

Laureate fellow views a nonlinear life

JILL ROWBOTHAM THE AUSTRALIAN JULY 31, 2012 12:00AM

NALINI Joshi, one of 17 Australian Research Council Laureate Fellows announced yesterday, is looking forward to a solid bloc of time to concentrate on her research, undistracted by the usual demands on senior academics.

"It frees me up in all kinds of ways," the University of Sydney professor of applied mathematics said of the \$3.18 million grant.

"I was head of school, for example and I have been playing quite a few other types of roles which are expected really, if you want to be a good citizen in the academic and profession setting," Professor Joshi said.

"This gives me a kind of unique power to set my own directions, to say this is important, so...I'm going to concentrate on just doing research for a while." She will pursue her interest in creating mathematical models for nonlinear systems.

Burmese-born Joshi moved to Australia when she was 12 and entered university keen to study astronomy and astrophysics.

"Like many people who entered science I was inspired by the idea that I could become an astronaut and understand the structure of the universe. But I discovered that really what I was trying to do was understand the deeper structures.

"Being able to understand how gravitation worked, how black holes radiated radio waves, all that required some rather subtle mathematical knowledge and I realised that really the universe I needed to understand was in my own mind first of all. I decided mathematics was where the real problems were."

Joshi is recipient of the Georgina Sweet Australian Laureate Fellowship which includes additional funding to help her mentor women in science.

"My plan is to hold mentoring activities where I'm going to try and bring together early career researchers and women researchers with the more senior people who have gone through the many -- what seem to be insurmountable -- difficulties that lie in front of person when they are a younger researcher.

"To give them a view of how they overcame those problems in their lives and their careers. I hope (it will) show the younger people that there is a way through, that you can be a wife and a mother, you can go on sabbatical, you can beat the 'imposter syndrome', you can develop in self-confidence by doing the things that are important to you as a scientist or mathematician."

She said the impostor syndrome, the belief that "whatever success comes your way is due to either luck or something that was a mistake on the part of the people who are making the judgements" is widespread among many researchers, not just women.

"But perhaps it's had more impact on younger women researchers because I think they have less of the support network that allows them to get through it," she said.



Nalini Joshi, University of Sydney professor of applied mathematics and 2012 ARC Laureate Fellow. Source: Supplied
