

# Snow as Witness: Winter, Silence, and the Ethics of Seeing Kashmir

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## Abstract

Winter in Kashmir is not just about the cold. It feels like this quiet time where everything slows down and you start remembering stuff from before. Especially with all the violence that's happened there. The snow comes every year and covers the Valley like it's trying to start over or something. People always show snow in nice pictures or stories, making it seem pretty and far off. But living through it is different, more real I guess. This paper wants to look at Kashmiri winter another way. Not just weather or something to look at. Snow witnesses a lot, like it covers everything materially and shows up in stories and traditions too. And ethically, it changes how we notice things around us. When the whole place gets buried, it becomes this waiting area where people are patient and feel connected somehow. It's like its keeping track of history that isn't written down or fully gotten in an ethical way. Not stored in archives right either. I think it pulls from environmental humanities and phenomenology. Also, cultural memory and how we perceive things ethically. To understand why winter has its own way of seeing and staying alive. That goes against just staring at stuff for show, like consuming it visually. Instead, it makes you pay real attention, be humble, take some responsibility. Explaining that part is messy, it feels like. Reading about winter as an archive or silence being present in its own way. And waiting as this in between time. Snow isn't background at all. It's part of how Kashmiris think about their culture. Some might see it like that, others probably miss it. Outlining a teaching way for winter adds to what people study about seasons and environmental ethics. Gives another angle on Kashmir, not just as a spectacle to watch. I might be oversimplifying here, but yeah, that's the main idea sort of.

**Keywords:** Kashmir, violence, environmental humanities and phenomenology, cultural memory, responsibility, Winter

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## Introduction

Winter in Kashmir has long occupied the doubly defined position of being consecrated and contradictory in its representation. Winter can hardly be said to be less admired in Kashmir for its snow-covered landscape, frozen water bodies, and silent forests. Winter is compelled to make an appearance through visual excess to be admired, photographed, and consumed. These very images, despite being an interesting visual statement, tend to reduce the reality of winters to the position of a spectacle that is far removed from reality. The snow symbolizes landscape, not reality.

This paper will argue that a Kashmir in the winter season can and ought to be perceived not only as a matter for the visual but as a matter for the moral. The linchpin in any such exploration will be the role of snow as a witness. The snow in Kashmir does not fall, rather, it witnesses. The snow in Kashmir does not fall on landscapes but on all other things as well, roads, homes, graves, annulling all boundaries but imbuing all with a memory.

The question being posed in this research is:

- ❖ What is the place of winter, snow, and silence in the creation of an ethic of seeing in Kashmir?

Instead of advocating an ethic of seeing in the form of visually dominating Kashmir, the paper will propose an ethic of seeing in the form of an ethic of restraint.

## Literature Review and Research Gap

Kashmir has been widely researched from the perspectives of landscape, identity, memory, and concepts of belonging. The importance of non-human entities from the domain of environmental humanities has been emphasized by concepts such as 'slow violence' (Nixon, 2011), 'material agency' (Bennett, 2010), or 'ecological memory' (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014). The only aspect that remains theoretically unresearched, however, from this perspective, is season, specifically winter.

"The recent literature on seasons and climate in the climate humanisms calls for a concern for perceptions of seasons in its construction of time and relations. Kashmir's winter has, however, thus far been defined, speaking generally, through romanticisms or descriptions, but has not, in a comprehensive manner, engaged

with winter in its ethical or phenomenological construction whatsoever. The gap filled in the paper is in comprehending winter in its ethical or epistemological construction, not merely in an aesthetic one.”

With the addition of snow as a witness in this study, there comes an entirely different method of interpretation that is an intersection of environmental ethics, cultural memory studies, and phenomenology, something which has never been put down in any scholarly work on Kashmir until now.

## **Methodology**

In this paper, an analysis framework that employs a qualitative approach, anchored on a model that describes research work in the humanities, is used. It targets observations about Winter and snow from literature that relate to environment, which are not empirical. Winter and snow are treated as texts that must be interpreted.

