

Religious and Caste- Discrimination in Anirudh Kala's Novel *Two and a Half Rivers*

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Abstract

Aims: *Anirudh Kala's second novel Two and a Half Rivers published in 2021. A psychiatrist by profession, Anirudh Kala "sketches out his characters and their personality traits." The novel describes the lives of three characters—a divorced doctor, two Dalit children—Bheem and Shamsie.*

Methodology and Approaches: *The novel is dealt with various themes like religion and caste-discrimination, Partition, Blue Star Operation, Khalistan-Movement etc. but the present paper focuses on the theme of religious and caste-terrorism.*

Outcome: *This paper explores how the Dalits being baptized into Sikhism face religious and caste-discrimination. It also shows their assertion and struggle to find equal place at Gurudwaras and in society.*

Conclusion and Suggestions: *The writer at the same time shows humiliation, exploitation, anger, struggle and assertion of Dalits for their dignity.*

Keywords: Caste, religion, exploitation, discrimination, anger, assertion.

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The novel is dealt with various themes like religion and caste-discrimination, Partition, Blue Star Operation, Khalistan-Movement, besides this it deals with the lives of three characters---a divorced doctor-narrator, two Dalit children—Bheem and Shamsie. Both these Dalit children studied in a government school and they were given mid-day meal there. They were keenly waiting for mid-day meal: “A watery dal and a slice of bread was the grandly termed ‘mid-day’ meal in government records.” (Kala 10) These two were the only Dalit students in school. Others children of Dalit caste worked with their parents in the fields and Dalit women did cleaning and other works at upper-castes houses: “Bheem and Shamsie were the only Dalit students in the school. The others were from a different world, children of landowning Jats, except two boys and a girl from a large family of Banias that owned the grocery shop in the village . . . All the other Dalit children of the village worked with their parents. The men worked as farm labourers called ‘seerins’ in fields they did not own, mostly for a pittance. The women cleaned the homes of the Jats and Banias. The boys grazed cattle belonging to Jats and girls ran after the cattle the whole day to gather dung.” (Kala 11)

The novel is scrutinized through the lens of intersectionality—caste, gender and religion as advocated by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Sharankumar Limbale, Omprakash Valmiki, Kancha Ilaiah, Gopal Guru, Hira Bansode and Namdeo Dhasal. The main objective of intersectionality is to understand how caste and

religion shape the lives of the people. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar criticizes the rigid Hindu Caste system and insists for the abolition of caste-system. Sharankumar Limbale develops a Dalit literary theory and emphasizes on resistance, authenticity and new aesthetics of Dalit literature. Omprakash Valmiki through his powerful autobiographical narrative criticizes the upper-caste domination and focuses on truth, suffering and assertion. Kancha Ilaiah criticizes Hinduism and upper-caste domination. Gopal Guru a political theorist focuses on Dalits' role in politics. Hira Bansode focuses on the intersectionality of caste, gender and Dalit women's sufferings and assertion. Namdeo Dhasal's poetry is filled with Marxism and Ambedkar's ideology.

Primary Sources: *Two and a Half Rivers* (2021) by Aniruth Kala is primary source.

Secondary Sources: Critical and fictional books related to caste, gender and religion, research articles, review papers related to novel, webliography are analyzed as felicitating material for this paper.

In India caste and religion are two sides of the same coin. Religion is an embodiment of purity and caste is associated with religion so caste is as pure as religion. One person is known by his caste how pure he is. One belongs to higher caste there is no question of purity but when one belongs to lower caste then that person is examined on the basis of purity. Dalits in India are sufferers of this impurity because of their caste. If a Dalit converts from one religion to another, he still remains a Dalit and untouchables because caste is as pure as religion. It is not a new thing that Dalits have been the victims of religion and caste-discrimination; they have been the victims of upper caste atrocities since ages. History is brimmed with plethora of examples of heinous crimes against Dalits. If one goes back into history one finds examples of caste-discrimination. During the *Ramayana* period Shambook, because of listening to Vedas, was tortured and molten lead was poured into his ears as punishment. During the *Mahabharata*

period Eklavya excelled Arjuna in archery, Guru Dronacharya got his thumb cut off. Dalits were discriminated in everywhere in India. Only Dr. B. R. Ambedkar who took the giant step and through Constitution gave some rights to Dalit masses. But in 21st century when India has become a global village Dalits have been facing the subhuman treatment. Many Dalit writers like Bama, Sharankumar Limbale, Baby Kamble, Omprakash Valmiki, P. Sivakami and many more have given voice to voiceless people through their writings. The writings of these writers have become a powerful tool of awareness and assertion for Dalits.

