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Exploring Dark Tourism Development in the Northern Province, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The tourism industry is a wide and holistic industry, the value of which cannot be overestimated: it plays a key role in promoting inter-cultural understanding and socio-cultural development. Sri Lanka is a renowned tourism destination that offers many diverse tourism products. However, the tourism industry has been continuously and severely disturbed by prolonged civil war. After the war, tourist arrivals in Sri Lanka, particularly to war zones and war memorial sites, rapidly grew. The main objective of this study is to explore dark tourism development in the Northern Province (NP), Sri Lanka. Employing a qualitative methodological approach, this study is underpinned by an interpretive research philosophy. Research data were collected through field-based interviews. For in-depth interviews, sixteen interviewees from different stakeholder groups were selected, using a purposive sampling technique. The research results reveal that twenty-seven dark tourism destinations in the northern territory face various challenges in being developed as sustainable dark tourism destinations. Furthermore, this study indicates that the Sri Lankan Army was aggressively involved in the revitalization of the tourism industry in the northern territory. This research recommends the following moves intended to promote dark tourism development in the NP. First and foremost, when developing dark tourism in the NP, the active participation of locals should be accommodated. Second, rituals must be taken into account as a key mechanism for impressing upon tourists the richness and historical value of dark sites. When developing dark tourism packages, death-related rituals ought to be considered. If so, travelers can experience amazing intangible heritage associated with death.

Keywords: dark tourism; post-war; memorialization; ethnic conflict; militarization

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1. Introduction

Tourism has attained a remarkable position in the national economy, mainly due to its contribution to foreign exchange earnings. The other economic benefits of tourism are employment and income creation, the generation of revenue, spatial development and accelerated economic growth (Samaranayake et al., 2013). In the present world, the demand for tourism products is continuously growing. At the same time, the tourism market has been reshaped by globalization, advanced technological development, socio-cultural changes and government policies and regulations (Dolnicar & Demeter, 2024). Dark tourism is a segment of Special Interest Tourism (SIT), which is generally interpreted as customized or tailor-made tourism activities that accommodate a specific interest of the group or individual. In the current world, millions of people not only from the Western world but also from around the world engage in dark tourism activities (Kamber et al., 2016).

Worldwide, there are many dark sites, but they do not all receive the same attention from travelers. The nature of the sites, the historical and heritage legacy, travelers' interest, the authenticity of the artifacts and esthetic values are major factors that draw the attention of visitors (P. R. Stone, 2006; P. Stone & Sharpley, 2008).

The concept of dark tourism is receiving increasing attention from academics, policy-makers, and researchers. But, even so, the term continues to remain poorly conceptualized (Jamal & Lelo, 2011). In the tourism literature, dark tourism, black-spot tourism, atrocity tourism, thanatourism, morbid tourism, and disaster tourism have been interchangeably used. However, they are slightly different from each other (P. R. Stone, 2006; Roberts & Stone, 2014; Kamber et al., 2016; Hartmann, 2014). A black spot is a destination in which people have gathered and celebrated unforeseen death and unexpected violence. Disaster tourism is a phenomenon wherein people travel to gain recreational and leisure experiences from a territory affected by natural disaster (Hartmann, 2014). Blom (2000, p. 32) articulated that morbid tourism is a form of tourism that focuses on sudden violent death and that quickly attracts a large number of people. Visiting dark sites and involvement in dark tourism activities are not new-fangled. It is easy to understand that, after the First and Second World War, people visited war-affected countries to experience woebegone sites and battlefields. Kamber et al. (2016) considered that battlefields, natural disaster sites, sites of genocide, death camps and sites of publicized murders are significant dark tourism destinations. Dark tourism attractions have sad and miserable stories behind the destinations. These stories might have been created through human folly or natural disasters (Light, 2017). Pieris (2014) stated that, in Sri Lanka, ethnic tensions and severe civil war created a huge number of war-related dark sites. Each of them has a unique story of sorrow.

Apart from war-related sites, there are many colonial dark heritage sites, Second World War cemeteries, and natural disaster sites in Sri Lanka. However, in Sri Lanka, the concept and practices of dark tourism only became popular at the end of the civil war. The main objective of this article is to explore dark tourism development in the northern territory of Sri Lanka and to discuss the features of key dark tourism sites and challenges faced by destinations.

