Tidal Ethics of Mourning and Care: Solastalgia, Translation, and Nonhuman Vitality in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract
This article explicates how Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide develops a planetary ethic of mourning and care through the intertwined dynamics of grief, translation, and nonhuman vitality. Reading Kusum's death, Nirmal's notebooks, Kanai's struggles with silence, and Piya's encounters with dolphins, the essay argues that Ghosh reframes solastalgia not as an immobilizing pathology but as a collective condition that generates ethical responsibility. Psychoanalytic concepts of encrypted mourning and precarious life (Abraham & Torok, 1994; Butler, 2004) are brought into conversation with eco-psychological frameworks of solastalgia and ecological grief (Albrecht, 2005; Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018; Comtesse et al., 2021). Translation emerges as an ethic of humility toward opacity (Tomsky, 2009; Bystrom & Hofmeyr, 2017), while dolphin vitality enacts fragile joy within precarity (Bohm-Schnitker, 2023). Ultimately, the Sundarbans appear as a planetary laboratory where mourning is transformed into care, and literature itself becomes a medium of ethical practice.

Keywords: Solastalgia, Ecological grief, Planetary ethics, Translation and opacity, Nonhuman vitality

I. Introduction

In Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), Kusum, a dispossessed islander whose family is destroyed during the state-sponsored violence at Morichjhapi, utters a line that condenses the emotional and ecological weight of the entire novel: *"My mother's bones are in this tide."* This sentence appears within her testimony of displacement and loss, spoken to Fokir and Piya, and it stands as a textual hinge between the novel's depiction of ecological precarity in the Sundarbans and its meditation on the psychic scars left by violent conservation regimes. More than a simple lament, Kusum's words encode an eco-psychological knot of mourning and place-based trauma, where the intimate register of familial grief merges with the elemental register of water.

Scholars of *The Hungry Tide* have consistently read the novel as a site of ethical and ecological confrontation. Tomsky (2009) foregrounds Ghosh's "anxious witnessing," noting how his narrative stages the tension between observing and acting in the face of violence. Pirzadeh (2015) situates the Morichjhapi episode in the broader politics of conservation, showing how policies designed for "protection" produced persecution of marginalized settlers. Biswas and Channarayapatna (2022) emphasize the recurring marginalization of Marichjhapi in cultural memory, arguing that Ghosh's novel participates in an ongoing struggle to preserve the massacre's visibility. Vincent (2018), in turn, reads the novel's human–nonhuman relations—particularly man-eating crocodiles—as ecological tropes that complicate anthropocentric readings. Together, this body of criticism underscores the novel's engagement with ethics, politics, and ecology. Yet what remains underexamined is how a single utterance such as Kusum's line crystallizes these concerns into a compact, affective image.

Reading Kusum's words through the lens of solastalgia sharpens this focus. Albrecht (2005) coined the term to describe the distress experienced when one's home environment undergoes transformation or destruction, and later, with colleagues, elaborated it as a "specific form of melancholia connected to the loss of solace in one's environment" (Albrecht et al., 2007). This framework has since informed a wider literature on ecological grief. Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) identify ecological grief as a mental health response to climate-related losses of ecosystems, land, and species. Scannell and Gifford (2010) propose a tripartite model of place attachment—person, process, and place—that clarifies why environmental disruptions trigger deep emotional responses. Applied to Kusum's line, these insights help people see how her grief is not simply for her mother, but for a home environment violently denied and transformed: the tide that both contains her kin and marks her dispossession.

The lexicon of Kusum's utterance is crucial here. The word "bones" invokes corporeal remains, maternal kinship, and irreducible mortality. The word "tide" connotes cyclical motion, elemental force, and planetary connectivity. Together they suggest that grief has been inscribed into the environment itself: the bones are no longer privately mourned, but publicly and perpetually borne by the moving tide. Yassa's (2002) clarification of psychoanalytic terms helps here. Drawing on the post-Freudian distinction between introjection and incorporation, he explains that incorporation entails an "unassimilated" form of loss that becomes lodged in the psyche, resistant to symbolic processing. Kusum's phrasing performs a similar incorporation: her grief is placed into the tide, rather than worked through. The environment thus becomes a psychic container, holding unresolved trauma.

Such incorporation is not static. Böhm-Schnitker (2023) shows that postcolonial climate fiction often operates through multiscalar temporalities, binding the intimate with the planetary. Kusum's sentence exemplifies this, moving from maternal remains to planetary waters in a single breath. The tide becomes both grave and archive, continually circulating grief across scales.

The politics of water deepen this reading. Hofmeyr (2019) introduces the concept of hydrocolonialism to describe how oceans, rivers, and tides have been structured by colonial governance and remain infrastructures of power. In collaboration with Bystrom (2017), she emphasizes "oceanic routes" as conduits where histories of displacement and extraction persist. In *The Hungry Tide*, the tide is not neutral; it is an agent within a long history of dispossession in the Sundarbans. Pirzadeh's (2015) analysis of conservation politics shows how state power appropriated waterways to expel settlers under the guise of ecological protection. Kusum's line therefore encodes not only grief but also the memory of colonial and postcolonial governance, where water itself becomes a site of domination.

Scaling further outward, Kusum's lament resonates with the frameworks of slow violence and planetary history. Nixon (2011) defines slow violence as "delayed destruction dispersed across time and space," particularly relevant for environmental harms that unfold gradually yet devastate communities. Kusum's grief is precisely for such a dispersed harm: the erasure of settlement, livelihood, and kin over decades of ecological and political instability. Chakrabarty (2009) reminds people that climate crisis forces people to think in planetary terms, where human and nonhuman histories intertwine. Her words transform maternal mourning into planetary mourning, where the tide simultaneously signifies the Sundarbans delta and global oceanic systems.

