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Lectures on Solar Physics

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Preface

The idea for these lecture series arose at a Workshop on solar physics which was held at the Inter University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA), Pune/India in December 2000. This Workshop aimed to present a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of solar physics for interested students and faculty in other branches of astrophysics. It was intended to show that this field, concentrating on our closest star, is a vital and exciting field of research. For this purpose a number of comprehensive reviews were organised which assumed that the audience would have only a basic physics background but had no prior knowledge about solar physics. The set of lectures covered topics ranging from the solar core to the convection zone, the photosphere, chromosphere, and corona and extending to the solar wind in the interplanetary medium.

During and after the Workshop there was much enthusiasm for this form of presentation and it was felt that these lectures, augmented by including the latest research findings in the field, would be beneficial to a much larger audience. Thus the plan for this book originated which could be realised thanks to the publishers, Springer Verlag.

There are 9 articles based on the lectures given at the Workshop. The article by Chitre on “Overview of Solar Physics” gives an introduction to the whole variety of phenomena of solar physics, the problems and their solutions and salient results. The article on “Instrumentation and Observational techniques related to Solar Physics” by Bhatnagar describes in detail the principles of solar instrumentation normally used to take simple white, monochromatic and spectroscopic observations. Practical methods to measure important basic parameters, like area, position and the classification of sunspots are described in detail. Antha’s article on “Solar Interior and Seismology” describes the solar interior, the technique of helioseismology and how this new technique allows a determination of the internal structure and dynamics of the Sun and constrains the theories of stellar structure, evolution and angular momentum transport. Ambastha’s article on “The Active and Explosive Sun” gives an overview of the highly time-dependent phenomena in the photosphere, chromosphere and corona of the Sun and provides some theoretical models of the solar flares. Hasan’s article on “Magnetic Flux Tubes and Activity on the Sun” discusses the generation, storage and emergence of magnetic fields in the form of small-scale flux tubes and examines their role in heating of the chromosphere. Ventakrishnan’s article on “Solar Magnetic Fields” gives a theoretical overview of the generation of
magnetic fields by the dynamo mechanism, the general magnetic field topology and how the magnetic fields are measured. Ulmschneider’s contribution on “The Physics of Chromospheres and Coronae” discusses why all stars like the Sun have hot outer chromospheric and coronal layers. It identifies the heating mechanisms and dynamical processes which take place both in the presence and absence of magnetic fields. The article by Dwivedi on “The Solar Corona” gives a general overview of the solar corona, how it is observed and what the physical processes leading to its formation are. Manoharan’s contribution on “The Solar Wind” finally describes the generation and measurement of the solar wind derived from in situ observations by spacecraft and interplanetary scintillation studies.

We hope that by reading these lectures, interested people, amateurs, graduate and postgraduate students will be motivated to take up solar physics as an area of research, and share our excitement about the wonders of our nearest star – the Sun.

We are thankful to the Inter University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, Pune for organising and hosting this Workshop on Solar Physics.

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## Contents

### Overview of Solar Physics

*S. M. Chitre* ................................................................. 1  
1 Introduction ............................................................... 1  
2 Composition and Structure of the Sun ................................. 3  
  2.1 Equations of Stellar Structure .................................... 4  
  2.2 The Standard Solar Model .......................................... 7  
3 Probes of the Sun’s Interior ............................................ 10  
  3.1 The Solar Neutrino Problem ....................................... 10  
  3.2 Helioseismology ..................................................... 14  
  3.3 Rotation Rate in the Solar Interior ............................... 18  
4 Magnetically Controlled Solar Phenomena ............................ 20  
References ........................................................................ 24

