

Narrativised Historicity in Arif Anwar's *The Storm*

Nishat Atiya Shoilee¹
University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Abstract

With five different plotlines over a prolonged course of sixty years in British Bengal and East Pakistan, Canadian-Bangladeshi writer Arif Anwar's debut novel *The Storm* (2018) captures historical ethos through a series of micronarratives. An occupied Burma during WWII, a 1965 pre-Partition Calcutta, and a devastated Bhola after the 1970 cyclone — all these feature in this historiographic metafiction. Each character contributes as an independent narrator for the greater geopolitical mise-en-scènes of their times, rediscovering a forgotten past. This paper aims to identify the narrativised version of historicity that Anwar considers “authentic” in his novel. The findings propose a reciprocal commitment between narration and history on the basis of lived experiences or memories, phenomenological recurrences, and intersubjective surroundings.

Keywords

Narrativised historicity, historical authenticity, experiences and memories, lived realities, event sequences

Introduction

The everyday interaction between “stories” and a broader spectrum such as “history” explains our socio-literary awareness that T. S. Eliot names the “historical sense” (10). “History” has been an oblique matter of discourse even under ad rem scholarships, and defining what constitutes the “historical” has undergone myriad speculations at least since the eighteenth century. When considered as an interplay between fact and fiction, history interprets fiction as its private repository to crisscross spaces and continents. As for fiction, history turns into a primary medium of aesthetic resources. In the last few decades, narrativising histories based on participants' observations has been an effective praxis both in contemporary social science and creative writing. Among other approaches, the narrativised variant negotiates community memories as an accumulated effect of individual experiences and family values. At the same time,

¹ **Nishat Atiya Shoilee** is Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Dhaka. She was Sub-editor of the literature and review page of Bangladesh's leading English newspaper *The Daily Star*. Her research interests include comparative literature, history, and narrative studies. Email: nishat.atiya@du.ac.bd ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7170-5513>

it calls into question the changing facets of systematic historical appropriation by power politics.

Whereas the pragmatist schools of René Descartes (1596-1650), Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), Karl Marx (1818-1883), William James (1842-1910), Max Weber (1864-1920), and John Dewey (1859-1952) explained historicity in terms of rationales, other Frankfurt theoreticians such as Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), Norman Brown (1913-2002) and Jürgen Habermas (1929-) chose “the meaning we intend when we say of something 'historical'” (Marcuse 250). Similar to Wilhem Dilthey (1833-1911), Edmund Husserl (1858-1938) and later Alfred Schütz (1899-1959) and Harold Garfinkel (1917-2011), Heidegger made a phenomenological claim in *Being and Time* (1927), associating *dasein* or “being-in-the-world” with a transient “life history, ... a flowing outward into the future and backward into the past” (Bunnin and Yu 316). On the other end of the spectrum, the 1930s Annales school in France endorsed a “unity of sciences,” stressing how history should be “assimilable to that of the natural sciences only” (Carr 202), rejecting the classic topos of *historia magistra vitae* (history’s role as a moral instructor). Not long after, Leopold von Ranke’s enlightenment principle of “the past as it is” was countered by Marc Bloch’s (1953) empiricist critique of history as a “craft” of man, thus malleable (Hall 83). With the progression of the twentieth century, narratological *différance* began to fault the “gaps” it found between events and their rectilinear representations (White 1973). Linda Hutcheon’s coinage of historiographic metafiction in the 1980s, too, defended a self-reflexive historicity that parodied obscure Kantian references like “*erfahrung*” (Carr 19) or unconscionable experiences.

Apart from the ever-evolving methodologies, a literary standpoint, however, would imply that historicity shapeshifts into a borderless dimension of the past. The phenomenon is no longer that of an isolated product from the present, but of an insight into its pastness and presentness at once. Here, the historical case outlives geo-specific barriers through a narrative anthology of implicit meanings. Followed by an “ideographic realisation of events,” the participants’ “immediacy of life process” serves as a lived testimony to historical “accuracy” (Marcuse 264). From this angle, history does not seem to be a tableau of lost worlds, a “nomothetic sleeping-beauty object waiting for the professional kiss to arouse it” (Rigney 2007). It turns into a collection of experiences by embodied narrators who keep telling “their own secret histories of laughter and pain” (Anwar 178) until they themselves become a part of those narratives.

