

Helina Hookoomsing bags the Edourd Maunick Poetry Prize for 2018-2019 for her poem *Toupi Leksi*

On 19th June 2019, at the State House in Réduit, in the presence of the Honourable Acting President of the Republic of Mauritius, Immedia held the prize giving ceremony for its 2nd edition of the Edouard Maunick Poetry Prize (2018-2019). This year's theme was 'Cyclone'.

Miss Helina Hookoomsing, Senior Lecturer, Mauritius Institute of Education, bagged the first prize from among 146 entrants, and 259 entries. Her poem *Toupi Leksi*, the only multilingual entry, was selected as the winning poem. It is a poem about childhood souvenirs, immigrant identities, and love; as well as the extraordinary spiraling rush of finding joy in simple things and the emotional 'cyclone' that is generated within oneself when evoking a very old and precious memory.

Rama Poonoosamy, Director of Immedia, which organised this poetry competition, revealed that it's during a lunch with Edouard Maunick in France that they chose the theme for the year 2018-19. "The word 'cyclone' is vast and can be linked to meteorology, as well as social and political situations". Marie Maunick, sister of Edouard Maunick, remarked that her brother "has always been a 'cyclonic' poet; he's never been afraid of voicing his opinions".

The competition was open to Mauritians of all ages living in Mauritius or abroad. Participants were welcome to enter as many poems – in English, French or Mauritian Creole – as they wished, provided that all the poems were original texts. Poems were signed using a pseudonym so that they could be read and judged anonymously by a jury of writers. The jury consisted of Shenaz Patel and Kavinien Karupudayyan, with the eminent Mauritian writer Ananda Devi as Chair.

Toupi Leksi

By Helina Hookoomsing

A forgotten whirlpool spinning in a lychee seed
A deluge of childhood
lost in blue light waves and screens,
My father's long fair fingers, swift, nimble,
Weaving my fascinated laughter,
My innocent ignorance of working-class poverty,
The price of fruit and toys
is balanced on a scale of one or the other,
Tipping into tissue-thin budgets, stretched
across tired bones, sore muscles, an immigrant's resourcefulness,
Agile fingers pressing toothpicks
into the symbolism of love and happiness, an old souvenir
zanfan nepli kone sa,
I wait eight years in silence to understand his words

Enn toupi leksi – the music begins,
A Sufi dance across our table
The madness of the whirling world in miniature
Toupitoupitoupitoupitoupi I whisper,
Over and over and over and over,
Savouring the flavour of the moment my lips touch
to puff out the second syllable, turning back on itself
like a chant , the seed swirls round
Destinée à tourner sur elle-même,
Chasing its own shadow,
Spiralling an infinity between my father and I,
Each swirl blowing soft fragrances
of my mother's frugality and inexhaustible love

A solar system of tropical fruit-stones whirling winds across the ceiling
Orbiting the tender-sun of our tiny home,
Dervishes floating in the silence of this joy,
In the trees that sway and shake, their leaves shivering,
Our windows trembling, lychees tumbling away,
A flurry of seeds, now a shallow dream-filled sleep,
I remember this – feverish gust, wild nostalgia
Playing in the tears that swell, memories rush