### Instrumentation and Observational Techniques in Solar Astronomy

*Arvind Bhatnagar* .............................................................. 27  
1 Introduction .................................................................... 27  
2 How to Observe the Sun? .................................................... 28  
  2.1 Observing the Photosphere ........................................... 29  
  2.2 Observation of the Chromosphere .................................. 32  
  2.3 Observation of the Corona ............................................ 32  
3 Solar Instrumentation ....................................................... 34  
  3.1 Solar Telescopes ......................................................... 34  
  3.2 Coronographs ............................................................ 39  
  3.3 Spectrographs, Spectrohelioscopes and Spectroheliographs .. 39  
  3.4 Narrow Band Filters .................................................. 48  
  3.5 Solar Image Guider ..................................................... 52  
4 Solar Observations ............................................................. 53  
  4.1 Solar Seeing ............................................................. 54  
  4.2 Sunspot Observations ................................................... 55  
  4.3 Development of Sunspots and Sunspot Groups .................. 59  
  4.4 Classification of Sunspots and Sunspot Groups ................. 61  
  4.5 Sunspot Number ......................................................... 64  
  4.6 Position Determination of Solar Features ....................... 67  
5 Solar Magnetic Fields ....................................................... 73  
  5.1 Sunspot Magnetic Field ................................................. 73
VIII Contents

5.2 General Magnetic Field ............................................. 75
5.3 Velocity Field Observation ........................................ 77
5.4 Leighton’s Spectroheliographic Technique for 2-D Velocity and Magnetic Field maps ........................................... 78
5.5 Vector Magnetic Field ................................................ 78
6 Solar Data From the Internet ......................................... 78
References ................................................................. 79

Solar Interior and Seismology
H. M. Antia ............................................................... 81
1 Introduction ............................................................ 81
2 Observations of Solar Oscillations .................................. 82
3 Properties of Solar Oscillations ..................................... 84
4 Seismic Inferences of the Solar Structure ......................... 92
   4.1 Inversion Techniques ............................................ 93
   4.2 Inversion Results ................................................. 96
   4.3 Inversion for Temperature and Chemical Composition ..... 101
5 Rotation Rate in the Solar Interior .................................. 105
   5.1 Inversion for Rotation Rate ..................................... 105
   5.2 Inversion Results ................................................. 109
   5.3 The tachocline ................................................... 112
   5.4 Meridional Flow ................................................ 114
6 Asphericity in Solar Structure ...................................... 115
7 Temporal Variations in the Solar Interior ......................... 116
   7.1 Temporal Variations of the Solar Radius ..................... 117
   7.2 Temporal Variations of the Rotation Rate ................... 119
8 Summary ............................................................... 121
References ............................................................... 122

The Active and Explosive Sun
Ashok Ambastha ....................................................... 128
1 Introduction ........................................................ 128
2 The Signposts of Solar Activity .................................... 132
3 Centres of Activity in the Solar Atmosphere – The Sunspots .. 134
4 Sunspots and Solar Rotation ....................................... 136
5 The 11 Year Solar Activity Cycle .................................. 139
   5.1 Mapping Sunspot Positions During Activity Cycles: The Butterfly Diagram ................................................. 140
   5.2 Changing Face of the Sun over the Solar Cycle .......... 142
   5.3 Solar Activity Cycles of Long Periods ....................... 143
   5.4 Babcock’s Model of the Solar Activity and the Magnetic Cycle ... 144
6 Explosive, Eruptive Phenomena on Sun .......................... 146
   6.1 Solar Flares ..................................................... 146
   6.2 Flare Classification ............................................. 152
   6.3 Standard Flare Model and the Main Phases of Flares ...... 154
   6.4 Fundamental Questions about Flares ......................... 154
Contents

6.5 Potential and Force-free Magnetic Fields ........................................ 156
6.6 Solar Corona!e Plasma Conditions and Magnetic Reconnection ........ 159
6.7 A Flare Model as Inferred from the Recent Observations .......... 160
6.8 Solar Quakes Produced by Large Flares ........................................... 162
6.9 Eruptive Prominences, and Filaments ........................................... 162
6.10 Coronal Mass Ejections (CMEs) – Large Scale Eruptions of Mag-
netic Clouds from the Sun .......................................................... 168
References ....................................................................................... 172

Magnetic Flux Tubes and Activity on the Sun
S. S. Hasan ....................................................................................... 175
1 Introduction ................................................................................... 175
2 Magnetic Fields in the Solar Interior and Flux Emergence ......... 176
  2.1 Solar Dynamo ........................................................................... 176
  2.2 Seat of the Dynamo ................................................................. 177
  2.3 Flux Emergence ..................................................................... 178
3 Nature of the Surface Magnetic Field ........................................ 180
  3.1 Formation of Intense Flux Tubes in the Photosphere ............ 181
  3.2 Thermal Structure of Intense Flux Tubes .............................. 187
4 Dynamical Processes and Heating of the Magnetic Chromosphere . 190
  4.1 Longitudinal and Transverse Waves in Flux Tubes ............. 192
  4.2 Linear Model ......................................................................... 193
  4.3 Chromospheric Heating .......................................................... 194
  4.4 Nonlinear Results ................................................................ 195
5 Summary ....................................................................................... 199
References ....................................................................................... 200