2. Understanding the Concept of Dark Tourism

The conceptualization of dark tourism is a complex task. After the 90s, this concept became an emerging ideology among academics, researchers, and professionals. The dark tourism literature reveals there are many different definitions for dark tourism. For example, Shome (2023, p. 848) articulated that dark tourism is a complicated phenomenon, manifesting disparate practices that inform spaces with inputs, thereby initiating processes that carefully reconstruct sites as domains occupied by death. Similarly, Tarlow (2005, p. 48) has defined dark tourism as visitations to places where tragedies or historically noteworthy deaths have occurred and that continue to impact our human lives. Likewise, P. R. Stone (2006, p. 146) stated that dark tourism is the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre. These conceptualizations have some significant aspects: first, dark tourism is a complex and emerging ideology; second, dark tourism is a set of integrated activities that are connected with death and suffering; third, dark tourism and sites can be considered as learning tools for rich histories and heritage.

Some studies have highlighted the interesting connection between dark tourism and heritage tourism. For example, Jureniene and Radzevicius (2022, p. 7) have a broader ideological argument that dark tourism and heritage tourism were considered as the "branches of cultural tourism" in the 19th century. But, in the 21st century, dark tourism has been considered as a separate segment of tourism activities (Kamber et al., 2016). Biran and

his colleagues advocated that the descriptive conceptualization of dark tourism encompasses tourist attractions that are most often considered and classified as heritage sites (Biran et al., 2011, p. 823). In some previous studies, atrocity, death- and war-related sites related to heritage have been called "disconnect heritage" (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996) and "difficult heritage" (Logan & Reeves, 2009). Furthermore, Ashworth (2002) pointed out that dark sites exhibit disharmonious tradition and the past phenomena of society. In general, a dark tourism destination is a place where tragedies, genocide, or historically remarkable murders and death have happened, and these sites continuously create meaningful impacts on human life (Tarlow, 2005).

In the dark tourism literature, supply, demand and integrated supply–demand perspective approaches have been employed to understand dark tourism (Biran et al., 2011; P. R. Stone, 2006; Timothy, 2011). The supply perspective ignores the diversity of individuals' inner experiences and motives, leading, in turn, to a simplified understanding of dark tourism, one which arbitrarily combines possibly unrelated experiences (Biran et al., 2011, p. 822). This perspective simplifies the identification of eclectic dark tourism destinations from "lightest" to "darkest" (Fonseca et al., 2016). Based on the historical value and deepness of tragedy, a darker–lighter paradigm was developed by Miles to demonstrate the nature of dark tourism destinations. Moreover, Miles defined "lightest sites" linked with death and suffering. For example, the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London, is one of the finest museums where artifacts have been exhibited that are connected with the involvement and sacrifice of the British forces in the First World War. "Darkest sites" are places where death and suffering occurred (Miles, 2002). The darkest tourism products are characterized by being highly politically influenced, education-oriented, and history-centric. In contrast, the lightest tourism products are characterized by having a lower political influence and being leisure- and entertainment-oriented and heritage-centric. From a demand perspective, dark tourism has been conceptualized in terms of the motivation for visits (Biran et al., 2011, p. 822).

The existing dark tourism-related research works indicate many of the following reasons for the rapid growth of demand for dark products: an increase in the intention of learning about dark sites; the expeditious development of media focus on death space (Dunkley et al., 2007); breaking down mis-conceptual and epistemic imagination about goblins and demons; remembrance; the celebration of crime and enthusiasm for finding new things (Dann, 1998) curiosity to engage and enjoy unusual activities; being fascinated by the occurrence of atrocities; a cruel mindset to enjoy the suffering of others; and learning history and heritage (Ashworth, 2002, 2014). In the present era, throughout the world, places where death, disaster, and other atrocities took place have been converted to tourism commodities with commercialized features (Foley & Lennon, 1996; P. Stone & Sharpley, 2008) because the tourism industry has been considered as a powerful tool to promote not only the economic conditions of a country but also to build peace and harmony post-disaster (Zavarika, 2022; Fernando et al., 2013).

