism prototype.

The practices of disaster sites turning into the object of the dark tourist gaze in the aftermath of a disaster (Wright and Sharpley, 2016, p.2), a surprising omission gave the immediacy and potential impacts of tourism on the local community and the recovery process in places where disasters have recently occurred. The guiding questions for this study are as follows: What is the motivation of tourists to visit Langtang in a post-disaster context? What is the situation before and after the disaster and who contributed to boost tourism after the disaster? What are the measures that were adopted to promote Langtang as a post-disaster tourism site?

The objectives of this study are to examine the demand for and supply of dark tourism in Langtang and to identify and explore issues relevant to development, management, commoditization and interpretation of Langtang as a dark tourism site.

Ethical consideration

There are serious ethical concerns relating to thanatology-based tourism worldwide. And dark tourism is widely criticized around the world for this very reason. During this research, there were instances where the overall ethical status of the research method and the topic itself was questioned. Although, this study periphery the dark tourism elements of history, heritage, remembrance, education or entertainment (edutainment) purposes, there are several criticisms of dark tourism components.

Stone (2006,) states that ethics and the morality of selling provocative and 'sensitive' narrative through heritage to the touring and visiting community is a more established and documented problem of dark tourism. The practice of offering death for touristic consumption, exploitation of grief, disaster and death which is in recent living memory and any use of tragic history must be treated with care and sensitivity. Sound management and governance are fundamental to ensuring dark tourism sites are not reduced to simply a voyeuristic tourist gaze, where people come to gawp

upon others' grief and misfortune. Therefore, to help attain an ethical dimension, balanced and rigorous interpretation is required if dark tourism, in its various shades, is to achieve the educative and commemorative objectives of exposing our heritage which hurts(Stone,2006). Although the term dark denotes devoid of light (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010; Kunwar & Karki, 2020), dark tourism as a new tourism product tends to provide awareness, education and entertainment on several cases of history and heritage, tourism and tragedies. This tourism form could play a potential role in allowing us to confront the mortality of both ourselves and others, and addressing wider anxieties in modern society (Stone,2006) if interpreted well.

The locution 'dark tourism' has undergone critical scrutiny, as detractors claim that it entails negative cultural connotations (Dunnett, 2014; Edensor, 2013; in Martini & Buda, 2020), and prefer definitions perceived as more neutral, such as thanatourism. Regardless of the word used to describe visits to places related to death, negativity may be implied because of wider morality and mortality subtexts (Stone, 2006). Dark places are discursive formations that can influence or be influenced by perceptions, imageries and bodily practices, which may bring with itself a connotation of ghastly, negative and destructive (Sather-Wagstaff, 2011, p. 72), but also of the new or exciting (Edensor, 2013; in Martini & Buda, 2020)). Dark recalls diabolism, deviancy, monstrosity, death and chaos (Koslofsky, 2011). Nonetheless the imageries associated with darkness, night, and obscurity, have been portrayed also through positive qualities: it is the time of experimentation, excitement, and spectacle (Edensor, 2013, p. 2; Martini & Buda, 2020).Moreover, not only does 'dark' not always equate with negative, but dark places cannot be considered solely as vehicles of reflection on death, as it diminishes the importance of the spatial characteristics and agency of the tourist (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2009; in Martini & Buda, 2020).

Review of literatures

As far as dark tourism in the context of Nepal is concerned, the area remains untouched for so long despite the immense possibility. The discourse of dark tourism only started after the 2015 earthquake although Hepburn (2012) had already published an article on dark tourism in the context of Nepal. The paper entitled "Shades of darkness: Silence, risks, and fear among tourists and Nepalese during Nepal's civil war" published in Writing the Dark Side of Travel edited by J. Skinner. The work of Hepburn's chapter published in Hooper and Lennon's edited book entitled Dark Tourism: Practice and Interpretation (2017). Her chapter, "Everyday darkness and catastrophic events: Riding Nepal's buses through peace, war, and an earthquake" highlights the concept of "everyday darkness in Nepal" and mentions that although there are better and worse deaths, everyone dies. And although we all experience different kinds and degrees of suffering, no one dies without their share of it. This is everyday darkness. The very idea of dark tourism is premised on selective attention

to instances of events that are, in fact, ubiquitous (Kunwar, Aryal& Karki, 2019). Nepal has the potential to be a unique dark tourism supplier as indicated by Hepburn (2012, 2017). It is Kunwar (2015, 2016) who published two articles on disaster-related tourism in the post-earthquake context of Nepal where he proposed to develop dark tourism as an alternative product in Langtang of Nepal, through his article entitled “tourism and earthquake: a case study of Nepal and Turkey” (Kunwar & Limbu, 2015) and “tourism and natural disaster: a study of Nepal’s earthquake-2015” (2016).

Research methods

The study incorporates qualitative approach and descriptive and exploratory research design. This research values adapting a broader, qualitative approach focusing on unpacking ‘more of’, if not ‘the whole truth’ (Moufakkir& Reisinger, 2013, p. xiii) of the destination’s social reality. This paper adapts sociological theory, experience, and participant observation to complete a vanity ethnographic study of a “post-disaster tour” in the Langtang area. Adopting this methodology helped the readers to develop an understanding of post-disaster sociological, cultural, environmental and economic scenario specifically concerning tourism sector without being immersed in the tour experience. The tools and techniques of data collection derived from qualitative methodological approaches such as case study, semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, participant observation, content analysis, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and house to house visit. The interviews were undertaken by the researcher during one and half month period the month of December and January 2018-2019. A total of 337 respondents were interviewed, an equal number of men and women were interviewed, varying in age from 19 to 84 but a relatively age group of 30-50 years representing the local voices. There were only 8 interviews with the local youth aged between 18-25. The demand-side interviews were taken to 185 individuals from 20 different nationalities. And supply-side interviews were taken to 83 individuals including 21 old-aged people. An average of 7 in-depth interviews per day out of 45 field work days. A variety of occupations, such as teachers, students, social workers, photo-journalists, engineers and tourism/hospitality professionals. Respondents were selected through a convenience and snowball sampling. It was adopted as the most appropriate sampling method for a number of reasons. First, the displacement of much of the population to surrounding villages and towns following the earthquake significantly complicated the process of identifying and accessing the respondents; second, the research required respondents who could vocally express about the disastrous experience; and third, it was evident that the local community was fatigued by hordes ‘outsiders’(researchers, journalists) wanting to talk about the catastrophic impact. Hence, a process of recommendation and introduction was deemed the most effective in securing a representative sample of respondents

willing and able to participate in the research. The interviews, each lasting between 5 minutes and 2 hours and 30 minutes, took place in a variety of locations in Langtang valley i.e. either in respondents' homes or in local places.

The synchronic study is supported by diachronic evidence in terms of earthquake history, myth, story and suffering. In the course of analysing the data the researcher followed certain qualitative tools such as coding, sorting, imagery and semiotics, dominant themes, triangulation and phenomenological interpretation. The discussions covered a variety of themes relevant to the research objectives but sought specifically to address a few broad areas of concern, namely: the supply side perspective, demand side perspective and commoditization of dark tourism. The colloquial language has been used in this study. However, talking about the research limitations. The life of Langtangpa (people of Langtang) has irrevocably changed after the disaster, and the physical destruction of the valley is evident but the social consequences of the disaster is very complex to be portrayed.

This work was initially the part of researcher's dissertation entitled "Langtang: A Prospective Destination for Thanatology Tourism in Nepal" submitted to Department of Conflict, Peace, and Development Studies (DCPDS), Tribhuvan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (M.A) in Conflict, Peace and Development Studies in the year 2019. After the completion of the degree, the researcher continued the study and the work has been thoroughly revised in the form of a research paper.

