



*An Introduction to*

# Space Exploration

For general awareness of the beginners

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# Table of Contents

Preface.....	3
What is Space? There may not be a unique answer.....	5
The Karman Line .....	7
Space Research and Exploration.....	8
Modelling, Simulation and Observation in Space Research.....	9
Earth.....	10
Geosphere .....	11
Biosphere .....	12
The neutral atmosphere around Earth.....	15
The ionosphere.....	17
Geodynamo and Geomagnetism.....	19
Ionosphere and Geomagnetism.....	21
Sun and the Near-Earth Space .....	21
The Interplanetary Magnetic Field (IMF).....	23
Solar Flares, Coronal Mass Ejections and Geomagnetic Storms .....	25
Space Weather: How different it is from ‘Weather’ .	29
The Solar System .....	31
Origin and Components of the Solar System.....	32
Planets in the Solar System.....	33
Beyond the Solar System .....	37
The Milky Way.....	37
The Bigger Picture .....	38

Are we Alone? .....	41
Techniques of Space Research and Exploration.....	42
Overview of Different Techniques .....	43
Importance of Space-Based Observations .....	45
<i>In-Situ</i> and Remote Sensing Observation Techniques .....	47
Messengers in Remote Sensing Observations .....	49
Multi-wavelength Observations.....	52
Information from the Polarisation of Electromagnetic waves.....	55
Platforms for Space Exploration.....	60
How to Configure a Space Science Mission.....	62
Planetary Protection .....	65
Space Infrastructure .....	67
Journey of India's Space Exploration.....	68
Formative Years.....	68
Birth of ISRO.....	69
India's Space-based exploration .....	69
Major Verticals in Space Exploration.....	72
Planetary Exploration.....	72
Solar physics, Heliophysics, and Space Weather .....	74
Astronomy and Astrophysics.....	76
Aeronomy and Space Weather Impact .....	79
Repository of Indian Space Science Data.....	80

Ground Based Solar and Astronomy Observatories in India .....	81
Technologies Associated .....	83
Multi-disciplinary Nature of Space Exploration.....	85
Applications of Physical Sciences and Technology .	85
Applications of Biology .....	87
Astrobiology .....	89
Astrochemistry .....	90
System-thinking: The Undercurrent of Unity .....	91
International Cooperation in Space Exploration.....	95
Summary .....	98

## Preface

Exploration of space has always fascinated the humankind. The exploration began with bare-eye observation of the sky during the pre-telescope era, then came the telescope, and then, one after the other, humankind innovated ways for observing the space with several other techniques. Then came the space era, opening up the opportunity for exploration of the space and celestial objects from the deep space, where there is no intervention of atmosphere, dust, aerosol or cloud.

Going to space is not easy; one has to break the barrier of the gravitational binding potential of the Earth. Lots of technology get into the process of accessing the space. The story doesn't end there; one needs stable orbits for conducting sustained space-based observations, ground stations to communicate the data from space to the Earth, sending commands to space, and lot more. While these technological advances take place, scientists put more demand for innovative ways to explore the space. The ever-lasting quest of the humankind to comprehend the vastness continues to motivate the study of the different facets of space science and technology.

I got the opportunity to interact with students of various levels from several schools, colleges and universities. Interacting with them, I felt the need to present to them a holistic view of space science exploration in a systematic way. Otherwise, students feel space science is all about Black Holes!

And hence, this booklet.

This booklet is composed primarily to generate basic awareness in the young minds about the different facets of space science and exploration, in a systematic manner. The topics addressed in this booklet span a wide spectrum, so as to present the holistic perspective of the subject to the students. Each topic, although deserves discussions at depth and breadth, has been consciously kept to the basic level, in order not to load the reader with the specifics of any particular aspect. It is expected that this booklet will also serve the purpose of making the students aware of the basic components of space science research, and appreciate the cross-disciplinary nature of space exploration, and the importance of system-level thinking, transcending the barriers of the individual subjects they study in their curriculum.

This booklet is an original composition of scientific facts, by the author. It contains only academic information, and public domain material, and not any confidential information.

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## What is Space? There may not be a unique answer

**J**ust ask ten people what they mean by the term ‘Space’, and, quite surprisingly, you may end up receiving ten different types of answers. I must say, all the ten answers you received may be correct in their own merit.

It all depends on the perspective. Scientists from different backgrounds perceive the notion of space through the lens of their respective fields, bringing unique perspectives to its understanding. As for example, an atmospheric scientist views space as the region beyond the Earth's atmosphere where the interactions between celestial bodies and the effects of solar radiation occur. They study how space weather and phenomena such as solar flares impact our planet's atmospheric conditions.

For a mechanical engineer, space presents itself as a challenging environment with harsh conditions. They focus on designing spacecraft and technologies that can withstand extreme temperatures, vacuum, and microgravity, ensuring the functionality and safety of systems in space.

A nuclear physicist investigates space from the perspective of fundamental particles and their interactions. They explore the cosmic rays, particles from

space that provide insights into high-energy processes occurring in the universe, and study phenomena like nuclear fusion that powers stars.

Theoretical physicists delve into the abstract and mathematical aspects of space. They explore the nature of space-time, gravitational forces, and cosmological models to understand the universe's structure, its expansion, and concepts like black holes and dark matter.

Even the space scientists themselves differ in opinion where should the realm of 'space' start. That all depends on the physical phenomena they are interested to study. While these perspectives differ, they contribute to a holistic understanding of space, combining the physical, mathematical, and conceptual aspects. By integrating insights from multiple disciplines, scientists gain a deeper comprehension of the vast and intricate universe we inhabit.

For practical reasons, in the beginning of the twentieth century, it was necessary to distinguish between the 'sky' and 'space'. We have to remember that in the beginning of the twentieth century, the Wright brothers invented airplane. The principle of flying an airplane primarily necessitated the interaction between air atoms and molecules with the structure of the airplane, to generate an upward force called 'lift', which is necessary to keep the plane floating against gravity. That was the beginning of the subject aerodynamics.

## The Karman Line

In the early 20th century, the Hungarian-American aerospace engineer Von Kármán conducted ground-breaking research in aerodynamics and the physics of flight. He recognized that as an aircraft ascends into the atmosphere, the air density gradually decreases, tapers down, until it becomes indistinguishable from the vacuum of space. Von Kármán proposed that the boundary between the atmosphere and space should be defined by an altitude at which the air is too thin to support conventional aerodynamic flight. Thus, the concept of the Karman line came into existence. The Karman line is an imaginary boundary at an altitude of 100 km above the mean sea level, that defines the boundary between Earth's atmosphere and outer space. Von Kármán played a significant role in establishing this concept and its importance in distinguishing between the realms of aeronautics and astronautics.

At the altitude of 100 km from the mean sea level of the Earth, the atmosphere is thinner by seven orders of magnitude as compared with the density of the atmosphere near the mean sea level, and the speed required for an aircraft to generate enough lift to maintain flight becomes impractical. Instead, any space-vehicle at that altitude or higher must rely on different propulsion systems to manoeuvre and maintain orbit.

The Karman line, therefore, serves as a demarcation between aeronautics and astronautics. Below this boundary, aeronautics deals with the study and

engineering of aircraft that operate within Earth's atmosphere, including planes, helicopters, and drones. Above the Karman line, astronautics focuses on spacecraft, satellites, and exploration beyond Earth's atmosphere.

Von Kármán's contribution in defining the Karman line has been crucial in differentiating the two realms and guiding the development of aerospace technology. It has become a widely accepted standard and aids in understanding the distinct challenges and requirements faced in aeronautical and astronautical endeavours.

## Space Research and Exploration

Usually, the terms 'space research' and 'space exploration' are used interchangeably. Both refer to studying the outer space. However, a bit of in-depth thought may bring out a subtle distinction between the two. Although both the terms refer to the study of the outer space, we may reserve the term 'space research' for that, while 'space exploration' would mean the observational aspect of the space research. Space exploration may, therefore, be looked upon as a subset (or special case) of space research. The exploration of space may happen through ground based and/or space-based observations. Apart from observations, formulating theories about how the Universe works is also space research.

## Modelling, Simulation and Observation in Space Research

The field of space science exploration relies heavily on the interconnectedness of modelling, simulation, and observation, forming a dynamic cycle that continually enhances our understanding of the cosmos. In the realm of modelling, theoretical approaches, such as physics-based explanations provide foundational frameworks for comprehending celestial phenomena. Additionally, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning-based modelling, driven by Big Data Analytics (usage of huge amount of data pertaining to a physical phenomenon or any aspect of a celestial body to find a pattern in them), has emerged as a powerful tool for extracting patterns and insights from vast datasets, offering a complementary perspective.

Simulation, a crucial component, encompasses both computer and laboratory simulations. Computer simulations digitally replicate complex space scenarios, aiding in the prediction of celestial events and the behaviour of astronomical objects. Laboratory simulations, on the other hand, recreate space conditions pertinent to specific studies, providing controlled environments for in-depth analysis.

Observation plays a pivotal role, encompassing both space-based and ground-based methodologies. Space telescopes and observatories offer unique vantage points for unobstructed views, while ground-based observatories contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the

cosmos. Laboratory studies of meteoroids and analysis of returned samples further enrich our knowledge base, offering insights into extra-terrestrial materials.

This triad of modelling, simulation, and observation functions as a continuous cycle. Models are refined and validated through simulations, aligning them with real-world observations. Observations, in turn, inform and improve models and simulations, creating a symbiotic relationship that propels scientific discovery. This iterative process is fundamental to advancing our comprehension of space, fostering a holistic and evolving understanding of the universe.

At this juncture, we have to remember that all the space research we do, are from the perspective of the Earth. Thus, our discussion on space should start from an understanding of the Earth.

## Earth

We, the Earthlings, study space, in general, from the perspective of Earth. This necessitates understanding the Earth and its uniqueness, along with its bulk nature. Even the phenomena in the interior of the Earth have significant roles to play to shape the near-space environment. In this context, it is necessary to understand the Earth's geosphere and biosphere, before we move on to discuss the space around the Earth.

## Geosphere

The Earth's geosphere refers to the solid part of the Earth, including the rocks, minerals, and landforms that make up its surface. It encompasses the crust, mantle, and core, and it plays a crucial role in shaping the planet's structure and supporting life.

1. **Crust:** The Earth's outermost layer is called the crust. It is relatively thin and comprises both continental and oceanic crust. The continental crust is thicker and less dense than the oceanic crust, consisting of various rock types such as granite, basalt, and sedimentary rocks. The oceanic crust is thinner and primarily composed of basaltic rocks.
2. **Mantle:** Below the crust lies the mantle, a thick layer of hot, solid rock. The mantle extends to a depth of about 2,900 kilometers and is composed mainly of silicate minerals. It is divided into the upper mantle and lower mantle, with the upper mantle being more rigid and the lower mantle exhibiting greater plasticity due to higher pressures.
3. **Core:** At the center of the Earth is the core, consisting of two parts: the outer core and the inner core. The outer core is a liquid layer composed mainly of molten iron and nickel. The inner core, despite being under immense pressure, is solid due to the high temperatures. It is primarily composed of solid iron and nickel.

The geosphere interacts with other Earth systems, such as the atmosphere, hydrosphere, and biosphere, influencing geological processes like plate tectonics, volcanic activity, and the formation of mountains and valleys. It also provides essential resources like minerals, fossil fuels, and water.