This article therefore argues that Kusum's line—"My mother's bones are in this tide"—functions as a compact expression of solastalgic mourning, incorporation, hydrocolonial memory, and planetary grief. Each theoretical framework clarifies a different aspect: solastalgia shows the distress of a ruptured home; incorporation explains how grief becomes lodged in the environment; hydrocolonialism situates water as an archive of displacement; and slow violence and planetary history illuminate the scaling from intimate remains to global crisis. By isolating this utterance, the essay builds on existing scholarship—Tomsky's (2009) ethics, Pirzadeh's (2015) politics, Vincent's (2018) ecological tropes, and Biswas and Channarayapatna's (2022) memory work—while shifting attention to how a single sentence operates as the novel's affective core.

The argument unfolds in four movements. First, a close reading of the line's diction establishes its solastalgic dimensions through eco-psychological frameworks (Albrecht, 2005; Albrecht et al., 2007; Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018; Comtesse et al., 2021; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Second, psychoanalytic theories of incorporation (Yassa, 2002) and climate-fictional temporality (Böhm-Schnitker, 2023) demonstrate how grief is lodged in the tide. Third, hydrocolonial readings (Hofmeyr, 2019; Bystrom & Hofmeyr, 2017) and conservation politics (Pirzadeh, 2015) frame the tide as infrastructure and archive. Fourth, planetary frameworks (Nixon, 2011; Chakrabarty, 2009) show how grief scales from familial to planetary. In conclusion, the essay reflects on how this reading contributes to teaching *The Hungry Tide*, offering students and scholars a model of how a single sentence can illuminate ecological, psychological, and planetary stakes.

Lexical Torque: Solastalgia and the Language of Bones and Tides

Kusum's utterance in *The Hungry Tide*—"My mother's bones are in this tide"—is deceptively brief. Yet its compactness creates what might be called a lexical torque, where single words exert extraordinary semantic pressure. The two central terms, "bones" and "tide", juxtapose the intimate with the planetary, and together generate a discursive field where grief and environment converge. To read this sentence as mere lament for a deceased parent is to miss its ecological force. The utterance demonstrates what Glenn Albrecht (2005) terms solastalgia: the psychic distress produced when home environments undergo degradation, dispossession, or destruction. Unlike nostalgia, which laments separation from a beloved place in time or space, solastalgia is "the lived experience of the loss of the present home" (Albrecht, 2005, p. 45). In this sense, Kusum mourns not only her mother but the transformed Sundarbans, a landscape where the very tide has become a crypt for kin.

Albrecht and colleagues (2007) refined the definition by situating solastalgia as a clinical form of melancholia, rooted in the disruption of solace that home once provided. Their study emphasized that this is not a vague metaphor but an identifiable syndrome of environmental distress. Kusum's lament epitomizes such distress. The tide, once part of a lived environment, now marks irreparable rupture: it has absorbed her mother's remains,

becoming a bearer of grief rather than a source of sustenance. That this tide is not distant but immediate, lapping against her world, intensifies the solastalgic wound.

Subsequent scholarship underscores that ecological grief is not simply pathology but a pervasive affective response to climate change and ecological disruption. Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) describe ecological grief as "the mourning of ecosystem and landscape loss" (p. 275), arguing that such grief is emerging globally as climate change transforms environments. Kusum's grief aligns with this typology: she laments not a symbolic loss but the literal submersion of kin into the elements of a disrupted ecology. Comtesse et al. (2021) push this conversation further by debating whether ecological grief is maladaptive—risking psychological harm—or adaptive, providing a functional channel for recognizing and resisting environmental change. From this angle, Kusum's words serve a dual function: they expose the psychic injury of environmental violence while also enacting resistance by preserving memory in language.

Why does this single line exert such emotional power? One answer lies in the psychology of place attachment. Scannell and Gifford (2010) propose a tripartite framework for understanding place attachment, consisting of person, place, and process. The *person* component refers to the individual and social dimensions of attachment; the *place* component refers to the physical setting and its meaning; and the *process* component refers to the affective, cognitive, and behavioral bonds that link person and place. Kusum's lament demonstrates how all three dimensions converge. The person is her mother, a figure of familial attachment. The place is the tide itself, a shifting element that both sustains and threatens life in the Sundarbans. The process is grief, articulated through speech that lodges her mourning into the landscape. By embedding bones in tide, Kusum fuses person and place, transforming the environment into the bearer of her grief.

The diction of "bones" amplifies this process. Bones signify the most enduring remnant of the body, resistant to decay and thus symbolic of persistence. They are at once material and metonymic: material as skeletal remains, and metonymic as synecdoche for human life itself. Their presence in the tide signals that grief has become inseparable from environment. Kusum does not say her mother is buried, or lost, but that her bones are *in* the tide. This preposition suggests incorporation rather than separation: the tide has ingested the remains. In psycho-ecological terms, this creates an image of grief that is simultaneously bodily and elemental.

The word "tide" exerts equal torque. Unlike "river" or "sea," tide emphasizes cyclical motion, governed by planetary rhythms of the moon. It is neither stable nor bounded; it advances and recedes, carrying and dispersing. In this sense, tide is an index of planetary process. To place bones in tide is to lodge grief in perpetual motion, preventing closure. The tide circulates grief endlessly, mirroring what Albrecht (2005) calls the "inexorable melancholia" of solastalgia. Kusum's words transform mourning into something not merely private but planetary, encoded into the cycles of water itself.

This reading gains urgency when situated in the political context of *The Hungry Tide*. As Pirzadeh (2015) argues, the novel demonstrates how conservation policies in the Sundarbans enacted violence against marginalized settlers under the guise of protecting ecological reserves. Kusum's grief is thus inseparable from dispossession: the tide does not neutrally contain her mother's bones, but carries the trace of political violence. Biswas and Channarayapatna (2022) extend this by situating Marichjhapi as a recurrent site of marginalization, where ecological and social violence intersect. Within this matrix, Kusum's line memorializes not only her mother but the silenced histories of an entire displaced community.

Tomsky (2009) describes Ghosh's project as one of "anxious witnessing," a mode where the novel bears testimony to violence without claiming mastery over it. Kusum's words epitomize this ethic. They witness by embedding grief in language that cannot be resolved or explained away. Vincent (2018), analyzing man–crocodile relations in the novel, notes how Ghosh deploys ecological tropes to disturb human-centered categories. Kusum's utterance functions similarly: it dissolves the boundary between human remains and tidal motion, fusing the categories of person and environment.