Bheem and Shmasie parents faced humiliating remarks for sending their children to school. Not only the upper-castes but also Dalits talked in an ironical manner about Bheem and Shamsie's parents' and commented ironically: "Not just Jats, even Dalits made no bones and foolhardiness of Bheem and Shamsie's parents in trying to rise above their caste by sending their children to school. What did they expect them to become? Deputy commissioners?" (Kala, 11) Similarly Omprakash Valmiki gives example of caste-discrimination at school. He said that he had to clean the rooms and sweep the floor for three days. Seeing Valmiki cleaning and sweeping the floor at school, his father became enraged and went to the upper caste Tagas to complain against the Headmaster, Kaliram. Whomsoever villagers he met, like Bheem and Shamsie's parents, he got ironical answers:

'What is the point of sending him school?'

'When has crow become a swan?'

'Hey if he asked a Chuhra's progeny to sweep, what is the big deal in that?'

'He only got him to sweep; did not ask for his thumb in gurudaksina like Dronacharya?' (Valmiki 6)

At school, only Dalit students had to do the work at their teachers' house. One day Bheem was late due to heavy rain at school and was late for another hour

because he did work at his teachers' quarters: "He would spend this time cleaning the teachers' living quarters next to the school and doing laundry for his family, which included the laundry of teachers' son who was sitting two rows away on a pukka patch of the floor. Teachers sometimes made Dalit students do all their household chores. Without payment of course." (Kala 10-11) Similarly Valmiki suffered both physically and psychologically at village, schools and colleges and he documented everything in his autobiography *Joothan*. At school, he faced caste-discrimination-- being a Chuhra. He further told that Dalits had to do the work without payment. He opines: "We did all sort of work for the Tagas, including cleaning, agricultural work and general labour. We would often have to work without any pay." (Valmiki 2)

In every village in India Dalits lived at the outskirts of the village and the area in which they lived it was called 'Vehra.' The writer's remarks: "'Vehra was a generic word and most villages had one. Its only function was to contain the low caste dwelling efficiently, so that there was no spill over into the rest of the village, which, in this case, was occupied by Jat Sikhs, a few Banias, and the eccentric, semi-literate Brahmin.

The Vehra itself was a squalid, overcrowded place. Mud and brick shanties, with cow dung cakes on the walls, surrounded a middle space traversed during the day by unclean children, hens, stray dogs, a drunk or two, and some adolescents trying to have a party out of a clump of cannabis leaves they had collected while grazing cattle. A strong smell of cow dung hung in the air day and night

The Vehra stood to the west of the main village, so that the rays of the rising sun reached Jat homes directly, without being polluted by the Dalits. The dirty water drain ran from east to west, based on the same fizzy logic. (Kala 12-13) Similarly Valmiki gives another example of untouchability and says that touching of Dalits was considered polluted. The writer says: "...if one happened

to touch a Chuhra, one got contaminated or polluted.” (Valmiki 2) Regarding this Sharan Kumar Limbale has very rightly remarked:

The work of the Dalits is essential for maintaining the upper caste Hindu's purity. If they did not clean latrines, skin the dead animals, and remove the carcasses, the social life of the upper caste will be unclean, polluted and diseased. And yet these are revolting activities, so is the Dalit is an object of revulsion, precisely for doing them, even though it is the upper caste Hindu who forces Dalits not carrying them out. Dalits enable the purity of upper caste society, and become impure in the process. (Limbale 3)

This clearly shows that how Dalits are discriminated due to their low caste and their houses are at the periphery to west so that the houses of the upper castes' remain unpolluted by the rays of the rising sun and Omprakash Valmiki and Sharankumar Limbale also show how they face such kind of humiliation from the upper castes at different places.

