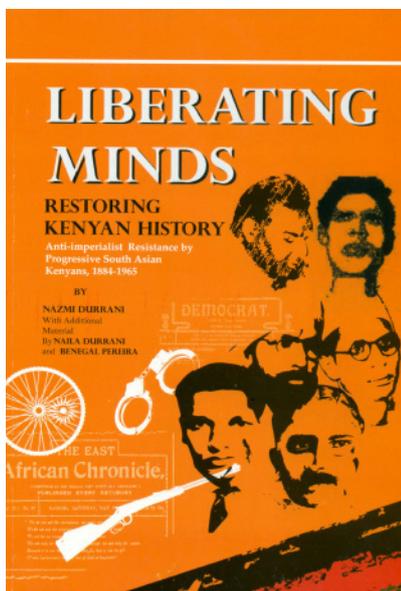


Book Reviews

Liberating Minds

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Author: Nazmi Durrani

Our patriotic history was first distorted by the colonialists and then suppressed by the post-independent dictatorial regimes. The best known example of this is the ban imposed on the Mau Mau movement which was not lifted until 2003. This policy affected many aspects of our history, some more evident than others. The narratives of Kenya's heroic South Asian freedom fighters belonged to this last category.

I say 'belonged' because in mid 1980s, an era often referred to as the Mwakenya years, this lacuna in our history began to be bridged. The late Nazmi Durrani was a librarian working with the US Library of Congress in Nairobi and thus had access to archival material. He researched and wrote short bios of South Asians who had played a part in the struggle of Kenyans for freedom, justice and equality.

On Thursday 18 May, the book, *Liberating Minds*, will be launched recording six of these stories together with writings concerning the struggle for liberation in Kenya in the 1980s.

The original stories were written in Gujarati and were published in a magazine called *Alak Malak*. Nazmi was an expert in his mother tongue but that was not the only reason he wrote these articles in a minority language and script. He fervently believed in the importance of preserving and promoting our languages; a goal he shared with Ngugi wa Thiongo. He also wanted the South Asian community to read about its own history. Another reason was quite simply 'security'. For those who can remember; the mid-1980s were some of the most repressive years in Kenyan history. His brother, Shiraz Durrani, had in 1986 written about Pio Gama Pinto and the *Standard* newspaper had published the articles. To avoid arrest, Shiraz had had to flee the country – he now lives with his family in the UK.

In putting together this book, Shiraz, and his wife Naila, have recorded for posterity Nazmi's accounts of some of Kenya's South Asian progressives. Alongside the Gujarati version is a translation in English which gives the average reader an insight into this lesser known group of freedom fighters. The six they have selected and adorn the book's cover are Ambu Patel, Jaswant Singh Bharaj, Makhan Singh, Eddie Pereira, Pio Gama Pinto and Manilal Desai.

Included in the book is a longer article on Eddie Pereira, written by his son Benegal, and titled 'Indian Nationalist Extraordinaire in Kenya'. Apart from narrating Eddie's life story it also gives an interesting account of the identity problems the Goan community in Kenya had to contend with when India became independent. Naila Durrani's article on 'South Asian Kenyan Resistance in Historical Context' presented to the United Movement for Democracy in Kenya (Umoja) in London in 1987 can be read [here](#).

Additional writings by Nazmi cover the presses and journalists, an historical overview of colonial India and Kenya and class formation in the South Asian community. Nazmi was also an accomplished Kiswahili speaker and had started an Introductory Reader identifying the freedom fighters in each Kenyan ethnic community. He was an active member of the December Twelfth Movement, acted in Ngugi's plays and wrote two books and liberation poetry.

He was a member of the Uvumbuzi Club and, ironically, it was while cycling on a Bicycle Awareness Campaign in Nairobi on 1 July 1990 that he was hit by a bus and passed away.