“Stock his imaginary garden with real toads”: Anwar and Fictionalised Historicity

Between the two major types of historical fiction that either remains true to the accuracy of details, or another which uses history as a narrative framework, *The*

Storm identifies with the latter. Roughly covering sixty years of selected South Asian history, it weaves together multiple box narratives of British, Japanese, Burmese, Indian, Bangladeshi, and American descent. Disregarding spatiotemporal limits, each separate event and character engages themselves in the making of their own histories.

Though primarily centred around British Bengal and Pakistan, Anwar transcends borders by maintaining the leitmotif of a storm in a tripartite structure (namely, “Gathering,” “Eye” and “Surging”). Given its nonlinear development, this research will analyse the novel’s response to the historical discourse of which it is a direct product. It will also discuss the contemporaneity it establishes by interlinking events with characters in no clear order. The “factual” ingredients (i.e.: settings, personages, conflicts, and so forth) do not seem to lose their autonomy as plot elements in a fictional reworking. Rather, the effectual use of recollections further secures the credibility of made-up encounters.

In the novel, a dialectic communication between the past and the present is delivered with anecdotes, antecedents, and the mercurial temper of a storm. History manifests via memories as they exist in the individual mind — memories which are transformed into narratives and carried on through generations. For Anwar, rethinking historicity is not a mere recreation of the Rankean past “as it was” but the way its implications are “informed by a narratorial subjectivity” (Megill 42).

Throughout the novel, it appears to be a personified rendition of fictional accounts which metamorphose into a cumulative narrative. Plagued by the seismic aftershocks of grand historical consequences, each character has to overcome a traumatic past and a problematic present. In Katherine Lasky’s words, theirs is a compilation of scattered “keyhole histories” (qtd. in Brown 1998) — perspectives of ordinary agents during extraordinary times that add to a synergic historical report. In order to create storylines either loyal or denied to historical authenticity, Anwar chooses to weigh between the contraries of choices and consequences. Much similar to Thomas Mallon’s allusion to Marianne Moore and his recommendation of a successful poet who knows how to “stock his imaginary garden with real toads” (141), the imagining of fictional views and voices in *The Storm* reinforces what it means to be of historical value.

Historical Contemporaneity and Contemporaneous Historicity: Ichiro’s Trauma Narrative

The four primary narrative strands set off in the year 1942 with Lieutenant Ichiro, a WWII Japanese pilot recently imprisoned in a British garrison by the border of Chittagong. There is also Claire, an English doctor by profession, torn between the luxuries of her husband’s high-ranking military job in colonial Burma and a yearning for meaningful companionship. Finally, Hashim is the boatman from

the coast of Bengal whose fate is inextricably linked with Ichiro's and Claire's. In Book I of Ichiro's part, the infantry pilot's opening narrative describes his exotic experience of Burman nature. At once an inquisitive youth, a steadfast military man and a pacifist philosopher, Ichiro champions his national cause before the English and confirms, "We fight for Japan's interest first and foremost. All else is secondary" (Anwar 94). When confronted by a mysterious Austrian monk, Julian during their multi-hour hike along Nyaung-U Road's Buddhist temples, Ichiro continues to rationalise his position by ridiculing the passivity of monkhood. He asserts that with the Westerns "sucking the Orient dry for centuries, stockpiling gold, gems, wood and oil," it is God's decision that Ichiro should be there, "avenging the blood of the black, the brown, the yellow, and the red" (Anwar 94). Desperate to leave a hero's footprint in the eventful history of the 1940s, Ichiro claims that his voluntary participation in the war is a far better act of righteousness than the monk's as "history will swirl around you while you mop your temple floor" (Anwar 96).

