



Ladakh in its Multifaceted Aesthetics: An Assessment

Saima Akhtar

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Hamidia Arts and Commerce Degree College
Bhopal, Email id: saimaakhtar909@gmail.com

Dr. Sona Shukla

Professor and Head, Department of Political Science, Hamidia Arts and Commerce Degree College
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

It may be bizarre to know on aesthetical parameters for a common man who has never paid visit to Ladakh, a hilly spot but for those who have got the chance to pay visit to it, finds it majestically aesthetical location that has been inviting world attention towards itself since antiquity, and experiencing its magnificence alter their vacillating narratives on reaching to the ontological notion that Ladakh in various ways constitutes beauty and grandeur of its own which is apparent even in its wilderness. On these grounds there is overabundance of that legacy which necessitates the concept of beauty which in general notion seems just a state of thing that gives pleasure to the senses and lets there be different perceptions as per the levels of impact in multitude. Here in the paper, an assessment is made to seek in Ladakh an aesthetical heritage in its multifacets for which the different sources shall be critically consulted.

Introduction

Ladakh region which recently has been declared as UT by Indian government, on 31 Oct, 2019, under Kashmir Reorganisation Act, and which has been proving as a prolonged brawl and conflict between India and China, associated with India-China war, is a distinct region physically, expanded on

59, 146 square kms, and having, according to recent census done in the year 2022, 30 lakh population. This boreal and gelid spot is surrounded by the gigantic peaks called Himalayas. As far as its altitude is concerned, it is 3000 m to 8000 m above the sea level owing to which the overall climate here remains brass-monkey and terribly dry with three inches average rainfall throughout the year. It reels under the snow spell during winters. Moreover, there is found sometimes shortage of vegetation. This spot is unique one in the cultivation and production of wheat, peas, millet, barley, etc. Geographically, this region got segregated in the backdrop of ceasefire treaty between India and Pakistan in the year 1949 with which its South-east part got attached to India. Despite all these apparent features entangled in its nature, full of predicament and arduousness, Ladakh has the favour of having aesthetic sources in its multifacets for which it has been central attention and interest for the national and international tourism. Here the aim of this paper is to have aesthetic insight into this land naturally, religiously and culturally. In this endeavour in relation to the theme of the paper, the notions like value, order, harmony, existence, etc., shall also be circulating. However, this becomes pertinently scholarly obligation to shed light firstly briefly on what aesthetics is and what are its objectives prior to unfurl the substance on the mentioned theme.

Aesthetics in brief

The word 'aesthetics' is derived etymologically from Greek word *aesthetikos* that means sensitive, *aesthetic*, or sometimes sentiment, which too is variedly, derived from other roots *aesthesis* that sense impression or simply the sensation. It has other a few derivations; however, in this context it was first used by Alexander Baumgarten in 1750 in his thesis. According to the Penguin Dictionary, aesthetics is, "the study of what is immediately pleasing to our visual or auditory perception or to our imagination: the study of the nature of beauty; also, the theory of taste and criticism in the creative and performing arts" (Mautner, 2015, 8). Traditionally this philosophical study of art and beauty was further developed by Plato, Aristotle, Hutchinson, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, etc., from time to time. Since antiquity the concept of beauty has been one of the primary attentions and centres of human inquisitiveness which has been accordingly in the state of having vast scope in aesthetics, which is held theoretically as a philosophical study of beauty and arts and other related aspects. In its purview it encircles all those subjective and objective things that have appeal for the human heart, mind and human perfection; to put in a different way, that bring joy, pleasure, and solace to the human heart. On these ground aesthetics has been anthropological in the sense that it studies and infers pleasantness and perfection in all objective domains of human knowledge like history, politics, literature, philosophy and

, at the same time, it could not unrecognize itself in relation to religious and mystical dimensions. For its essence, it is based on the concept of utility and virtue that found the whole of economical edifices in which both together determine the demand of the products and production. Apparently, since it has been having association with cultural heterogeneity and regional structures but foregroundly it has been a brisk debate in European world. However, it as an established movement called Aesthetic Movement emerged as a phenomena prominently during 19th century, particularly with French influence that could be an interest for Walter Scot who, " advocated the view that life itself should be treated in the spirit of art" (Cuddon,2014, 12).