Understanding the geosphere is crucial for various scientific disciplines, including geology, seismology, and mineralogy. It helps us explore the Earth's history, unravel the dynamics of tectonic plates, study earthquakes and their impacts, and identify potential mineral and energy resources.

The geosphere's study also contributes to environmental science, as it helps assess the impact of human activities on the Earth's surface and atmosphere (collective referred to as 'anthropogenic effects') and develop sustainable practices for resource management. By studying the geosphere, we gain insights into the Earth's past, present, and future, enhancing our understanding of our dynamic and ever-changing planet.

## Biosphere

The position of the Earth in the Solar system, its mass and evolution of its bulk and atmosphere (which again, are well connected with one another) weaved a pleasant conspiracy that made life originate and sustained on it. Scientists say that the Earth is located at the 'Goldilocks zone' of the Solar system.

The Goldilocks zone, also known as the habitable zone, refers to the region around a star where conditions are just right for liquid water to exist on a planet's surface. Earth, positioned within the Sun's Goldilocks zone, enjoys stable temperatures suitable for sustaining life. It is not only about the temperature due to the solar radiation, but also the warmth due to the greenhouse effect that dictates the temperature of the Earth's surface. The resultant temperature, the atmospheric pressure, composition, the magnetic field of the Earth, work together to sustain life. This fortunate placement allows for the diverse array of life forms that thrive on our planet. As we explore the cosmos, we realize the rarity of such a privileged position, highlighting Earth's uniqueness in supporting life and emphasizing the need to protect and preserve it. Thus, Earth sports a biosphere. The existence of biosphere on Earth imbues the philosophic thought that everything is happening with a purpose, and that's why this pleasant conspiracy!

The Earth's biosphere is the layer of the planet that encompasses all living organisms and their interactions with the environment. It includes a diverse range of ecosystems, such as forests, grasslands, oceans, and deserts, where life flourishes in various forms. The complex web of biosphere interconnects its various components to develop an ecosystem that support the incredible diversity of life on Earth. It comprises different levels of biological organization, from individual organisms to populations, communities, and entire ecosystems.

Life in the biosphere is sustained by the interactions between living organisms and their physical surroundings. Organisms depend on the availability of resources like sunlight, water, nutrients, and energy to survive and reproduce. In turn, their activities, such as photosynthesis, respiration, and decomposition, influence the environment and contribute to the cycling of elements and energy.

Biodiversity is a fundamental characteristic of the biosphere, with millions of species coexisting and adapting to various environmental conditions. Each organism plays a unique role in its ecosystem, contributing to the stability and functioning of the biosphere as a whole.

Human activities have a significant impact on the biosphere, altering natural ecosystems, depleting resources, and causing habitat loss and species extinction. Conservation and sustainable management of the biosphere are vital to maintain ecological balance, preserve biodiversity, and ensure the well-being of both human and non-human life.

Studying the biosphere is crucial for understanding the intricate relationships between living organisms and their environment. It involves disciplines like ecology, biology, and environmental science. By studying the biosphere, scientists gain insights into the processes that shape life on Earth, the adaptations of organisms, the dynamics of ecosystems, and the impact of human activities on the natural world. This knowledge helps conservation efforts,

promote sustainable practices, and safeguard the future of the biosphere and its invaluable biodiversity.

## The neutral atmosphere around Earth

The biosphere sustains itself with its interaction with the atmospheric gases. The Earth's atmosphere is a layer of gases that surrounds our planet and plays a vital role in supporting life. It consists of different layers, each with distinct characteristics and functions. These layers are formed primarily due to variations in temperature and composition with increasing altitude.

1. **Troposphere:** The troposphere is the lowest layer and extends from the Earth's surface up to an average altitude of about 8 to 15 kilometers. Troposphere is thicker in the tropical regions, and thinner at the polar regions. This layer is where weather phenomena occur, and temperature generally decreases with increasing altitude.
2. **Stratosphere:** Above the troposphere lies the stratosphere, which extends up to around 50 kilometers. The stratosphere contains the ozone layer, which absorbs harmful ultraviolet radiation from the Sun. As a result, the temperature in this layer increases with altitude due to the absorption of UV radiation.
3. **Mesosphere:** The mesosphere is above the stratosphere and extends up to about 85-90 kilometers. In this layer, the temperature decreases with altitude, and it is known for the occurrence of

meteors that burn up upon entering the atmosphere.

4. Thermosphere: Beyond the mesosphere is the thermosphere, which extends up to approximately 600 kilometers. The temperature in the thermosphere increases significantly due to the absorption of high-energy solar radiation. Despite the high temperatures, the air density is very low in this layer.
5. Exosphere: The outermost layer of the Earth's atmosphere is the exosphere. It gradually transitions into space and is characterized by extremely low air density. The exosphere is the layer where satellites and other spacecraft orbit the Earth.

The formation of these atmospheric layers is primarily driven by variations in temperature, which, in turn, are influenced by factors such as solar radiation, altitude, and the composition of gases.

Note that, Von Karman's imaginary line at 100 km altitude lies just above the mesosphere, in the lower regime of the thermosphere. There are several scientifically intriguing physical phenomena that occur even below and above the Karman line. Also, satellites launched today fly well beyond (above) the Karman line to avoid the collisions with the atmospheric gas atoms and molecules, which would slow them down due to an effect called aerodynamic drag. That is the reason why satellites are usually injected at altitudes above 400 km, where the drag effects are not significant. We need to remember that

the composition of the Earth's atmosphere varies with altitude, and the altitudes at which satellites are injected, the relative composition of atomic Oxygen predominates, which is highly reactive. This, in turn, necessitates special chemical techniques to protect the satellites, especially its solar panels, from the reactive environment of atomic Oxygen.

The Earth's atmosphere is crucial for various processes, including weather patterns, climate regulation, and protecting life on the planet from harmful radiation. Studying the composition and characteristics of these atmospheric layers helps scientists better understand Earth's climate system and make predictions about weather patterns and climate change.

It has to be noted that a part of the atmosphere gets ionized as it receives energy from the Ultraviolet and X-Ray radiation from the Sun. Thus, a part of the neutral atmosphere gives rise to the ionosphere.

## The ionosphere

The Earth's ionosphere is a region within the upper atmosphere where the atoms and molecules are ionized. It extends from about 60 kilometers to thousands of kilometers above the Earth's surface and plays a crucial role in various atmospheric and communication phenomena.

The ionosphere is formed primarily due to the ionization of atmospheric gases by solar radiation. When high-

energy ultraviolet (UV) and X-ray photons from the Sun interact with neutral particles in the upper atmosphere, they can knock off electrons, creating positively charged ions and free electrons. This ionization process is more significant at higher altitudes and during periods of high solar activity.

The ionosphere is often divided into several layers based on the altitude and degree of ionization. The main layers include:

1. D-Layer: The lowest layer, located between 60 to 90 kilometers, is known as the D-layer. It is primarily composed of ions formed by the ionization of nitrogen and oxygen molecules.
2. E-Layer: Above the D-layer is the E-layer, which extends from 90 to 150 kilometers. It is mainly composed of free electrons and ions, and it plays a significant role in reflecting radio waves.
3. F-Layer: The F-layer is further divided into two sub-layers: F1 and F2. The F1-layer, located around 150 to 300 kilometers, is more prominent during the daytime, while the F2-layer, around 200 to 500 kilometers, is more dominant at night. The F-layer contains the highest concentration of ions and is critical for long-distance radio communication.

The Earth's ionosphere exhibits diurnal variability, meaning that its characteristics change throughout the day. During the day, solar radiation ionizes the atmosphere, leading to a more significant ionization and a

higher electron density. This results in a stronger ionospheric reflection of radio waves and better long-distance communication. At night, the ionization decreases, and the electron density drops, causing lower reflection and limited long-distance communication.

Understanding the formation and characteristics of the ionosphere is essential for various applications, including radio communication, satellite navigation, and space weather monitoring. Scientists study the ionosphere to analyze its behavior, investigate ionospheric disturbances, and develop models to predict its effects on communication systems and satellite operations.

## Geodynamo and Geomagnetism

To make things more dramatic, the magnetic field of the Earth comes into play. As you are aware, charged particles respond to electric and magnetic fields. Thus, it is easy to guess that the ionosphere of the Earth is also affected by the Earth's magnetic field.

Before entering into that discussion, we will peep into the interior of the Earth, to know the origin of the Earth's magnetic field. It is often said that the Earth's magnetism, or 'Geomagnetism' is a result of a 'geodynamo'. A dynamo is a device that converts mechanical energy into electrical energy.

In similar lines, the geodynamo is a process deep within the core of the Earth. The Earth's core consists of two main parts: the solid inner core and the liquid outer core.

The liquid outer core is made primarily of molten iron and nickel.

The geodynamo works because of the movement of the liquid in the outer core. This movement is driven by the immense heat within the Earth's interior. As the liquid iron flows, it undergoes a phenomenon called convection. Convection is similar to how water boils in a pot, where hotter fluid rises while cooler fluid sinks.

This convection process creates circulating patterns of molten iron in the outer core. These circulating currents, combined with the rotation of the Earth, produce a phenomenon known as the geodynamo. The geodynamo generates an electric current, which, in turn, generates a magnetic field that surrounds our planet. This magnetic field extends into space and is often referred to as the geomagnetic field.

The geomagnetic field acts as a protective shield, deflecting and trapping charged particles coming from the Sun, which is called the solar wind. It plays a crucial role in shielding the Earth's atmosphere and its inhabitants, including us, from the harmful effects of these charged particles. Additionally, the geomagnetic field is responsible for creating phenomena like the Northern and Southern Lights, also known as auroras, which are mesmerizing displays of colorful lights in the sky near the polar regions.

In summary, the geodynamo is the process that generates Earth's magnetic field by the movement of molten iron in

the outer core. This magnetic field, known as the geomagnetic field, serves as a protective shield and creates fascinating natural phenomena like auroras.

## Ionosphere and Geomagnetism

The geomagnetic field plays a significant role in shaping the behavior of the ionosphere. One fascinating phenomenon influenced by the geomagnetic field is the Equatorial Electrojet.

The Equatorial Electrojet refers to a narrow, eastward-flowing current in the ionosphere near the magnetic equator. This current is caused by the interaction between the geomagnetic field and the ionized particles in the ionosphere.

The geomagnetic field guides the flow of the Equatorial Electrojet in the ionosphere, which is strongest during daylight hours. The Equatorial Electrojet has practical implications. For example, it can affect the accuracy of navigation systems that rely on radio waves passing through the ionosphere.

Understanding the connection between the geomagnetic field and the Equatorial Electrojet helps us appreciate the intricate interplay between Earth's magnetic field, the ionosphere, and the dynamic behavior of charged particles in our atmosphere.

## Sun and the Near-Earth Space

After having discussed about the Earth, let us turn our discussion to Sun.

The Sun is a star that powers our solar system. It generates energy through a process called fusion, where four hydrogen atoms combine to form one helium atom, releasing an enormous amount of energy in the process. The energy ionises the gases, and sustains the state of ionisation, which makes Sun a giant ball of plasma. Due to the dynamics of the plasma, the Sun also possesses a magnetic field, just like Earth, but on a much larger scale.

The study of the Sun's magnetic field and its interaction with the surrounding space is known as magnetohydrodynamics (MHD). MHD combines principles of magnetism and fluid dynamics to understand how magnetic fields influence the behavior of plasma in the Sun. The influence of Sun is tremendous in the region which we refer to as the near-Earth space.

