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Mathematician wins prestigious \$10 000 prize

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An international prize for mathematics has been won by Ramdorai Sujatha, an Indian woman, according to a report on the Science and Development Network website (www.scidev.net). The \$10 000 prize is named after Srinivasa Ramanujan, the Indian mathematics genius, a college dropout who ended up at the University of Cambridge in England during World War One.

His ideas became the underpinning for the digital revolution before he died at the age of 33, worn out by wartime food deprivation and northern hemisphere winters.

A movie about Ramanujan's passion for mathematics and his friendship with a cricket-loving university don who recognised his talent is being produced by Stephen Fry, the British actor-writer and Dev Benegal, the renowned Indian director. "For me, Ramanujan's work and ideas are the DNA of what powers digital technology is today," Benegal told Soutik Biswas of *BBC News* in Delhi.

"When your automated teller machines divide and arrange your money before coughing it up, they are all using Ramanujan's partition theory." The winner of the Ramanujan prize, was Ramdorai Sujatha, an associate professor from the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Mumbai. She was awarded the prize at a ceremony at the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy.

Ramanujan only prize honouring mathematicians

The Centre was founded by Abdus Salam, the Pakistan-born physicist and Nobel prizewinner, who once said "scientific thought is the common heritage of mankind". The Ramanujan Prize is the only international prize honouring mathematicians from developing countries, including those in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

The award given every year to a mathematician under 45 is a source of inspiration for mathematicians from developing countries, Sujatha told the *BBC Online*. The website said Sujatha specialises in "arithmetic of algebraic varieties" and has made substantial contributions to a mathematical framework known as Iwasawa theory.

While she does not think that being a woman has hindered her career, Sujatha believes that scientific policies could be more sensitive to the problems that women face. She said that women in developing countries could face career obstacles although she had encountered none herself. There is no Nobel Prize for mathematics, which has led to the creation of a number of prizes elsewhere to fill this gap.

"In the last few years there have been a flurry of various prizes instituted for mathematical research, but none that was addressed to support mathematics in developing nations," Professor Sujatha told the *BBC Online*. "It is an important recognition and serves well to integrate mathematics globally. It will certainly inspire working mathematicians in the developing nations."

"Scientific development is part of the overall development and the increased interconnectedness of the world today implies that it is dangerous for all of us to leave any part of it too far behind," KR Sreenivasan, the director of the International Centre for Theoretical Physics, said at the awards ceremony.

African mathematicians still lacking behind

The prize has never yet been won by a mathematician in Africa. The 2005 Srinivasa Ramanujan Prize was won by Marcelo Viana of the Institute for Pure and Applied Mathematics in Brazil.

Nominations and two supporting letters for the 2007 Srinivasa Ramanujan mathematics prize, worth \$10 000, must be made by July 31 2007 by contacting director@ictp.it. The International Centre for Theoretical Physics has been based in Italy since 1964 and operates under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) and the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The Ramanujan Prize is funded by the Norwegian Academy of Sciences and Letters - the equivalent of the Academy of Science of South Africa in Pretoria/Tshwane - with the help of the International Mathematical Union and the Niels Henrik Abel Memorial Fund, named after an extraordinary but poverty-stricken young Norwegian mathematician. Abel died of tuberculosis in his twenties but is considered one of the founding fathers of modern algebra for his achievements. www.SciDev.Net

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