Similarly, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in his book titled *Annihilation of Caste* has given a fine example of untouchability and caste-discrimination: “Under the rule of Peshwas in the Maratha country, the untouchable was not allowed to use the public streets if a Hindu was coming along, lest he should pollute the Hindu by his shadow. The untouchable was required to have a black thread either on his wrist or in his neck as a sign or a mark to prevent the Hindus from getting themselves polluted by his touch through mistake. In Poona, the capital of Peshwas, the untouchable was required to carry, strung from his waist, a broom to sweep away from behind the dust he treaded on, lest a Hindu walking on the same should be polluted. In Poona, the untouchable was required to carry an earthen pot hung in his neck wherever he went for holding his spit, lest his spit falling on earth should pollute a Hindu who might unknowingly happen to tread on.” (Ambedkar 16) This shows that during every period in history Dalits have been the victims of caste-discrimination.

Bheem's father Ramchander worked as a labourer in Jalandhar as leather tanner and his mother as a cleaner in a Jat's house: "Ramchander worked as a leather tanner in Jalandhar . . . Bheem's mother, a cleaner in a Jat's house, returned from work only in the evening after her employers had been eaten and she had washed the utensils. She was not allowed to cook for them. This was done by a widowed relative." (Kala 12) This shows that being a Dalit, Bheem's mother is not allowed to enter the kitchen and cook for her employers. It's because the lower caste people are treated as untouchables.

On the other hand, Shamsie's father worked at the new museum as a sweeper. Like Bheem's mother he was not allowed to enter the main block for sweeping. He only swept the outside toilets: "Shamsie's father was a sweeper at the new museum which had opened the previous summer. A sweeper not of the halls, where the freshly-mounted statues, figurines slabs and coins stood on display, but the sweeper of the toilets, outside the main block." (Kala 13-14) Similarly Bama told that most of the Dalits worked in upper caste Naikers' houses as bonded-labourers. Whenever the Naikers weren't satisfied with their work, they ill-treated the Dalits. Bama writes: "They would chase us, throw stones and pieces of wood at us, and drive us away...." (Bama 50) Similarly a very famous Dalit writer Bama gives another example of untouchability and caste-discrimination. She told that when she was in 8th standard, she worked in the houses of Naikers. Dalits were not allowed to touch any kind of goods rather they had to stand at a distance. Bama remarks: "All the time I went to work for the Naikers, I knew I should not touch their goods or chattels; I should never come close to where they were. I should always stand away to one side. These were their rules. I often felt pained and ashamed." (Bama 51) This clearly shows that how Dalits are discriminated due to their caste. Bheem's mother and Shamsie's father and Bama face caste-discrimination at their places. Bama has the first hand experiences and she has documented everything in her autobiography *Karukku*.

Most of the low born children were named after gods and goddesses. But they were not allowed to enter the temples or worship those gods and goddesses whose names they carried with them. The writer has very beautifully observed the naming process of Dalits' children: "Children born in the lowest castes are more likely to be named after gods and goddesses, and celebrities by their parents. Or simply as Raja or Rani. Bheem was named after the Dalit jurist Bhim Rao Ambedkar, known world over as the father of Indian Constitution.

Krishan, Shamsie's father was, named after Lord Krishna, while her grandfather, a leather tanner, was named Shiva. Shiva's father was Raj Kumar, the Hindi word for prince, and Bheem's father shared his name with Lord Rama himself. These hollowed names were among the few things Dalit parents could give their children without any hindrance or expanse. (Kala, 16-17) This is an irony that Dalits can have the names of Hindu gods and goddesses but they are not allowed to enter the temples or worship these gods and goddesses.

Shamsie's father, a second-generation refugee, shifted from Pakistan to India during Partition. When the Second World War started Krishan's grandfather Raj Kumar after giving up the business of skinning of dead cattle, joined the army. After joining army, he thought that "it would be a masterstroke towards shedding his Dalit ancestry." (Kala 17). He fought for three years for the crown, first in Africa, and then in Burma. Raj Kumar believed he had succeeded. Until in a cruel twist of fate, the British army constituted a brand new separate Chamar regiment for the people of his caste." (Kala 18) It was believed that a separate caste-based Regiment created a sense of belongingness and unity among Chamar in army and could do better: "Inspired by the logic, a Chamar Regiment was formed to replicate the successes of the exclusive Sikh, Jat, Dogra, and Gorkha Regiment . . . while the Dogras, Sikhs, Jats and Gorkhas had wanted to belong, the Chamar had joined the army for the exact opposite reason to 'disbelong' and forget that they were Chamars. They wanted to be assimilated in the vast

behemoth that was the British Indian Army, never to be recognized by their caste again.” (Kala 18) This is very obvious that Dalits are discriminated because of their caste even in Army.