Findings and discussions

Several modes of data collection on the aspect of thanatology in Langtang, led the emergence of quite a few significant themes viz: commoditization of Langtang as dark tourism site, supply-side and demand-side perspective on dark tourism, disaster and identity crisis, edutainment, 'darventure' (Kunwar, 2019)tourism, and so on to justify the prospective of thanatology tourism in Langtang. Yet, it can be recognized that few categories intersect one another. The common possibilities of dark tourism in Langtang are conscripted in following headings:

Tourism trends in Langtang

Particulars	2070/71	2071/72	2072/73	2073/74	2074/75
SAARC Country	279	277	63	157	289
Other Country	12,273	11,988	4,229	8,097	10,330
Total	12,552	12,265	4,292	8,254	10,619
%change	-6	-3	-65	92	29

Fig: Foreign Visitors Statistics in Langtang, (2019; in Lamsal, 2019, p.28).

The milestone for highlighting Langtang as a tourism-based economy started-off in 1970's with establishment of Cheese factory by Swish Anthropologist Tony Hagen, founding of Langtang National Park and contribution of local tourism enthusiasts. Every single settlement in the Langtang valley has embraced tourism as the major source of their livelihood. However, the three prominent settlements are Lama Hotel at the altitude of 2500m, Langtang village at 3400m and Kyanjin Gomba the highest settlement at the altitude of 3850m. The visitor tourism statistic shows that Langtang was visited by 12,265 visitors per year before Earthquake 2015. There was a drastic decrease in the visitor's in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. The immediate aftermath visitors were researchers, relatives of the bereaved members, journalists, volunteers and so on. There were only 4,292 visitors in the disaster year 2015. Whereas the Nepalese visitors are visiting Langtang more than ever before. Disaster popularized Langtang among Nepalese visitor and they were more empathetic to the suffering as they were also the one who experienced it on a different site.

Prior to the 2015 earthquake, there were few hotels with larger capacities in Langtang, but in the post-disaster setting, every household has turned into a hotel with room capacity as low as 2 bedrooms. Field interviews illustrate the slight increment in carrying capacity of the hotels in the anticipation of increment in the visitors. From each touristic settlement hosting approximately 400 visitors prior to disaster to hosting approximately 600 visitors per night in the post-disaster setting. However, the sluggish flow of the visitors and hotels being the only amenity has created an unhealthy competition in Langtang. Conferring to the field interviews, 9 out 13 local respondents when asked about the faulty tourism practices prevalent in Langtang noted about rampant bargaining, contact and recommendation system, demand and supply of free room and facilities, hoteliers conflict, tourist and locals' conflict and so on. When asked the same question, 14 out of 20 foreign visitors, listed constant pressure from hoteliers to stay in their place, recommendation as a problem. The foreign visitors realized their freedom of choices being ruined. Based on the field observation, many hoteliers were seen to be travelling to the cliff nearby during the time of tourist's arrival in order to persuade the visitors to stay at their hotels. Despite these faulty practices the locals are optimistic on the improvisation of tourism practices along with the stability. They also aim to revive the Langtang tourism committee, to create a win-win situation for hosts and guests and ensure responsible tourism through collective effort.

Disaster and resilience

In the immediate aftermath, the survivors in Langtang were evacuated to Kathmandu, where some lived for more than a year before returning to the valley to rebuild and restore their livelihoods. Most of the 488 survivors from the Langtang community shifted to a camp for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) that had

been established at the Phuntsok Choeling Monastery (Yellow Gompa) near Swayambhunath in Kathmandu. Most of the community remained as rehabilitee until October 2015 (Lord& Galen,2017), where as a significant team of locals were leading the reconstruction via the local-led recovery process initiative named Langtang Management and Reconstruction Committee (LMRC) which was tasked to organize the post-disaster recovery of the Langtang Valley in an equitable way and by seeking self-determination within the official process of reconstruction (Lord & Galen, 2017).In the absence of formal assistance from the government during this period, Langtang residents primarily relied on their own networks and ingenuity(Lord & Galen, 2017).

In the course of reconstructing the devastated village, in the very beginning, there was a huge influx of professional outsiders and donors aiming to intervene and support the community. Nevertheless, the dilemma on how to support the community was prevalent. This scenario could be correlated with the statement of Barsalou (2014). As he writes “ while it is apparent that professional outsiders can indeed plan and implement memorial projects, especially if they have a qualified skill set not readily available in survivor communities, it should always be ascertained whether they assist in bringing disparate together without creating unrealistic expectations or generating additional hostility’ (Barsalou, 2014; in Freidrich, Stone, & Rukesh, 2018,p,266). To avoid such conflict and solve the dilemma in the post-disaster period in Langtang, the insiders (the survivors) of the community played a very important role in coming together and decided to form a reconstruction committee on their own. LMRC, which originated as a symbol of local unity in times of hardship, comprised one person from each household as a member, making 116 members and seven executive members in the Committee. The unanimous voice was represented in several forums to plan for reconstruction, this effort showcased the resilience of the community, resilience is, ‘The ability of system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to the community and recover from the effects a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions’(UNISDR,2009). The committee eased the reconstruction work, most importantly by setting up a joint bank account for the entire community where the donated amount from every donor was distributed equally to 116 household. Even bringing and coming together demonstrated few conflicting expectations, priorities, memories, and realities which were solved by open discussion and participation. Financial transparency was the key for committee’s success.Along with that, the assistance of a small network of NGOs, to repair and rebuild community infrastructures—trail networks and bridges, community and religious centres, a health post, and a small hydro power station(Soden& Lord,2017) supported the livelihoods in the valley.

Disaster and identity crisis

The disaster somewhat faded away from the effervescence of Langtang as a tourism site for a while and there was a phase of identity crisis and delusion within the Langtangpa community about the revival of tourism in their place and going back to normal. Langtang Valley was long considered a *beyul*(sacred hidden valley within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition), it had only recently become a tourist Shangri-La.Hence, Langtangpa's are attached to their place and this attachment is discussed under the spectrum of identity and identity crisis. In the immediate aftermath, the government imposed a cordon for three months, cordon is a barrier established by an authority to temporarily exclude the public from a defined area. It is a tool that allows authorities to manage access to and from the restricted area (Underwood,Orchiston, ERI, & Shrestha, 2020). But, later Langtang was claimed inhabitable, the authority proposed the translocation of the entire Langtang community.This decision was highly opposed by the people of Langtang because of the issue of identity crisis, topographical variances, and attachment to the place and so on.

