

Women Writers Want to Be Heard



COSAW (Natal)
Women's Forum
Launch

"We women writers want to be heard, we want to be published, we want to hear each other, we want to write about our issues!" - Jenni Karlsson, (COSAW)

Working Towards Equal Representation

"Women became aware that the men always seemed to hold the floor and take the lead. And we said no! No more! We got together, we passed the resolution to have a Women's Forum, and work towards 50% representation by women at each level of Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) structures," said Jenni Karlsson, poet and executive member of COSAW, at the historic Natal launch of the Women's Forum of the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW).

Many People Attended

The launch took place on 24 September 1989 in Pietermaritzburg. It was attended by worker, youth and women's organizations, as well as writers from the local structures of COSAW. The national Women's Forum of COSAW is still to be launched.

Mewa Ramgobin, one of the speakers, and chairperson of COSAW in Natal, explained that a woman writer is any woman who is able to write or deal with the spoken word. He said that part of our historical duty is not only to recognise but also to encourage our oral poets.

"We in the liberatory movement are going to guard against all forms of oppression. We as South Africans can never be free as long as we keep half the population, our women, in bondage. And it is within that context that we look at the role of women writers," Mewa said. "We welcome the Women's Forum of COSAW!"

Tumi Mofokeng, poet and executive member of COSAW in the Transvaal, said: "The winds of change are blowing all over South Africa, even here in COSAW, which is why we have launched the Women's Forum."

Black Women Must Write

Tumi spoke about the issues facing women as writers. She said that black women writers must write about the customs they do not agree with, because of the negative and destructive effects some of these customs have on their lives.

To show what she meant she read out one of her poems which she had just recently written. The words 'with my baby on my back' had been going around in her head. Then she wrote:

With my baby on my back
Day in and day out I toil
with my baby on my back
Hour after hour I count undone chores
I'll have to stop at 6pm
to prepare meals
with my baby on my back.

I listen to all cries of hunger
only one long lullaby makes my baby sleep
And he, the man of the house stays
Wide awake
watching me toil around like a race horse
waiting for his moment to give a helping hand

Only at that time of retirement
he helps to remove my baby from my back
because now is the time to make love
The only chore I do with my baby
not on my back.

Tumi feels strongly that women must be brave enough to write about the problems they face in their homes. She said: "Let us bring up our children without treating girls and boys differently. Because then when males have grown up, they will give their wives a chance."

"Let us express our true feelings about the things which keep us down. If we don't speak for ourselves, men will accept that things are okay."

"What is very encouraging," said Tumi, "is that COSAW is applying the resolution and the men are hearing us. So it is a step forward. The men within COSAW have accepted the fact that women have to play the role of making themselves heard, and we are being given the chance!"

The launch of the COSAW Natal Women's Forum ended on a high note, with women writers reading and sharing their creative work with an appreciative audience. Everyone left with a feeling of hope and excitement. Now the opportunity had come for women to tell their stories and make their voices heard●

Forward with COSAW Women's Forum!

Drawing by Sanna