The writer gives another example of caste-discrimination in Army. Being an unwilling founding member, Naib Subedar, Raj Kumar joined the Chamar Regiment. Although he was a soldier in the British Army yet remained a Chamar. Raj Kumar died in the World War II at the Kohima front. He died of ‘leaping off a cliff into the Tizu River.’ (Kala 18) When the war ended, Chamar Regiment was disbanded and soldiers mixed up back into their parent units. The writer observes: “Naib Subedar Raj Kumar then found himself posted to Chamar Regiment as one of its unwilling founding members. He was a soldier in the British Army, but once again a Chamar. . . . The Chamar Regiment was disbanded, and the soldiers absorbed back into their parent units. The official reason given in army files for disbanding the Chamar Regiment, even as the Sikh, Jat, Gorkha, and Dogra regiments carried on as before was ‘unforeseen circumstances’.” (Kala 18-19)

People were very perplexed during Partition. They were in a great dilemma like Hamlet—to go to India or stay here in Pakistan or to change their religion or become Muslims or continue to live in new formed Pakistan or go to India and keep their Hindu faith. The writer told about the dilemma of Raj Kumar’s grandfather Shiva during partition. The writer writes: “Raj Kumar son’s and Krishan’s father Shiva, was 15 at the time, and worked with a hide tanner in a village near Sargodha. Shiva had a difficult choice of his own to make a few years later, when the Partition of India happened. The dilemma was whether to change religion, become a Muslim. And continue living into the newly carved out Pakistan, or to keep the Hindu faith and go to India.” (Kala 19) When after partition Shiva came to India, his caste was written on his ration card in Urdu. He was happy here in India and kept his work on skinning dead cattle. His son

Krishan like his grandfather fought against caste-discrimination. When he went to sell the skins of dead cattle, he was told by someone that there were no castes in Sikhism. He listened to the famous lines from the holy book of Sikh, “Awwal allah noor upaya, qudrat keh sab banday, aik noor keh sab jag upajaya kaun bhale ko mande.”(Kala 19-20) After listening to these lines from Guru Granth Sahib, he was deeply influenced to know that there were no castes in Sikhism and started preparation to join Sikhism: “ . . . Krishan fought his own battle like his grandfather to break free of the caste mould. At the factory, where he went to sell cow hides, someone told him that there were no castes in Sikhism” (Kala19). Further he was told that it was written in Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of Sikhs: “Awwal allah noor upaya, qudrat keh sab banday, aik noor keh sab jag upajaya kaun bhale ko mande.” (Kala 20) Listening to these words of equality from the holy book of Sikhs, Krishan was deeply influenced and decided to grow his hair and beard and changed his daughter’s name from Shamsie to Gurshamseer: “These words touched Krishan’s heart. That same day, he started growing his hair and stopped shaving. He quit smoking beedis and put on a decent turban. Once the beard was presentable, he took a bus from the school bus stop on the highway and went to the Golden Temple in Amritsar. He returned a baptized Sikh, wearing the kara, a sturdy steel bangle, and the kirpan, a small scimitar around his waist. He had learnt a bit of scriptures and named his two-year old daughter Gurshamseer, which means ‘the Guru’s sword.’ His own name after three months’ time and a cost of 50 rupees for the declaration in the Punjabi newspaper, got changed from Krishan Kumar to Krishan Singh.” (Kala 20)

The above excerpt documents the transformation of Krishan Kumar to Krishan Singh and Shamsie to Gurshamseer. This transformation takes place only after knowing that Sikhism is a casteless religion and everyone is equal in this religion—out of caste and creed.