The avalanche and the force of the blast it created, turned the centuries-old village of Langtang into a monotone landscape.The disaster hindered the cultural landscape of Langtang,it cannot be neglected that culture joins each and every quintessence that furnishes the human flavors with the capacity to be a piece of a general public (Albense & Boedeker, 2003; in Pliakas,2017). The hustle of rebuilding further deteriorated the cultural identity of the Tibetan Buddhist community. Regardless of locals' interest in rebuilding in a culturally sensitive way, Langtang's new concrete structure failed to embed the cultural essence. These indexes the contours of culture and catastrophe in Langtang. The locals, particularly the older generations, wished to recover a future that resembles the past. At present day, only one village in the valley named Mundu,reflects the past through the traditional houses that still remain.However,people in Mundu are divided as to whether they should repair their homes (now symbols of a 'traditional' or lost past) or deconstruct them and build new based on the modern government-endorsed designs. Caught between longing for that which is lost and desires for a new post-earthquake future, they are engaged in their own kind of‘negotiated traditionalism’ (Lord, 2017). The authentic heritage has become even more endangered in Langtang at the present context, the senior most religious leaders, very few people who knew stories and songs of the place died in the disaster ensuing a huge cultural and heritage loss. The traditional ways of life such as yak herding, farming and weaving have declined and there is very little chance of passing the old practices to the generations to come (Kvicalova, Slade, & Gawne, 2017; in Lamsal, 2019). The transmission of language to the younger generation is gradually declining as children as young as 4 years old are sent to Kathmandu for sponsor-supported education. Adding on a visitor’s perspective on the cultural essence of Langtang, 7 out of 11 foreign respondents explained about

the missing mountain culture that they were expecting to see in the mountain village i.e. the features like wooden carved houses, heritage trails, people working in highland pastures, weaving, cultural welcome and singing songs. The present Langtang valley resembles very little to what it was before the disaster.

Cultural coping mechanism

It is widely mentioned that disasters give lessons to the communities that are rechanneled by means of a mythical mechanism of resiliency (Krostanje & Ivanov, 2012). Referring to Korstanje and Ivanov's (2012) model, the role of sacralization of the dead in the process of anthropomorphism ultimately ends in exhibiting a place wherein suffering, tragedy and curiosity converge and reinforce the social bondage and cultural values of every society. Resembling this phenomenon, the post-disaster visits to Langtang echoed subtle emotions mixed with trauma, hope and frustration that was combated through strong spirit. The resilience and determination of Langtangpa community to lead the reconstruction phase all by themselves 'not merely as victims of disaster or idealized 'others' living in a remote Himalayan community, but as complicated people facing uncertainty, doing the best they can' (Austin, 2017). The path of sustainable recovery, bouncing back and resettlement was directed by Langtangpa's engagement in cultural and religious coping mechanism. Several acts of memories and death rituals were organized signifying the different forms of cultural coping mechanism and post-disaster engagement to help themselves recover from the suffering and despair.

The cultural coping mechanism initiated along with the combined funeral acts of reciting the funerary text, the *Bardo Thötröl* also called as Tibetan Book of the Dead in Tibetan Buddhism. Aforesaid series composed by Padmasambhava is recited by *Lamas* to ease the consciousness of a recently deceased person through death and assists them into a favorable rebirth and continues throughout the 49-day period leading to rebirth (Fremantle & Trungpa, 1975). On 49th day, community members and *Lamas* (priest) conducted a *ghewa* ceremony, that signifies the final stage in the larger process of 'ritual poiesis' that facilitates the "transmutation of life" in the Tibetan Buddhist traditions (Desjarlais. 2016; in Lord, 2017). In addition to that, the field observation showcased the practice of everyday remembrance ritual called *sangsing* which requires burning incense, offering water in the altar where pictures of holy people and bereaved members are placed with ritual items and ingredients in the morning and evening hours. Formal ceremony was organized in Langtang village to mark the one-year anniversary of the earthquake where Langtanpa's along with the families of foreigners who lost their lives in Langtang gathered in the avalanche zone to perform religious rites, which was led by a group of local *Lamas*. Diverse acts of commemoration were conducted including reading aloud the names of the deceased, unveiling memorial walls with the name inscription of the deceased, instilling white

prayer flags in avalanche spots as a symbol of peace and so on. Hotels are constructed in the name of bereaved relatives and few relatives have tried to give continuity to the hotels that used to be run by the deceased relatives. Photographs are of great importance in the tourist driven community, but in the aftermath of disaster they rarely have pictures of their house and the loved ones. Hence, in a community house there was a photo display of old houses retrieved from the satellite imagery and old pictures sent by the former visitor which can also be taken as an act of memory and revisiting the past. There has also been an increase in religious pilgrims visited by the entire community in post-disaster settings including the prominent tour to India to get blessings from Dalai Lama in the immediate aftermath.

Supply-side perspective

Perspective of those who have suffered a disaster is very important in order to get a sense of the supply side narrative of post-disaster tourism. Local's understanding of what a disaster 'is' really important, researcher comprehended that the Langtangpa community depicted utter reluctance to talk about the disaster experience. Most of the locals associated Langtang's tourism motivation to the adventure tourism model and they perceived it to be the only medium that engages the tourists. Conferring to the field interviews, 23 out of 25 local respondents ranked Langtang's natural beauty (mountain, *beyul*, National Park) on the top rank to the visitor's motivation to Langtang.

Local's narrative evidently suggests that there is a demand and curiosity among the visitors to know about the disaster, however, the locals are in denial of addressing visitor's motivation relating the disaster and obstinate from addressing the queries about disaster, death and suffering. The concept of becoming the object of dark tourist gaze is considered as a subject of intrusion to their personal life. Many of the local residents of Langtang mentioned the voyeuristic attitude of visitors that checked their patience at times. Although they have been involved in the tourism industry for two decades, they explained they need some space and privacy which are often infringed by visitors who would cross their limits by either asking too personal questions, clicking pictures every time. Some respondents believed that tourists come to Langtang not to gaze upon the mountains but to gaze upon the destruction with, perhaps, an element of schadenfreude. Few anecdotes of the locals while intervening these narratives are:

"They are our guests, they are paying us for the services we deliver, we have to respect them...but that doesn't mean we need to bear all their irrational actions."

"Langtang is famous for its beautiful landscapes, flora, fauna, heritage...yet people like to go back in the rubble and take pictures. Is that a pleasant scene? What do you say?"

“We know tourists like to take pictures as a memory, but sometimes we are not ready.”

“I think the natural beauty of our place is more appealing, rather than the deserted avalanche site”.

The researcher's questions that commenced with the content of disaster experience were unattended by the locals. Few locals padlocked the interview in the middle of conversation when they had to recall the gloomy morning of the disaster experience. Hence, a participatory data collection method was adopted. The daily schedule of Langtangpa is dedicated towards rebuilding their lives and restarting tourism. Therefore, to think of the scope of dark tourism, discussion on working on aspects is not impossible but will definitely be too early to be initiated by the locals. Nevertheless, some respondents were more pragmatic, revealing the inherent resilience of people of Langtang and sharing the entire experience of disaster. There was a different narrative from few respondents who realized that disaster marketed their place in the world like never before and also discussed the prospects of tourism flourishing in a post-disaster setting. A variety of insights and retorts in regards to post-disaster tourism is observed, from intolerance to voyeuristic gaze upon the misery to feeding the curiosity of the visitors in a right way in order to prevent misinterpretation of their place and experience. The local's resilience and evolution over the time in relation to disaster tourism discourse is seen. Few anecdotes shared by the locals showed immense positivity on dark tourism possibility as noted:

“we can't change the past and we can't lie about it either, we suffered and we bounced back, there need not be any reluctance in sharing what we went through, that is part of us now. It is better to share the real experience rather than making ourselves misunderstood by the random hunches of the visitors”.

Demand side perspective

When asked about the major motivation behind visiting Langtang valley, the majority of the visitors responded that the main reason for visiting Langtang was because of its adventure and tourism features i.e. beautiful landscapes and mountains, scope off-beat travel, adventure, wildlife, wilderness, remoteness and comradery. The authenticity in Langtang valley trekking has been promoted through the word of mouth marketing principle and preferred by beginners, short-term travelers and cultural enthusiasts. Aforementioned preferences majorly cover the context of the pre-disaster scenario and priorities of adventure tourists who are unknown about the disastrous event of Langtang. However, those who knew about the disaster, prior to the visit and during the visit, developed an interest to know about the disaster, to see the rugged trail, the mound created by the avalanche and so on. A number of local respondents reported that every tourist that stays at their hotels are curious

about the disaster experience. The urge to understand and explore more on disaster experience can be a significant pattern to imply dark tourism. Some of the anecdotes that explains the demand side perspective are:

“Recommended by a friend who is a mountain Lover. Choose Langtang also because I could support the community by visiting here. I visited most of the guest houses... purchased their food and services...since everyone was inviting to stay at their place... that was the least I could do...”.