“Phenomenologies, particularly those drawn from the notion of perception as a bodily act in the work of Merleau-Ponty,” will be used in the examination of the experience of winter. Environmental Humanities will be incorporated in the analysis of snow as an active material presence rather than material. Cultural Memory Studies will be used in conjunction with the analysis of winter as archive/witness.

That means that this paper is able to maintain an ethical perspective within its methodology because it is not extractive or representational in its approach but is concerned with depth and originality.

## **Silence and the Phenomenology of Winter**

The unsound of Kashmiri winters is enormously and harmfully misunderstood for the absence of it. Snow carves an immense silence which acts upon sound and movement and consciousness. Sound is dulled, voices brought low, time itself slackened. This is not a silence of absence, but of presence, which demands a new quality of attention.

From a phenomenological perspective, winter changes the modality of body occupancy of space. Movement becomes deliberative, perception introspective.

Snowy landscapes beckon reflection rather than mastery. A sensory shift undercuts modern values of velocity and visual dominance, promoting an ethic placing a premium on patience and nurture.

Silence also resists the spectacular. In a world full of images, the sameness of snow resists the picture. It resists spectacular differentiation by challenging the viewer with presence rather than consumption. Silence, as a medium of winter, resists the spectacular too.

### **Snow as Archive and Cultural Memory**

Snow offers a seasonal archive that records without any permanency. Footprints can be seen momentarily before disappearing. Paths vanish but remain in memory. The temporary memory mirrors how societies hold histories that embody the notion that lives are lived, but history is not written.

Winter culture in Kashmir is full of activities like eating, storytelling, communal labor, and home warmth. Snow shares all these activities incurably, marking out the moments of care and interdependence. Unlike the memory of the archive monument, which is past, the memory of the snow is always coming back every year.

As a specialization in trauma studies, "the covering power of snow is particularly significant in this respect." The covering, "it does not erase scars, but hides them, is itself suspended in the gesture of loss and resilience. This is how a community carries an impossible history, living in the past as a recurrence."

### **Waiting and Winter Temporality**

Winter in Kashmir is a season of waiting. Winter in Kashmir is waiting for the roads to open up, waiting for the snow to thaw, waiting for things to get moving again. But waiting is not a passive act. There is preparation entailed in waiting. There is storytelling entailed in waiting. There is reflection entailed in waiting. There is concern entailed in

From a philosophical perspective, winter represents a kind of thick temporality, it is a very meaningful season. Snow brakes this linearity; hence, imagination and memory coexist because of this phenomenon that does not conform to time in terms

of its role in efficiency and productivity. But the snow is a witness to this other temporality, advocating a waiting that is a form of resilience rather than stagnation.

### **The Ethics of Seeing**

Where the central ethical practice of this essay begins is by thinking about the act of seeing as witnessing. Today, visual culture shrinks the issue of Kashmir into pictures that are all at once beautiful, consumable, and removed.

Bearing witness is a function of responsibility. It means an acknowledgment of boundaries, of silence, of the un-masterable. Snow itself is a witness to this ethical attitude: it watches sans spectacle, writes sans domination. Taking up Susan Sontag's warning about visual desensitization, Winter becomes a pedagogical notion teaching forbearance, humility, and listening.

### **Conclusion**

Winter in Kashmir, and by extension its snow, has been constructed to be perceived not only as a season, but more so as an event of witness from within this article, where snow itself can be viewed from within the framework of witness. through which winter can be viewed from within the framework of Archive, Silence, and Wait.

The relevance of the paper in relation to Environmental Humanities as well as Kashmir Studies is in its emphasis on seasonality as an important point of inquiry. This not only rejects visual consumption/romanticism philosophy but also supports ethical witnessing instead.

Perhaps the future path that this work may take is in the realm of comparative winter studies or native winter knowledge. Finally, the winter of Kashmir shows us that there are lands that beckon the eye to look, but to look slowly.

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