Being baptized into Sikhism for eight years, Krishan Singh was treated as Dalit, an outcaste: “Eight years later, however, Krishan Singh was still not allowed to join the langer, the community meal after prayers, at the big gurudwara. He could often be seen arguing with the blue robed guards. ‘Guru said, *qudrat de sab bande*.’ Everybody is allowed. Even Muslims.’ Each time, he was curtly told, ‘Muslims are. Chamars are not.’” (Kala 20)

Listening to all these arguments from the blue robed guard, Krishan Singh remarks: “But—I am a properly baptized Amritdhari. Sikh, ‘he would insist, pointing one by one to his turban, his beard, and the kirpan as if explaining to a child.” (Kala 20) Responding him back, the guard said to him that, “You a Sikh, but a Chamar Sikh. This is a Jat gurudwara. You have your own Gurudwara in the Vehra: go there---.” (Kala 20) This clearly shows that the caste-discrimination is prevalent even at religious places like gurudwaras. Krishan Kumar changes his religion for the sake of equality but what he gets in gurudwara, the same kind discrimination which he got when he was a Hindu Chamar. Caste is as pure as religion so Dalits remain Dalits whether they change their names or religion. Conversion from one religion to another cannot wash away the caste. Caste remains with a person till death. Many Dalits have converted to Christianity but they got the same treatment at churches. Bama converted to Christianity but she faced caste-discrimination at church and she has given a detailed picture of such kind of religious-discrimination in her autobiography *Karukku*.

One day when both Bheem and Shamsie reached home after school, her father was not at home so she could not prepare evening tea and they both decided to go to the big Gurudwara because of Sangrand they got food there. The big gurudwara belonged to the Jat community. It was at the far end of the village. The small gurudwara belonged to the Vehra gurudwara. Both Bheem and Shamsie knew that there was not food at the Vehra gurudwara. For eating food they went to the big Gurudwara: “Once they reached the big Gurudwara, the

Nihang guard shouted at them, ‘This gurudwara is not for people for like you. Why don’t you go to your own?’ (Kala 22) Listening to all this from the Nihang guard, Bheem replied: “Baba Nanak said that all are born equal. *Aik noor toh sab jag upjiya, qudrat de sab bande*. Bheem recited like the younger children chanted multiplication tables in school.” (Kala 22) Not only Bheem but all the Vehra children had memorized these lines of Baba Nanak ‘*Qudart de sab bande*.’ (Kala 22) Listening to these lines from them the Nihang guard showed some mercy and allowed them to enter from the back entrance. But Bheem knew that back entrance remains closed on the day of Sangrand so that they entered stealthily:

Bheem and Shamsie sat quietly on the floor of the big gurudwara, their heads covered and hands folded, in the middle of the congregation, trying to be invisible. They waited patiently for the kirtan to end, after which langar would be served in the hall at the back. But as ill luck would have it, at the end of the *ardas*, they discovered that it was the young *sewadar* deputed to find them whose turn it was to distribute the Prasad. When he came to them, the two cupped their palms together to receive the sweet halwa. But either due to the small size of Bheem’s hands or the irate man was being too careful to avoid touching the skin of an untouchable, the halwa fell off from Bheem’s cupped palms to the dust-filled duree. Bheem was pulled out and taken outside the gate where Nihang slapped him hard. ‘This is for insulting the guru’s Prasad. Don’t show your dark faces here ever again.’ (Kala 24)

This clearly shows that how the Dalits are discriminated because of their caste in the name of religion. It has been happening with Dalits since ages. Dalits have been facing religion and caste-discrimination all over India. It may be temples, gurudwaras, mosques, and churches. Being baptized as Christian Bama faces religion and caste-discrimination and humiliation. She has exposed the reality of

churches in her autobiography *Karukku*. Here in this novel Krishan Singh being baptized into Sikhism faces religious and caste-discrimination.

Being a Chamar, Krishan was given the work to sweep the toilets at new museum outside the main block. A higher caste sweeper was assigned to sweep the indoor figurines and statues in the museum. Krishan argued with authority and asked to show him where it was written that Chamars were not allowed to enter the main block. He was told that it was a verbal order: “At the newly opened museum, where Krishan was hired as a sweeper, he was confined to the outdoor toilets. His entry into the hallowed sanctum sanctorum, where statues of stylish women from thousands of years back reigned, was forbidden. A higher-caste cleaner was hired for the indoors. Krishan insisted that he be shown the rule that said that he was not allowed inside the halls. He was told that there was nothing written, only verbal orders from the staunchly Brahmin director of the department.” (Kala 21) After knowing all this, he felt annoyed and took a giant step and shed everything which made him a Sikh: “A miffed Krishan took off his kirpan, cut his hair, shaved off his beard, and bought ten packets of beedis at one go. It would have been too cumbersome to rename his schoolgoing daughter. She continued to be Gurshamseer Kaur in the school register, but was called Shamsie by everybody. His own name too continued being Krishan Singh.” (Kala 21) The above lines show Krishan Singh’s assertion for his identity. What he gets from being baptized as a Sikh. The answer is nothing. He gets only same kind of humiliation and discrimination when he was a Chamar before conversion. So he sheds everything and again becomes a Hindu Chamar.