Nevertheless, Ichiro agrees with his friend Tadashi almost in the same breath how both of them are equally dubious of the war they have joined despite themselves. A blind quest of national glory coupled with family reputation seems to manipulate him into living the illusion of military pride. When captured, his Japanese sensibility to commit suicide and die a warrior's death (similar to the samurai "*seppuku*") clashes with the image of a life he might have lived if not dead. Here, cultural evidences verify the lived history of Ichiro as a fictitious WWII serviceman. A close glimpse into his split consciousness tells the readers how he feels:

How much longer could he pretend ...? Why should he expect an army that treats the lives of its soldiers with such disdain — throwing them at the fortresses of the enemy like so many bags of meat — to treat those of others any better? (Anwar 97)

Ichiro's moral dilemma functions as both a disruptive and a unifying factor for his identity formation. The gaps between his thoughts and action produce a concurrent past, elevating bare facts in their experiential quality. Ichiro's narrative initiates the novel's plaintive take on WWII from an insider's perspective — perhaps more potently than could an authorial embellishment of dry war facts. However, the changing trajectories in the narrative reproduction of such Sisyphean a trauma as the War seem to get frailer over time. Lives like those of Ichiro's and Tadashi's become obsolete — worthless cogs in the enormous mechanism of military demographics. Ichiro's memory narrative on the ensuing effects of the War explains how "individuals inscribe their identities by ... the collective" (Wilhelm 24), making him a fierce patriot on one hand and a convicted mass murderer on the other.

Ichiro's reflections on the war navigate a shared history which goes on to traumatise generations that have not even arrived yet. An anonymous Burmese young girl (later identified as Honufa) inherits Tadashi's sash after Ichiro's crash landing, thereby extracting a share of her own in the entirety of Ichiro's trauma narrative. The incidence sustains what Jeffrey Alexander had to say about transgenerational traumas and their "indelible marks upon group consciousness, changing the future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (13). Besides, Ichiro's denial of the Nanjing Massacre followed by an ultimate remorse for the Empire of Japan on the same path as its European masters echoes his own learning by trial and error. Thus, Ichiro's tale brings in focus the unarchived trauma response of the combatants who complied against their better judgment — eliciting a contemporary readers' response to the textbook records of war and peace, crime and punishment.

Historicity as a Shared Narrative: Ichiro and Claire

On the same end of the timeline from Book-1, "Gathering," Claire Drake is introduced, a British doctor who is passionate about her job and maintains sympathetic ties with her patients. Her generosity extends to her ayah, Myint too whom she treats like a family member and tries to save from a Japanese air attack on the British camps in Rangoon, Burma. Her failure to save Myint or any of the affected civilians while being carried away into safety herself by a train full of British officers smoking cigars leads her to wonder:

"Is this as good as we can be here in the colonies? Taking the best of it and then running when things get hard? What was it that Forster said about us? That we're cold and odd, moving like icestreams through these lands?" (Anwar 74)

Her failed empathy during a deadly war seems to coexist with an imbalanced marriage since Claire's humble background collides with her husband Theodore's bloodline of admirals. A potential fairy tale falls short of its sparkling romance as Claire recognises her isolation even around her husband. Faced with a sudden confrontation from Rachel, an officer's wife, Claire vaguely suggests that a colonel's job is far more important than tending his wife's petty needs — a "weak defense" (Anwar 81) she concocts to save herself from instant humiliation. Her plea for authentic friendship is obvious when she tries to communicate with Hashim, a boatman from the shore and his then six-year-old son, Jamir. A white British woman, she interviews a Japanese captive in an attempt not so much as to "defend the past or uphold the present," (Anwar 90) or to confirm the sworn enmity of Japan and England, but to be acquainted with the injured man's stories and memories. Claire and Ichiro's encounter instigates a unique journey into the heart of a war that no metanarratives in world military history can justify.