As earthlings, the near-Earth space is of prime significance to us. Near-Earth space refers to the region surrounding the Earth, extending from the Earth's surface up to a few thousands of kilometres into space. It encompasses various important features and phenomena that have significant scientific, technological, and commercial implications. This is the region where the satellites orbit around the Earth, the space stations are situated, space debris wander around, and the near-Earth objects (NEO) like asteroids are encountered. The near-Earth space is also significant for scientific exploration of space, as well as the commercial space activities. Hence, understanding the near-Earth space is crucial for various

domains, including scientific exploration, as well as applications like communication, navigation, meteorology, to name a few.

The near-Earth space witnesses a fantastic coordinated dynamics of two magnetic fields, *viz.* the geomagnetic field, and the Interplanetary Magnetic Field.

## The Interplanetary Magnetic Field (IMF)

The generation of the solar magnetic field is a complex process. The Sun rotates faster at its equator than at its poles. This differential spin causes the twisting and amplification of magnetic fields, generating powerful magnetic loops and regions of intense activity on the Sun's surface, such as sunspots and solar flares.

The Sun's magnetic field extends beyond its surface and creates an interplanetary magnetic field (IMF) that permeates the entire solar system. The IMF interacts with charged particles emitted by the Sun, forming a continuous flow known as the solar wind, wherein charged particles propagate away from the Sun in helical paths along the lines of the IMF. In other words, as the solar wind travels away from the Sun, it carries the IMF with it. Due to the spin of the Sun, the lines of the IMF resembles a spiral in the interplanetary space, which is known as the Parker spiral.

You must have heard of the Sunspots; the dark patches on the Sun, which are observed with the projection of the solar image onto a screen with necessary lenses and mirrors (we call 'optics'). Direct view of the Sun with bare

eyes is harmful; one should not attempt that. Sunspots are dark, relatively cooler regions that appear on the Sun's surface. They are areas of intense magnetic activity and are typically associated with strong magnetic fields. With suitable optics, you can count the number of visible sunspots on a given day. We call this number 'sunspot number'. This has an important significance as a proxy to the level of 'activity' of the Sun.

Solar observers track the sunspot numbers to monitor the progress of the solar activity cycle. The solar activity cycle, also known as the sunspot cycle or the solar magnetic cycle, refers to the periodic variation in solar activity over approximately 11 years. This cycle is characterized by the rise and fall in the number of sunspots and other solar phenomena.

The solar activity cycle is driven by the Sun's internal magnetic dynamo, which generates and organizes the Sun's magnetic field. As the cycle progresses, the Sun's magnetic field becomes more complex and tangled. This leads to the formation of sunspots and the occurrence of solar flares, coronal mass ejections (CMEs), and other solar events. These will be discussed in the next section.

The magnetic field of the Sun experiences 'flips', which means that the magnetic North pole becomes the South pole, and *vice versa*. This flip occurs during the transition from the solar maximum to the solar minimum. At the solar maximum, the Sun's north magnetic pole becomes the south magnetic pole, and *vice versa*. The exact timing and duration of the pole flip are not well-predicted due to

the complex and variable nature of the Sun's magnetic field.

The significance of sunspots, the sunspot number, the solar activity cycle, and the flip of the solar magnetic field lies in their impact on space weather and Earth. Solar activity, including sunspots, solar flares, and CMEs, can influence geomagnetic storms, which in turn can disrupt satellite communications, power grids, and other technological systems.

Understanding the Sun's magnetism and the dynamics of the interplanetary magnetic field is crucial for studying space weather and its effects on Earth and other planets in our solar system. It allows us to predict and prepare for phenomena like solar flares, coronal mass ejections, and geomagnetic storms, which can impact satellite operations, power grids, and communication systems on Earth. Moreover, studying the Sun's magnetism provides valuable insights into the fundamental processes that drive the behavior of stars throughout the universe.

## Solar Flares, Coronal Mass Ejections and Geomagnetic Storms

Now, we have two giant magnets in space, the Sun and the Earth, separated by a physical distance of about 150 million km. You are aware, what happens when you bring two magnets in close vicinity. The like poles repel, while the opposite poles attract each other. If you do not allow the magnets to move, say, you keep them fixed in space, the space between them undergo an interesting change. You are aware that from an isolated magnet, the invisible

magnetic lines of force emerge from its North pole, which end at the South pole, resembling loops. The magnetic lines of force are the lines along which another tiny compass would align its needle. You may conduct an experiment as well with a big sized bar magnet fixed in space, and a tiny, coin sized compass to move around it, and trace the movement of the tiny needle of the later. The patterns you generate out of this experiment are called magnetic lines of force. You may put arrows along those lines with a pencil, such that the south-to-north direction of the tiny magnetic needle of the small compass would mark the forward direction of the arrow. You cannot see the magnetic lines of force with your eyes, but another magnetic needle can feel them.

Now, let us assume that you have two bar magnets fixed in space separated by a finite distance. The magnetic lines of force from the two bar magnets would attract and merge with each other if they are of opposite direction. The lines would repel each other if they are of same direction. I am sure, if you are good at making animations, you can make attractive and mesmerizing computer screensavers out of this concept. This fantastic dynamics is called ‘magnetic reconnection’ phenomenon. It is all about magnetism, and the re-connection refers to the incessant dynamics of making and braking of the process of handholding between the magnetic field lines; it is not only ‘connection’, but also ‘disconnection’ and ‘reconnection’. You know from basic physics that if you put a charged particle in a magnetic field, they follow the magnetic field lines in helical paths, with the magnetic line of force forming the axis of the helix. Now, whether

you would make a statement like ‘charge particles, as they move, create its own magnetic field’ or ‘charged particles follow the magnetic field lines in helical paths’, I leave that to you. Which one is the cause, and which one is the effect, depends mostly on the context. For me, a safer statement would be ‘a charged particle in motion has, *associated with it*, a magnetic field, which guides the former’s trajectory’. Sometimes, we physicists, get away with such jargons when we do not wish to enter into complicated discussions on the cause-effect relationships.

Now, let us make this scenario more interesting. Let us assume that out of the two magnets, one is a ball of plasma, which displays intermittent instability as far as holding back its own plasma contents within itself is concerned. You guessed it right; I am speaking about the Sun as one of the magnets, which is constantly emitting charged particles called ‘Solar Wind’. Solar wind is rich in H and He<sup>++</sup> ions (along with very small proportion of heavier ions), which pass through the interplanetary space along the magnetic field lines in helical trajectories. While the emission of the Solar Wind is a continuous process that forms a background of charged particle emission from the Sun, there are sporadic emissions due to instability. The process of magnetic reconnection conspire to provide the instability of the plasma a path for eruption, and propagation in the interplanetary space. These processes connect the Sun and Earth with the photons, particles and associated magnetic fields from the Sun. To remember easily, the photon emissions in burst are referred to as solar flares (they are pretty rich in high energy, say, X-Ray photons), the charged particle

emissions are referred to as Coronal Mass Ejection (CME) and the effect of the magnetic field that are *associated with* the charged particle emissions, is referred to as the Geomagnetic storm. Once geomagnetic storms occur, the magnetic field from the Sun pushed the Earth's magnetic field more towards the Earth. In other words, the solar magnetic field overpowers the geomagnetic field which helps the former to inject more solar origin charged particles to the close vicinity of Earth. We refer this condition as a severe space weather.

Having discussed these, let me break down these concepts for you as a summary:

1. **Solar flares:** Imagine the Sun as a giant ball of hot gas with tremendous energy. Occasionally, it releases a sudden burst of intense energy in the form of a solar flare. Solar flares are explosions that happen in the Sun's atmosphere, and they release a vast amount of energy, including X-rays and ultraviolet radiation. These flares can be as powerful as millions of hydrogen bombs exploding at once. Although solar flares don't directly affect us on Earth, they can influence space weather and potentially disrupt communication systems and satellites.
2. **Coronal mass ejections (CMEs):** During a solar flare, the Sun can also release a massive cloud of plasma called a coronal mass ejection or CME. This cloud consists of charged particles, mainly electrons and protons, that are accelerated by the flare's energy. When a CME reaches Earth, it can interact with our planet's magnetic field. These interactions can cause

disturbances and create intense displays of the Northern and Southern Lights (auroras). In some cases, particularly strong CMEs can pose a risk to satellite operations and power grids, potentially leading to disruptions in communication and electrical systems.

3. **Geomagnetic storms:** When a CME interacts with Earth's magnetic field, it can trigger a geomagnetic storm. A geomagnetic storm is a disturbance in Earth's magnetosphere caused by variations in the solar wind, which is the constant stream of charged particles flowing from the Sun. As the charged particles from the CME interact with Earth's magnetic field, they can cause fluctuations and disturbances in the magnetosphere. These disturbances can affect our planet's electrical currents and induce powerful electrical currents in long conductors like power lines. In extreme cases, geomagnetic storms have the potential to disrupt satellite operations, navigation systems, and power grids, leading to widespread impacts.

These concepts show how the Sun's activity and space weather can have effects that reach our planet, influencing our technological infrastructure and creating beautiful natural phenomena.

## Space Weather: How different it is from 'Weather'

Weather is a term we all are familiar with. When two unknown people wish to initiate a conversation, often it

starts with weather. People like you and me are comfortable initiate conversations with statements like “What a nice weather today to go for a walk” (and then, with a pause, “Should we?”). The term ‘weather’, in this context, refers to the collective state of the Earth's atmosphere, with parameters such as temperature, precipitation, wind speed, and cloud cover. It also includes phenomena like rain, snow, thunderstorms, and hurricanes. Weathers inspire poets, authors, lyricists, and also, scientists who work on weather and climate.

Then comes a completely different class of people, who engage into discussions that sound like “How is ‘space weather’ today?”

This lesser-heard term, ‘space weather’, refers to the conditions in the space surrounding the Earth, particularly the Sun's activity and its effects on our planet. As long as you are within the atmosphere and magnetic field of Earth, it is *weather*; the moment you come out of those protections, you are exposed to ‘*space weather*’.

Let us see the aspect of space weather in a bit of more details. As we have discussed, magnetic reconnection is a fundamental process that occurs when magnetic fields collide, merge, and release tremendous amounts of energy. It is a key mechanism for transferring energy from magnetic fields to particles and is responsible for numerous phenomena in astrophysics and plasma physics.

In the context of the Sun-Earth system, magnetic reconnection plays a crucial role in the interaction

between the solar magnetic field and Earth's magnetic field. The Sun constantly emits the stream of solar wind, along with its *associated* magnetic field. Earth has its own magnetic field, which extends into space and creates a protective shield called the magnetosphere.

When the solar wind interacts with Earth's magnetic field, magnetic reconnection can occur. The process begins when the magnetic field lines of the solar wind and Earth's magnetic field merge and realign, releasing a burst of energy. This energy can accelerate charged particles, creating phenomena such as the Northern and Southern Lights (auroras) in the polar regions.

Space weather can involve events like solar flares, coronal mass ejections, and geomagnetic storms, which can influence the Earth's magnetic field and affect technologies like satellites, power grids, and communication systems. While weather focuses on what's happening in our immediate atmosphere, space weather examines the interactions between the Sun, Earth, and the space environment around us.

## The Solar System

Having discussed about the Sun, the Earth, as well as the Sun-Earth connection, let us have a look at the Solar system.