Further the narrator told that both Bheem and Shamsie shifted to Bombay. Shamsie joined a dance school and Bheem worked as a bouncer at the dance bar there. Her name was changed from Shamsie to Jassi. Only Bheem and a baptized Sikh named Sidhu knew that she was Shamsie. In Bombay ‘they lived in one room in the three-cubicle brick house in a honeycomb—like colony of thousands

of such tenements. The colony was called Dhakka Colony.” (Kala 94) When Shamsie came back to her village and met the doctor-narrator at his house. She told him about her life in Bombay. Doctor-narrator asked her why she came back here. She told him that she came to dance in the weddings of Jats’ here: “Because they are Jats,’ she said, followed by a long pause. ‘They are the only ones who can afford such weddings.’

‘And you a Chamar? Is that it? I thought you were one kickass Chamar girl.” (Kala 113) Further she told the narrator about the village life: “. . . there were no toilets in the village, and everyone used the fields instead, but the Vehra people did not own any fields. That the girls walked as far as into the Jat fields as they possibly could. That their mothers taught them how to do it cleverly as they grew up. That raping a girl from the Vehra was a coming-of-age ritual for the Jat boys. That she had escaped with just her clothes torn and bruises on the thighs, because she got hold of a stone, while lying pinned down.” (Kala 113) This shows that Chamar girls are treated as commodities by the upper caste Jat. Similarly, Thangam in P. Sivakami’s novel *The Grip of Change* is raped by an upper caste man Kathamuthu and when the matter brings to the panchayat it is said that she is lucky to be touched by an upper caste man.

Both Bheem and Shamsie reached at dera Mahaprabhu Gribparivar and there they were sent to dormitory number 27. There Bheem kept silent and Shamsie tried to know to what was wrong with him. When she was there she was very surprised to know that dera needed a dancer. She was told later that dera had ‘thriving cultural division that had musicians and singers from around the country . . . The dera encouraged performing arts and taught dance and music in their schools.” (Kala 193)

After a month training Bheem was appointed as a supervisor and dera authority gave them a family block to live in. Later Bheem worked as a security guard at a power plant for three months and stayed there. He did not meet Shamsie and felt

that one of his body parts missed. It was very suffocating for Bheem to live in the dera. He was junior at power plant. He was offered a job of supervisor. For the job of supervisor, he was late for interview and was waiting at the station the next train to come. And finally through underpass he reached for interview. When he reached there he met two Jats who became hostile to see him though they were very friendly to him until the day before the interview. He came to know later that, “. . . the interview had been cancelled because of a fresh government notification that reserved the slot for scheduled caste candidate. Bheem, as the only such candidate available stood automatically selected.” (Kala 207)

Now Bheem became the supervisor at the power plant. Due to enmity he was heavily drunk and after sedating he was left on the railway line, and his legs got cut on the track. When he came into consciousness he found his both legs cut off. After this heinous incident Dalit worker at the power plant went on strike. In this connection two Jat boys were arrested but soon released because both of them were able to show their presence at 200 km. from the place of incident. The power plant authority arranged artificial limbs for Bheem's amputated legs. He could not sleep for many nights due to severe pain. He was appointed as a security guard by the power plant authority to maintain the duty rosters of the employees. The worker unions found in Bheem a supermodel: “The Dalit unions projected him as mascot of upper caste brutality. A handsome young man, with both legs amputated, singing rousing songs from a wheelchair, fitted the bill perfectly. Bheem obliged, not because he liked the adulation and his picture on the posters, but because he got to sing the songs he wanted to and as loudly as he willed because before an audience of hundreds who clapped after every verse.” (Kala 209) Seeing all this, the power plant authority warned him that if he would incite the workers against government, he would be dismissed from his job.