Ichiro's final impression of Claire as "no more an extension of this place than he" or both of them waiting on "island nations, frantic to leave their blue prisons" (Anwar 151) suffices the novel's narrativised undertaking of history. Therefore, when Hashim loses his life at the hand of the British force for obeying Claire's order and ferrying Ichiro into safety, a palpable thread seems to unite Bangladesh, Japan, and Britain in an imaginary synthesis. Each character can be viewed as a metonymic vessel of their respective national attitudes towards historical crises. Generating a reciprocal narrative over the prevailing continuums, they "allow for an inscription into others' contemporaneous identities" (Hall 22).

The conversations between Ichiro and Claire in a war-ridden Burma act as a catalyst for "alternative emplotments of the same events [that] emphasise different facts and give divergent meanings to the same facts" (in a Braudelian sense, 1968). As proposed by S. Cohen (1986), the poststructuralist "aboutness" of historicity necessitates a mutual storytelling stratagem as Ichiro and Claire intersect in their separate spheres freely. The "historical punctuations" transitions, revolutions, resolutions (Althusser and Balibar, 1970) they reenact convey a shared philosophy of the war as "an array of phenomena ... in their textured historiography" (Hall 85). The combined effect of the literal and the literary signals at a paradigmatic shift of history, also its change of focus from calendrical accuracy to convergent narratives.

Partition Subjectified: Narratives of Crises

One of the most violent upheavals in the modern history of South Asia, the Partition in this novel "brings to light patterns in religious, ethnic, and national conflicts, exposing the everyday narrative of living through it at a local level" (Harrington 1). The timeline from 1946 features the story of a local bureaucrat Muslim couple, Rahim and Zahira during the Hindu-Muslim communal violence in Calcutta. In Book I, Anwar skilfully delineates the high ideological battles between the Congress and Muslim League in parallel with an image of Rahim's Morris Wolseley steering through the narrow pass of a lower India, its raw "scent of bodies, sewage and old wood" (Anwar 34). Though subtle, Rahim's comfortable lifestyle in alliance with his high-paying job at Britannia Biscuits underscores a grey area of political consciousness. It comments on the departure of the British Raj from India as "prolonged and bittersweet for not just the occupiers, but the occupied as well" (Anwar 36). A vain bridge between his less fortunate compatriots on one hand and the financial loss he contented on the other, Rahim's dilemma echoes the same trepidation all Muslims and Hindus alike might have felt during their pre-Partition emigration process.

Next to a crucial national crisis, Rahim's indecisiveness appears to be the most precipitated development to address for both Rahim and his wife, Zahira.

Similarly, it is the memory of a deep-rooted personal experience that reassures Motaleb, their chauffeur about the inevitable schism of the country than the actual riot. He still remembers the trauma-inducing childhood memory when a high-caste Hindu woman let out a piercing shriek at a young himself reaching towards the statue of Krishna and supposedly ruining its purity. In his own words, "Hindus and Muslims are like my wife and me. We've been fighting for so long that we'd miss it if we stopped" (Anwar 39). Much like a fragment of Motaleb's past, Partition manages to resurface in the novel as a repressed historical memory, a domino effect of alterations to connect seemingly unrelated characters.

In parallel to Rahim's premonition of an *unheimlich* home in East Bengal, there echoes a constant reminder of the pair's spiritual emptiness. While the city prepares for a historical strife outside, Anwar delivers a private look into Choudhury *andarmahal* where Zahira reminisces her early days as a plain bride. She is found confident yet vulnerable, feeling her belly which is "taut and strong like the skin of a drum, and like it, just as empty" (Anwar 50). Despite an acute reminder of the state politics that forced them to leave Calcutta, Zahira still entertains a glimmer of hope about reproductive success. It also reiterates the immediacy of the current situation she needs to handle. For Zahira, it is her husband's life which rises above the country, or the "unsolicited political hectoring" of Inspector Nandi who thinks "running to the white man as soon as we scrape a knee" (Anwar 55) is injurious to the Indian nationalist sentiment. The sheer urgency in her voice recapitulates how history is a reservoir of narratives some of which see the light of discourse and some do not, like the one of a lone Muslim housewife, unable to find her husband in a riotous city. This part of the novel observes Rahim and Zahira's narrative as a personal commentary on the departure of the British Raj while they experience a shifting subjectivity in their respective zones of (non)being:

I've just learned that my husband has been kidnapped. What is this nonsense you're spouting about going to the English? ... Would any other housewife in my position have done things differently? (Anwar 55)

Significant socio-political factors such as religious differences, political antagonism- and unshared resentment among classes/casts did operate in the backstage, resulting in an unavoidable division of the subcontinent. However, the abduction of Rahim itself is not so much about the riot or the Hindu-Muslim conflict as it is a ploy devised by deceitful men. With Rahim being kidnapped by fake militant Hindu gangs the day before the Direct Action Day, Zahira makes a heroic rescue of her husband. She was unaware that Motaleb, their chauffeur conspired to secure a heavy ransom and worked with the Hindu zamindar from Chittagong with whom the couple was supposed to swap countries, identities and properties. In this case, the riot is a historically significant pawn to justify a mimetic double, a criminal offence which neither involves religious bias nor racial

disparity — but an opportunistic plot causing a life-altering crisis for Rahim and Zahira.

In order to realise what constituted the mass temperament behind the Partition, Anwar seems to draw clear ontological references that exist both for theoretical research (class/caste issues, corruption, intolerance, and so on) and simulated eyewitnesses (like Rahim and Zahira). They consolidate imagined events under a single rubric which is the Partition itself. More than a historical “footnote to the main text of Partition” (Harington 5), the couple’s dislocation from home hints at the beginning of one more schism yet to follow, the eventual split of Pakistan into halves and the birth of Bangladesh.

In this case, it is Rahim and Zahira’s testament which intensifies the political significance of the Partition as it is, reflecting Arthur Danto’s (1965) address of reflexive observation both in history and literature. Historical claims take a form of “narrative sentences” (Danto 28), crises and consequences imparted on the narrators who happen to experience them. He stresses that the historical character of an event cannot attain a complete evaluation by its contemporaries without the involvement of successive generations. In the end, it is the forced flight of the Muslim bureaucrats from Calcutta to East Bengal which essentially results in their adoption of Honufa and later in a chain of event sequences, marks the beginning of Shahryar’s journey as well. The combined consequence of these crisis narratives gives rise to a generational “postmemory” (Hirsch 2012) of the Partition as a continuous process felt by those who were not there.

1970 Cyclone: Honufa and a “Frozen” History

The 1970s storyline opens upon the arrival of Rahim and Zahira in Chittagong and the childless couple’s affectionate interest in an intelligent Hindu girl named Rakhi Jaladas. It later concentrates on Rakhi becoming Honufa and getting married to Jamir, the son of Hashim. *The Storm* begins and ends cyclically on the same image of the woman rediscovering herself amid an abysmal storm — both literally and figuratively to see a future that was embedded in her past. A former Hindu and presently Muslim, an outcast of a new kind, Honufa’s narrative is unchanging in that it is of her community too. It is a joint narrative of jaladases from the coastal Bengal who live and die with the sea, the profound ecoprecarity of whose humble narrative ensues even after the novel comes to an end:

Men and women, sinewy — dark from the sun — pull in boats and tie them with sturdy knots to the trees, drag back and fold nets. Children carry back fish caught in cylindrical traps ... such is life on the bay. (Anwar 9)

Historically speaking, the horrific aftermath of the ‘70s cyclone is vague in the current cultural memory of Bangladesh which at its time amplified an already

growing dissatisfaction between East Pakistan and West Pakistan. The slow, grudging response of the central government to the affected region ultimately led to irretrievable political consequences, such as the Awami League's landslide victory in the national elections. In Anwar's depiction, the natural disaster resonates through a discreet interaction of Honufa's narrative with those of others, turning history into a memory text forgotten and retrieved as needed upon a narratorial commitment. The saga continues as a recognition of historical continuity where a disaster from the past is re-described in relation to the now and the next.