The solar system is a captivating and vast expanse that consists of the Sun, planets, natural satellites, dwarf planets, comets, asteroids, and various other celestial

objects. Let's explore each of these components and understand their significance.

## Origin and Components of the Solar System

The solar system began its journey about 4.6 billion years ago from a giant cloud of gas and dust called the solar nebula. As the cloud collapsed under its own gravity, it formed a spinning disk. In the center, the Sun ignited, while the remaining material in the disk began to clump together, giving rise to the planets and other objects in the solar system.

1. **Planets:** There are eight recognized planets in the solar system: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. Planets are celestial bodies that orbit the Sun, are spherical in shape due to their own gravity, and have cleared their orbits of other debris.
2. **Natural Satellites (Moons):** Moons are objects that orbit planets. Earth has one moon, while other planets have multiple moons. For example, Jupiter, the largest planet, has over 80 known moons.
3. **Dwarf Planets:** Dwarf planets are similar to planets but have not fully cleared their orbits of other debris. The most famous dwarf planet is Pluto. Other recognized dwarf planets include Eris, Haumea, Makemake, and Ceres (located in the asteroid belt).
4. **Comets:** Comets are icy bodies composed of dust, rock, and frozen gases. When they approach the

Sun, they heat up, and their ices vaporize, creating a glowing coma and often a tail that points away from the Sun.

5. **Asteroids:** Asteroids are rocky remnants from the early solar system. They are typically found in the asteroid belt, a region between Mars and Jupiter. Some asteroids have even been visited by spacecraft, such as the dwarf planet Ceres.
6. **Meteors, Meteoroids, and Meteorites:** A meteoroid is a small object, typically a fragment of an asteroid or comet, that orbits the Sun. When a meteoroid enters Earth's atmosphere and burns up, it is called a meteor or a shooting star. If any part of the meteoroid survives and lands on Earth, it becomes a meteorite.
7. **Kuiper Belt:** The Kuiper Belt is a region of the solar system beyond Neptune's orbit. It is home to numerous icy bodies, including Pluto, and is considered the source of many short-period comets.
8. **Oort Cloud:** The Oort Cloud is a region located far beyond the Kuiper Belt. It is thought to contain billions of icy bodies and is considered the origin of long-period comets.

## Planets in the Solar System

The criteria for classifying a celestial body as a planet were established by the International Astronomical Union (IAU) in 2006. According to the IAU definition, a planet must meet three conditions: it must orbit the Sun, be spherical in shape due to its gravity, and have cleared its

orbit of other gravitationally significant debris. Pluto, despite being considered the ninth planet for many years, does not fulfil the third criterion as it shares its orbit with a similar sized celestial body Charon, which is a natural satellite of Pluto. Thus, it was reclassified as a dwarf planet.

It is a natural tendency of the solar system investigators to compare between the planets, and hence emerged the branch of comparative planetology in space research. Comparative planetology is the study of the similarities and differences among the planets, moons, and other celestial bodies within our solar system and beyond. By examining these objects, scientists can gain insights into the processes and conditions that govern their evolution and better understand the diversity of planetary systems.

In our solar system, there are eight planets that can be classified into two main categories:

**Terrestrial Planets:** Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars are the terrestrial or rocky planets. They are relatively small, dense, and have solid surfaces. These planets are composed primarily of silicate rocks and metals. The density of atmosphere around them is also diverse. As for example, Mercury is devoid of any substantial atmosphere, while Venus sports a thick atmosphere. There are other diversities in them in terms of their global magnetic field, spin, internal activity, to name a few.

**Jovian Planets:** Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune are the Jovian or gas giant planets. They are much larger than

the terrestrial planets and primarily composed of hydrogen and helium. These planets have thick atmospheres and lack a solid surface. Jovian planets also have a ring system and several moons.

Although these planets started their journey together during the process of formation of the solar system, they have evolved in different ways. Mercury, being the closest to the Sun, experiences extreme temperatures and has a thin atmosphere. It has undergone intense volcanic activity and has a heavily cratered surface. Venus has a thick atmosphere of carbon dioxide, causing a runaway greenhouse effect and creating a scorching surface with a dense atmosphere. On the other hand, Earth, with its moderate temperature range and abundant liquid water, has a dynamic geology, supporting a wide range of ecosystems and life forms. Mars has a thin atmosphere and evidence of a once-wet past. It has polar ice caps, ancient riverbeds, and the potential for subsurface liquid water, making it a prime candidate for studying the possibility of past or present life.

Jupiter and Saturn are gas giants with thick atmospheres, prominent rings, and numerous moons. Jupiter has a turbulent atmosphere, powerful storms, and the famous Great Red Spot. Saturn's rings and its moon Titan, with its thick atmosphere and lakes of liquid hydrocarbons, are of particular interest. Uranus and Neptune are ice giants, composed mostly of water, ammonia, and methane ices. They have dynamic atmospheres, distinct blue hues, and a collection of fascinating moons and ring systems.

There are several important parameters that govern the evolution of planets and natural satellites, as discussed below.

- **Distance from the Sun:** The distance from the Sun determines the temperature and amount of sunlight received, which affects the composition, atmosphere, and surface conditions of a planet.
- **Size and Mass:** The size and mass of a planet influence its gravity, internal structure, and ability to retain an atmosphere or support geological activity.
- **Composition:** The chemical composition of a planet determines its internal structure, surface features, and potential for supporting life.
- **Atmosphere:** The presence and composition of an atmosphere affect the planet's climate, weather patterns, and ability to sustain life.
- **Geological Activity:** Geological activity, such as volcanic eruptions, tectonic plate movements, and erosion, shapes the surface of a planet and contributes to its evolution.

By comparing the characteristics and evolution of these planets and their natural satellites, comparative planetology provides valuable insights into the wide range of planetary processes, environmental conditions, and the potential for habitability throughout the universe.

Thus, comparative planetology is a fundamental aspect of planetary exploration, focusing on the similarities and differences between different celestial bodies. By

studying other planets and moons, scientists gain insights into the processes that shaped Earth and how it might evolve in the future. Comparative planetology helps us understand the factors that influence habitability, the development of life, and the long-term sustainability of our own planet. The knowledge gained through comparative planetology guides our approach to addressing challenges related to climate change, resources, and the preservation of Earth's ecosystem.

Exploring the solar system allows us to gain insights into the formation and dynamics of celestial objects. By studying these fascinating bodies, we deepen our understanding of our own planet and the vastness of the universe that surrounds us. Especially, achieving a good amount of understanding about our own Solar system facilitates conjecturing about the other Solar systems, and the planets therein, which are referred to as exoplanets.

## **Beyond the Solar System**

### **The Milky Way**

The Milky Way is a majestic spiral galaxy that is home to our solar system. It is named after the hazy band of light that stretches across the night sky, resembling a milky pathway. The Milky Way is estimated to be about 105700 light-years in diameter and contains billions of stars, along with various other celestial objects.

Our solar system resides in a spiral arm of the Milky Way called the Orion Arm or Local Spur. Specifically, we are located about 28,000 light-years away from the galactic center. This places us in a relatively calm region, away from the intense gravitational forces and cosmic activities that occur near the galactic core.

From our vantage point within the Milky Way, we can observe the band of the galaxy arching across the night sky. However, the true structure and shape of the Milky Way can be difficult to perceive due to our position within it. Detailed studies, including observations from telescopes and space missions, have allowed scientists to construct a better understanding of our galaxy's structure and dynamics.

## The Bigger Picture

The Milky Way is just one of many galaxies in the Virgo Supercluster, a massive cluster of galaxies that includes the Milky Way and numerous other galaxy groups. Beyond the Virgo Supercluster we may speak about the Observable Universe, the vast expanse of space that encompasses everything we can observe with our telescopes. The Observable Universe contains countless galaxies, galaxy clusters, and other cosmic structures, spanning an unimaginable distance of about 93 billion light-years. Exploring the Milky Way, the Virgo Supercluster, and the Observable Universe helps us comprehend the grand scale and diversity of our cosmic neighborhood.

The Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation (CMB) is a faint glow of radiation that permeates the entire universe. It is residual energy from the Big Bang, which occurred around 13.8 billion years ago. The CMB is uniform on large scales, but when observed in detail, it exhibits tiny variations or anisotropy. These variations provide crucial information about the early universe's structure and composition. They indicate areas of slightly higher and lower density, which eventually led to the formation of galaxies and galaxy clusters. Studying the anisotropy of the CMB helps us understand the evolution of the universe and supports the prevailing Big Bang theory.

While CMB makes us feel that the universe is a giant microwave oven, there are gravitational waves that pervade the universe that make us feel that we are swimming within the ripples of space-time. Like electromagnetic waves may be looked upon as outcome of acceleration of charged particles, gravitational waves are ripples in the fabric of space-time caused by the acceleration of massive objects. They were first predicted by Albert Einstein in his general theory of relativity in 1915. These waves carry energy away from their source and propagate through space, similar to how waves in water spread out when a stone is dropped into it.

Gravitational waves can originate from a variety of astrophysical events, including binary Systems. The most commonly detected gravitational waves come from binary systems consisting of two massive objects orbiting each other, such as pairs of neutron stars or black holes. As these objects revolve around their common center of

mass, they emit gravitational waves. Also, when a massive star explodes in a supernova, it can generate powerful gravitational waves. These waves carry information about the supernova's dynamics and can provide valuable insights into the stellar explosion process.

During the early moments of the universe, a rapid expansion known as cosmic inflation occurred. This period of accelerated expansion would have produced gravitational waves, leaving an imprint on the cosmic microwave background radiation.

Studying gravitational waves is a worldwide endeavor that involves collaborative efforts between scientists, observatories, and research institutions around the globe. The Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) and the Virgo Interferometer are two prominent ground-based observatories dedicated to detecting gravitational waves. They employ highly sensitive instruments called interferometers to measure the tiny distortions in space-time caused by passing gravitational waves. In 2015, LIGO made the first direct detection of gravitational waves, originating from the merger of two black holes. Since then, numerous gravitational wave events have been observed, including binary black hole mergers, binary neutron star mergers, and even potential signals from cosmic inflation.

Furthermore, even when no specific event is occurring, there is a background of gravitational waves permeating the entire universe. This cosmic gravitational wave

background is believed to be the cumulative effect of all gravitational wave sources throughout cosmic history.

Thus, Space research and exploration serve both scientific and philosophical motivations. Scientifically, they allow us to expand our knowledge, understand the universe's origin, evolution, our local space, and develop technologies for a better future. Philosophically, they inspire curiosity, provide a broader perspective of our place in the cosmos, and foster a sense of wonder and exploration that defines the human spirit. Exploring and studying the Milky Way and beyond provides us with valuable insights into the formation and evolution of galaxies, as well as our own place in the vast cosmic landscape. It also prompts us the inevitable question, 'Are we alone in this Universe?'

## Are we Alone?

This is an outstanding fundamental question, which has propelled many of the scientific investigations worldwide. The question 'are we alone' has two major aspects, *viz.* extra-terrestrial forms of life, and (ii) extra-terrestrial intelligence. Search for the signatures of organic compounds on the surface or atmosphere of a celestial body is one of the major goals of several space agencies.

In our quest to search for extra-terrestrial life and intelligence, there have been significant worldwide efforts. Initiatives like the Search for Extra-terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) use radio telescopes to scan the skies

for signals that may indicate technological activity from other civilizations. Additionally, space missions, such as NASA's Kepler and James Webb Space Telescope, address the aspects of exoplanet exploration and characterizing their atmospheres for discovering potential signs of life. These collective endeavors underline humanity's curiosity and eagerness to unravel the mysteries of the cosmos and discover possible neighbors in the vastness of space.