During this time it was a philosophical vogue and propensity to hold that beauty lies in an art in its fullest perfection. However, if it had remained limited to this only, it could be anachronistic for its least scope. It was therefore widened in its scope, meaning and essence. In his work *Symposium* Plato presented it in a different spectrum of experiences, particularly in relation to love with beauty according to which it is first natural to be under the influence of love for a specific object of grace, then it ranges to plurality of beautiful objects of grace, then it gets associated with human psyche, then remains for social order and then ultimately for divine grace. It was Aristotle then who had commentation on the subtlety of beauty in terms human virtues and their purpose. No doubt aesthetics evolved further with Baudelaire under the influence Edger Allen Poe's *Poetic Principle (1850)*, it was radicalised with Schopenhauer, and mostly with Kant. In this regard it may be acknowledged that:

The Historical roots of Aestheticism are in the in the views proposed by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgement (1790)*, that the "pure" aesthetic experience consists of a "disinterested" contemplation of an object that "pleases for its own sake," without reference to reality or to the "external" ends of utility or morality. (Abrahams, Harpham, 2012, 4)

The two most important aspects of beauty are *interest* and *disinterest*: in the first man endeavours to seek for beauty on the enticing of interest, for example, man constructs a magnificent house, and it is his will to or interest to built it and have joy while living in it, while, however, in the second one there is natural spontaneity of joy and wonder on seeing the beautiful objects in their magnificent features, suppose, one in the morning comes out of the house and all of a sudden sees sunshine on the snow clad mountains, he abruptly feels unbound joy. This sort of beauty is highly appreciated and appreciable for Kant. In the evaluation of beauty and its essence, one needs to have a scrutinizing mental discretion and insight so as to become better soul, within the natural order as Iris Murdoch believes that this quality

enables alone to, “discern beauty in concrete objects and abstract ideas, in works of nature and works of art, in things, animals and people, in objects, qualities and actions” (Scruton, 2011, 1).

Natural aesthetics

Natural surroundings of Ladakh make most of its aesthetic heritage and its unflinching majestic charisma. In this respect the beautiful spots like Zanaskar valley, Survey valley, Pangong lake, NabruLamayuru, and Drass constitute in their manifestation of nature the overall enchant, elegance and adorability that make the whole world of tourism turn their aptitude towards this spot and enjoy the natural allure. It is a universal praise and commendation that:

Ladakh is a moon land where earth and sky seem to meet and it looks like the roof of the world. It is a vast sandy desert full of gold granite, dust and barren lofty mountains. The naked peaks seem to touch the blue and clear horizon. These are a few valleys here and there surrounded by high mountain ranges. You also meet a narrow and deep river on your way to Leh. During your journey, you also see lofty cliffs, spotted by gumpas for meditation. (Hassnian et al; p.4)

Since ancient times Ladakh has been winning the status of beautiful place, in it the Pangong lake shares much to win this spot the status. This lake is famous for its mesmerizing and captivating charms, altering its magnificent colours from blue to green and emerald. Etymologically, the word Pangong is derived from Tibetan language that means ‘enchancing or ‘mesmerizing. For all its aesthetic value it has been called ‘the nature’ nest’. The stark serenity and majesty flowing from it bedecks and embellishes the whole of traditional Ladakh. It seems if God had created it heaven for the agonized and forlorn, and simply, it acts as an antidote for all emotional ills and pains. It appeals human consciousness on three levels: on empirical level when its ebullient charms make the place beautiful physically, it touches human heart and vouchsafes it with peace and calmness, and thirdly sufficiently, it moves consciousness to see a divine soul of beauty residing in it ; for a mystical mind it reinforces the belief of pantheism that considers the universe and God identical in essence if being which, to put un a different way, means everything is God and God is in everything. For its pictorial glory it becomes that kind of locale wherefrom man attains mental and emotional tranquillity as:

Man is attracted towards objects of beauty because he derives from them because he derives from them a temporary, restful, and joyous relief from the difficulties of life. And being also inquisitive, it is natural for man to attempt to understand the nature of what he calls beauty. Thus

has resulted the intellectual pursuit of the knowledge of beauty in addition to the pursuit of its enjoyment. (Ramachandran1979, 29)

Physically, this world's famous lake is situated at 14270 feet height and 154 kilometres to Leh from South – east direction spreading over 134 kilometres in length stretching from eastern Ladakh to Tibet, almost often embellished with white clouds on the peaks of mounts making the place more heavenly. Zanskar valley is another home of beauty, which at the height of 131564 feet above the sea level and, “All the area lying between the two branches the river Zanskar was known as Zangaskar, meaning the place of white copper. It is now known as Zanaskar. It is bounded by Tushu, Lahul, and various mountain ranges of the Himalayas” (Hassnian et al, 1977, 43). For its ethereal beauty, naturalised under in the bottom of surrounding peaks clad with white snow cap, conducive milieu, breeding many glittering rivulets filled in transparent ale , and lush picturesque. This land, besides its having its cultural ethics, is considered also as that one the eye, the head, and the soul, attain freshness and feeling of vivacity from. It so comes to know that life and nature are intertwined in each other. Chader Trek, Suru Valley, Shafet glacier, Pandi la, Umsi la , etc., offer to the human interest deep gumption of a divine order that makes philosophical essence to the teleological evidence of God according to which, “ The world seems everywhere to reveal a rational ordering and a benevolent design, which certainly points to the fact that one must be a divine architect or designer of the world” (Patrich, 2015 , 388) . This argument states itself on that design which is found in the harmony of those objective elements that gives grandeur to the meaning of existence, and that order is felt apparently understood on catching sight of these valleys and peaks in Ladakh. For their aesthetic utility and other places like Nabru, Lamayuru, Drass, etc., also are not least in making of composite beauty and insight into the Divine design analysed in knowing the proofs of God' s existence.

