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Liberating Kenyan History

<https://pattnameera.wordpress.com/2017/10/22/liberating-kenyan-history/amp/>. [Accessed: 07-11-17]



“Not being considered Kenyan in the country I grew up in, have millions of memories, suddenly makes me feel very out of place and angry,” says student Minahil Qureshi who gave a Ted Talk on her identity as a fourth generation South Asian Kenyan. South Asians have been part of Kenya for decades – while some were brought to Kenya to work on the railway, others migrated to conduct trades across the coastal border of East Africa.

In today’s hustle, history tends to either be forgotten or regarded as something unworthy and pointless to ponder upon. One part of history that has been sidelined is the role that South Asians played in Kenya’s fight to freedom. On the 18th of May, the book ‘Liberating Minds – Restoring Kenyan History – Anti-Imperialist Resistance by Progressive South Asian Kenyans 1884-1964’ was launched in Nairobi. The book involves a collection of brief biographies of progressive South Asian activists that were

originally published by Nazmi Durrani in the Gujarati magazine 'Alakmalak' during the 1980s. Alongside the biographies, the book explores the various ways in which progressive South Asians resisted against colonial rule.

South Asian Kenyans helped the freedom fight of Kenya in a number of ways. Ranging from publishing articles of the terrible acts of the colonial government, to organizing strikes, and to supplying arms, food and shelter to the Mau Mau fighters. The biographies of Makhan Singh, Pio Gama Pinto, Amubhai Patel and Manilal Desai, alongside others, are the activists explored in the book.

Makhan Singh established Kenya's Trade Union Movement, he was also the first Kenyan to publicly demand the "complete independence and sovereignty" for east African colonies on 29th April 1950. Pio Gama Pinto, who was a journalist and patriot, supplied arms and materials to Mau Mau fighters in conflict zones, and later became the first martyr of independent Kenya.

The book launch was attended by the family and friends of Nazmi Durrani, many of whom took the podium to share their memories of him. Nazmi Durrani was born in Kisumu on March 31 1942, he died after a tragic accident on July 1, 1990. Durrani taught at Aga Khan High school in Mombasa, after which he moved to Nairobi and began working at the Library of Congress Office from 1969 till his death. Nazmi Durrani joined the anti-imperialist organization 'December Twelve Movement' towards the end of the 1970s; this helped shape his political activism and dedication towards a more equal Kenya. Nazmi Durrani had written the original articles in Gujarati as a means for the Gujarati speaking Kenyans to understand their own progressive history. "There was dedication to his life and what he put his mind to," his nephew Rahim Suleiman tells me as he recalls the time when his uncle changed the time on his watch to be read in Kiswahili and ended up going for a jog at 12 o'clock midnight. Suleiman expressed his emotions over the book launch, "its extremely emotional to see that people are actually following him to see these many people here with that kind of dedication is amazing," he told me.

Writer and activist Zarina Patel was one of the attendees of the launch, described Durrani as someone who would get along with everyone, "I just loved his depth of knowledge, he knew so much particularly about the history. He was very serious very committed, but also great fun to be with," she explains.

The erasure of history is commonplace across the world, and often, it is done by those in positions of power, "You know they erase the thing because it's been made that history is no use doesn't bring any money, what does a historian earn?" Zarina Patel explains, "They don't want history themselves, for example, our school books don't even have much about our history it's been downgraded", she adds.

Wahu Kaara is a social right's activist who launched the book on the day, "I must say I am feeling very motivated very energized and it has given me a determination to see that there is something to be done for the completion of the work that they started just like I stated at the launch," she expressed her excitement to me, "It is the spirit of humanness that connects us the spirit of good for all that we must build. Your world and the world of your children must be a world for all. So you and I must build on this victory that has continued to be gained from the book we are launching," she added.

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