The notion of recreating historical provenance is exclusive to the fact that the 1970 cyclone is a synecdochical a priori account of more significant incidents to follow in *The Storm*. Honufa's close association with the disaster demonstrates Hall's idea about narratives in approaching history. For Hall, it would be a "frozen moment" (87), a moment which "freezes" its temporal constraints and acknowledges the value of narratives in rejuvenating lost histories. As also suggested Croce in *Theory & History of Historiography* (1917):

This conception does not contemplate the establishment of an abstract history of the spirit, [...] but the understanding that individuals and ideas, taken separately, are two equivalent abstractions, [...] and that true history is the history of the individual in so far as he is universal and of the universal in so far as individual. (107)

In *The Storm*, historically authentic evidence and the fictionality of Honufa's narrative are complementary associates. A compelling representation of a memory expands here the relevance of narrativity when historicised, staying true to its philosophical purpose of connecting borders. With each knot to tie herself to a tree against the tidal surge, each organ in focus reminds Honufa of a specific memory from the past: the legs which took her to Jamir; the belly that bore her children; the bosom now as empty as the barren beach of the Bay; and the mouth that uttered the sacred words of the *shabadah*. As Honufa has a last few flashbacks of her life in sporadic images, history, too remains a strand of incomplete events loosely tied to meaning-making processes, ready to narrativise historical facts.

For Jamir, too, "frozen" junctures of history include, though are not limited to the imminent signs of a super-storm, the real-life "fight between men and waters" (Anwar 24). Internally, it would be a vortex of mixed emotions he has to attend upon discovering a secret letter, apprehensive of its probable connection with a former affair Honufa still pursues. Plagued by an uncertain existence by the ocean-side and a sudden predicament like the letter coming into view, political considerations are far-fetched fairy tales for hired hands like Jamir. In reply to Abbas's question on the 1970 election and West Pakistan's exploitation of the East, his answer is simple, "Babu, don't ask such grand questions of a man who cannot even read. Politics is the concern of rich men,

the likes of landholders such as the zamindar, Rahim” (Anwar 25). The comment shows the failure of state narratives to intimidate a man who fears the worst about his marriage and later is found struggling for life underwater. Jamir needs no update on the election but an urgent solution to the unmaking of his own history. In an Arnoldian sense, the pressing impression of Jamir’s private crisis surpasses the larger premise of civic agencies, their “vast Mississippi of falsehood” (Arnold 22).

Shahryar’s Postmemory: After the Storm

The novel’s final arrangement of events falls between the years of 1993 and 2004, covering the narrative of Shahryar (shortly, Shar), one last crucial anthropomorphic link to the overall plot development. An orphaned child, he was taken under the wings of his foster parents (Rahim and Zahira) when his biological parents (Honufa and Jamir) died in the 1970 Bhola cyclone. With his work visa soon to expire, Shar is caught between his decisions of the present and scars of the past. He is even prepared to adopt illegal means to be able to stay behind in the US with his daughter, Anna. An atemporal man with no strings attached, Shar’s pursuit of a true identity begins and ends in Bangladesh selectively on the onset of a storm. While chasing higher education abroad on natural disasters, a recurring childhood memory of “running hand in hand with an unknown figure ... to escape a storm” (Anwar 121) rightfully justifies his choice of subject close to home. Furthermore, it connotes the idea of history as an array of subjective interpretations born of nostalgia and “postmemories.” History is rendered as a plethora of antecedents “collected through the stories and behavior from previous generations” (Hirsch 2012).

Incidentally, somewhat similar to his father Jamir’s decision to stay oblivious to national polity, “the concern of rich men and landlords” (Anwar 25), Shar shows a keen disinterest in the world of statecraft as well. Even when post 9/11 US islamophobia has a reactionary impact on his feelings of immigration shame, he “scoffs [at the news] and turns off the television” (Anwar 30). In other words, the soundness of statesmanship or its reliance on public discourse is disrupted by men who live free of political curiosity. Ironically, Shar’s resistance to the many complications of inter-personal/national politics only reveals the bias of his apolitical improvisation regarding how history works.