Religious aesthetics

‘Religion’ as derived from two Latin words which are ‘*religare*’, meaning to bind, and ‘*religio*’, meaning bond, reverence or obligation. For these reasons it is understood as a systematic bond between man and God. God in almost all religions in the world is held as Supreme Good, source of all perfection and beauty. The attribution of beauty, perfection, virtue, etc., therefore in religion along with the rest together make Ladakh religiously as aesthetics in true sense. Religious Ladakh is heterogenetic land on which 46% are Muslims, 40% are Buddhists , 12% Hindus and 02% others, however, all these religious people live as brethren and live fullest in their Faith's without religious monopoly; this coexistence and

co- living add to the moral and spiritual nature of the people. The history behind the religious origin in Ladakh is a long one. But it is recorded that it was Buddhism in 2nd century that from Kashmir managed to spread in the region as per the information given by Xuanzang. Differently, it is said that, “Buddhism first penetrated into the country from Kashmir. This happened at an unknown date, but possibly at Kushana times, as shown by several Indian inscriptions of a religious nature, found chiefly at K’ a-la-ltse” (Peteck, 1977, 164). The history of the region has witnessed Islam entering here around 1380 and 1510 when Sayid Aki Hamdani , Muhammad Noor Bakash and Meer Shams-ud-Din Iraqi with their followers spread and propagated Islam in different corners of Ladakh. It was with this experience that in different places many masjids and Islamic religious places were built and established. Despite having multi religious tradition this place has remained exemplary one in the sense of peaceful coexistence for centuries together that unearths the deep understanding of religious tolerance. All different religious sects have been successfully managing the creation of that environment in which what matters the most is the humanity in total. Where Lord Buddha asks his followers to seek Buddha state or inner enlightenment that, "appears as the light of wisdom that awakens people into a newness of life and causes them to be born into the world of Buddha" (Kyokai, 2015, 26). There it also is a religious fundamental to harm none, and respect all irrespective of caste, creed and colour. These lessons together lie in Islamic way; in it reverence for all people, stress on cumulative goodness, service to the humanity, etc., are mostly emphasised. The point to understand here is that the people in Ladakh in following their religious ideals have emerged as the universal beings ordering their cosmic living and existence. This way they have got to the land religious aesthetics with their positivity in thought, belief and action.

Cultural aesthetics

Since culture is a vast domain of humanity in terms of ideologies, mannerisms, inner and outer beliefs, etc, it makes of Ladakh a unique anthropological understanding in whose study and investigation a partial looking at objects cannot make proper knowledge of it certain. In its colourful historical importance, there are hundreds of those components that together edifice cultural aesthetics of this sky touching land: its vastness lies in several cultural festivals which entail social and religious significance in which HemisTsech and Losar are of indomitable importance; the former is dedicated to Lord Padmasambhava, adorned as the dance performing, however, at Hemis monastery. According to local tradition the Lord improves the spiritual state of living beings, and the second is remembered on Tibetan New Year. On this festival of Tibetan Buddhism a holiday is celebrated on different locations differently in Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, and India. So this festival also has cosmic interest. This is celebrated for 15

days with the observation of Vajrakilaya in remembrance of HerukaYidandiety whose action is being understood as the most effective power of eliminating impediments in human life and destroying those forces that go against the higher values like compassion. There are other festivals like Dosmache, Tak Saka Deva, etc., that altogether give full consolidation to the being of cultural aesthetics of the region. Moreover, the different dress codes, paintings, portraits on the walls on the religious monasteries, stone jewellery, etc., enable Ladakh dazzle aesthetically.

Conclusion

Optimistically, this can be viewed that Ladakh's overall aesthetics comprises of many different natural, social, religious and man-made components that jointly bedeck the region to be there as the next to heaven on earth. With it there is no exclusion of spiritual strata and collective human mannerism and human thought and belief. The outstanding feature of Ladakh's aesthetics lies in its multi religious beliefs also that does not seem to have any breach in the attainment of its value. For centuries together this land has been India's known cultural spot for its peaceful coexistence. However, this land though wins the status of being special and multidimensionally aesthetical, has been on verge to destruction in the grip of warlike situations between Indian and China. To preserve this locale of India's collective cultural heritage with a magnificent uniqueness, India has to resolve issues with China on all those parameters that generate positivity between the two nations to motivate themselves for making an end to the warlike conditioning to save the land from vanishing.

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