

MWISHOWE Neera Kapila

by Dr Norman Aselmeyer and Neera Kapur Dromsom

I knew Neera Kapila for many years as we met often at the Arya Samaj where she and her husband Suresh were fervent members. Moreover, her mother and mine were close friends, belonging to the same group of ladies who met often at each other's house to have lunch and enjoy a meal together. Neera Kapila taught at the State House Girls' School, and my sister had her as a teacher. Over the years, she started taking an active role in movements, political, and social. She attended reform movements for a change in the Kenyan constitution, for example. Unfortunately, after a very sad car accident that took her beloved daughter Ruchi, and later, the death of her husband Suresh, Neera Kapila started losing interest in life. But her legacy, the important book **Race, Rail & Society**, will remain with us.

Neera Kapila was surprised no one had yet investigated the role of South Asians in the construction of the Kenya-Uganda Railway. She dreamed of filling this gap and bearing witness to the people whose sweat and lives were closely linked to the 'iron horse.' After many years of dedicated research, she finished writing a book that will be remembered for generations.

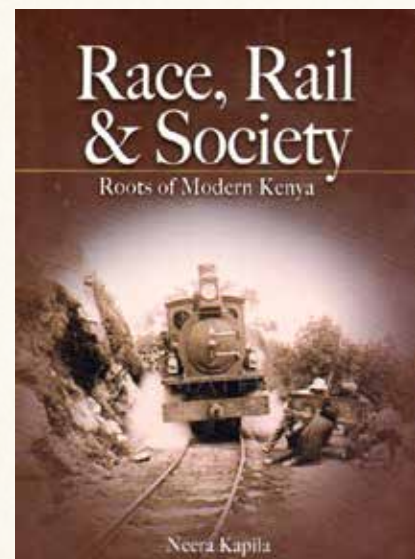
In her book **Race, Rail & Society**, published by Kenway Publications in 2009, Neera Kapila goes beyond anything written about the railways in Kenya before. She visited and worked in archives on three continents, unearthed and unveiled

previously unheard voices, and collected photographs that brought the story to life. There were detailed statistics about the Indian workers, how much they were paid per day, how many hours they worked, what kinds of meals and rations they received, their clothing, bedding, the water supplies. Her book immediately became the main reference point for scholars and interested readers around the world who shared her interest in colonial railways. But her contribution went beyond that. Ngugi wa Thiong'o once stated that "the railway was the most important event in the modern history of Kenya." Neera Kapila's book lives up to this claim. It not only gave South Asian railway workers a long-desired and admirably written history, but also made her a biographer of modern Kenya.

Neera Kapila passed away on 21 July 2022. She was

the beloved wife of the late Suresh Kapila and loving mother of the late Ruchi Kapila. She was daughter of the late Shree Sukhdev and Satya Kent.

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*Neera Kapila's authoritative work **Rail, Race & Society**, explored the role of South Asians in building the railway that formed the backbone of modern Kenya.*



Neera Kapila at the launch of her book in 2009.