Solar Magnetic Fields
P. Venkatakrishnan ........................................................................ 204
1 Introduction ................................................................................... 204
2 Magnetohydrodynamic Approximation in Stellar Plasmas ...... 205
3 Generation of Magnetic Fields ..................................................... 207
  3.1 Turbulent Dynamo and Mean Field Magnetohydrodynamics .... 208
  3.2 Dynamo in the Overshoot Layer .............................................. 213
  3.3 Babcock-Leighton Picture and Hybrid Models .................... 214
  3.4 Inputs from Helioseismology ................................................. 215
4 Force Free Equilibria, Topology, Reconnection and Flares ....... 216
5 Measurement of the Solar Magnetic Field ................................ 219
  5.1 The Zeeman Effect ................................................................. 219
  5.2 The Hanle Effect .................................................................. 221
  5.3 The Stokes Parameters .......................................................... 222
  5.4 Subsystems for Polarimetry .................................................... 223
  5.5 Conversion of Polarisation Maps into Magnetograms .......... 230
6 Concluding Remarks .................................................................... 231
References ....................................................................................... 231
## Contents

### The Physics of Chromospheres and Coronal Emissions

*P. Ulmschneider*

1. Introduction, What are Chromospheres and Coronal Emissions? .................................. 234
2. Heating Mechanisms .................................................. 236
3. Hydrodynamic Heating Mechanisms .................................. 238
4. Magnetic Heating Mechanisms ........................................ 241
   4.1 Mode-coupling .................................................. 244
   4.2 Resonance Heating ............................................. 246
   4.3 Turbulent Heating ............................................... 247
   4.4 Compressional Viscous Heating ................................. 248
   4.5 Ion-cyclotron Resonance Heating ............................... 249
   4.6 Landau Damping ............................................... 249
   4.7 Resonant Absorption ........................................... 249
   4.8 Phase-mixing .................................................. 250
   4.9 Reconnection in Current Sheets ................................ 250
5. Acoustic Energy Generation ........................................... 254
6. Theoretical Chromospheres .......................................... 257
7. Semi-empirical Chromosphere Models ............................... 261
8. Extremely Time-dependent Chromospheres ........................... 262
9. Realistic Chromospheres ............................................ 270
10. Magnetic Chromospheres ........................................... 275
11. Conclusions .......................................................... 280
References .............................................................. 280

### The Solar Corona

*Bhola N. Dhivedi*

1. Introduction .......................................................... 284
2. History of Coronal Studies ......................................... 287
3. X-rays and Ultraviolet Emission from the Solar Atmosphere ........ 289
4. Coronal Heating ..................................................... 292
   4.1 Coronal Heating by Nanoflares ................................ 295
   4.2 Coronal Heating by Waves ..................................... 297
   4.3 Fieldwork ........................................................ 298
5. Conclusions .......................................................... 300
References .............................................................. 300

### The Solar Wind

*P. K. Manoharan*

1. Introduction .......................................................... 302
2. The Hot Solar Corona .................................................. 302
   2.1 Coronal Magnetic Field ........................................ 303
   2.2 Coronal Heating ............................................... 305
3. Coronal Expansion/Solar Wind ....................................... 306
4. Interplanetary Magnetic Field ....................................... 308
5. Solar Wind Measuring Techniques ................................... 308
   5.1 Interplanetary Scintillation .................................. 309
Contents

6 Solar Wind in the Inner Heliosphere .................................. 313
   6.1 Quasi-Stationary Solar Wind .................................... 314
   6.2 Radial Evolution of the Quasi-stationary Wind ................. 315
   6.3 Latitudinal Variations ........................................... 317
   6.4 Density Turbulence Spectrum .................................... 319
7 Solar Wind Transients .................................................. 321
   7.1 Co-rotating Interaction Regions ................................. 321
   7.2 Coronal Mass Ejections ......................................... 323
References ........................................................................ 327

Index ............................................................................. 331
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