“We didn’t know about it before coming to Langtang. We felt very sad while walking through the site of devastation.”

“Didn’t know about the avalanche, only knew of the earthquake. Who enjoys watching devastated sites?- I could not imagine the intensity of the damage it made in the lives of people”.

“I see this place as it is now and want to contribute for a better-looking back would not be an ideal idea-I don’t want to dig into their personal stories- but rather believe that they need our support to heal- Their resilience must be respected”.

“I was so curious about the entire incident, asked a few questions to the locals but was very reluctant to dig into their personal life”.

“Mountains are the danger zones for most of the German’s, they don’t like taking risks”, that’s why they hire porters and guides. I couldn’t do that because I can’t afford it as a student. I thought it would be risky to visit this place, especially with all the bad things that I heard from the news. I can now recommend this to anyone.”

Although adventure motivations emerged as the first reason to choose Langtang, there was subtle visitor interest towards disaster that the researcher perceived through fieldwork. Disaster reversely popularized Langtang in the tourism market by relating to the magnitude of the suffering and damage caused by the earthquake triggered avalanche. It generated inquisitiveness to visit and know more about the occurrences in tourism enthusiasts. In the case of actual visitors, every visitor in the valley must pass through the avalanche site because it falls on the main trail. The spot of the disaster is so confronting that visitors and adventure tourists who visited Langtang for adventure purposes will incidentally turn into dark tourists because of the curiosity that arises in them when they see the intensity of the damage. The monotone area spread almost 1.5 km where the former Langtang village was situated resembles nothing to its former state is filled with rubbles, big rocks, debris of older settlement, white prayer flags, small pond, a five storied building in the corner that survived the avalanche. The walk through the disaster site generates a lot of questions among the visitors and despite the curiosity they will have to be limited with the information provided by their guides and their conversation with their hotel owner.

To sum up, adventure tourism Langtang was already commodified before the earthquake but after the great disaster a new possibility of dark tourism has been identified with the patterns of visitors thinking about disaster, death and sufferings. This will be consumed by the tourists on one side and getting adventurous activities on the other. Langtang visitors will experience repressed sadism (disaster, death and suffering) which compels them to memorialize the invisible debris of the dead buried under the avalanche site. Until before the earthquake the tourists used to get only one benefit now in the post-disaster the prospective tourists would get multiple benefits with features of darkness and adventure respectively.

Commoditization of Langtang as dark tourism site

Disaster is portrayed as the consequences of a sudden, unpredictable and extreme event that define it not only as a disaster but also as a dark tourism attraction (Wright & Sharpley, 2016). More specifically, it is arguably the human cost of an 'event concentrated in time and space, in which a society or one of its subdivisions undergoes physical harm and social disruption' (Kreps, 1995, p. 256; in Wright & Sharpley, 2016), often measured in a relatively significant number of deaths and injuries, that transforms the site of a disaster into a potential disaster tourism destination. Earthquake 2015 popularized Langtang for catastrophe whys and wherefores and sensitized its valuation as a disaster tourism destination. Every visitor approaching Langtang valley knowingly or unknowingly confronts the disaster tourism attributes of the place, they have to cross a rugged trail of approximately 1.5 km which is the major site of an avalanche situated between Gumbadada and new Langtang village. The old Langtang village was situated in the avalanche zone prior to the 2015 earthquake and there is no trace of it at present. In the course of proceeding one's journey everyone should encounter the mound which reflects the avalanches' damage. This might raise curiosity to the visitors. If a visitor is unknown about the disaster occurrence or self-guided, his/her mind will generate questions as to why this place is like this? What resulted in dispersion of large rocks everywhere? Why is the trail not maintained? Why are the white Flags standing in between the site? And if the visitors know about the disaster experiences as a part of a guided tour, he/she will have questions such as How was the place before it got swiped away by an avalanche? What were the settlements like? And so on. The absence of information from the authorities further complicates the process of curiosity about the composited wreckage. The visitors have to be limited with the verbal narrative provided by their guides, some passerby and few locals who are ready to open up about their disaster experience.

From the field observations, it is evident that the disaster site and the memorial walls were consumed as an attraction by many visitors. However, the consumption of the disaster related attributes is not commoditized by the authorities. Disaster sites act as an open learning laboratory; hence, a valid information dissemination

is a key in disaster sites. But in the case of Langtang the official attempt to deliver information about the disaster is almost non-existent. The local authorities identified to perform the task are the village council and ward office, the Langtang national park authorities, and the buffer zone committee. There are no signages to facilitate the visitors on post-disaster tourism experience. Information desks are required to feed the curiosity and warn about the safety of walking through the disaster affected trails. The deserted path ends with a memorial *mhane* (Buddhist earthen-stone monuments) and a long freestanding stone wall engraved with Tibetan Buddhist mantra, Kunwar, 1989,1999) and inscription names of the people who lost their life in Langtang disaster, prayer flags, special messages carved by the relatives of foreigners and photographs of the deceased. The open structure and windy weather in Langtang village has held only a few pictures now, the inscription is blurred and information is almost faded away, bamboo attached prayer flags are scattered here and there and the place is not maintained. The authorities need to understand that memorials are not just a symbol of commemorating the lost lives but also a way through which relevant information can be communicated to the visitors (Wright & Sharpley, 2016), these potential disaster tourism products can be taken as a very powerful tool of memorial interpretation and disaster education.

Educational elements can be commoditized as dark tourism products in Langtang. The place is already established as an education hub for outdoor and adventure trainees with the mountainous sport, peak climbing, rescue, ski and rock-climbing feasibility, it is a place selected by many geologists to understand more on the mountain geographies, the rich biodiversity has attracted scholars of natural science in Langtang since time immemorial. To this milieu, disaster gives an additional dynamic on consuming Langtang as a disaster education site. As educational visits to the dead, whether in the classroom through books or at heritage sites through educational tourism, are the basis of the teaching of history. Sometimes the dead are physically present, as in exhibitions. The exhibition, like all popular yet purportedly serious exhibitions, museums and heritage sites, and indeed like comparable television documentaries, is edutainment (Walter,2009,p.48; in Kunwar, Karki, & Aryal). As Cohen epitomizes dark tourism, acts are an instrument which can be used for educative purposes (Korstanje, 2017, p. 61). Dark tourism sites represent unique opportunities for learning not only about the historical facts of atrocity and disaster, but also human experiences of and responses to them, including our own (Roberts, 2018, p.628). The dead, like much else from the past, are used to educate and entertain today's masses- as they were too in 18th-century public executions (Walter, 2009, p. 48). To which Roberts (2018) Dale and Robinson (2011) called 'dartainment', which identifies both dark attractions that attempt to entertain (Robinson & Dale, 2009 b; in Dale & Robinson, 2011, p. 213). There needs to be design and dissemination

of resources and educational material at all levels. But in the case of Langtang all the education materials are centralized in the district headquarter named Dhunche and travelers miss out on a lot of information. The interviews with national park authorities reflected that documentaries and several audio/video tools are made yearly but only kept in the official record.