Sidhu the baptized Sikh tried to search him and he came to know that he behaved weirdly and sang songs on the top of his terrace. When the neighbours

asked him to stop, he warned them saying that revolution might be happened any time. He warned them by singing the lines of Faiz Ahmed Faiz:

Ae khak naseeno uth baitho who
Waqt qareeb aa pahuncha hai
Jab takht giraye jaaenge
Jb taj uchhale jaaenge.
(You man of dust, wake up from your slumber,
The time has come when thrones will tumble. And crowns kicked around.
(Kala 210)

Bheem sang such kind of songs everywhere--- at a crowd traffic crossing, verka booth, mobile booth, and railway crossing etc. On the fourth day of singing such songs, a police gypsy came and carried Bheem and his wheelchair away. When he was carried by police, the terrorism was at its height. There was hue and cry everywhere. Police caught men on the suspicion of terrorism and took them to fields and shot them dead. By doing this police man got promotions and incentives. Bheem sang songs of revolution and became hurdle for police. The police also decided to kill Bheem but he was handicapped and they knew that they got nothing for his killing. Even though he was shot dead by the police and his legless body and wheelchair were thrown into the river Sutluj. When Bheem was shot dead, Shamsie was in London for her performance with the cultural troupe of dera. After coming back from London to dera, Shamsie left dera for good. She searched for Bheem and later met Sidhu. They both searched and could not find Bheem. She was alone in her flat and was not safe there. She met doctor-narrator but the narrator could not recognize her. She seemed to narrator a middle-aged woman, with disheveled hair. When she could not get any information about Bheem she took a room on rent at Dhakka Colony. For a month both Shamsie and Sidhu could not get any information about Bheem. One of Bheem's acquaintances told them that he saw Bheem's picture on a poster with wheelchair.

Knowing all this, Shamsie felt heart-broken and she dared not to go in search of Bheem, so Sidhu went to know about Bheem. He got information about Bheem from the neighbors and went to police station to know more about Bheem but he received the answer that they did not have any record of Bheem. Shamsie came to know that Bheem was abducted by police for singing revolutionary songs. She said that she wanted to know more about Bheem. For that she went to higher court but the police authority told them they had no such record.

When Shamsie was in Dhakka Colony, a client came to book Shamsie for wedding in her village: “We want her, because, she is from our village. She grew up here. Your party is invited to stay for the wedding at the village gurudwara, till the next morning.” (Kala 224) Sidhu got surprised to know that the wedding took place at Shamsie’s village. The wedding was not in a proper village; it was celebrated in a newly opened resort on the highway. Shamsie was unaware that she was going to perform in her own village. She danced in the wedding party and nobody bothered that she was from their own village. Shamsie wanted to stay at the guest room at night because. “. . . She wanted to go to see stupas in the morning and wanted to walk through the Vehra in the daylight . . .” (Kala 225) She was in her room at the wedding complex and through window she was enjoying the outside beauty of her own village Uccha Pind. When she was in her room a man entered and tried to abuse and exploit her. Seeing the man entering in her room, she screamed: . . . “but no voice came out of her. Then a heavy, abrasive palm pressed down hard on her mouth, pushing her head back against the pillow. She struggled to breathe and, in that moment, when she felt she was dying of suffocation, she saw the silhouette of the man in her room from the flitting light of a passing car on the road. She knew the man who was weighing down on her body, with his other hand gripping tight her wrists at her back. It was Sukha, who had pinned her down, just like now, in the fields, not far from that room, more than 10 years ago. He eased the pressure on her mouth and hissed breathlessly.

‘You will be paid as much as you want. That is what you do anyway.’ (Kala 227-28) This clearly shows that an upper caste man Sukha wants to take revenge on Shamsie because ten years ago Shamsie broke his teeth. Sukha bolted the room from inside and she had to fight alone with him. The writer remarks: “He forced her face towards him and Shamsie braced herself while struggling to turn her face away. Instead of kissing her, he slapped her hard on her cheek.

‘This is what you deserve, not a kiss. What do you Chamar girls think of yourself anyway? That you will hit a Jat boy, break his tooth, and he will just have forged about it? What I wanted the day in the fields has been happening for centuries.’ (Kala 227) This shows the hostile attitude of Sukha against Shamsie. He wants to punish her for losing his teeth so he tortures her physically.