In this context, it is important to mention about the celebrated work of Dr. Frank Drake. The Drake equation is a theoretical framework proposed by astronomer Dr. Frank Drake to estimate the number of active, communicable civilizations in the Milky Way galaxy. It takes into account various factors that could influence the existence of intelligent life, such as the rate of star formation, the fraction of stars with planets, the number of planets suitable for life, the likelihood of life developing on those planets, and so on. The equation provides a way to contemplate the potential abundance of extra-terrestrial civilizations.

## **Techniques of Space Research and Exploration**

Space research and exploration involve a variety of techniques that allow scientists to study and understand the vast expanse beyond our planet. These techniques encompass theoretical modeling, computer simulation, laboratory simulation, ground-based observation, space-

based observation, and the emerging domain of Big Data Analytics.

## Overview of Different Techniques

**Theoretical modeling** is a fundamental technique used to develop mathematical frameworks and models to describe physical phenomena.

**Computer simulation** is a powerful tool that enables scientists to recreate complex space environments and phenomena in a virtual setting. By entering data and parameters into computer models, researchers can simulate and study events like galaxy formation, star evolution, and the dynamics of celestial objects.

Yet another technique is laboratory simulation. **Laboratory simulation** involves creating controlled experiments on Earth to replicate specific conditions present in space. Scientists use sophisticated equipment and instruments to mimic space environments, such as simulating the extreme temperatures, vacuum, and radiation encountered in different parts of the universe. This technique allows for detailed analysis and experimentation under controlled conditions.

**Ground-based observation** involves using telescopes, radio antennas, and other instruments on Earth to observe and study celestial objects. Astronomers collect data across the electromagnetic spectrum, from radio waves to X-rays, to gain insights into various astronomical phenomena like planetary movements, star formation, and black holes.

**Space-based observation** takes research beyond Earth's atmosphere. Space telescopes provide unobstructed views of the universe, free from atmospheric interference. They enable observations across different wavelengths, revealing detailed information about distant galaxies, exoplanets, and several celestial processes.

**Big Data Analytics** is a rapidly emerging domain that involves the analysis of vast amounts of data to extract meaningful insights. In space research, this technique allows scientists to process massive datasets collected from space missions, ground-based observations, and simulations. It aids in modelling complex physical phenomena, identifying patterns, and making predictions, enhancing our understanding of the universe.

By employing these diverse techniques, scientists can explore and unravel the mysteries of space, advancing our knowledge of the cosmos and opening doors to new discoveries. Each method offers unique advantages and contributes to a comprehensive and multidimensional approach in the pursuit of space research and exploration.

At this juncture, I must mention that although we have discussed modelling, simulation and observation as different techniques, in fact, they collectively form a self-sustaining process called space research. Observations improve the models so as to achieve better simulation, which, in turn, prompts the need for better observation. It is imperative to appreciate the role of each of this component of space research to achieve a holistic appreciation of the subject.

## Importance of Space-Based Observations

Among the different types of observation, Space-based observations play a pivotal role in advancing our understanding of the universe by providing unique vantage points (strategically advantageous locations for a given purpose; here, observation of celestial objects or processes) and enabling the study of celestial phenomena that are otherwise not observable from the Earth's surface. These observations offer several advantages and open up new avenues for scientific exploration.

Observing from vantage points beyond the atmosphere provides a clear and unobstructed view of the cosmos. Earth's atmosphere can distort and absorb various wavelengths of light, limiting our ability to observe certain celestial objects and phenomena. Beyond the magnetosphere, space-based observations enable the study of cosmic phenomena that are influenced by magnetic fields. Earth's magnetosphere shields us from certain types of particles and radiation, making it challenging to directly observe phenomena such as high-energy cosmic rays and energetic particles from the Sun. Space missions and observatories positioned outside the magnetosphere provide crucial data on these phenomena, enhancing our knowledge of space weather and its impacts on Earth.

There are another set of special vantage points, called the Lagrange points. For any gravitationally bound two body system in space, as for example, the Sun-Earth system, there exist a set of five locations where gravitational

equilibrium exists. These five points arise due to the relative position and relative motion of the two bodies. They are referred to as L1, L2, L3, L4 and L5 points. Each of them offers you some advantage or the other, as far as space-based observations are concerned. As for example, if you place a spacecraft in an orbit around the Sun-Earth L1 point, where the gravitation forces of the Sun and Earth get cancelled out, the spacecraft is not only beyond the Earth's atmosphere and magnetosphere, but also offers a continuous view of the Sun. As the Sun-Earth system rotates about their common centre of mass, the relative positions of all the five Lagrange points remain the same. Thus, the spacecraft placed around the Sun-Earth L1 point has the privilege of sustained view of the Sun, without experiencing eclipse.

For example, the Lagrange points have been utilized for missions like the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO) and the Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe (WMAP), which have provided valuable insights into the Sun and the cosmic microwave background radiation, respectively. India's Aditya-L1 mission will be placed at a halo orbit around the Sun-Earth L1 point.

In addition to photons, space-based observations encompass multiple messengers that carry information about celestial processes. Particles, such as cosmic rays and solar wind, provide insights into the dynamics of space environments. Gravitational waves, ripples in the fabric of spacetime, offer a new way to detect and study cataclysmic cosmic events, like merging black holes or neutron stars.

By combining observations across different messengers and wavelengths, scientists can create a more comprehensive understanding of the universe and its intricate processes. Space-based observations provide unique opportunities to study celestial phenomena without the limitations imposed by Earth's atmosphere and magnetic field, offering a broader and deeper understanding of the cosmos.

## *In-Situ* and Remote Sensing Observation Techniques

In space-based observations, scientists employ two primary techniques: *in-situ* measurements and remote sensing. These techniques offer distinct approaches to studying celestial bodies and provide valuable insights into different aspects of the universe. To understand their basic difference, just compare between the ways nose and eyes function. In order to smell an object, your nose has to be in direct contact of the gas atoms and molecules, which would create the sensation of smell. On the other hand, eyes can see objects remotely; the light from the object carries information to the eyes. In the terminology of space science, nose does *in-situ* observation, while eyes do remote sensing observations. You may find out to what category tongue and ear belong.

***In-situ* technique**, thus, involves direct contact with the celestial body or environment being studied. Probes, landers, and rovers are deployed to collect data on-site. This technique allows for the collection of detailed

information about the composition, physical properties, and local conditions of the target.

**Remote sensing techniques**, on the other hand, involve gathering data remotely from a distance, without physical contact with the target. It relies on the detection and analysis of electromagnetic radiation, or any other messenger from the celestial body. This technique enables scientists to study large-scale features, atmospheric conditions, and phenomena that cannot be directly accessed.

*In-situ* measurements allow for direct contact with the target, providing detailed, localized information. Remote sensing, on the other hand, observes from a distance, providing a broader perspective and allowing the study of large-scale features. Although remote sensing techniques offer opportunity to study a remote celestial body without accessing it directly, it often requires an ‘inversion algorithm’ to account for the effects of the medium of propagation of the messenger that carry the information about the subject. You can understand this with a simple example. Stars are seen to twinkle. The twinkling of the stars is due to the fluctuation of the refractive index of the medium (atmosphere) along the line of propagation of light coming from it. To decipher the accurate location and brightness of the star, one needs to account for the atmosphere, its composition, and variation of its refractive index along the path of propagation of light. This process is an example of inversion. It involves lots of computation and consideration of several parameters, each of which introduce some amount of uncertainty in estimation of the effects of the medium. Thus, the overall measurement of

the subject is affected by the accumulation of errors from the measurement error as well as the error associated with the inversion process.

Both *in-situ* and remote sensing techniques play critical roles in space-based observations. While in situ measurements provide detailed, localized information, remote sensing offers a broader perspective and allows for extensive observations over large distances. The combination of these techniques contributes to a comprehensive understanding of celestial bodies, their composition, dynamics, and the vastness of the universe.

## Messengers in Remote Sensing Observations

If I now ask you, how would you classify your act of sky-watching with a telescope? Is that *in-situ*, or remote sensing observation? If you have followed the discussion so far, you would readily answer that observing the sky using a telescope is a remote sensing technique.

Yes, it is. Now, the next question is that, what is the messenger that brings information from the star you are observing, to your telescope? You would readily say, it is light. In general, electromagnetic radiation or electromagnetic wave that carries the information from the celestial body to your eyes, through the telescope. In this case, light, which is an electromagnetic wave, acts as a messenger.

**Electromagnetic waves**, including visible light, radio waves, infrared, ultraviolet, X-rays, and gamma rays, are among the most familiar messengers. They carry a wealth

of information about celestial objects. Visible light allows us to study the surfaces, structures, and composition of planets, stars, and galaxies. Infrared observations reveal the presence of cool dust clouds, molecular gas, and distant galaxies. Ultraviolet and X-ray emissions unveil high-energy processes, such as active galactic nuclei, black holes, and supernovae. Gamma rays, with their extreme energy, provide insights into the most violent and energetic phenomena in the universe.

Having appreciated this, the next question would be, are electromagnetic waves the only messengers that can carry the information about a celestial object? Now, you would start thinking, as this is a bit beyond the scope of simple light-based observations.

The answer to this question is *no*. Electromagnetic waves are *not* the only messengers. There exist other agents than electromagnetic waves that carry the information from a celestial body, or information regarding some processes in the universe.

These messengers come in various forms. They include cosmic rays, neutrinos, gamma rays, gravitational waves, and other particles. The combination of multi-messenger observations has revolutionized our understanding of the universe, providing a more comprehensive and profound perspective. Here is a brief description about a few of such messengers.

### **Cosmic Rays:**

Cosmic rays are high-energy particles, mainly protons and atomic nuclei, that travel through space at nearly the speed

of light. They originate from various astrophysical sources, such as supernova remnants, active galactic nuclei, and gamma-ray bursts. By studying cosmic rays, scientists can gain insights into the acceleration mechanisms, cosmic magnetic fields, and the environments surrounding these powerful sources. Cosmic rays also serve as messengers from distant regions of the universe, allowing us to study phenomena beyond our solar system.

### **Neutrinos:**

Neutrinos are subatomic particles that possess almost no mass and interact weakly with matter. They can penetrate through enormous amounts of material, making them valuable messengers for studying the most elusive and energetic phenomena in the universe. Neutrinos are produced in high-energy cosmic events like supernovae, gamma-ray bursts, and active galactic nuclei. By detecting neutrinos, scientists can investigate these cataclysmic events, providing unique insights into the inner workings of celestial objects.

### **Gamma Rays:**

Gamma rays are the highest-energy photons in the electromagnetic spectrum. They arise from nuclear reactions, particle interactions, and processes involving extreme gravitational fields. Gamma-ray observations help us understand phenomena such as pulsars, supernova remnants, and gamma-ray bursts. They also allow us unveiling the extreme physics associated with black holes and the early universe.

## **Gravitational Waves:**

Gravitational waves are ripples in the fabric of spacetime, generated by the acceleration of massive objects. Gravitational wave observations provide a unique way to study compact objects, such as binary black holes, neutron stars, and their mergers. By combining gravitational wave data with other messengers, scientists can obtain a more detailed understanding of the astrophysical processes and environments associated with these phenomena.