The other prospect of commoditization is remembrance, it entails the act of commemoration of those whose suffering and death one may not have personally witnessed, but is not yet history. When memory is not first hand, it turns into remembrance or history, genealogy, or ancestry ...and doubtless other possibilities too (Walter, 2009, p. 47). If there is no formal way to care for the dead, all that is left is to remember them. If a shrine is where the dead are cared for, prayed to and where guidance is sought from them, a memorial is more simply a place of memory. Memories may be internal to the individual visitor, or shared within the group, but a memorial is not designed to be a place of interaction between the living and the dead—or at least, not officially. Post-disaster memory projects are proposed in Langtang in different ways. The inception of Langtang Memorial Project aimed to create a 'living archive' of Langtangpa culture and heritage and supported Langtangpa to tell their tales before and after the avalanche. The projects as part of a larger commitment to polyvocality in the wake of disaster—providing space for at-risk communities to describe their own conditions of vulnerability and narrate their own process of recovery (Schuller 2014; Liboiron 2015; Gergan 2016; in Lord & Murton, 2017, p.96). This action of souveniring is connected to the meaning of the word rooted in the Latin verb *subvenire* (meaning 'to remember') The other aspect of commoditization could also be souveniring the disaster experience.

The other dark tourism commoditization discourse is identified through the museum construction plan of the locals. Since the rebuild household couldn't maintain the heritage authenticity. Locals have now realized that there needs to be an effort to preserve the settlements which were not devastated by disaster and convert them to museums. The old houses are not used as tourism products by the locals despite that they are being consumed as one hence few notables in the valley have been discussing setting up a museum as a way to introduce new products in Langtang's tourism and an initiative to protect the authenticity related to their identity. Museums allow combining emotional and spiritual factors to create the tourist experience (Sheng & Chen, 2012; in Korstanje, 2012,p.57). In the case of Langtang the proposal of museum establishment project in Mundu village of Langtang highlights the component of historical reminiscence and cultural entertainment (Sheng & Chen 2012; in Korstanje, 2012, p.57; in Kunwar, Aryal, & Karki, 2019).Museums have been described as key institutions through which we understand our past and present identities. All the belongings that Langtangpa owned are only in their memory now. Langtangpa are

concerned about the loss of cultural identity, therefore they are willing to archive the few things that still remain. Almost 8 out of the 19 houses in Mundu, a village within the valley resembles the old Langtang valley's outlook. With regards to the houses that survived the earthquake with repairable damages, the owners are planning to demolish the house and make it a new one to fit the touristic mandate of providing rooms and services. Amidst the demolition plans, there are narratives of turning those houses into museum and cultural heritage sites and compensating the owners for their contributing to saving heritage.

The curiosity of the people about suffering of their own kind appears to be insatiable, and motivated by empathy, excitement and other psychological stimuli of varying moral worth (Uzzell, 1989; in Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996, p.96). Thus, the tourist appetite for sites and artefacts relating to tragedy is substantial. "If a museum or a site is to have educational value...they must also honestly represent the more shameful events of our past... if interpretation is to be a social good then it must... alert us to the future through past" (Uzzell, 1989:46; in Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996,p.96). Natural disaster are part of the common heritage of mankind but rarely in themselves can be seen as atrocities in so far as there is no human perpetrator. However, disasters and accidents link this theme to the literature on natural and human hazards (Yin and Moore, 1985; Oliver-Smith, 1986; Platt, 1986; in Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996,p.96).

The use of storytelling as a product is yet another dimension of commoditization of dark tourism in Langtang. On the eve of 24 April, 2015, hundreds of people gathered at the monastery for a *ghewa* of a deceased valley resident who wanted to be buried near Langtang Lirung. The earthquake of 25 April 2015 induced a disastrous avalanche which is called *Khayuu* in Langtangpa language. Langtang village (3040m) of Langtang valley was completely buried. The field interviewees mentioned that the structures constructed predominantly of stones and strong materials despite that, almost 100 houses were buried and were grounded by the debris and only one house adjacent to the mountain survived. Only a few of them luckily survived. Those who survived were mourning over the loss and some were frantically searching for their loved ones. The aftershocks continued to occur with grand rocks falling down from the mountains. The fear remained among survivors. All of the remaining 488 Langtangpa survivors were evacuated to Kathmandu. Every survivor went through a traumatic phase and the field interviews highlighted that there was no psychosocial support and intervention dedicated to help the Langtangpa community. The survivor stories were quite moving, personalized and graphic. Some anecdotes from the the survivors are cited below:

"Every ghewa for me is about drinking and dancing a lot and waking up at noon. That day I woke up at 6:00 am, I took an alternative way to reach Sindhum, my

home. If I had taken the main route I would have been offered tea in every relative's home and we would have been busy with conversations and probably would have been swept away by the avalanche".

"Four of us had session breaks of our high school, we celebrated ghewa and slept together in our friend's house which was in the present avalanche zone. Two of us woke up nearly at 11:30 am and were ready to go home. My friend who wouldn't let me go without a cup of tea didn't stop me that day. That was quite unusual. We passed the village and minutes later an avalanche covered the entire settlement. We witnessed it from a cliff. It is the darkest nightmare." - As narrated by a local teenager about the disastrous event and who could not pursue his further education because of the family obligation created after the loss of his father and sister in the disaster.

"I am a survivor of the Langtang disaster. I had been guiding tourists on this route with one of my friends. We had divided our guests. We were returning down. He was a few minutes ahead of me. Me and my guest were taking a rest, and we could see them from far. Suddenly it was all dark, dark fumes made it hard to breathe. We rushed to the mountain wall; stones were falling from everywhere. We spent that night in the cave. We could hear people screaming all night but we were helpless. We were unsure if we could survive the night. Next day, 25 of us were evacuated to Dhunche. I was the only one who could speak. I mustered up the courage to revisit this place after 4 years. It was a traumatic experience. This place is nothing like before." - As narrated by a guide who survived the Langtang disaster 2015 and was continuously looking at the disaster spot through the hotel windows trying to picturize everything that he experienced four years ago.

Although the experience was similar, there were diverse stories of survivor's guilt when locals were asked to recall the disastrous incident. The statements made by 14 out of 24 local respondents who survived the incident were very striking and full of pain. They explained about how they wished to save lives and decrease the casualties but had to remain helpless because of the situation they were in. Many people died of the cold and since everyone were exposed to that situation there was no option to help, people were struck under giant boulders and asking for help but survivors couldn't help, those who were unharmed by the avalanche took a shed in the caves from where they could hear people screaming for help and since rocks were falling from everywhere and it was too dark the survivors had no alternative but to listen to the appeal. A few died asking for water and the survivor has been regretting still now for not being able to provide water. All the dead bodies were collected and burned together. Survivors have guilt on not being able to organize proper funerals in the fatal death emergency. The intensity of pain is different in the case of natural and unnatural death. In the local language, fatality and mortality is distinguished

asgelsuru/hoptesisuru and *suru* respectively. These local narratives can be the element of commoditizing dark tourism. This engagement can help visitors to gain awareness about disaster whereas it can help locals in the healing process through the received empathy. For Ashworth and Hartmann (2005), empathy relies upon the capacity of heritage consumers to identify with individual victims of the atrocity in question. Subsequently, Miles (2002, p.1176) regards this enabling of empathy 'between the site seer and the past victim over and above the evocation of historical knowledge' as essential to the success of dark tourism interpretation. However, Genuine empathy of being able to understand and share the feelings of another with those whose lives and deaths are represented by in-situ sites may be impossible to achieve.

Potential of 'darventure' tourism prototype.