Historical Phenomenology

In order to understand historicity as a continually narrativised process, the many voices and languages in *The Storm* serve as metaphors for the different perceptions of reality that govern their cultures. Yet the connection between events and

personae posits history as a legacy of explanatory frameworks. History, in the last section of the novel, is an “interaction of forces, events and actions” (Hall, 1999, 156–59). Like phenomenological recurrences, the forces are ready to “repeat” both in productive and counterproductive directions. For instance, the parallel images of Shar teaching Anna how to write Bangla alphabets in 2004 and Rahim instructing Rakhi (later, Honufa) the same back in 1970 unite the son with his mother over a circuitous gap of forty years. Besides, the act of writing situates them within a historic telos which signals at a contemporary conditioning of their stories. Oscillating in a third space of hopes and fears, both Shar and Anna seem to float in a limbo they had carried into their lives from the ancestors. The undertone of the overall scenario however changes towards the end when a different kind of storm is about to hit Shar’s place, evoking a more renewed return of the same cycle of events. Eventually, Shar finds a way to connect with Anna who has been exposed to cultural milieus drastically different from his by using family narratives as building blocks. The purposive allusion to Yeats’ “A Prayer for My Daughter” (1921) in the epigraph, too, points to a father’s readiness to dance to a “howling storm” and imagine “in excited reverie” what “the future years” will bring to his daughter (Anwar 4).

Going back and forth from the ’40s till 2004, the storm-like narrative technique (mimicking the “Russian Nesting Dolls” structure with multiple figurines stacked in one, as reported the author himself) connects the dots each time a supporting character has a role to play in Shar’s past. This component of nonlinearity “intrigues readers about historical events as opposed to giving them blow by blow reenactments” (Anwar 2018), implying that each of the *petits récits* contains its subjective, nonetheless *real* truth. The redistribution of historical value towards the characters’ experiences or memories point at the broader literary spheres in and from which they generate.

Symbols: Mapping Historicity through Narrative Sentiments

Multiple symbols dispersed through the novel function as emblems of expression as long as there is a narratorial value attested to them. One symbol as such is of a tripundra, signifying knowledge, will and action in the Shaivite traditions of Hinduism, yet the power of the symbol is exploited by those who “claim to be soldiers of faith, but are thugs recently out of jail” (Anwar 54). From then on, the symbol becomes a trauma trigger which would be forever haunting Rahim and Zahira. Another recurring symbol would be the aum, the Vedic mystical mark of a cosmic sound which, to its believers, indicates the universe’s beginning and end. But the bipartite motif achieves its symbolic significance when Ichiro seconds before crash landing, closes his eyes and latches onto it. Ichiro’s sentimental attachment makes the symbol a mere addition to the narrative flow of his story.

The third one is of a heron in the flight, marking a childhood memory of Ichiro receiving a notebook as a gift from his father, and the fourth is a Japanese ideogram of the dragon's eyes and the word "destiny" underneath, a recurring image affiliated with Ichiro's rise and fall as a character. For Jamir, on the other hand, the same sign is a reminder of the Japanese man responsible for his father's death. The fifth would be the curved letters, "CLD" on a silver flask gifted to Jamir by Claire as a token of her apology for not being able to save his father. The same flask at the end goes back to its most deserving owner, Shar who now shows it to his daughter, Anna and tells her about his parents. History repeats itself through these ideograms in the likeness of an interpenetrating Yeatsian gyre and the significance they possess is felt in terms of the narrators' personal lives. In it, moments of contraction and expansion (resembling the very title of the novel itself) spiral forward and backward simultaneously. In Yeats' words:

Each age unwinds the thread another age had wound ... Persia fell, and ... Rome fell; and at the outset of our westward-moving Renaissance Byzantium fell; all things dying each other's life, living each other's death. (271)

Therefore, the past affects the present and the present in turn, reflects the past like an archaic ouroboros (Marcuse 50), its ruminations between a beginning and an end, as long as narrative sentiments retain.