## **Other Particles:**

In addition to the aforementioned messengers, other particles, such as protons, electrons, and atomic nuclei, contribute to our understanding of the universe. For example, charged particles emitted from the Sun during solar flares allow us to study space weather and its impact on Earth.

The combination of multi-messenger observations has transformed our understanding of the universe. By harnessing the information carried by electromagnetic waves, cosmic rays, neutrinos, gamma rays, gravitational waves, and other particles, scientists can build a more complete and intricate picture of celestial objects and phenomena. This multi-messenger approach not only broadens our knowledge but also opens up new avenues for scientific discovery.

## **Multi-wavelength Observations**

If I ask you to draw a wave, you would probably draw a beautiful sketch of up-down pattern. As a high school

student, you are familiar with a sine wave. If I ask you to label the wavelength, you would nicely label the distance between the consecutive crests or the consecutive troughs as the wavelength.

In nature, we come across various waves. Electromagnetic waves, for example, are space-time variations of electric and magnetic fields. If you could take a snapshot of the wave (in your wild imagination), you could freeze the propagating wave in time, thus facilitating you to appreciate how the wave varies in space. The same concept holds here also; the crest-to-crest or trough-to-trough distance of the wave is its wavelength. If you have studied basic Physics (even if you haven't, just trust my words) you know that shorter the wavelength, higher is the energy of the wave.

The concept of wavelength of light is crucial in understanding the different processes occurring in celestial bodies and unraveling the mysteries of the universe. Different wavelengths of light provide unique information about celestial objects, and this knowledge is essential for space exploration.

The wavelength of the electromagnetic wave that arises from a celestial body depends on the process that has generated it. If that celestial body moves away from the observer, the wavelength of the electromagnetic radiation from that body is increased a bit (we call this phenomenon a Doppler red-shift, as the red light has longest wavelength among the band of electromagnetic waves we can see). If the source approaches us, the wavelength decreases (you may say 'compressed'; we call this

phenomenon as Doppler blue-shift, for similar reason). Although the ‘Doppler’ shifts alter the wavelength to a certain extent, the nominal wavelength of the electromagnetic radiation contains information about the physical process that generated it. Now, if you wish to study multiple such processes, you need to observe at multiple wavelengths, as each wavelength has its own story to tell you.

Now, if you wish to *listen* (i.e. interpret) the complete story, you need what are called multiwavelength observations. Each wavelength range corresponds to specific phenomena, such as thermal radiation, atomic transitions, or high-energy particle emissions. By observing various wavelengths, scientists can obtain a comprehensive picture of the complex interactions and dynamics occurring in space.

For instance, **visible light**, with a wavelength between approximately 400 to 700 nanometers, allows us to study the surfaces of planets, stars, and galaxies. It provides valuable information about the composition, temperature, and structure of these objects. **Ultraviolet (UV) light**, with shorter wavelengths than the visible light, unveils the hot, energetic regions in space, including young stars, supernovae, and Active Galactic Nuclei (AGN). X-rays, with even shorter wavelengths, can penetrate dense matter, enabling us to observe phenomena like black holes, neutron stars, and high-temperature plasma.

**Infrared light**, on the other hand, has longer wavelengths than the visible light, and allows us to detect cooler objects, such as dust clouds, molecular gas, and distant

galaxies. By observing the infrared spectrum, astronomers can peep through cosmic dust clouds, which can obscure visible light, and reveal hidden stellar nurseries or planetary systems. **Radio waves**, with the longest wavelengths, help us explore the universe's largest structures, such as galaxies, galaxy clusters, and cosmic microwave background radiation. Radio observations enable us to study the processes associated with cosmic magnetic fields and cosmic microwave background radiation, offering insights into the early universe.

By combining observations across multiple wavelengths, astronomers can construct a more complete and accurate understanding of celestial objects and phenomena. This multiwavelength approach allows them to investigate different aspects simultaneously, revealing the intricate interplay between various physical processes.

Furthermore, multiwavelength observations help in overcoming the limitations of individual telescopes and instruments. Not all telescopes are optimized for observing the full electromagnetic spectrum. Some telescopes are designed for specific wavelength ranges, while others are more versatile. By utilizing a diverse set of telescopes and instruments, scientists can harness the strengths of each and gather complementary data. This collaborative effort enhances our ability to comprehend the intricate nature of the universe and pushes the boundaries of our knowledge.

## Information from the Polarisation of Electromagnetic waves

Even if we confine our discussion to observation of space using electromagnetic waves, there are certain questions that arise.

The first question is, good that you are watching the celestial body with your telescope. What exactly are you watching?

The answer could be, I am watching the time-variation of the intensity of its light. Well, it will tell about the celestial body's timing information, and/or some properties of the medium through which the light is reaching your telescope.

The next question could be, "Do you know at what wavelength you are observing the celestial body?"

To that question, you might answer, "Yes, although I am receiving all the light emitted by the celestial body, my telescope's back end has a mechanism to separate out different wavelengths. I can collect light from different wavelengths at different detectors, and analyse them as a multi-wavelength information."

Fair enough.

Then the next question is shot: "Timing, and wavelength? That's all? Don't you have any other way to derive some extra information?"

You would immediately reply back, "Are timing and wavelength now enough? Why do I need anything else?"

At this juncture, I may ask, "What if, two different processes have generated light of the same wavelength (or, so close wavelengths, that your instrument cannot

distinguish them), and they share the same timing information as well. Will you not lose some valuable information? After all, there are two processes that generated electromagnetic waves.”

Now, you would start thinking. What are all the parameters of electromagnetic waves that you have studied? Amplitude, wavelength, speed, and ...yes, polarization!

What is polarization? It refers to the orientation of the electric field vector of an electromagnetic wave as it propagates through space. Understanding polarization is crucial in space exploration as it provides valuable information about celestial objects and their surrounding environments. The polarization of light carries significant insights that find applications in planetary exploration and astronomy, enhancing our understanding of the universe. Here, we will devote some time on the building of the concept about polarization of light.

Light is often described as an electromagnetic wave, which is a train of time-and-space-oscillating Electric and Magnetic fields that propagates in space in perfect synchronization of phase. The length of the light-wave-train (one may visualize them as arrows of light with finite length), which is also referred to as ‘coherence length’, is given by the product of the velocity of light and the time associated with its generation. Let us discuss more about a single light-wave-train.

If time is frozen, and somehow, the electric and magnetic field vectors are made visible, the time-frozen light-wave ‘train’ would have been visualized as a spatially-varying

sinusoidal electric field in the x-direction (say), spatially-varying magnetic field in the y-direction, and the wave-propagation in the z-direction. It means that the x-direction would represent the direction of oscillation of the Electric field vector, and the y-direction would represent the direction of oscillation of the Magnetic field vector. The polarization of that light-wave-train is said to be along x-direction, as it is customary to refer the direction of the Electric field vector of a light-wave-train as its direction of polarization. Since in a given light-wave-train the electric field vectors are aligned in a definite plain (and the magnetic field vectors are at perpendicular to the plain of electric field vectors), it is completely (i.e. 100%) polarized. Thus, one of the parameters that describes polarization of light is the angle of the polarization (i.e. the electric field vector), with respect to a reference direction.

So far, we have discussed about a single light-wave-train, where the angle of polarization is well-defined. In reality, a source of light emits numerous number of light-wave-trains, and there is, in general, no correlation between the angles of polarization of the individual light-wave-trains. Hence, if infinite number of such light-wave-trains, emitted from a source, is considered, statistically (integrating over time) the net polarization angle will tend to zero, and such a source of light is known as an unpolarized light source. Here comes another parameter that quantifies the degree of polarization, expressed in percentage. For a light source where the net polarization is zero, the degree of polarization is zero percent. Similarly, if a source of light has 70% degree of polarization, it means that, on an average, 70% of the

light-wave-trains are vibrating in a specific direction, while the remaining 30% are oriented randomly. This alignment, or breaking of symmetry (0% polarization represents perfect directional symmetry) typically occurs due to interactions with matter or other physical processes that preferentially transmit light waves with a particular orientation.

In planetary exploration, the study of polarization helps us understand the surface properties and atmospheric conditions of planets and moons. For example, on Earth, the polarization of sunlight scattered by the atmosphere provides valuable information about atmospheric composition, aerosols, and cloud formation. By studying the polarization of light reflected off planetary surfaces, scientists can determine surface textures (say, roughness), geological properties, and the presence of certain materials, as well as signatures of water-ice. Polarimetry, the measurement of polarization properties, has been utilized in several spacecraft missions to gather crucial data for geological analysis and atmospheric investigations.

In astronomy, polarization observations shed light on a variety of phenomena and structures in the universe. Polarized light from distant stars and galaxies can reveal the presence of magnetic fields, as magnetic fields can affect the polarization of light passing through or emitted by these objects. By studying polarized light from supernova remnants, astronomers can gain insights into the geometry of the explosion and the surrounding magnetic fields. Polarimetry is also used to study the polarization of light from active galactic nuclei, allowing

scientists to probe the intricate dynamics of the supermassive black holes at their centers.

Furthermore, polarization measurements aid in the detection and characterization of exoplanets. By studying the polarization of starlight reflected off exoplanets, scientists can distinguish between scattered light from the planet's atmosphere and the glare of the host star. This enables them to identify and study exoplanetary atmospheres, determine their compositions, and even search for signs of life.

## Platforms for Space Exploration

Space exploration encompasses a wide range of platforms that serve specific purposes and enable scientists to study and explore celestial bodies and phenomena. Each platform offers unique advantages and limitations, and the choice of platform depends on the scientific objectives and observation requirements of the mission.

Scientific balloons provide a cost-effective way to conduct experiments and observations in the Earth's atmosphere and near-space regions. These large, helium-filled balloons carry scientific instruments, such as telescopes or particle detectors, to altitudes of up to 40 kilometers. Balloons allow for extended flight durations, access to specific atmospheric layers, and the ability to recover instruments after the mission. However, their limitations include limited payload capacity, dependence on wind patterns, and inability to reach outer space.

Sounding rockets are relatively (as compared with satellite launch vehicles) small rockets that carry scientific payloads to higher altitudes for brief durations. Sounding rockets offer quick turnaround times and relatively low costs compared to larger launch vehicles. However, their limited payload capacity and short flight durations restrict the scope and duration of experiments.

Satellites are spacecraft that orbit the Earth or other celestial bodies. They can be equipped with various instruments and sensors to study different aspects of the universe. Satellites provide continuous observations, long-term data collection, and global coverage. They are suitable for monitoring Earth's atmosphere, climate, and weather patterns, as well as studying distant objects in space. However, the high costs of satellite development and deployment, limited payload capacity, and finite lifespan are important considerations.

Landers and rovers are robotic spacecraft designed to land on the surface of celestial bodies, such as the Moon or Mars. They carry scientific instruments to study the surface environment, collect samples, and conduct experiments. Landers provide precise, targeted investigations of specific locations, while rovers offer mobility and the ability to traverse significant distances. However, their limited range, dependency on surface conditions, and the challenges of operating in harsh environments are notable limitations.

Fly-by missions involve spacecraft passing by a celestial body at high speeds, capturing valuable data during the

encounter. This technique allows for close-up observations without the need for landing or orbit insertion. Fly-bys provide unique opportunities for reconnaissance and data collection, but the duration of observations is limited to the short encounter time.