Adventure tourism in Langtang was commodified before the earthquake. After disaster the destination reflects a new product of dark tourism and popular adventure tourism destination. Therefore, the prospective tourists visiting Langtang may not know about the disastrous events. When they reach the proposed destination, they will come to know about the tragedies that might instantly change their mind thinking about disaster, death and suffering. Ultimately this will be consumed by the tourists on one side and getting peak experience from their adventurous activities on the other. Thus, the tourists might realize, consume and enjoy from nature and culture. Though the trekking seems to be the most important activities a visitor visiting post-disaster Langtang will experience with repressed sadism (disaster, death and suffering) which compels them to memorialize with invisible debris of the dead buried under the avalanche. The tourists used to get only one benefit prior to the disaster, but now in the post-disaster the prospective tourists visiting both sites would get multiple benefits with features of darkness and adventure respectively.

This could be called as 'darventure' (Kunwar, 2019) a new form of dark tourism (Kunwar, Aryal, & Karki, 2019). The model is represented through the amalgamation of dark tourism (Dark) and adventure tourism (Adventure), the letters "dar" from dark tourism is prefixed and the letters "venture" from adventure tourism is suffixed to form a phenomenon that is named "darventure" (Kunwar, 2019). And, the phenomenon of 'darventure' tourism features the elements of both thanatology and frontier thrills at the same place. Dark tourist and adventure tourist experience can coexist in Langtang, it creates a unique tourism prototype that complements both practice and can be offered as 'darventure' tourism. Implication of this model can be further justified by Dunkley's (2005) recommendations on various inspirations that may hasten visits to dark tourism destinations. In the case of Langtang, the primary motivation of the visitor is the adventure component, however, special interest tourism like dark tourism can coincide with the mainstream tourism forms as a matter of convenience (Dunkley, 2005). Adventure tourists (mainstream tourists) can also be a dark tourist

partially and explore the dark attractions. This way, dark tourism can be considered as a complimentary phenomenon in the case of Langtang. Korstanje and Ivanov's (2012) have also highlighted the implication of dark tourism as a part of the resilience of tourism industry which are impinged with diverse threats. Tourism, from our end, does not seem to be a resilient industry but it works as a mechanism (one among many others) societies develop to intellectualize the disaster (Korstanje & Ivanov, 2012). This resiliency can be a ripe moment for tourism suppliers for introducing circumstantial tourism products like dark tourism in a post-disaster scenario.

Post-disaster dilemma

The reconstruction realities were narrated by the community in different ways by prioritizing their present ameliorations (political, social, personal, economical). Even global communication mediums like the media mired the destination image of Langtang. This could be linked with the concept of dissonant heritage as defined by Asworth and Hartmann (2005:253) as "lack of congruence at a particular time or place between people and the heritage with which they identify", characterized by (re) presenting painful pasts. Therefore, it is crucial for the researcher of this study to 'identify, determine, and attempt to alleviate narrative tensions within the interpretation of dark tourism sites' (Freidrich et al., 2018, p.266).

Media is a crucial element in the consumption and supply of dark tourism experiences. In the case of Langtang, the media mired the destination image. The fiasco in differentiating Langtang village (*Langtang lungba*) and Langtang valley circulated the misinformation of the entire valley swiped up by avalanche whereas the reality was one settlement named Langtang village was only affected by the avalanche. There are several other settlements i.e. Rimche, Lama Hotel, Thangshyap, Ghodatabela, Gumbadada, Mundu, Sindhum, Yamphu, Nashapali, Kyanjin Gompa within the valley that was only affected by the earthquake. The title story entitled "Langtang Gone" questioned the existence of the rest of the settlements within the valley. The intensity of the damage was emphasized frequently through every medium but Langtangpa's resilience and self-determination in leading the rebuilding process by setting up independent committee was kept on shadows. Realizing an urgency to the participation of locals in disaster interpretation and signifying their effort of coming together during in the post-disaster scenario local tourism entrepreneurs mentioned: "*Interpretation of the disaster experience will be entirely changed if there is no local people to voice their experience*".

The field interviews, however, show that portrayal of Langtang as a victim site somehow helped in advertising a valley which was marketed solely on "word of mouth" principle prior the earthquake. Yet, another dynamic to the post-disaster scene is the lines of responsibility in a post-disaster situation which creates conflicts among the

various stakeholders. In fact, there are many instances where much valuable time is wasted after a disaster determining who will take charge of the reconstruction agenda and how lines of responsibility for implementing that agenda will be organized. Disputes that can be resolved over time under ordinary circumstances can be very difficult to handle if there is inadequacy in the post-disaster scene and it can further complicate the situation. The local authorities identified in the case of Langtang are Langtang National Park, Buffer Zone Committee, Gosainkunda Village Council, Ward Number-4 of Gosainkunda Village Council. The post-disaster scenario and reconstruction roles created a dilemma among the authorities on who will lead the post-disaster rebuilding. When asked about the corrective measures to be taken in order to improvise the existing faulty practices in the tourism sector and planning and priorities to introduce new form of tourism products in post-disaster Even four years after the disaster there is a blame game among the local stakeholders. Another form of conflict existing in Langtang is similar to Schwab et al. (1998) demolitions related conflict particularly of badly damaged historic infrastructures. Langtang valley's cultural architectures can be resembled only through one particular village named Mundu that too not visited by many visitors as it doesn't lie on the main trail. Many visitors mentioned the lesser authentic essence through the building structures existing in the post-disaster Langtang, the locals acknowledge the fact that the speedy rebuilding process was unable to guarantee the historic designs in the architectures.

Conclusion

The massive earthquake of 2015 devastated Langtang, one of the most popular adventure tourism destinations of Nepal Himalayan region. Nevertheless, the post-disaster Langtang gives a picture of a resilient, self-supportive and introspective society that is well-suited to the change but somehow reserved towards outsiders. Tourism has been a part of its economy since 1953, hence, the resilient and robust efforts of unified reconstruction were made by adventure tourism hosts to revive their tourism value. This paper attempts to explore the flexibility of the tourism industry after a catastrophe, noting that the post-disaster scenario is the 'opportunity', 'signs of hope' and 'rebirth' (Miller, 2007, p.15), rather than an incident of decline. Furthermore, this study tries to identify the potential of dark tourism in Nepal's post-disaster setting.

The data was collected primarily through a collection of personalized interpretation through first person stories. The visitors and locals' words are recollected and are illustrated in several dark tourism themes. On the one hand the interpretation moves on to the earthquake triggered avalanche and follows individual victims and survivors through the actual event and the days that followed to cover the supply-side perspective, but on the other hand the interpretation is based on Langtang being chosen as a destination and figuring out the major motivation and retaliating with dark tourism themes to highlight the demand-side perspective.