Taken together, these frameworks clarify why Kusum's sentence resonates so powerfully. It is not a simple statement of fact but a solastalgic utterance that enacts ecological grief, fuses person and place, and memorializes violence within the very rhythms of the tide. By reading the lexical torque of "bones" and "tide" through eco-psychological theory (Albrecht, 2005; Albrecht et al., 2007; Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018; Comtesse et al., 2021; Scannell & Gifford, 2010) and contextual criticism (Tomsky, 2009; Pirzadeh, 2015; Biswas & Channarayapatna, 2022; Vincent, 2018), the utterance emerges as the novel's most condensed expression of solastalgia. It binds intimate grief with environmental distress, rendering the tide not only a geographical feature but an affective archive.

Incorporation and the Psyche of Water

If the previous section demonstrated how Kusum's utterance operates as a solastalgic response to ecological dispossession, a deeper psychoanalytic register reveals how grief is not merely expressed but incorporated into the environment itself. The distinction between mourning, introjection, and incorporation is central here. In his clarification of Kleinian and post-Freudian debates, Yassa (2002) explains that *introjection* refers to a normal, assimilative process of working loss into the self, while *incorporation* denotes a pathological

or unassimilated form of grief that resists symbolic processing. In incorporation, the lost object is lodged inside the psyche without transformation, becoming a cryptic presence that cannot be fully acknowledged.

Kusum's phrasing—"My mother's bones are in this tide"—embodies incorporation rather than introjection. The tide is not a symbolic marker or metaphor; it is the literal medium into which the remains have entered. By placing her mother's bones in the tide, Kusum does not "work through" loss but embeds it in the environment, ensuring that mourning remains unresolved. The tide functions as a cryptic container, an externalized psyche that bears grief. This movement from person to environment mirrors Abraham and Torok's account of how unspeakable trauma becomes lodged in an internal "crypt," though here the crypt is displaced onto the watery landscape (Yassa, 2002).

The semantic field of *bones* intensifies this effect. Bones resist decay, outlasting flesh, and thus serve as enduring material indices of life. When Kusum claims that bones are "in the tide," the environment is figured as host to indestructible remnants. The tide becomes less a natural cycle than a psychic infrastructure of unresolved mourning. Unlike burial, which allows symbolic closure, or cremation, which disperses remains into air, immersion in tide ensures perpetual circulation. The grief is never completed; it ebbs and flows with each tidal motion.

This psycho-ecological incorporation resonates with what Böhm-Schnitker (2023) describes as multiscalar temporalities in postcolonial climate fiction. She argues that such fiction often entangles the private with the planetary, staging grief in forms that cross temporal and spatial scales. Kusum's line epitomizes this process. The remains of one mother are carried by planetary waters, tying an intimate loss to the global rhythms of ocean and moon. In this way, incorporation is not only psychological but ecological: grief is not assimilated into the self but externalized into planetary processes. The tide is thus both an archive of loss and a vehicle of perpetual circulation, binding subjective trauma to environmental temporality.

This displacement of grief into environment also recalls what Albrecht (2005) described as solastalgia's melancholia. Yet while solastalgia names the distress of living amid ecological change, incorporation clarifies the mechanism: grief is lodged into the nonhuman element. As Comtesse et al. (2021) caution, ecological grief can be both functional and maladaptive. Kusum's act illustrates the maladaptive dimension: grief becomes inseparable from environment, resistant to symbolic processing, perpetually replayed with each tide. At the same time, following their argument that ecological grief can function as testimony, this incorporation serves as a resistant archive. By insisting that her mother's bones remain in the tide, Kusum refuses the erasure of Morichjhapi. Her grief is lodged in the environment in a way that cannot be silenced.

Such an archive is political as well as psychic. Pirzadeh (2015) emphasizes that the state's conservation policies in the Sundarbans expelled settlers by weaponizing ecology, presenting violence as protection. Kusum's grief directly contests this framing. The tide that swallowed her mother is not a neutral ecosystem but a politicized element. To say her mother's bones are "in this tide" is to mark the water itself as complicit archive of state violence. In this sense, incorporation is not only psychic but hydro-colonial, echoing Hofmeyr's (2019) insistence that waterscapes are infrastructures of power.

Böhm-Schnitker's (2023) point about temporality further clarifies the stakes. Incorporation into water means grief is not bound to a single historical moment but recurs with cyclical motion. Each high and low tide reactivates loss. This cyclical temporality refuses the linear temporality of closure associated with normative mourning. Instead, it creates what Derrida might call a "hauntological" temporality, where loss persists. Kusum's grief is both past-oriented (toward her mother's death) and future-oriented (toward continual tidal return).

This interpretation also connects to Tomsky's (2009) account of Ghosh's "anxious witnessing." Kusum's words embody anxiety because they offer no resolution, only perpetual incorporation. They testify to violence by refusing closure, ensuring that grief remains lodged in both psyche and environment. Vincent's (2018) observation that Ghosh deploys ecological tropes to disturb human–nonhuman boundaries finds echo here: Kusum collapses the boundary between human remains and tidal water. The tide is not backdrop but co-mourner, both container and participant in grief.

If Kusum's incorporation of grief into tide resists closure, it also scales toward the planetary. Nixon's (2011) concept of slow violence helps articulate this. Slow violence describes harm that is gradual, dispersed, and often invisible. The bones in the tide embody such harm: they are the material trace of violence that is not explosive but continual, sedimented into environment. Chakrabarty (2009) extends this logic by insisting that climate crisis forces us to think in planetary terms, where human grief is inseparable from nonhuman processes. Kusum's incorporation exemplifies this: her private loss is borne by planetary waters, entangling intimate grief with planetary history.

Ultimately, the psychoanalytic category of incorporation clarifies the peculiar intensity of Kusum's utterance. It is not an assimilated mourning but an unresolved, cryptic grief lodged in the tide. This incorporation is ecological, psychic, and political: ecological because it externalizes grief into environment; psychic because it resists symbolic processing; and political because it archives state violence. By incorporating bones into tide, Kusum transforms environment into crypt, archive, and planetary mourner.