Impactors are spacecraft deliberately directed to collide with a celestial body to study its composition, surface properties, or to create an impact event. By analyzing the resulting debris or impact effects, scientists can gain insights into the target object. Impactors provide valuable data about the interior structure and composition of celestial bodies but are limited by the one-time nature of the mission and the destructive nature of the impact event.

In choosing the appropriate platform for a space-based mission, scientists consider factors such as scientific objectives, desired observation duration, payload capacity, cost constraints, and technological feasibility. Each platform offers distinct advantages and limitations, and the selection depends on the specific goals of the mission and the scientific questions to be answered. The diverse array of platforms ensures a comprehensive approach to space exploration, enabling scientists to explore different environments and gather a wide range of data to advance our understanding of the universe.

## How to Configure a Space Science Mission

Configuring a space science mission is a multi-step process. Here, we will present a brief overview of each

step involved to arrive at the configuration of a space mission.

Step-1: Start from a fundamental question. The fundamental question may sound more philosophical than scientific. Often it sounds very simple, and it may be difficult to understand the context of this question, i.e. whether it is a poetic or scientific statement. An example of such a fundamental question is “How is the cosmic journey of a solar system?”

Step-2: Split or decompose the fundamental question to a set of specific (semi-fundamental) questions. Those specific questions sound more scientific than philosophical. As a continuation of our example of the fundamental question, a set of specific question that may arise out of it could be “How did the solar system originate”, “How did the solar system evolve”, “How did the planets evolve so differently”, “Can the knowledge about our own solar system be extended to the other solar systems in our galaxy, or even beyond”, “Is there an Earth-like exoplanets”, to name a few.

Often, answering any of these semi-fundamental questions may necessitate multiple space missions to study multiple celestial bodies. As for example, if you are interested to study the chemistry of the early solar system, you may choose to study the permanently shadowed regions of the Moon, which are believed to have been repositories of the information regarding the early solar system. If you are interested to study the evolution of a planet that has lost its atmosphere due to the unforgiving solar forcing, you may choose to explore Mars. The

bottom-line is that, once you break down the fundamental question to a set of semi-fundamental questions, you also choose the apt target (i.e. celestial body), which is likely to provide you some clues related to your question.

**Step-3: Selection of study domain:** Once your target (celestial body to be studied) is identified, start answering what exactly would you like to study about it. Do you wish to study its interior, its surface, atmosphere, magnetic field, or anything else?

**Step-4: Selection of the parameters:** Once the domain of study is identified, this step is to identify the parameters which need to be studied. It is not only the identification of the parameters for study, but also specifying the ranges, accuracies, resolution, etc. required to answer the scientific questions. It is at this step, where one selects the techniques and instruments for conducting the scientific measurements. These important parameters go into the development of the scientific instruments or payloads.

**Step-5:** In this step, you decide about the suitable platform for conducting the observations. Would you like to achieve a global coverage of the celestial body? Then an orbiter around the celestial body with a suitable orbital geometry might be your choice. If you wish to perform scientific analysis at a given location of a celestial body, you may choose a lander and/or a rover platform. Once the observation platform is selected, the next step is to arrive at the observation plan. This include preparing a plan for when to observe, which operational mode of the instrument to invoke, when to store the data, to name a few. This stage of planning also includes the aspect of

visibility of the ground station(s) and the plan for data download.

Take the example of any space mission globally, it must have paved the way of these steps. You must have appreciated by now, that, a given space mission cannot provide the ultimate answer to a fundamental question. It is the collective effort of numerous scientists and engineers who plan several space missions that provide diverse perspectives to several semi-fundamental questions. Arriving at *the* answer to the fundamental question requires putting together all the pieces of information available from the space missions, ground observations, simulations, as well as modelling. That is precisely why a holistic and philosophical view is necessary to be a space scientist.

## Planetary Protection

When you are sending a space mission that is supposed to land on, say, Moon, that too at its polar region (which could contain valuable information about early solar system), can you afford to carry some biological substance (say, organic molecules), even by mistake?

No.

If you do, it would contaminate the pristine information of the celestial body.

Similarly, when you bring back a sample from a celestial body to the Earth, are you sure that you are not bringing back any substance that would contaminate the environment of the Earth?

These aspects of space exploration are called Planetary Protection. Protect the planets from getting contaminated, protect your own planet.

Planetary protection, thus, is a crucial practice in space exploration that aims to protect other planets and moons from potential contamination by Earth's microbes, while also safeguarding Earth from possible harmful substances brought back from space missions. This practice ensures that the search for life beyond Earth remains unbiased and allows us to explore other worlds with minimal interference.

When we send spacecraft to explore other celestial bodies, there is a risk that our own germs or microorganisms could hitch a ride and contaminate these places. This is a concern because if we find signs of life on these planets or moons, we want to be certain that it originated there and is not just a result of contamination from Earth. Additionally, these alien environments may be delicate and vulnerable, and introducing Earth's organisms could disrupt the balance and hinder scientific discoveries.

To prevent contamination either way, strict protocols and cleanliness measures are implemented in spacecraft design, assembly, and testing. Special precautions are taken to sterilize the spacecraft, ensuring that they are as germ-free as possible before they leave Earth.

Likewise, when astronauts return from space missions, they are quarantined and undergo thorough health checks to prevent any potential hazardous materials from entering Earth's biosphere. This is done to protect our planet's delicate ecosystems and prevent the introduction

of unknown substances that could harm humans, animals, or the environment.

Planetary protection is vital for the future of space exploration because it allows us to conduct unbiased scientific research and search for extraterrestrial life without interference from Earth's organisms. It also ensures that we protect our own planet from any potential harmful substances that may be present in space. By adhering to strict protocols and maintaining cleanliness standards, we can continue to explore and learn about the wonders of the universe while preserving the integrity of both Earth and other celestial bodies.

## Space Infrastructure

Space Infrastructure refers to the combined capability of development of rockets to access space, rocket launch facilities, satellites and other suitable space-based observation platforms, ground stations for tracking, commanding, and receiving of the data. The tracking and commanding functions refer to both rockets and satellites. Apart from the tracking data, the ground stations are also equipped to receive the health check parameters of rockets and satellites through a technique called telemetry. Thus, the space infrastructure is classified into two major classes, *viz.* (i) Space segment, and (ii) Ground Segment. Usually, the rockets and satellites, which 'go to the space', are referred to as 'space segments', while the ground stations are referred to as 'ground segments'. India sports its complete chain of space infrastructure, i.e. it has all the space and ground segments. Among the several centres

of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), the space agency of India, many cater to the development of space and ground segments.

## **Journey of India's Space Exploration**

### **Formative Years**

The Indian Space exploration journey began way back in 1920s with the series of experiments conducted by Prof. Sisir Kumar Mitra, a disciple of Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose. Prof. Sisir Kumar Mitra used radiowave sounding technique for the study of Earth's ionosphere. The decade of 1940s witnessed two great institution builders, Dr. Homi Bhaba and Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, who established the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) and Physical Research Laboratory (PRL), respectively. During 1940s several cosmic ray experiments were conducted with scientific balloons from National Balloon Facility, TIFR. Both TIFR and PRL played pivotal roles in these ground-breaking experiments. This early research laid the foundation for India's ambitious space exploration journey.

Apart from the study of the cosmic rays, the study of the upper atmosphere and ionosphere near the geomagnetic equator emerged as a key area of interest for Indian scientists. Recognizing the importance of this unique region, the Thumba Equatorial Rocket Launching Centre (TERLS) was established in Thumba, Kerala, in 1962. Located near the geomagnetic equator, TERLS provided an ideal launch site for rockets to explore the upper atmosphere and ionosphere. It became a hub for

conducting experiments and launching sounding rockets to gather valuable data about these regions. On 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1968, TERLS was dedicated to the United Nations. The decades of 1960s and 70s have witnessed several scientific experiments conducted from the land of Thumba using sounding rocket platforms. The first sounding rocket was launched from Thumba on 21 November, 1963.

## Birth of ISRO

In 1962, Indian National Committee for Space Research (INCOSPAR) was set up, shortly after which, in 1969, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was founded. Subsequently, in 1972, Space Commission and Department of Space (DoS) were set up to steer the development of space science and technology in India, and ISRO was brought under DoS. Since its inception, ISRO has undertaken several space science missions that have expanded our knowledge of the universe and pushed the boundaries of Indian space technology.

## India's Space-based exploration

The exercise of building scientific instruments for sounding rockets was the formative ground for the development of space-borne instruments for exploratory space science. Through the cycles of successes and failures, Indian scientists and engineers burnt their fingers to master the art of building scientific instruments that would withstand the unforgiving environment of space. As a natural consequence, the year 1975 witnessed the

launch of the first Indian satellite Aryabhata, that included X-Ray astronomy, Aeronomy and solar physics experiments. Subsequently, in 1994, the SROSS C2 from India was launched to study Gamma Ray Bursts (GRB). Within two more years, in 1996, Indian X-Ray Astronomy Experiment (IXAE) was flown. Year 2003 witnessed the Solar X-Ray Spectrometer Experiment (SOXS). If you closely follow these developments, you will notice that Indian space exploration emphasized mostly on Astronomy (and Solar physics) to start with, and many of the scientific experiments were co-passenger to operational missions. However, during this process, the country was gathering experience to send its own dedicated scientific missions.

In the early twenty first century, India ventured into dedicated scientific missions to study the solar system. In 2008, the Chandrayaan-1 mission was launched. This mission placed India on the global space map as the fourth country to reach the Moon. Chandrayaan-1 successfully carried out a range of experiments, including detailed mapping of the lunar surface and the discovery of water molecules on the Moon.

Another significant milestone was the Mars Orbiter Mission, popularly known as Mangalyaan, launched in 2013. Mangalyaan achieved global acclaim as India became the first country to reach Mars on its maiden attempt. The mission provided valuable insights into the Martian atmosphere and further showcased India's space capabilities.

ISRO's space science missions also include AstroSat, India's first dedicated multi-wavelength space observatory. Launched in 2015, AstroSat has contributed significantly to the field of astronomy by observing celestial objects in different wavelengths and conducting astrophysical studies.

Building on these achievements, ISRO embarked on the Chandrayaan-2 mission in 2019, aiming to land a rover on the lunar surface. Although the lander encountered challenges during the final descent, the mission demonstrated India's prowess in lunar exploration and the capability to undertake complex missions.

Chandrayaan-3, launched on July 14, 2023, achieved soft-landing on the lunar face at Southern higher latitude (69.3 S, 32.3 E) on August 23, 2023. The Chandrayaan-3 landing site is named as 'Shiva Shakti point', and the day August 23 is announced as the 'National Space Day' by the Honb'le Prime Minister of India.

The Aditya-L1 mission, ISRO's endeavour to study the Sun, is launched on September 2, 2023. It will be injected in a halo orbit around the Sun-Earth L1 point, which is about 1.5 million km away from the Earth (Sun-Earth distance is about 150 million km), where the gravitational forces of the Sun and the Earth cancel each other.

ISRO has several missions in its roadmap, showcasing India's commitment to further expand its space exploration programme. The X-ray polarimetry satellite,

is also ready, highlighting ISRO's diverse scientific objectives.

The genesis and evolution of the Indian Space Exploration Programme demonstrate India's steady progress in space science and technology. From the early cosmic ray experiments to the establishment of research centers, and the successful execution of space missions like Chandrayaan-1 and Mars Orbiter Mission, India has made significant strides in advancing its space capabilities. With ambitious missions on the horizon and an unwavering commitment to exploration, India's space programme continues to push boundaries, expand scientific knowledge, and inspire generations to dream big in the realm of space exploration.