2.1. Dark Tourism Product

Within the tourism literature, many researchers have highlighted that dark tourism products have unique value but are multifaceted, diversified in character and more complex (P. R. Stone, 2006; Kuznik, 2019; Timothy, 2011). Kamber et al. (2016) mentioned that battlefields, prisons, war museums, locations of natural disasters, sites of genocide, death camps and sites of publicized murders have been considered as significant dark tourism resources. Kuznik's Slovenia-based study categorized dark places into two groups: dark places in nature and dark places linked with humans. A dark place in nature is an area where natural disasters like tsunamis and earthquakes have occurred. Furthermore,

dark places in connection with humans refer to sites that are created from the results of human activities. Grave sites, battlefields, holocaust and genocide sites, prisons, sites of murder, accident sites, and museums are examples for dark places connected with people (Kuznik, 2019). Similarly, Timothy (2011, pp. 447–448) has categorized dark tourism attractions into six groups: places of human incarceration, war- and conflict-related attractions, natural disasters, sites connected to death, crime scenes, and other morbid attractions and places of human suffering.

P. R. Stone (2006, p. 152) classified dark suppliers into seven groups: dark fun factories, dark exhibitions, dark dungeons, dark resting places, dark shrines, dark conflict sites, and dark camps of genocide. A dark fun factory (DFF) is a lightest, entertainment-oriented site with commercialized features that is less politic-centric. The London Dungeon is an example of a DFF and was established in 1974 to showcase the dark history of the British. Dark fun factories have generally well-established and sophisticated infrastructure to draw the attention of visitors (P. R. Stone, 2006). From a marketing perspective, in dark fun factories, the core product is characterized by a history of tragedy, but the supplementary products are comparatively consumer-oriented because they are designed as more commercialized products to draw the attention of leisure travelers. For example, "Dracula Park", a tourist destination located in Romania, provides many entertainment products, with 40 major attractions. At present, many dark exhibitions such as the "Smithsonian Museum of American History" and "Body Worlds Exhibitions" have become major attractions among travelers. As noted by P. R. Stone (2006, p. 153), dark exhibitions refer to those exhibitions and sites which essentially blend product design to reflect education and potential learning opportunities.

Dark exhibitions manifest in places away from actual sites of death and macabre events and are designed with many artifacts to showcase to the public for education and entertainment purposes. The main objective of dark exhibitions is to provide an epistemological approach to creating awareness and remembrance. For example, "The National September 11 Memorial and Museum" was established in New York city to remember the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York and holds images and artifacts derived from the 11 September 2001 attack on the Twin Towers. Dark dungeons, with commercialized infrastructure and a rich heritage background, are another type of diversified dark tourism product offering educational and leisure experiences to travelers. Dark dungeons refer to sites and attractions which present bygone penal and justice codes to the present-day consumer and revolve around (former) prisons and courthouses (P. R. Stone, 2006, p. 154). For example, Melbourne Gaol Seek—Australia, the National Justice Museum, and the Bodmin Jail Centre—UK are dark dungeon sites in the world. These sites exhibit a history and heritage of crime and punishment. Some dark dungeon sites like Robben Island are multifaceted. In South Africa, political activist and Nobel peace prize winner Nelson Mandela was detained in Robben Island, where, to meet visitors' expectations, multi-dimensional products including a theme park, shrine and museum are offered. Shackley (2001, p. 359) highlighted that Robben Island is part theme park, part shrine and part museum of African history. Furthermore, as a destination, Robben Island prison receives a large number of tourists who are enthusiastic to see the cell where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned.

At present, dark resting places such as cemeteries and graves are designed as leisure and entertainment areas with basic infrastructure to draw the attention of travelers (Seaton, 2002). Generally, tourists visit cemeteries to engage in commemorative ritual activities and share social memory. Dark shrines are locations where people essentially engage in commemoration and respect for the recently deceased (Lennon, 2017). Recently, these types of sites have been gaining more attention through building political awareness

and media focus. Similarly, P. R. Stone (2006, p. 155) indicated that dark shrines are often constructed, formally and informally, very close to the site of death and within a very short time of the death.