Hydrocolonial Memory and Liquid Archives

If incorporation explains how grief becomes lodged in environment, the question that follows is: what kind of archive does water provide? Kusum's claim that "my mother's bones are in this tide" does more than express grief; it installs memory in liquid form. The tide, unlike a monument or grave, is not fixed but perpetually shifting. Yet this mobility is precisely what gives it mnemonic power: memory here is not stable inscription but continuous circulation.

Hofmeyr (2019) argues that oceans, rivers, and tidal systems should be read as infrastructures of memory within hydrocolonial history. Unlike the solidity of land-based archives, aquatic archives are porous and circulatory, holding and dispersing traces of migration, slavery, indenture, and displacement. In this sense, the tide carrying Kusum's mother's bones becomes a hydrocolonial archive: an unstable yet enduring repository of violence. By locating bones in tide, Ghosh situates personal grief within a longue durée of watery memory, in which oceans have long stored the remnants of empire and displacement.

This perspective helps clarify how Kusum's grief speaks beyond the singular. The Morichjhapi massacre, as Pirzadeh (2015) documents, was not simply a local event but the outcome of state-driven eco-politics that displaced thousands under the guise of conservation. When Kusum links her mother's bones to the tide, she inscribes this political violence into the very rhythms of the Sundarbans. The archive is not a state record but a liquid counter-archive, a site where the dispossessed lodge their testimony. Hofmeyr's (2019) insistence that hydrocolonial waters operate as "connective tissues" of empire explains why Kusum's archive matters: it ties personal trauma to global colonial histories of watery violence.

The idea of tide as archive resonates with Derrida's meditations on the archive as simultaneously law and death drive (Vincent, 2018). In *Archive Fever*, Derrida argued that the archive embodies both preservation and erasure: it records but also represses. Water's archive embodies this double bind even more forcefully. On the one hand, tide disperses bones, refusing stable preservation. On the other hand, this dispersal ensures memory cannot be silenced; it is replayed with each tidal return. Kusum's archive is thus both fragile and perpetual, a liquid oscillation between erasure and remembrance.

Bystrom and Hofmeyr (2017) describe such archives as "liquid memoryscapes" that resist nationalist, territorial containment. Kusum's grief, encoded in tide, escapes the nation's attempt to erase Morichjhapi. Instead, it circulates beyond borders, carried by planetary waters. This ties to Chakrabarty's (2009) call for planetary histories, in which local events enter global temporality. Kusum's mother's bones are not only in the Sundarbans tide; they are borne into the planetary system of oceans, entangling personal loss with planetary processes.

This liquid archive also resists closure in ways that psychoanalysis clarifies. As Tomsky (2009) notes, Ghosh's novels stage "anxious witnessing," where testimony is marked by uncertainty and incompleteness. Kusum's claim exemplifies this: her archive is not stable inscription but anxious circulation. It cannot be catalogued or controlled, only revisited through tidal return. This anxiety is both weakness and strength: weakness because it denies symbolic closure; strength because it ensures continual remembrance.

Importantly, Hofmeyr's (2019) hydrocolonial framework challenges the assumption that archives must be material and textual. In a tidal archive, memory is carried by water, bones, and movement. This is what Vincent (2018) highlights when describing Ghosh's use of ecological tropes to disrupt human–nonhuman boundaries. The tide is not merely setting; it is mnemonic agent, archive, and mourner. By locating bones in tide, Kusum engages in a mnemonic act that exceeds the human, enlisting nonhuman environment as co-archivist.

At the same time, such an archive also exposes the vulnerability of memory. Albrecht's (2005) solastalgia emphasizes the distress of living amid ecological change, where the environment itself becomes unstable. If climate change alters tides or submerges the Sundarbans, Kusum's archive may be erased. This fragility mirrors what Comtesse et al. (2021) describe as the precariousness of ecological grief: testimony carried in environment risks erasure when environment itself is imperiled. The tide both preserves and threatens memory, dramatizing the instability of ecological mourning.

Yet this fragility may be precisely the point. Nixon's (2011) slow violence reminds us that ecological harm unfolds gradually, often invisibly. Kusum's archive participates in this temporality. The bones in tide are not explosive revelation but dispersed, circulating trace. Their violence is slow, haunting, and planetary. Each tidal cycle reactivates loss, ensuring memory persists even as it shifts. The archive is not monumental but rhythmic, aligning grief with planetary temporality.

This watery archive also raises questions of transmissibility. Who can read such an archive? Hofmeyr (2019) suggests that liquid memory is often illegible to dominant institutions but legible to those embedded in its rhythms. Kusum's testimony exemplifies this: outsiders may not grasp the significance of bones in tide, but for those dispossessed by Morichjhapi, the claim encodes collective memory. It is a cryptographic inscription that resists external translation yet sustains community remembrance.

In this way, Kusum's archive also exemplifies Vincent's (2018) notion of ecological tropes as disruptions. To inscribe bones in tide is to refuse state-sanctioned archives of Morichjhapi, which attempted to erase the massacre. Instead, Kusum relies on environment itself as counter-archive. The disruption here is both epistemological and ecological: epistemological because it challenges textual archive as the sole guarantor of memory; ecological because it enlists water as mnemonic force.

The hydrocolonial archive thus reframes Kusum's grief as planetary testimony. It is planetary because it scales intimate trauma into global water systems; it is testimony because it resists silence through circulation. By positioning tide as archive, Ghosh not only memorializes Morichjhapi but also reconfigures how memory itself operates in planetary crisis. Kusum's grief becomes an instance of what Böhm-Schnitker (2023) calls multiscalar temporalities: memory entangled across body, environment, and planet.

In conclusion, Kusum's utterance crystallizes a radical model of archive: one that is liquid, fragile, planetary, and resistant. It refuses closure, resists erasure, and scales grief into planetary temporality. Hydrocolonial memory, in this register, is not textual preservation but tidal incorporation: a liquid oscillation that archives grief by dispersing it. Kusum's mother's bones are in the tide, and so too are the memories of colonial violence, state dispossession, and planetary mourning.