In the course of understanding local's experiences of disaster, researchers realized that the Langtangpa community depicted utter reluctance to talk about the disaster and their experience of it. Therefore, to think about the scope of dark tourism, discussing and working on aspects is possible but will definitely be too early to be initiated by the locals. The supply-side stakeholders are unknown about dark tourism purview but want to introduce new tourism products to retaliate with hotel-based neck-to-neck competition. People who come to see the mountains and the beautiful landscape of Langtang are also interested to see the rugged trail, the mound created by the avalanche and so on. The confronting disaster spot will incidentally turn every adventure tourist into a dark tourist because of the curiosity that arises in them when they see the intensity of the damage. This urge to understand and explore more on disaster experience can be a significant pattern to imply dark tourism. Post-disaster Langtang reflects the prospect of dark tourism that compliments adventure tourism components. Though trekking seems to be the most important activity, a visitor visiting post-disaster Langtang will experience repressed sadism (Korstanje, 2017), relating to disaster, death and suffering which might compel them to visualize the invisible debris of the dead buried under the avalanche site. Ultimately, the tourists will not only experience the adventure of the mountains but also contemplate the calamity and its implications. The tourists used to get only one experience prior to the earthquake, and now in the post-disaster the prospective tourists visiting both sites will get multiple experiences with features of darkness and adventure respectively. This paper attempts to portray an important proposition; the coalescing of two hitherto distinct tourism motives for visiting post-disaster tourism destinations. The model is represented through the amalgamation of dark tourism (Dark) and adventure tourism (Adventure), the letters "dar" from dark tourism is prefixed and the letters "venture" from adventure tourism is suffixed to form a new tourism phenomenon that is named "darventure" (Kunwar, 2019) tourism as a subset form dark tourism (Kunwar, Aryal, & Karki, 2019). The 'darventure' tourism features the elements of both thanatology and frontier thrills at the same place. Dark tourist and adventure tourist experience can coexist in Langtang, it creates a unique tourism prototype that complements both practices. These diverse motivations of visiting Langtang could be materialized by introducing new forms of tourism products that ultimately leads to tourism sustainability.

However, the official attempt to cash the dynamic tourism values is almost non-existent. The local authorities fail to interpret the essence of tourism, disaster and memorials in the main sites, it should be understood that memorials are not just a symbol of commemorating the lost lives but also a way through which relevant information can be communicated to the visitors (Wright & Sharpley, 2016). The

flow of the internal and international tourists and their motivations and benefits show the prospects of both adventure tourism and dark tourism in Langtang can be promoted. The individuals or groups whoever interested to visit Langtang in post-disaster context will be benefited and well-motivated in the different aspects as of: culture & tradition, environmental, heritage identity, suffering, commemoration, economic, security, ecological, psychological, remembrance, educational, ethical, memorial, humanitarian aspect and more importantly edutainment. This is what Roberts (2018) called dartainment, a memorial site used in order to educate people of the disaster and intensity of damage which may arouse extensive interests of tourists. Langtang's thanatology tourism induced by earthquake 2015 has following themes that are identified through field work:

- Dark tourism attractions/ resources: The avalanche site, debris of dead, rubbles, wreckages and the survivor's story can be highlighted as dark tourism resources.
- Dark tourism product: The proposal of establishing a museum in the disaster site and using the site itself in order to educate many scholars of diverse fields can be categorized under dark tourism.
- Dark tourism element: The elements of nostalgia, myths and legends, survivors' guilt, acts of memory, remembrance can be categorized as dark tourism elements in the case of Langtang.
- Dark tourism attribute: disaster interpretation, emotion, experience, authenticity.

As Robinson (2015) recognized dark (thanatology) tourism as a subjective experience which will fluctuate starting with one individual then onto the next including their relationship to the site (Robb, 2009). There are many types of dark tourism and the motives of the visitors are all different (Chang, 2014; in Pliakas, 2017). To fulfill all these motivations and make it more beneficial through the dark tourism in Langtang, it is necessary to promote the dark tourism by accessibility, attraction, interpretation, accommodation and reconstruction. Nepal Earthquake 2015 post disaster recovery framework brought up by Government of Nepal has categorized year 2015-2020 as post-disaster recovery phase. The tourism revival planning enlisted in the framework is not holistic and it is just limited to trail maintenance projects in touristic areas. A recovery plan on prioritizing innovative approaches to sustain the tourism industry is equally important in disaster affected areas. In the case of Langtang, the tourism recovery plan must include the technical support in revamping the tourism committee for locality-led tourism development, launching contextual tourism initiatives that meet the multiple interests of the visitors, upgrading the tourism amenities i.e. correcting trails, waste management,

updating map and information board, categorizing hotels and services, controlling price monopoly, establishing new form of tourism products and so on.

To sum up all, although the term dark denotes devoid of light (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2010; Kunwar & Karki, 2020), and recalls diabolism, deviancy, monstrosity, death and chaos (Koslofsky, 2011; in Martini & Buda, 2020). Dark tourism as a new tourism product tends to provide awareness, education and entertainment on several cases of history and heritage, tourism and tragedies. Nonetheless the imageries associated with darkness, night, and obscurity, have been portrayed also through positive qualities: it is the time of experimentation, excitement, and spectacle (Edensor, 2013, p. 2; Martini & Buda, 2020). Moreover, not only does 'dark' not always equate with negative, but dark places cannot be considered solely as vehicles of reflection on death, as it diminishes the importance of the spatial characteristics and agency of the tourist (Bowman & Pezzullo, 2009; in Martini & Buda, 2020). Dark tourism acts as a mediating institution of the mortality and mortality is inevitable in both ordinary situations and also the situation of crisis. Hence, as the core idea of dark tourism being "death", there is the sustainability of dark tourism as a special interest tourism.

References

- Allman, H. R .(2017).Motivations and intentions of tourists to visit dark tourism locations. An Unpublished Graduate Theses and Dissertations Submitted to the Iowa State University, 15243.<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/15243>
- Ashworth, G.J. & Issac, R.K. (2015). Have we illuminated the dark? Shifting perspectives on dark tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research*,1-17.
- Bowman, M. S. & Pezzullo, P. C.(2009). 'What's so 'Dark' about 'Dark Tourism'?': Death, Tours and Performance'. *Tourist Studies*, 9(3),187-202.
- Dale,C. & Robinson, N.(2011). Dark tourism. In Robinson, P.Heitmann,S.& Dieke,P. (Eds.). *Research Themes for Tourism*, Wallingford: CABI.
- Dunkley, R., (2005), Tourism Society seminar event, Dark tourism - cashing in on tragedy? London, Kensington Close Hotel. On 17th October 2005. Retrieved from 69 Ph. D. Thesis by Neil Robinson "An Investigation into the Motivations of Visitors to Sites Associated with Dark Tourism", (2015).
- Farmaki, A.(2013). Dark tourism revisited : A supply/demand conceptualization. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 7(3): 281-292.
- Foley, M. & Lennon,J.(1996). Editorial : Heart of darkness. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2(4):195-197.
- Fonseca, A.P, Seabra, C. & Silva.C.(2016). Dark tourism : Concepts, typologies and sites. *Journal of Research and Hospitality*, S2:1-6.