2.2. Dark Tourism Phenomenon: Empirical Review

Pieris (2014) and Hyndman (2015) articulated that, in Sri Lanka, due to the long-standing ethnic tensions between the majority of Sinhala-speaking people and the minority community of Tamil-speaking people, severe civil war has occurred. As a result, the socio-economic development of the nation and the social harmony were continuously and negatively affected until 2009. During the post-war era, socio-economic development has improved, but not up to the expected level. Once the war ended, Sinhala nationalists, who failed to offer permanent solutions for long-standing ethnic issues, were unable to win the minds of the Tamils. At this juncture, in the NP of Sri Lanka, the military established many war memorial monuments in the NP to celebrate its war victory against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Furthermore, before resettlement and rehabilitation in the war zone, the key focus of the military was to prioritize building Buddhist temples in the war zones. A Rwanda-based study highlighted that, after the genocide of the Tutsi enthinic group, Rwanda faced a major challenege in rebuilding the society and identity of Tutsis. Furthermore, their study highlighted the very sensitive matter that, where multi-cultural and multi-ethinic groups are living, memorial ritual celebrations and the memorialization of genocide are very difficult tasks (Friedrich et al., 2018).

Shome (2023, p. 83) has written that "a closer look at the reconstruction reveals that it is not merely power in its invisible sense; but structured through politically charged premises that effectively bear the specificities of Sinhala nationalist imagination". The Lithuanian-based study articulated that there is no distinction between cultural heritage objects and dark tourism objects in Lithuania. Most of the tourism resourses are known as heritage destinations; this is because they are reflections of a long and rich history and heritage of genocide, cemeteries, and other death spaces (Jureniene & Radzevicius, 2022). Kamber et al. (2016) stress that, recently, arrivals of tourists who are enthusiastic to experience war memories in Sarajevo are booming. However, developing dark tourism and dark heritage in Sarajevo is a more complicated and difficult task because multi-cultural and multi-linguistic people live there. Without proper planning, paying more attention to developing dark heritage generates the possibility of creating socio-cultural tension among various ethnic groups.

Moreover, Kamber and his colleagues indicate that mass media has a significant influence on opening a huge market for dark products and also creates more media positioning and attractions for dark products. In the modern technological-driven world, digital media makes a more valuable contribution in motivating travelers to visit tragedy sites and materializing brand images for dark sites (Dunkley et al., 2007). There are a few research studies that focus on post-war tourism development, particularly dark tourism development in Sri Lanka. The course of the paper leads to examining dark tourism development in the NP of Sri Lanka. The next section describes the research methodology, covering dark tourism sites in the northern territory and analyzing dark tourism development through gathering data. A limited number of studies focused on post-war tourism development, particularly dark tourism, in Sri Lanka. There are some distinguished exceptions, including Samarathunga et al. (2020), Sivesan (2017), Shome (2023), Pieris (2014), Samaranayake et al. (2013) and Schalk (1997). Finally, this study will contribute to reducing the gap and making a remarkable contribution for academics, policy-makers and industry.

3. Research Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research approach is employed, as it is oriented towards exploration and discovery. Through the use of qualitative methods, it is possible to explore the ideas and opinions of stakeholders as they appear throughout the research process. A triangulation technique is employed to gather data. Data triangulation provides valuable information that cannot be received from conducting semi-structured interviews alone and, as such, is a useful research tool (Merriam, 2002). In this study, in-depth interviews and document analyses are employed. A document analysis is a systematic process for scrutinizing documents that can be written texts, images and cultural artifacts (Bowen, 2009). In this study, secondary data are collected from gazette notifications and official media reports. The secondary data are used to develop a strong foundation for the analysis. Furthermore, in the study, an in-depth interview method is used as a data collection tool that allows respondents to offer more data and to include their feelings, attitudes and understanding of the subject.