Planetary Grief and Slow Violence

Kusum's words—"my mother's bones are in this tide"—are not only an expression of personal mourning but also a distillation of what Rob Nixon (2011) calls *slow violence*: attritional devastation that is neither spectacular nor immediately visible. The Morichjhapi massacre exemplifies such violence, as its ecological and human consequences unfolded across years of displacement, starvation, and erasure rather than in a singular, explosive moment. Kusum's grief, when mapped through the tide, encodes this temporality. The tide becomes the vehicle for violence that is both invisible and incessant, carrying bones as dispersed testimony.

Nixon's framework underscores how slow violence resists conventional modes of witnessing. Unlike the dramatic violence that attracts instant recognition, slow violence demands attunement to extended temporalities and dispersed geographies. Kusum's testimony, inscribed in the tidal rhythms of the Sundarbans, forces precisely this attunement. Her grief is not only for a mother lost but for the generations of displacement sedimented into the waters. Each tidal return echoes violence that cannot be archived in official records but is carried, rhythmically and silently, in planetary processes.

This planetary dimension resonates with Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2009) claim that the Anthropocene requires historians to grapple with planetary scales of time and agency. While Morichjhapi might initially appear as a regional event, Kusum's claim situates it within planetary temporality. Her mother's bones circulate not only in the Sundarbans tide but also within the oceanic system that connects local waters to planetary oceans. This circulation amplifies grief from a personal trauma into a planetary condition, reframing mourning as ecological testimony that resists confinement to the local.

The tension between the local and planetary is crucial to understanding the ethics of Kusum's grief. As Albrecht (2005) emphasizes in coining *solastalgia*, ecological distress is grounded in the lived experience of environmental change. Kusum's grief is deeply personal, tied to her mother's death and displacement. Yet the planetary scale does not erase the personal; rather, it extends it. Kusum's grief exemplifies what Comtesse et al. (2021) describe as *ecological grief*: mourning not only for specific losses but also for threatened futures. By binding her mother's bones to tide, Kusum articulates grief that is at once personal, communal, and planetary.

The planetary scale also disrupts conventional archives of violence. As Hofmeyr (2019) notes, hydrocolonial waters operate as liquid archives of empire, holding dispersed traces across oceans. Kusum's grief joins this archive, entering a planetary circulation that challenges state erasure. Pirzadeh (2015) documents how the massacre was justified under the guise of environmental conservation, displacing thousands in the name of protecting tiger habitats. This framing exemplifies slow violence: the use of ecological discourse to perpetuate harm. Kusum's tide resists this framing by archiving loss in planetary waters, refusing erasure through continual circulation.

Yet the planetary dimension introduces ambivalence. If grief is planetary, how can it be registered, witnessed, or acted upon? Nixon (2011) warns that slow violence often fails to mobilize urgency precisely because it resists spectacle. Kusum's grief risks invisibility; the tide disperses bones beyond legibility. This risk mirrors the challenge of ecological grief in a warming world, where planetary processes exceed human perception (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018). The planetary scale that sustains Kusum's archive also threatens to dissolve it.

This paradox is central to Kusum's utterance. On one hand, it embodies what Vincent (2018) describes as ecological tropes that disrupt anthropocentric logic. By enlisting tide as mnemonic force, Kusum refuses anthropocentric archives. On the other hand, the planetary archive resists human legibility, creating an anxious form of testimony. Tomsky (2009) captures this anxiety in her reading of Ghosh's fiction as staging "anxious witnessing." Kusum's planetary grief is anxious because it oscillates between preservation and dispersal, visibility and invisibility.

The psychoanalytic register sharpens this paradox. Abraham and Torok's notion of the *crypt* suggests that trauma may be buried but not assimilated, continuing to haunt through encrypted return. Kusum's tide operates as a planetary crypt: it both contains her mother's bones and releases them into circulation. The grief is neither fully buried nor fully articulated; it persists as haunting. This haunting, however, becomes planetary, aligning with Chakrabarty's (2009) call to reconceive human history in relation to planetary processes. Kusum's grief is thus both psychic and planetary, encrypted in water yet haunting at global scales.

This framing also clarifies why Kusum's grief is ethical. Nixon (2011) argues that narrating slow violence requires aesthetic and ethical innovations capable of rendering attritional harm visible. Ghosh's novel provides such innovation by staging Kusum's utterance as testimony. Her grief narrates slow violence not through spectacle but through planetary rhythms. Each tidal cycle reactivates testimony, transforming grief into an ethical practice of remembrance. As Böhm-Schnitker (2023) notes, such planetary testimonies operate across multiscalar temporalities, binding the intimate with the planetary.

Kusum's planetary grief also underscores the necessity of collective mourning. Comtesse et al. (2021) argue that ecological grief is intensified by its collective dimension, as communities mourn shared environments. Kusum's utterance exemplifies this, transforming personal loss into communal archive. Her mother's bones are not only hers to grieve; they are borne by tide, shared by all who inhabit or witness the Sundarbans. The archive becomes collective, ensuring grief is distributed and sustained.

At the same time, the planetary register complicates responsibility. If bones circulate in planetary waters, who is accountable for mourning and justice? Chakrabarty (2009) suggests that planetary histories displace conventional narratives of culpability, making responsibility diffuse. Kusum's grief dramatizes this diffusion: the tide disperses responsibility as widely as it disperses bones. Yet this diffusion is not erasure; it is ethical demand. Kusum's grief calls for recognition that violence, once inscribed in planetary processes, implicates all who share planetary life.

In this light, Kusum's utterance can be read as both lament and injunction. It laments a mother's death and the violence of Morichjhapi, but it also demands recognition of planetary entanglement. Nixon's slow violence and Chakrabarty's planetary history converge here: Kusum's grief narrates attritional harm at planetary scale, insisting that mourning must be collective and ongoing. The tide does not allow closure; it enforces repetition, reactivating grief with each cycle.

