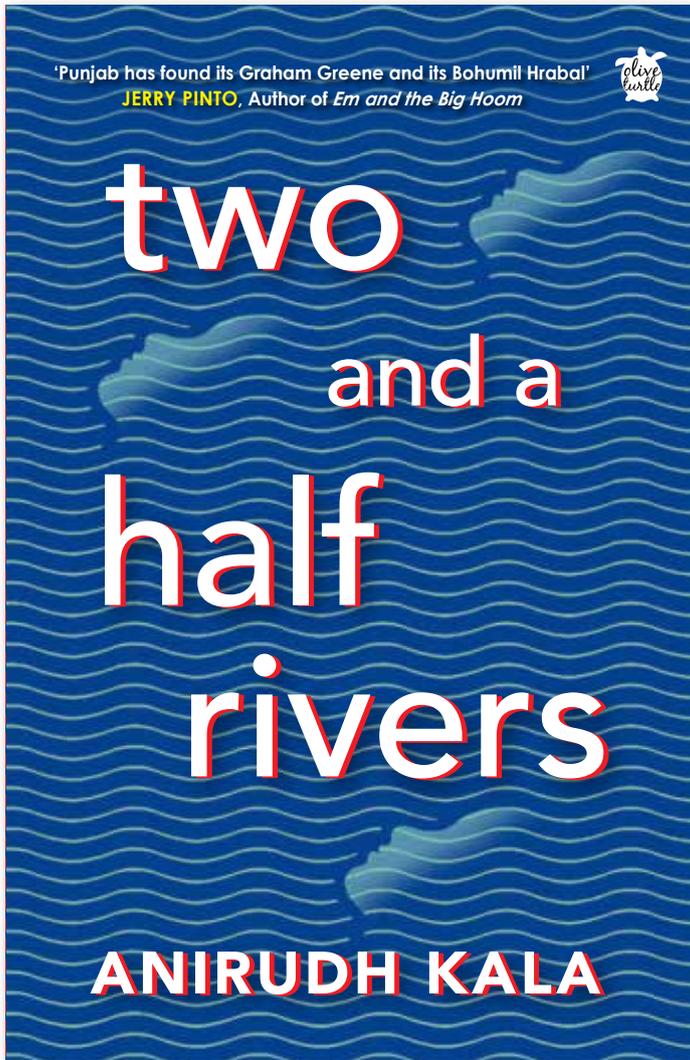


'What does one do when reality itself has lost contact with reality?'—asks Dr Mustafa, the psychiatrist treating the narrator / depressed doctor. If reality becomes relative, then how reliable does a reality check remain in retaining one's sanity?

Relatively dark themed, but punctuated with wry wit and subtle humour, this is one of Kala's best fictional deliveries.

A commentary on casteism, sociopolitical turbulence and love amid violence—Two and a Half Rivers is everything in one. A fast read, a must-read!



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Two and a Half Rivers

Anirudh Kala

A narrative of the real Punjab caught in the vortex of an armed insurgency

A recently divorced doctor looking for seclusion, relocates to an isolated house on a riverbank. The following summer, dead bodies start turning up in the river, on the roads, in trains and on city crossings. Everybody calls it the 'Punjab Problem', as if it were a stubborn crossword puzzle. The doctor is kidnapped and nearly killed, once by terrorists for helping the police and once by police for helping the terrorists.

A young Dalit girl, with the dream of becoming a dancer in her eyes, and her soulmate Bheem leave their caste-ridden existence behind and relocate to Bombay. They have learnt the hard way that the preaching of oneness by their religion does not work in the real world.

Drawing its title from the historicity of the Partition which has left in its wake only two and a half rivers to India from the land of the five rivers, Anirudh Kala's novel offers a poignant commentary on the turbulent connection between religion and terrorism.

Anirudh Kala lives in Ludhiana and is a psychiatrist by profession. His experience as a psychiatrist shows in how he sketches out his characters and their personality traits. This is his second book as a fiction writer, the first being *The Unsafe Asylum: Stories of Partition and Madness* (2018).

His focus is always to educate people about mental health and mental illness, focussing on eradicating stigma, labels, and prejudice.

Besides his professional passions, Anirudh Kala also likes reading Urdu poetry, hiking, and listening to Indian semi-classical music.



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Endorsements

'How do you tell of the tragedy of a state, ravaged by political tensions and a religious war? Anirudh Kala offers us three unforgettable characters, a depressive doctor, and a young Dalit couple who are struggling with an oppression that is centuries old and completely indifferent to the promises of Guru Nanak. Punjab has found its Graham Greene and its Bohumil Hrabal.'

Jerry Pinto, Author of *Em and the Big Hoom*

'Keenly observed, wryly written, Two and a Half Rivers lays bare the schisms of Punjab in this masterly tale by Anirudh Kala.'

**Manreet Sodhi Someshwar,
Author of *Radiance of A Thousand Suns***

'A feisty exploration of the militancy years of Punjab. With rare sensitivity, courage and sagacity, Kala explores the many dimensions of the complex violence of those dark decades.'

**Amandeep Sandhu,
Author of *Panjab: Journeys Through Fault Lines***

Extract from the book

I would wake up groggy from the effect of sleeping pills. The day was a viscous stream that had somehow to be crossed. . . . There were days when walking into the river seemed like the best idea ever. For its part, the edge of the water had been creeping towards my house as if it were a message. Jeet said it was not unusual for this part of the year. I did not feel like seeing patients at all. In fact, I hated them for reminding me how contented I used to be around them and now was not. I imagined I had made mistakes, even when I had not. One particularly dusty morning, I ran bare feet after a couple after my flip-flops broke, while scrambling out of my chair. I thought I had written some horribly wrong injection for their child. They had gone ahead walking and it took me a while to catch up. They were startled when they saw me bare-feet and panting, my stethoscope still hanging around my neck. I snatched the prescription from the father's hand, took a quick look, and gave it back, sheepishly saying that I just wanted to check the dose. I came back and put up a cardboard sign at the gate, which read that the clinic would remain closed 'till further notice' because I had to go away due to a bereavement in the family. Death was the only thing patients respected. If I had written I was ill, they would have walked up to ask how I was feeling. Jeet, of course, knew I had no family.

I was left alone, but after seeing the board, either the errorists or the policemen started using the ground floor of my house, at night, as a resting or meeting spot or for laying an ambush.

I do not think they knew I was sleeping upstairs all along. Otherwise, they would have brought me down to treat their injuries, because some mornings I saw blood on the floor and blood stains on the doorknob. More than that it was the unflushed toilets and the stink that left me disturbed. After some days, the shit of the holy warriors, of the police, or of both, not that you could tell, made me take the board down. I got the place cleaned up by the sweepers brought by Jeet, using garden hoses. When I came down in the afternoon, they showed me empty bottles of country liquor, pouches of snacks, four used cartridges, and some condom wrappers.

'Is this the police or the terrorists?' I asked Jeet.

'There was a time when one could tell,' he said wistfully.

(from page 180–181)