A non-probability purposive sampling technique has been used to select participants for interviews. Purposive sampling is a favorable sampling method because it is able to consider local conditions and values. The interview questions have been developed by the researcher. In the data collection process, stakeholders have been identified through purposive sampling techniques. An invitation letter (plain language information statement) to participate in an interview was sent. Sixteen stakeholders (16), including industry experts, managers of hotels, travel agents, tour guides, tourists, local community, government officials and experts, took part in the interviews during the period from May to July in 2025. The interviewees were encouraged to share their insights on their experiences, opinions, and challenges in promoting dark tourism in the NP. All the interviews were audiotaped with the permission of the respondents. Those voice recordings were transcribed. Interviews were conducted in both English and Tamil based on the participants' language preference, since using an effective language is critical (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

This study employs interpretivism philosophy, with the researcher able to investigate how the participants construct and understand their world in terms of social phenomena. Interpretivism is very useful, as it differentiates between humans and their role in society as social actors (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 137). Interpretivism philosophy creates a clear way to recognize the world not only through the sense of human observation but also through human interpretation of what our senses tell us about events. Interpretivism is a more appropriate philosophical foundation for qualitative research. In this study, a discourse analysis technique is employed to address questions. Thompson (1988, p. 368) conceptualizes that the term discourse actually refers in this context to occurring instances of communication, such as a novel, a newspaper article, a classroom interaction or a conversation between friends.

In addition, confidentiality was maintained by protecting participants' identities using pseudonyms and by handling data with the utmost care. Moreover, the ethical dilemmas that arose during the interview process were also addressed by the researcher, ensuring that all sensitive issues were managed in accordance with recognized ethical standards. Data analysis was mainly carried out through a rigorous process of data familiarization, coding and theme development using a discourse analysis approach, since it is the best method to analyze repeated patterns (Lacey & Luff, 2001).

4. Resuts and Discussion

In this section, dark tourism sites and their characteristics have been briefly discussed, and dark tourism development in the NP has been empirically analyzed.

4.1. Brief Profile of Dark Tourism Destination

The NP has inherited an unbroken history of Tamils, a rich cultural heritage, archeological monuments, art and architecture, and magnificent Hindu, Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist monuments. However, compared with other provinces like Central and North Central, it has relatively fewer resources and also lacks commercialized features adhering to these sites. As mentioned earlier, in the NP, there are many dark destinations that are connected to war and ethnic conflict, natural disasters and colonial heritage. Table 1 presents the number of dark tourism sites located in the NP by district.

Table 1. Number of dark tourism sites in the NP.

No	District	War- & Ethnic Conflict-Related Sites	Natural Sites	Total
1	Jaffna	5	1	6
2	Kilinochchi	5	-	5
3	Mullaitivu	9	1	10
4	Mannar	3	1	4
5	Vavuniya	2	-	2
	Total	24	3	27

Source: author.

According to the above Table 1, the majority (89%) of dark tourism sites in the NP are connected with war and ethnic conflict. But the political authenticity, identity and values of each site are varied. During the interviews, a data sheet (consisting of 27 dark sites) was issued to participants to rank as per their preferences. Based on the preferences of participants, the top five dark tourism destinations were ranked.

(a) The Mullivaikkal Massacre Memorial at University of Jaffna—Sri Lanka was built in May 2019 at the University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, to remember and pay tribute to civilians who lost their lives during the last days of the civil war at Mullivaikkal. The University community and public used to engage annually in memorial ritual performances on 18 May. Due to high political pressure and interference from the military, the administration of the University of Jaffna demolished the monument on 8 January 2021. As a result, the University faced many criticisms from the public, students and local politicians. Furthermore, students heavily committed themselves to the several protest activities. As a result, the University of Jaffna reconstructed the Mullivaikkal Massacre Memorial at the same place with approval from the relevant authorities in January 2021. This incident reveals how far the Sri Lankan government and military respect minority community feelings and emotion even in the case of paying tribute to fallen martyrs.

(b) Jaffna Public Library is a significant landmark for the educational culture of the Tamil community. It was burned in 1981 by Sinhala political leaders in power and their followers. In 1998, the rebuilding process of the public library commenced, and it was reopened to public access in 2004. The burning incident is representative of the uncivilized political vandalism committed by the majority community against the Tamil-speaking community. The incident articulates how, systematically, Sinhala nationalism destroyed the source of education for the Tamil community.