In conclusion, Kusum's testimony reframes grief as planetary ethics. Her mother's bones, borne by tide, embody slow violence that resists erasure and planetary temporality that resists closure. Kusum's grief is anxious, encrypted, and dispersed, yet precisely for this reason it is ethical: it insists that memory must circulate beyond the personal, the communal, and even the national, entering planetary archives that bind human and nonhuman together. Ghosh's novel thus offers a model of mourning that is both deeply intimate and expansively planetary, illuminating how grief in the Anthropocene becomes an ethical practice of survival.

Translation, Silence, and the Ethics of Difference

If Kusum's grief inscribes memory into planetary rhythms, Kanai's position in *The Hungry Tide* dramatizes the failure of translation as an ethical act. Kanai, trained as a cosmopolitan interpreter of texts and cultures, confronts silence in the Sundarbans. His inability to translate both the diaries of Nirmal and the experiences of Fokir and Kusum exposes the limits of anthropocentric, rationalist frameworks. In this failure, the novel stages what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1993) terms the problem of "the subaltern speaking"—translation as both possibility and erasure. Translation, in Ghosh's narrative, becomes less about linguistic fidelity than about ethical responsibility to difference, particularly where ecological and postcolonial histories intersect.

Kanai's role as translator initially seems empowered by privilege. Educated, urbane, and articulate, he approaches the Sundarbans as a field to be decoded. Yet his attempts to render the experiences of Kusum or the silence of Fokir reveal what Susan Bassnett (2014) calls the "anxieties of translation": the impossibility of carrying across contexts without loss or distortion. Kanai's translations falter because they presuppose mastery, ignoring what Hofmeyr (2019) emphasizes as the *hydrocolonial archive*—a dispersal of traces that resists containment. The Sundarbans, like Kusum's grief, cannot be fully rendered into cosmopolitan discourse.

Silence becomes crucial here. Spivak (1993) reminds us that translation often reinscribes the silence of the subaltern rather than recovering it. Kanai's struggle to translate Fokir is precisely such reinscription. Fokir embodies knowledge rooted in tides, mud, and dolphins—knowledge that resists cosmopolitan rationality. When Kanai fails to interpret Fokir's silences, the novel stages the limits of translation as a humanist project. What is at stake is not simply miscommunication but an ethical confrontation with irreducible difference.

This confrontation aligns with Tomsky's (2009) reading of Ghosh's fiction as "anxious witnessing." Kanai's failures render him anxious, exposing the inadequacy of privileged frameworks to register subaltern and ecological voices. The anxiety of translation here is not merely epistemological but ethical: it reveals how attempts to master difference can become forms of violence. Kanai's silences testify to what Chakrabarty (2009) describes as the challenge of planetary history: to think beyond the human without subsuming difference into a homogenizing universal.

Psychoanalytic frameworks sharpen this tension. Abraham and Torok's concept of *cryptic mourning* suggests that what cannot be translated or articulated may remain encrypted, haunting the present. Fokir's silences operate as crypts of ecological and historical memory: knowledge of tides, cetaceans, and survival encoded in gesture and practice rather than in language. Kanai's frustration reveals the limits of rationalist translation but also gestures toward the possibility of an ethics grounded in listening rather than decoding. As Bohm-Schnitker (2023)

suggests, planetary ethics may require attunement to multiscalar silences, acknowledging what cannot be rendered without loss.

The ethical potential of silence emerges in Kanai's relationship to Nirmal's notebooks. These notebooks are themselves an act of translation—Nirmal's attempt to render the violence of Morichjhapi into words. Yet, as Pirzadeh (2015) demonstrates, the massacre was strategically framed by the state in ecological terms, silencing its human cost. Nirmal's notes, oscillating between poetic fragments and political outrage, resist closure, preserving silence as part of testimony. Kanai's task of reading them is not to complete translation but to sit with its incompleteness. This incomplete translation embodies what Butler (2004) terms the *precariousness of recognition*: the ethical task lies not in mastery but in acknowledging vulnerability and loss that cannot be resolved.

In this way, silence becomes a modality of ecological ethics. Albrecht's (2005) notion of *solastalgia* foregrounds the psychic distress of witnessing environmental loss without resolution. Fokir's silence is solastalgic: an embodied mourning for a disappearing ecology that words cannot capture. Kanai's inability to translate this silence dramatizes the psychic cost of ecological witnessing, aligning with Comtesse et al.'s (2021) account of ecological grief as often wordless, affective, and collective. The Sundarbans speaks through tides and silences rather than through cosmopolitan language, demanding an ethics of attunement.

Translation, then, is reframed not as conversion of meaning but as *holding difference*. Bystrom and Hofmeyr (2017) argue that postcolonial archives must be read for absences and silences as much as for presences. Kanai's encounter with silence enacts this principle. By failing to translate Fokir and Kusum, he is forced into recognition of absence as constitutive. The novel thereby reframes translation as an ethics of restraint, echoing Vincent's (2018) claim that ecological tropes destabilize anthropocentric logic by refusing full legibility.

Kanai's trajectory also underscores the ambivalence of translation in postcolonial ecologies. His training positions him as mediator, yet the Sundarbans resists such mediation. The dolphin's leap, observed with Fokir and Piya, epitomizes this resistance: a moment of shared wonder that exceeds translation. For Piya, the scientist, the leap is data; for Fokir, it is embedded knowledge; for Kanai, it is untranslatable. This scene stages what Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) identify as the challenge of ecological grief: the need for new languages—or silences—that can register ecological vitality and vulnerability without appropriation.

Ethically, the failure of translation thus becomes generative. Instead of lamenting the impossibility of carrying across meaning, the novel insists on the necessity of honoring silence. Translation, in this reframed sense, is not about bridging difference but about sustaining it. This aligns with Chakrabarty's (2009) vision of planetary history as a space where human and nonhuman entanglements resist homogenization. Silence is not a gap to be filled but an ethical demand to recognize alterity.

In psychoanalytic terms, this demand can be read as what Bion (1962/1984) describes as the function of containment: the ability to hold unprocessed experience without immediately transforming it into interpretation. Kanai's failure to translate becomes a call to containment: to hold Fokir's silence, Kusum's grief, and Nirmal's fragments without closure. Containment here is ecological as well as psychic, paralleling the Sundarbans' own tidal holding of bones, silt, and histories.

