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Qabula, Hlatshwayo and Malange are familiar names in Natal's worker movement. They are increasingly becoming familiar names nationwide as their reputation as "Worker izimbongi" is spreading with every major issue in the country. By now thousands of people have witnessed their powerful oral poetry at mass-meetings and at worker and community gatherings. They are part and parcel of an exciting and militant cultural movement which is daily becoming central to the lives of working people in South Africa: indeed, a "Black Mamba Rising" in dignity.

This book gathers together Qabula’s, Hlatshwayo’s and Malange’s poetry from the beginnings of 1984 to the launch of COSATU in November 1985, it captures the oral poetry from the time Qabula started wandering through worker gatherings with his “Praise Poem to Fosatu” to the time when he and Hlatshwayo orated their joint composition, Tears of a Crafter. In between these two major compositions, the poems here, sometimes in short and harsh lines, sometimes in complex Nguni symbolism, capture the power, the commitment and the pride of the progressive labour movement.

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This book looks at the history of Indian workers from 1860 to the present. It tries to show how the actions of the bosses and the laws of the government have created and reinforced divisions between Indian and African workers. There were times when the workers were able to unite together, but more often Indian and African workers were involved in separate struggles. In the days of early industry Indian workers were militant and organised. The bosses then used African workers against Indian workers. Today, in the 1980’s, it is the African workers who have come together in strong unions and a militant federation, COSATU. Most Indian workers are not involved in these unions.

These experiences are looked at, and where possible this is done through the words of workers and organisers who try to understand the divisions and the way forward to unity.

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