(c) Tsunami memorial sites: The coastal belt of Sri Lanka was severely devastated by a tsunami on boxing day of 2004. To remember the victims of the tsunami, memorial statues were set up in Jaffna (Uduthurai), Mullaitivu (Beach Road at Mulliyawalai) and the Mannar bridge memorial (Mannar). Irrespective of religious differences and

social status, all local people annually gather to commemorate the victims at tsunami memorial sites. Generally, memorial sites are destinations for visitation and sites for conducting ritual activities where tourists, local people and those who have interest participate in the ritual ceremony (Sharma, 2021).

(d) The Kumuthini boat massacre monument was established on Delft Island to venerate the memories of 36 Tamil civilians, including children, men and women, who were murdered by Sri Lankan Navy personnel on 16 May 1985. In the history of Sri Lankan Tamils, this tragedy is a remembered as a massive genocide.

(e) War memorial mementos, museum and Martyr's cemetery: In the northern territory of Sri Lanka, many war memorials were established and are maintained by the Sri Lankan military to celebrate its victory in the civil war against the LTTE who fought for an independent Tamil state (Tamil Eelam). In Kilinochchi town, in 2010, a war memorial was installed to mark the day of capturing the capital of the Tamil state. Another war memorial was set up at Elephant Pass in 2010 to honor the sacrifice and bravery of the Sri Lankan forces. In the Mullaitivu district, war memorials were erected to commemorate those who fought against LTTE. But we cannot find any shrines built by the Sri Lankan military for remembering the civilians who lost their lives in the civil war. According to the Tamil Guardian (2021), the International Truth and Justice Project highlighted that 169,769 citizens were killed during the last days of the civil war at Mullivaikkal. Throughout the Northern and Eastern territory of Sri Lanka, LTTE maintained the Tamil hero's cemetery known in the Tamil language as Maaveerar Thuyilum Illam, where the corpses (dead bodies) of the LTTE were buried. During the Tamil hero's week from 21 November to 27, these places are decorated with red and yellow flags, and people pay heartfelt tribute with the provision of flowers mourning their dead.

4.2. Debate on Dark Tourism Development

The development of the tourism industry in Sri Lanka dates back to the British era. Due to its low cost, favorable climate, built environment and a legacy of 450 years of colonialism by different European countries, by the end of the nineteenth century, Sri Lanka had become a popular winter resort for middle-class Europeans, many of whom took a round-trip tour of the country from Colombo through the hill country down south and then up the west coast (Samaranayake et al., 2013; Winterer, 2019). The industry in Sri Lanka was disturbed by civil war, political instability, natural disaster, terrorist attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crises (Sivesan, 2021; Shome, 2023; Samarathunga et al., 2020). However, this industry continuously makes a substantial contribution to the economic development of the nation.

Looking at historical accounts, it can be understood that tourism is relatively novel to the NP, despite the tourism sector growing quickly. During the 60s and 70s, tourism development in NP was less prioritized compared with the agriculture and manufacturing industries (Sivesan, 2017). Moreover, in the 1980s, due to the severe ethnic conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhala communities, all industries in the north and east collapsed. In fact, in the 1980s, Tamil youth demanded a separate Tamil state known as Tamil Eelam from the majority community. At the same time, Tamil youth lost faith in democratic practices. This demand was rejected by Sinhala political parties. It led to a thirty-year war. The cost of the war cannot be described in words or measured in numbers. The war led to the collapse of each and every activity of the community.

Before discussing dark tourism development, the causes for the civil war in Sri Lanka should be understood. The origins of the ethnic conflict date back to the disenfranchisement of Indian Tamil plantation workers. The Sri Lankan government continually quelled the

minority communities in several ways. For example, in 1956, the Sinhala-only Act was introduced, meaning that the Sinhala languages only were declared as official languages. Tamil was purposely excluded in official communication. Then, in 1970, standardization was introduced. As a result, many Tamil students lost their opportunity to enroll in the University. In 1956, 1977, and 1983, there were anti-Tamil riots. These were some of the main reasons for the civil war (Ganguly, 2018; Shastri, 2009; Perera, 2001).