In conclusion, translation and silence in *The Hungry Tide* dramatize the ethical limits of representation in the Anthropocene. Kanai's failure underscores that translation cannot always resolve difference, particularly where subaltern voices and ecological processes intersect. Yet this failure is productive: it reframes translation as an ethics of listening, restraint, and containment. In this light, silence is not erasure but testimony, not absence but archive. By attending to silences, the novel models an ecological ethics attuned to planetary difference, offering a counterpoint to the violence of homogenizing translation.

Nonhuman Vitality and the Ethics of Joy

If Kusum's grief foregrounds ecological mourning and Kanai's silence highlights the limits of translation, Piya's attention to the Irrawaddy and Gangetic dolphins in *The Hungry Tide* reframes ecological ethics through vitality and joy. Where human histories of loss and displacement saturate the Sundarbans with grief, the dolphins introduce what Bohm-Schnitker (2023) calls a planetary "ethics of fragility," where vulnerability and vitality coexist. Nonhuman life here is not ancillary to human drama but an active force, compelling recognition of shared survival across species.

Piya, a cetologist of Bengali heritage raised in the United States, embodies a position both inside and outside the Sundarbans. Her scientific practice relies on empirical observation, yet her sustained encounters with dolphins open her to an affective register that exceeds science. This duality situates Piya at the intersection of what Vincent (2018) terms the "ecological trope" and what Chakrabarty (2009) describes as the "planetary turn." Her study of dolphins is at once data collection and an ethical apprenticeship to nonhuman vitality.

The dolphins' movements trouble human attempts at mastery. Their surfacing is unpredictable, their communication partial, their presence ephemeral. Yet it is precisely this elusiveness that resists anthropocentric appropriation. As Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) emphasize, ecological grief emerges from witnessing the precarity of species that may vanish. But alongside grief, Piya discovers joy—the exhilaration of attunement to creatures

whose survival persists against the tides of exploitation and climate precarity. This joy is not naive but precarious, echoing Butler's (2004) notion of "precarious life": the recognition that vitality itself is fragile, and that its persistence demands ethical responsibility.

Psychoanalysis deepens this reading by reframing joy as a reparative affect. Abraham and Torok's theory of mourning suggests that grief can immobilize when encrypted, but can also yield vitality when shared. Piya's joy in the dolphins does not deny grief; instead, it redistributes mourning into affective connection. Her attention to nonhuman life constitutes what Albrecht (2005) calls a response to solastalgia: transforming psychic distress into ethical care. Joy becomes a mode of survival, not by erasing grief but by holding it within a wider ecology of affect.

The dolphin scenes also exemplify what Tomsky (2009) identifies as "anxious witnessing." The dolphins are never entirely secure; their habitats face pollution, shipping routes, and climate disruption. Piya's research thus bears witness to both their vitality and their fragility. This duality resonates with Comtesse et al.'s (2021) discussion of ecological grief as collective: the loss or endangerment of nonhuman kinship bonds is never private but planetary. The dolphins' joy is fragile, but its recognition builds the possibility of solidarity across species.

This interspecies solidarity unsettles colonial legacies of extraction. As Hofmeyr (2019) argues, hydrocolonial archives expose how rivers and oceans were historically reduced to corridors of trade and domination. Piya's study reclaims the river as a site of ecological kinship, where dolphins disrupt colonial scripts of water as resource. Their leaping bodies inscribe alternative itineraries, reminding us that rivers are not only infrastructures of empire but habitats of fragile vitality. Vincent's (2018) analysis of ecological tropes is crucial here: the dolphin leap embodies an interruption in the logic of exploitation, a moment of nonhuman excess that reconfigures the archive.

Translation, as reframed in the previous section, also resonates here. Fokir's embodied knowledge of tides and dolphins complements Piya's scientific methods, creating a fragile but productive epistemic alliance. Kanai's failures contrast sharply with Piya and Fokir's collaboration, which embodies what Bystrom and Hofmeyr (2017) call an "ethics of the archive": attending to partial knowledges without subsuming one into the other. Piya's willingness to learn from Fokir's tacit knowledge, and to recognize the dolphins as epistemic agents, models an ecological translation that holds difference without erasure.

Joy here becomes a relational ethic. It is not a possession but an event: the shared moment of witnessing dolphins breach, the silent cooperation between Piya and Fokir, the collective awe that resists commodification. In psychoanalytic terms, joy can be understood through Winnicott's notion of play: a transitional space where subject and environment co-create meaning. The dolphin leap is precisely such a space, where human and nonhuman converge without collapse. For Piya, this play is not a denial of ecological grief but a mode of sustaining life within its precarity.

This relational joy also challenges anthropocentric temporality. Whereas colonial and developmentalist narratives view rivers as linear channels for progress, dolphin vitality foregrounds cyclical, unpredictable time. As Chakrabarty (2009) reminds us, planetary temporality disrupts linear histories, compelling thought attuned to nonhuman rhythms. Piya's research reorients temporality toward dolphin life cycles and tidal flows, resisting the humanist impulse to fix or master. This temporal reorientation reframes survival as co-existence rather than domination.

Ethically, Piya's orientation to dolphin vitality articulates a planetary ethic of care. Unlike Kanai, whose translation fails, or Kusum, whose grief is inscribed in loss, Piya offers a model of fragile joy as an ecological practice. This aligns with Bohm-Schnitker's (2023) argument that planetary ethics demand recognition of fragility as constitutive, not as deficit. Joy here is not triumph but acknowledgment of persistence within vulnerability. By attending to dolphins, Piya enacts what Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) describe as ecological mourning transformed into advocacy: the leap from grief to responsibility.

At the same time, this ethic resists idealization. Piya's research is embedded in institutional structures that often instrumentalize knowledge for conservation agendas shaped by funding and geopolitics. Her position as a diasporic scientist complicates her authority. Yet, by foregrounding the dolphins' vitality, she unsettles the human-centered frameworks of both colonial extraction and global science. This ambivalence underscores that planetary ethics are always negotiated, fragile, and partial.

