

Indian physicist wins Lars Onsager prize

The American Physical Society (APS) has awarded the prestigious Lars Onsager prize for 2009 to physicist Sriram Shastry of India, who is currently a professor at the University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC) in the US.

The Lars Onsager prize was established in 1993 to recognise outstanding work in statistical physics and is open to scientists of all nations regardless of geographical location. Shastry, who earned his first physics degree from Nagpur University, is the first Indian scientist to win this award.

Shastry studies the complicated interactions of strongly correlated systems, of which the best known are high-temperature superconductors.

High-temperature superconductors are easier to cool and may eventually replace the low-temperature superconductors currently used to create the magnetic fields for magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machines in hospitals and magnetic levitation trains.

A UCSC press release said that 'in addition to explaining these superconductors, Shastry's work has advanced the understanding of thermoelectric materials, which may someday be used to capture waste heat and convert it to useable energy'.

In its citation, the American Physical Society said the Onsager prize recognises Shastry 'for pioneering work in developing and solving models of strongly correlated systems and for wide-ranging contributions to phenomenological many-body theory, which have advanced the analysis of experiments on strongly correlated materials'.

Shastry earned his B.Sc. in physics from Nagpur University, his M.Sc. from the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, and his Ph.D. from the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai.

He joined the UCSC faculty in 2003 and was elected an APS fellow in 2006. In 2000, he was elected a fellow of the Academy of Sciences for the Developing World.

Shastry will receive the \$15,000 prize amount and a certificate at the APS meeting in Pittsburgh in March 2009.

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