Conclusion

The authorial choice of accounts helps Anwar illustrate the continuity of history than its pseudo stasis. The novel acts as a discourse for its readers to grasp the significance of self-built narratives in the making of history, the notable compatibility and antagonism between historicity and fictionality. The narratives are gained by imagining the past Anwar himself experienced based on an analogical mapping. Living along the coastal area of Chittagong, it was about chasing his keen interest in adult literacy, disaster management, poverty issues and public health (Anwar 2018), communal experiences meeting halfway for the narratives (re)created in *The Storm*.

In Anwar's view, anachronistic tendencies fit into larger patterns of events ranging far beyond particular persons and events, offering its narration a unique historical propriety. Questions can be raised against the risks of historical interiorisation by implied narrators since there is no guarantee that human experience of all kinds require the same frames of enquiry. Yet, it is equally true that through the mediating role of the imaginary, narratives can substantiate historical observations.

References

- Alexander, Jeffrey C. "The Social Construction of Moral Universals," *Remembering the Holocaust. A Debate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Althusser, Louis, and Etienne Balibar. *Reading Capital*. London: NLB, 1970.
- Anwar, Arif. "The Bright Future of Bangladesh: Researching *The Storm*." Interview by Amy Shearn, 16 May 2018. *JSTOR Daily*. <https://daily.jstor.org/the-bright-future-of-bangladesh-researching-the-storm/> Accessed 2 June 2023.
- Anwar, Arif. *The Storm*. Washington Square Press, 2018.
- Arnold, Matthew. "Literary Influence of Academies." *Essays in Criticism, First Series*. Chicago UP: Later Printing edition, 1964.
- Braudel, Fernand. *On History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Brown, Joanne. "Historical Fiction or Fictionalized History? Problems for Writers of Historical Novels for Young Adults." *The ALAN Review*, 26.1, 1998.
- Bunnin, Nicholas, and Jiyuan Yu. *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Carr, David. *Experience and History: Phenomenological Perspectives on the Historical World*. New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Cohen, Sande. *Historical Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986
- Croce, Benedetto. *Theory & History of Historiography*. Translated by Douglas Ainslie, London: G. G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1921.
- Danto, Arthur C. *Analytical Philosophy of History*. Taipei, Rainbow Bridge Book, 1971.
- Eliot, Thomas S. "Tradition and Individual Talent." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Norton, New York, 1987.
- Hall, John E. *Cultures of Inquiry: From Epistemology to Discourse in Sociohistorical Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- , "Historicity and Sociohistorical Research". *The SAGE Handbook of Social Science Methodology*. London: SAGE, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607958>. Accessed 2 June, 2023.
- Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Hutcheon, Linda. Historiographic Metafiction: Parody and the Intertextuality of History. *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*. Eds. O'Donnell, P., and Robert Con Davis. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (1989): 3-32.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*. Trans. Seyla Benhabib. London: MIT Press Cambridge, 1987.
- Megill, Allan. "History, Memory, Identity." *History of the Human Sciences*, 11.3 (1998): 37–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/095269519801100303>

- Moore, Marienne. *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore*. Macmillan. Penguin Books, 2009.
- Rigney, Ann. "Being an Improper Historian". *Manifestos for History*. Eds. Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan & Alun Munslow. UK: Routledge, 2007.
- Walsh, Paton J., "History is Fiction." *Horn Book Magazine (February)*, Boston: Horn Book Inc. (1972): 17-23.
- White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.
- Wilhelm, Thorsten. "Historical Contemporaneity and Contemporaneous Historicity Creation of Meaning and Identity in Postwar Trauma Narratives." *Boundless* 6 (1). 2017. Doi: 10.5195/contemp.2017.206. Accessed 30 May, 2023.
- Yeats, William B. *A Vision*. London: Macmillan, 1937.