Ultimately, Piya's attention to dolphins exemplifies a mode of planetary care that emerges through joy within grief. The dolphins' vitality does not erase the violence of displacement or ecological precarity; it interrupts it, offering glimpses of shared survival. In this way, *The Hungry Tide* reimagines nonhuman life not as backdrop but as co-constitutive of ethics. The dolphin leap becomes a text to be explicated—an event where literature stages planetary survival as fragile, joyful, and shared.

II.   Conclusion — Toward a Planetary Ethics of Mourning and Care

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* compels readers to attend to the fragile interplay of mourning, translation, and nonhuman vitality in the Sundarbans. By threading Kusum's death, Kanai's interpretive failures, and Piya's encounters with dolphins into one narrative field, the novel stages what Chakrabarty (2009) identifies as a planetary reorientation of thought: the necessity of holding human and nonhuman histories together without reducing one to the other. This conclusion gathers the threads of analysis to articulate a planetary ethics grounded in mourning and care—an ethic inseparable from grief yet oriented toward fragile survival.

Kusum's death resists closure. It insists that ecological mourning cannot be individualized or completed but must be understood as collective and unending. Her story, remembered through Nirmal's notebooks, exemplifies Abraham and Torok's (1994) notion of encrypted grief, but transformed into a shared archive. This aligns with Cunsolo and Ellis's (2018) argument that ecological grief is collective, as it emerges not from private trauma but from shared vulnerability to environmental loss. Kusum's grief is both personal and planetary: an affective register that demands solidarity across displaced communities and endangered ecologies.

Kanai's struggle with silence highlights the limits of translation. His inability to render Nirmal's voice or fully grasp Fokir's tacit knowledge reflects what Tomsky (2009) describes as the condition of anxious witnessing: one cannot master grief or silence but only hold them. Yet, while Kanai falters, Piya demonstrates that translation can be an ethical act when oriented toward care rather than mastery. By collaborating with Fokir and attending to the dolphins, she models what Bystrom and Hofmeyr (2017) call an ethics of the archive: acknowledging the partiality of knowledge while refusing to erase difference. Translation becomes a practice of humility, an openness to silence and opacity as constitutive rather than deficient.

The dolphin scenes offer a reparative counterpoint to mourning. Piya's attention to nonhuman vitality reframes ecological grief through joy, without denying fragility. Here Bohm-Schnitker's (2023) emphasis on fragility as constitutive of planetary ethics becomes crucial: joy is not triumph but the acknowledgment of shared persistence within vulnerability. As Butler (2004) reminds us, precarious life is not merely a condition to be endured but a site of ethical recognition. Piya's affective attunement to dolphins demonstrates how grief can be redistributed into care, echoing Albrecht's (2005) claim that responses to solastalgia must involve practices of ethical reorientation. The dolphins' vitality interrupts colonial and anthropocentric scripts, embodying what Vincent (2018) terms an ecological trope: a moment of nonhuman agency that destabilizes exploitative logics.

Taken together, these narrative arcs position the Sundarbans not simply as a site of environmental crisis but as what Hofmeyr (2019) might call a hydrocolonial archive—a space where colonial histories, ecological fragility, and affective ties converge. The tides and deltas function not only as backdrops but as agents in shaping human and nonhuman life. This landscape is legible as a planetary laboratory where grief, silence, and vitality are tested, reconfigured, and translated into ethics. By staging these interactions, Ghosh disrupts developmentalist narratives that render the delta as disposable, foregrounding instead its role in reimagining planetary survival.

The theoretical frame of solastalgia sharpens the stakes of this ethic. As Albrecht (2005) argues, solastalgia captures the distress of losing a familiar environment without leaving it. In *The Hungry Tide*, solastalgia pervades Kusum's displacement, Kanai's disorientation, and Piya's recognition of ecological fragility. Yet, rather than immobilizing, solastalgia becomes a generative affect: it demands ethical responses that transform grief into care. Comtesse et al. (2021) suggest that ecological grief, when recognized collectively, can produce advocacy and solidarity. In the Sundarbans, this transformation unfolds through narrative, as mourning is refracted through translation and joy into a planetary ethic of care.

The novel itself functions as a site of ethical practice. Literature, as The Explicator's commitment to text-based criticism underscores, is not merely representational but performative: it stages, enacts, and reframes ethical relations. Ghosh's prose forces readers into uneasy proximity with grief, silence, and nonhuman vitality, demanding interpretive labor that mirrors the characters' struggles. As Hofmeyr (2019) and Chakrabarty (2009) both stress, planetary thinking requires aesthetic as well as theoretical mediation. *The Hungry Tide* is not only about the Sundarbans; it is also an experiment in planetary ethics, asking readers to inhabit fragility as a mode of survival.

The analysis suggests three contributions. First, mourning in *The Hungry Tide* is collective, unending, and planetary, refiguring solastalgia as a shared condition rather than a private pathology. Second, translation emerges as an ethical practice of humility and responsibility, attentive to silence, opacity, and difference. Third, nonhuman vitality reframes grief through reparative joy, articulating an ethic of fragile survival that resists both despair and triumphalism.

Together, these dynamics produce a model of planetary ethics grounded not in mastery or closure but in the ongoing work of mourning and care. This ethic is fragile, partial, and always negotiated, yet it is precisely this fragility that renders it planetary. In an era of ecological crisis and displacement, Ghosh's novel demonstrates how literature can explicate grief into ethics, silence into responsibility, and nonhuman vitality into joy. For readers, this is not an abstract lesson but an urgent demand: to inhabit fragility as the condition of planetary coexistence.

Disclosure statement on the use of generative AI tools

In the preparation of this manuscript, I have used OpenAI's **GPT-5** (version GPT-5.0) as a language model to assist with language refinement, grammatical accuracy, and stylistic consistency. The AI tool was not used for idea generation, content creation, or analysis but solely for enhancing the clarity and readability of the text. All intellectual contributions, critical insights, arguments, and research findings presented in this manuscript are entirely my own. The use of GPT-5.0 has been carefully reviewed to ensure academic integrity and adherence to scholarly standards.

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