- Fremantle, F. & Trungpa, C. (1975). *The Tibetan Book of the Dead : The Great Liberation through hearing in the Bardo by Guru Rinpoche according to Karma Lingpa*, London : Shambhala.
- Hepburn, S. (2012). Shades of darkness: Silence, risk and fear among tourists and Nepalis during Nepal's civil war. In Skinner, J. (Ed.), *Riding the Dark Side of Travel* (pp. 122-142). Oxford: Berghahn.
- Hepburn, S. J. (2017). Everyday darkness and catastrophic events: riding Nepal's buses through peace, war, and an earthquake. In Hooper, G., & Lennon, J. J. (Eds.). *Dark Tourism: Practice and Interpretation* (pp.147-159), London: Routledge.
- Hooper, G.& Lennon.J.J.(Eds.) (2017). Dark Tourism : Practice and Interpretation, London: Routledge.
- Horell, M.(2017).The fate of Langtang village two years after the Nepal earthquake. Retrieved from <https://www.markhorrell.com/>. Assessed on 15-Nov-2018.
- Kargel, J.S., Leonard, G.J., Shugar, D.H., Haritashya, U.K., Bevington, A., Fielding, E.J., Fujita, K., Geertsema, M., Miles, E.S., Steiner, J. & Anderson, E., 2016. Geomorphic and geologic controls of geohazards induced by Nepal's 2015 Gorkha earthquake. *Science*, 351(6269).
- Karki, N. (2019). Langtang: A Prospective Destination for Thanatology Tourism in Nepal. An Unpublished Master's Thesis Submitted to the Department of Conflict, Peace, and Development Studies (DCPDS), Tribhuvan University.
- Korstanje, M. E. & Ivanov, S.(2012). Tourism as a form of new psychological resilience: The inception of dark tourism. *Cultur*, 56-71.
- Korstanje, M.E.(2017). *The Rise of Thana-Capitalism and Tourism*, London: Routledge.
- Kunwar, R. R. (2016). Tourism crisis and disaster management. *The Gaze Journal of Tourism and Hospitality*. 7:1-36.
- Kunwar, R. R. (2016).Tourism and the natural disaster : A study of Nepal's earthquake. Voice of Himalaya, Kathmandu : Nepal Mountain Academy.
- Kunwar, R.R. & Karki, N.(2019). Dark tourism: Understanding the concept and recognizing the values. *Journal of APF Command and Staff College*. 2:42-49.
- Kunwar, R.R. & Limbu, B. (2015). Tourism and earthquake : A case study of Nepal and Turkey. NATTA Souvenir, Kathmandu.
- Kunwar, R.R.(2018).Tourism education, curriculum spaces, knowledge production and disciplinary pluralism. *The Gaze Journal of Tourism and Hospitality*. 9(1), 83-155.

- Kunwar, R.R.(1989). *Fire of Himal : An Anthropological Study of the Sherpas of Nepal Himalayan Region*, Jaipur: Nirala Publications.
- Kunwar, R.R.(1999). *Himalayan Heritage : A Study of Society, Culture and Religion*, Kathmandu: Laxmi Kunwar.
- Kunwar,R.R., Aryal, D.R., & Karki, N.(2019). Dark Tourism: A Preliminary Study of Barpak and Langtang as Seismic Memorial Sites of Nepal. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Education*,9, 88-136.
- Kunwar, R.R., & Karki, N. (2020). A Study of Dark (Disaster) Tourism in Reconstructed Barpak, Nepal. *The Gaze: Journal of Tourism and Hospitality*, 11(1), 140-180. <https://doi.org/10.3126/gaze.v11i1.26637>
- Lamsal, B.B.(2019). Post-disaster tourism in Langtang, Rasuwa. An Unpublished Master's Thesis Submitted to the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University.
- Light, D. (2017b). The undead and dark tourism: Dracula tourism in Romania. In Hooper, G., Lennon, J. J. (Eds.), *Dark Tourism: Practice and Interpretation* (pp. 121-133). Routledge: Abingdon.
- Light,D.(2017a). Progress in dark tourism and thana-tourism research an uneasy relationship with heritage tourism. *Tourism Management*: 61:275-301.
- Lord, A. & Murton, G. (2017) "Becoming Rasuwa relief: Practices of multiple engagement in post-earthquake Nepal, "HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies, 37(2), <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol37/iss2/12>.
- Lord, A. (2017). Review of trembling mountain by Kesang Tseten, HIMALAYA, *The Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*, 37(2), <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol37/iss2/2>.
- Martini, A. & Buda, D.M. (2020) Dark tourism and affect: framing places of death and disaster,*Current Issues in Tourism*, 23:6, 679-692, DOI: 10.1080/13683500.2018.1518972
- Miller, D.S.(2007). Disaster tourism and disaster landscapes attractions after Hurricane Katrina : And auto-ethnographic journey. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*. 2(2): 115-131.
- National Reconstruction Authority (2016). Nepal earthquake 2015 post disaster recovery framework. Government of Nepal.
- Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2015 (2016). Government of Nepal Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation Planning & Evaluation Division Statistics and Research Section Singha Durbar, Kathmandu June, 2016.

- Pliakas, T. (2017). Dark tourism representations in travel articles. An unpublished Master's Thesis Submitted to Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.
- Priest,S. & Bunting,C.J. (1993). Changes in perceived risk and competence during whitewater canoeing. *Journal of Applied Recreation Research*,18(4) :265-280.
- Robb, E. M. (2009).Violence and recreation: Vacationing in the realm of dark tourism. *Anthropology and Humanism*, 34(1), 51-60.
- Roberts, C. (2018). Education the (dark) masses: dark tourism and sensemaking. In Stone, P.R., Hartmann, R., Seaton, T., Sharpley, R., & White, L. (Eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies*(pp.606-637), Palgrave Macmillan, U.K.
- Seaton, A.V.(1996). Guided by the dark from thanatopsis to thanatourism. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2(4):234-244.
- Seaton, T.(2012). Thanatourism and its discontents: An appraisal of a decades work with some future issues and directions. In Jamal, T.& Robinson, M.(Eds.) *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies*,(pp.521-543), London, Sage.
- Sharpley, R.& Stone, P.R.(Eds.) (2009). The Darker Side of Travel ,Bristol : Channel View Publications.
- Soden, R. & Lord, A. (2018). Mapping Silences, Reconfiguring Loss: Practices of Damage Assessment & Repair in Post-Earthquake Nepal. In Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, Vol. 2, No. CSCW, Article 161, November 2018. ACM, New York, NY. 25 pages .<https://doi.org/10.1145/3274430>.
- Stone, P.(2006). A dark tourism spectrum : Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions. *Tourism*, 54(2)145-160.
- Stone, P.(2007). Dark tourism: the ethics of exploiting tragedy. University of Central Lancashire.
- Stone, P.R., Hartmann, R., Seaton, T., Sharpley, R., & White, L. (2018). *The Palgrave Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies*, palgrave macmillan , U.K.
- Stone, R.P.(2012). Dark tourism (also Thanatourism). In Robinson, M.(ed.) *Tourism the Key Concepts* (pp.46-49), London: Routledge.
- Subedi, M. (2018). Post-disaster recovery: Case from post-earthquake central hills of Nepal. An unpublished literature review paper submitted to the Department of Conflict, Peace and Development Studies, T.U.
- Tang Y. (2014). Dark touristic perception: motivation, experience and benefits interpreted from the visit to seismic memorial sites in Sichuan Province. *Journal of Mountain Science* 11(5). DOI: 10.1007/s11629-013-2857-4

- Tang, Y. (2018a). Contested narratives at the Hanwang earthquake memorial park : Where ghost industrial town and seismic memorial. *GeoHeritage*, Author's personal copy.
- Tang, Y. (2018b). Dark tourism to seismic memorial sites. R. Stone P., Hartmann R., Seaton T., Sharpley R., & White, L. (Eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies* (pp. 423-441). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tunbridge, J.E. & Ashworth, G. J. (1996). *Dissonant Heritage : The Management of the Past as a Resource Conflict*, New York : John & Wiley & Sons.
- Underwood, G. ,Orchiston, C., EERI,M. and Shrestha,S.R.(2020).Post-earthquake cordons and their implications. *Earthquake Spectra*.<https://doi.org/10.1177/8755293020936293>.
- Wen, J. & Wu, M.Y. (2020) How special is special interest tourism – and how special are special interest tourists? A perspective article in a Chinese context, *Current Issues in Tourism*, 23:16, 1968-1972, DOI: 10.1080/13683500.2020.1750575
- Wright. & Sharpley, R. (2016). Local community perceptions of disaster tourism: the case of L'Aquila, Italy.*Current Issues in Tourism*, 21 (14), 1569-1585.