Sukha slapped Shamsie again and again and tried to put his penis into her mouth as vengeance. Out of anger Shamsie cut his dick with her teeth and it bleed. The writer observes: “Her mind stunned after a slap, she could not struggle for a while. He had to just stretch his arm to pull her chunni trailing from the back of the chair in the room. With that he tied her wrists in the chair, pressing her mouth with a hand just in case. He loosened his belt with one hand to let his trousers and then his underwear drops to his feet, pushing her back against the chair with other hand. Then he tried to force himself into her mouth. When she clenched her teeth to resist, he slapped her, and then backslapped her again.”(Kala 227-28)

Sukha further says: “You thought, I was going to fuck you. No, you don’t deserve that either. Pay me back my tooth this way and, then we would be even. During the few seconds she went limp, he managed to push his now erect penis into her mouth. He was holding her head and moving it back and forth. Shamsie was alert again and felt a nauseous bile rising from her stomach. Then in a moment of aversion, shame, anger, hate, and clarity, she tightened her mouth and dug her teeth deliberately and determinedly into the stiff flesh. Sukha erupted into

obscurities. He tried to withdraw, which hurt even more. Sukha's hands went around her neck in a desperate attempt to strangle her, but the all-consuming pain had numbed his brain and weakened his grasp. The pain had made the penis soft and that made the teeth go through it easier. Blood was sprouting from Shamsie's mouth and going back into her throat, some of which she had to swallow.

Her teeth pressed on final time to avenge for her humiliation of that day, for not being allowed into the gurudwaras, as a child, for her father having been cheated and driven to death, for his great grandfather having been forced to jump off a cliff and, most of all Bheem's legs and then for his life." (Kala 228). This above passages Sukha's exploitation and tortures against Shamsie and Shamsie's assertion and retaliation against such kind of base treatment. She doesn't lose courage and takes her revenge in this way. But there are other Dalit women like Thangam in *The grip of Change* and Anandhayi in *The Taming of Women* by P. Sivakami, are brutally tortured and raped. Not all the Dalit women are as powerful as Shamsie.

Sukha was admitted to hospital in this critical condition and discharged soon and he died of fulminating infection. On the other hand, Shamsie survived and she became 'an adored Dalit icon.' (Kala 233) She spent most of her time in dancing school. She had trained dancers there and paid them well and she lived with them in the same building. Shamsie met doctor-narrator whenever she passed his way in her Maruti Zen. Sometimes she stayed with the doctor if she got late. One day in autumn season, when the sky was full of stars and river submerged half of the sarkanda grass she questioned me what my caste was. Listening to this question from Shamsie the doctor said that he was uncomfortable and he replied that he hated identities. Shamsie further says: "And that, Doctor Sahib, is the difference. You have the privilege to hate identities and say it too, and that privilege comes with your caste. If I said I hate identities, I would be told, of course you do, you are a Chamar. Therefore, I cannot say that, not in this

birth. I hope that I am born in a Jat or a Brahmin next time just for the sake of this one privilege. The privilege of being able to say I hate identities. Right now, I hug my identity, close to my chest and tell others like me to do the same.” (Kala 234) She further told that she tried to sing songs as Bheem sang, she looked beyond the river Sutluj, “. . . as if she was searching somebody. She sands a few lines in a voice that was deep and striving:

‘Words have been uttered
Long before us,
And will be uttered
For long after we are gone
Chop off every tongue
If you can.

But the words have been uttered’ (Kala 234)

The novel ends with a stark reality that Dalits are identified only through their caste. Only upper castes have the privilege to hate identities. The above passage is a strong answer to the narrator’s statement of ‘hate identities.’ To conclude it can be said that Anirudh Kala’s novel *Two and a Half Rivers* is filled with plethora of instances of religious and caste-discrimination. Dalits are exploited, assaulted and tortured because of their caste. Shamsie, Shamsie’s father Krishan Singh, and Bheem face religious and caste-discrimination because of their caste at gurudwaras and other places like school, museum, etc. Exploitations and tortures against Dalit is a never ending process. They (Dalits) have been, they are and will be the victims of caste based atrocities all over India. No remedy can heal their unseen wound of untouchability and discrimination. Like Shamsie, they will have to fight themselves for their dignity and equality in society and work places. In Bama’s novel *Sangati* Dalit women use abuses as a tool for assertion against the upper castes. Although Dalits are working on high posts but they are still Dalits. They are treated sub-humanly and it is said that they are only in the higher posts

only because of reservation. The question is still answered, ‘Have Dalits attained actual freedom from slavery, discrimination, exploitation, and suppression?’ They will be the victims of this caste discrimination till the doomsday.

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