During the civil war, the tourism industry in the NP was totally destroyed. Tourist arrivals dropped because some countries like Canada, Australia and the United States frequently advised their citizens to avoid traveling to the NP to ensure their safety. At the same time, the Sri Lankan government implemented a pass system (security clearance) for Tamil-speaking people traveling from the northern region to the other parts of the country, particularly the capital of the nation (Schalk, 1997). The travel restrictions and implementation of the terrorism act (Prevention of Terrorism Temporary Provision act No 48 of 1979) were barriers for tourists to travel to the northern territory. Immediately after the ethnic war in mid-2009, there was a large influx of domestic, international and diaspora tourists to the NP curious to see the battlefield, war memorials, and the devastated places. Many of the post-war tourism studies revealed that travelers visiting war zones after the civil war not only paid tribute and remembered the dead, but also traveled for educational purposes, in particular for research, encountering people who were victims of war, and for charity work (Biran et al., 2011 Pieris, 2014; Shome, 2023; Kamber et al., 2016; P. R. Stone, 2006).

Sixteen years after the end of the civil war, travelers still visit the northern territory for study purposes. During field visit-based data collection, I met a tourist from the United Kingdom who declared the following:

> This is my second trip to war zones in the northern territory. The first time, in 2014, I was here with my family to experience the Tamils' cultural heritage, and visited more than ten dark tourism destinations throughout NP. I observed the Army established and properly maintained war monuments. The military uses war remnants as main tourism resources to draw the intention of travelers to the North. The purpose of my current visit is to gather the primary data for my research. But I was not allowed to visit some dark places like the house of the LTTE leader and the largest swimming pool located at Puthukkudiyiruppu. (I-03)

In recent years, visitors have not been permitted to visit some ethnic conflict-related sites like the LTTE leader's house and his bunker because those sites exhibit the strength of the military architecture and the configuration of the LTTE. If they visit there, people are able to understand who the LTTE were. In Kilinochchi, Elephant Pass and Mullaitivu, the military installed many monuments to celebrate and showcase the triumph of Sri Lankan battalions against the LTTE. People are not ready to celebrate and pay tribute to the military. An interviewee indicated the following:

> The LTTE sacrificed their lives to obtain a separate Tamil state with self–determination for Tamils. Unfortunately, it became a dream but they are our heroes ever. Tamils who are living in the north and east of the country, celebrate LTTE as the freedom fighters. Therefore, we (Tamils) do not prefer to join hands with the Sri Lankan military to commemorate triumphalism. Further, they strongly oppose to saluting monuments that are related to chauvinism and state oppression. (I-08)

Previously, Shackley (2001) too clearly indicated that Tamils celebrated the LTTE as freedom fighters. Furthermore, those Tamils who opted to live in the north and east of the country have been led in the last three decades by apparently resolute leadership guided

by the best intentions, receiving not merely the widest support of the people but also their enthusiastic cooperation. Yet the Tamils find themselves at the lowest ebb of their history. A Sri Lanka-based study by Shome (2023, p. 857) revealed that "dark tourism practice is also closely linked to the Sinhala reimaging of the northern territories, which means resurrecting Buddhist pilgrimage or instituting conscious projects of emplacement". The obvious truth is that LTTE was a powerful military force in the world, and it was a threat to the Sri Lankan forces and the government for at least three decades.

Globally, war conquest has not only created a valuable image for the Sri Lankan military. In the post-war development process, with vested power, the armed forces engaged in reshaping and rebuilding the north of Sri Lanka. Hyndman's study revealed that the military became a guardian for the region, and, without listening to opinions from the host community, the military prioritized building war memorials and Buddhist temples even on private land. Furthermore, his study highlighted that post-war development and civilian life were highly militarized (Hyndman, 2015). As per Tamil tradition, people have a custom annually to perform ritual and spiritual activities to remember souls on their death anniversary. Due to the civil war, many civilian and LTTE soldiers were killed. A participant articulated the following:

> There is no freedom for locals in Sri Lanka to remember people who lost their lives in the War, the ultimate reason for this state oppression is racial hatred. (I-13)

The present government (National People's Power) allows people to commemorate civilian massacres during the civil war periods. At the same time, National War Heroes Day is celebrated on 19 May, the day following the last day of the civil war. The purpose of this commemoration ceremony is to pay holy offerings to those who sacrificed their lives in defense of the security and sovereignty of the nation. These two events are proof of how the Tamil community in denied its basic human rights to commemorate the genocide of Tamils at Mullivakkal.

Sri Lanka is a pluralist country, with multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual people living together. But the majority community enjoys all the privileges, and gains all the benefits. During the LTTE era, Tamil Heroes Day was celebrated in the Tamil homeland. Generally, LTTE stands with secularist ideology. However, they allow people to involve themselves in religious and ritual activities. To commemorate the Tamil heroes during the Tamil Heroes Days from 21 November to 27 November, people irrespective of any social class, caste, or religion used to assemble at the cemetery to honor and pay tribute to LTTE soldiers. Schalk (1997) pointed out that the LTTE adopted the Indian concept of secularism, with liberal ideological thinking in the implementation. The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTD) and other tourism-related government institutions are willing to develop dark tourism in the NP, but local people have opposed dark tourism development. An interviewer emphasized the following:

> There are some dark colonial heritage sites in the NP but relevant government and private institutions failed to take necessary action to preserve and convert them as sustainable dark heritage tourism destinations. Though the government pays more interest in branding NP as a war related tourism destination. It is not the right approach to tourism development in NP. Moreover, throughout NP, tourism business people face some basic problems like insufficient basic infrastructure facilities, lack of entertainment and leisure activities in dark sites. (I-15)

Some challenges are faced by dark tourism destinations in bringing tourists to the northern territory of Sri Lanka. There is no diversified dark tourism product with basic infrastructure including accessibility and sanitary facilities. The time spent by travelers on the battlefield and at other war memorials is comparatively short because they are not

commercially and leisurely attractive. Likewise, there is no place for preserving war-related artifacts like museums.

5. Conclusions

This study has explored dark tourism development in the northern territory of Sri Lanka. After three decades of civil war, the tourism industry contributes to regional development, particularly to socio-economic aspects, and also the flow of investment from local and diaspora sources has continuously increased. This study revealed that there are 27 dark tourism destinations including war and ethnic conflict sites (24) and natural sites (03) throughout the NP. They are the Mullivaikkal Massacre Memorial at University of Jaffna, the Jaffna Public Library, tsunami memorial sites, the Kumuthini boat massacre monument, and war memorial mementos, museums and Martyr's cemetery. However, this study highlights the following facts: First, the demand for dark tourism products continues to increase more than other forms of tourism products in the NP. Second, the purposes for visitation of domestic, international and diaspora people who travel to dark sites, in particular battlefields and so-called genocide sites in the northern territory, are varied, and so cannot be limited to dark tourism. Education and research purposes, meeting those who were affected by civil war, jointly working with charity institutions in the NP, and finding their ancestors' roots are the main reasons to voyage to war zones in the NP. Third, Sri Lanka is a pluralistic country where multi-cultural and multi-lingual people are living with their unique beliefs. So, while developing dark sites, the sentimental values of host communities should be respected. If done, the NP can be transformed into a sustainable tourism destination in the future. Fourth, it should be understood that dark tourism sites are not only places of passive observation and consumption where many ritual performances and official and personal commemorative ceremonies take place. Based on this study, it can be realized that Tamils, who are intransigent in abstaining from acknowledging the military's triumphalism, would like to celebrate the holocaust Remembrance Day.

This study proposed a number of recommendations to ensure the availability of space to local communities who engage in their remembrance and ritual commitments as usual. In Tamil culture, rituals are more connected with day-to-day life. Death-related rituals play a significant role in understanding the social engagement and social behavior of Tamil communities and also understanding how individuals and societies engage with sites of death and atrocity. Rituals have been taken into account as a key mechanism for highlighting the richness and historical values of dark sites. When developing dark tourism packages, death-related rituals ought to be considered. If so, travelers can experience amazing intangible heritage associated with death. Finally, if dark tourism development is systematically carried out in the NP, it may facilitate the reintegration of the Tamil and Sinhala communities and rebuild regional economic development.

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