## Major Verticals in Space Exploration

At present, the major verticals of India's space exploration programme are: (i) Planetary Exploration, (ii) Solarphysics, Heliophysics, and Space Weather (iii) Astronomy and Astrophysics, and (iv) Aeronomy and Space Weather Impact. Following is a brief description about each of the verticals.

### Planetary Exploration

Planetary exploration encompasses the scientific study of celestial bodies within our solar system, such as planets, moons, asteroids, and comets. It aims to unravel the mysteries of these cosmic entities, understand their origin, evolution, and potential for supporting life. Through the

exploration of other planets and moons, scientists gain insights into Earth's past, present, and future, enhancing our understanding of our own planet.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has been actively involved in planetary exploration, making significant contributions to our understanding of the solar system. One of the notable missions undertaken by ISRO was Chandrayaan-1, launched in 2008. It was India's first lunar mission and played a crucial role in the discovery of water molecules on the Moon's surface. Chandrayaan-1 also conducted detailed mapping of the lunar surface, providing valuable data for future lunar missions.

Building on the success of Chandrayaan-1, ISRO embarked on Chandrayaan-2, a more ambitious lunar mission launched in 2019. Although the lander encountered challenges during its descent, the orbiter continues to operate successfully, capturing high-resolution images of the lunar surface and conducting scientific experiments. Chandrayaan-2's primary objective was to study the lunar south pole region, which is believed to contain water ice and hold clues to the Moon's geological history.

In addition to lunar exploration, ISRO ventured beyond the Moon with the Mars Orbiter Mission, also known as Mangalyaan, launched in 2013. This mission made India the first Asian nation to successfully reach Mars. Mangalyaan provided valuable data about the Martian atmosphere, its composition, and dynamics, contributing to global scientific knowledge of the Red Planet.

The Chandrayaan-3 mission is a follow-up to the Chandrayaan-2 mission. Chandrayaan-3 achieved soft landing on the lunar surface, addressing the challenges encountered during the previous mission. Scientific objective of this mission is to conduct studies on the composition and thermo-physical properties of the lunar regolith, as well as studying the vibrations on the Moon due to moonquakes and other impact-generated events, and also to study the plasma environment near the lunar surface. It will continue India's quest to explore the Moon and further advance our understanding of Earth's closest celestial neighbour.

Thus, planetary exploration provides a unique opportunity to expand our understanding of the universe and our place within it. ISRO's endeavours, including missions like Chandrayaan-1, Chandrayaan-2, Mars Orbiter Mission, and the Chandrayaan-3. Comparative planetology not only enriches our understanding of other celestial bodies but also helps us predict the future of Earth and make informed decisions to ensure a sustainable future.

## Solar physics, Heliophysics, and Space Weather

Solar physics is the study of the Sun and its dynamic processes, while the term heliophysics refers to the study of impact of the emissions from the Sun on the solar system. Some scientists use these two terms synonymously. Solar and Heliophysics encompass a wide range of phenomena, including solar flares, coronal mass ejections, solar wind, and the generation of the solar magnetic field. Understanding this domain is crucial for

studying space weather, which refers to the conditions and disturbances in the space environment that can affect technologies on Earth and in space.

ISRO has been actively involved in solar physics and heliophysics research, contributing to our understanding of the Sun and its effects. One of the significant missions by ISRO is the Aditya-L1 mission, which is India's first solar mission, dedicated to study the Sun from a unique vantage point called the Lagrangian L1 point, which is about 1.5 million kilometers from Earth. At this point, the gravitational forces of Sun and Earth balance each other, and hence, the L1 point is a point of unstable equilibrium. A spacecraft around the L1 point is dynamically stable in a special type of orbit called 'halo' orbit. Thus, the Aditya-L1 mission will be inserted in a pre-determined halo orbit about the L1 point between the Sun and the Earth.

The primary objective of the Aditya-L1 mission is to study the Sun's corona, the outermost layer of the solar atmosphere, which exhibits high temperatures and plays a crucial role in driving space weather phenomena. Study of the solar corona will help scientists understand the mechanisms behind solar flares, coronal mass ejections, and their impact on Earth's space environment.

Aditya-L1 carries a suite of instruments, including a visible emission line coronagraph to observe the solar corona, a solar ultraviolet imaging telescope to study the Sun's chromosphere, a solar X-ray spectrometer to measure solar X-ray emissions, as well as instruments to

study the solar wind ions and electrons at the first Sun-Earth Lagrange point, along with the Interplanetary Magnetic Field. These instruments will provide valuable data for understanding the dynamic processes occurring on the Sun and their influence on space weather.

Space weather affects a wide range of technological systems, including satellites, power grids, communication networks, and navigation systems. By studying and predicting space weather, scientists and engineers can mitigate its potential impacts and ensure the safety and reliability of these critical systems.

To sum up, solar physics, heliophysics, and space weather research are essential for understanding the Sun's behavior and its effects on Earth and the solar system. ISRO's Aditya-L1 mission represents India's endeavor to study the Sun and its corona, contributing to global efforts in solar physics research and advancing our understanding of space weather. By studying the Sun and its influence, we can better protect and prepare our technological infrastructure against the impacts of space weather phenomena.

## Astronomy and Astrophysics

Astronomy and astrophysics are closely related disciplines that explore the vastness of the universe, its celestial objects, and the physical laws governing them. Students often ask about the connections between Astronomy, Astrophysics, and Cosmology. Cosmology is the scientific study of the origin, evolution, and overall

structure of the universe. It aims to understand the fundamental principles that govern the universe on its largest scales, including its structure, composition, and dynamics. Cosmology seeks to answer questions about the universe's origins, its past and future evolution, the nature of dark matter and dark energy, and the formation and distribution of galaxies and large-scale structures.

Astronomy, on the other hand, is the study of celestial objects, such as stars, planets, galaxies, and their properties, behavior, and interactions. It encompasses observations, theoretical models, and experiments to understand the nature and behavior of these objects. Astronomers study the positions, motions, and physical properties of celestial bodies and explore phenomena such as stellar evolution, galaxy formation, and the dynamics of celestial objects.

Astrophysics is a branch of astronomy that focuses on applying the principles of physics to understand the behavior and properties of celestial objects. It involves studying the physical processes, such as nuclear reactions, gravity, electromagnetism, and the behavior of matter and energy, in astronomical systems. Astrophysics encompasses a wide range of topics, including stellar astrophysics, galactic astrophysics, high-energy astrophysics, and more.

While astronomy and astrophysics primarily focus on the study of celestial objects and their physical properties, cosmology takes a broader perspective. Cosmology seeks to understand the universe as a whole, including its origin,

large-scale structure, and dynamics, as well as the underlying physical laws that govern it. It addresses questions about the nature of space and time, the expansion of the universe, the distribution of matter and energy, and the ultimate fate of the cosmos.

ISRO has made significant contributions to the field of astronomy and astrophysics through its dedicated missions. One of the notable missions is AstroSat, India's first multi-wavelength space observatory launched in 2015. AstroSat carries a suite of instruments capable of observing celestial objects across the electromagnetic spectrum, including X-rays, ultraviolet, visible, and gamma rays. It has been instrumental in studying a wide range of astrophysical phenomena, such as black holes, active galactic nuclei, supernovae, and star formation regions.

ISRO has ventured into the measurement of the polarization of the X-Ray from bright X-Ray sources, through the X-ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPoSat) mission. X-Ray polarization serves as a crucial diagnostic tool for examining the radiation mechanism and geometry of celestial sources. By venturing into X-ray astronomy, ISRO aims to contribute to our understanding of the most energetic processes occurring in the universe. X-ray observations provide unique information about highly energetic phenomena that cannot be observed with other wavelengths. By studying X-rays, scientists can unravel the dynamics of black holes, the behavior of matter in extreme environments, and the nature of cosmic explosions.

ISRO's efforts in astronomy and astrophysics are aligned with its commitment to scientific exploration and expanding our knowledge of the universe. Through missions like AstroSat and upcoming missions like XPoSat, ISRO aims to advance our understanding of the cosmos and contribute to global efforts in unraveling the mysteries of the universe.

ISRO's endeavors in this field, including the AstroSat mission and the XPoSat mission, reflect its commitment to pushing the boundaries of scientific exploration and contributing to the growing body of knowledge in astronomy and astrophysics. These missions enable the exploration of various wavelengths, including X-rays, allowing scientists to gain insights into the most energetic phenomena in the universe and unravel the mysteries of the cosmos.

## Aeronomy and Space Weather Impact

Aeronomy focuses on the study of the upper atmosphere and its interactions with the Sun, space weather, and the Earth's magnetic field. It investigates the composition, structure, and dynamics of the ionosphere and the neutral atmosphere in the upper regions of the Earth's atmosphere.

The study of aeronomy is crucial for understanding the impact of space weather on our planet. Space weather refers to the conditions and disturbances in the space environment that can affect various technological systems on Earth, including satellite communication, navigation,

and power grids. By studying aeronomy, scientists can gain insights into the processes occurring in the upper atmosphere and their relationship with space weather phenomena such as solar flares, geomagnetic storms, and ionospheric disturbances.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has been actively involved in aeronomy research and has made significant contributions to our understanding of the upper atmosphere and its interaction with space weather. ISRO's efforts in aeronomy include the study of the ionosphere near the geomagnetic equator, which is crucial due to its unique characteristics and susceptibility to space weather effects.

Looking ahead, ISRO has plans for future aeronomy missions. ISRO's endeavors in aeronomy not only contribute to our understanding of the upper atmosphere but also play a crucial role in assessing and mitigating the impact of space weather on technological systems. By studying the ionosphere and its relationship with space weather, ISRO's research and missions aim to improve our ability to forecast and understand the effects of space weather events on Earth.

## **Repository of Indian Space Science Data**

The Indian Space Science Data Centre (ISSDC) serves as the central hub for the archival management of payload data from various Indian Space Science Missions. Situated on the Indian Deep Space Network (IDSN)

campus in Byalalu, which is near Bangalore, ISSDC plays a pivotal role in the ingest, processing, archival, and dissemination of science payload data and associated ancillary data for space science exploration missions. The space science data are archived in compliance with the standards of the Planetary Data System (PDS). This approach ensures global compliance with long-term data preservation standards, maintaining data usability, and facilitating the scientific community with high-quality data for analysis. Mission archives encompass a comprehensive range of data types, including raw and reduced data, calibration data, auxiliary data, higher-level derived data products, documentation, and software. Initially reserved for principal investigators during the lock-in period, ISSDC's data becomes accessible to scientists from other institutions and the general public, fostering broader scientific exploration and knowledge dissemination.

## Ground Based Solar and Astronomy Observatories in India

Apart from its space infrastructure, India is also home to several ground-based solar and astronomy observatories that contribute significantly to scientific research. The space and ground based observations often complement and/or supplement each other. Here are some notable observatories, along with their operating institutes and key capabilities:

1. **Gurushikhar Observatory** - Operated by the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL): This

observatory, located in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, is equipped with a 1.2-meter infrared telescope and a 1.04-meter optical telescope. It facilitates research in various areas of astrophysics, including star formation and solar physics.

2. **Udaipur Solar Observatory** - Operated by the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL): Situated in Udaipur, Rajasthan, this observatory is dedicated to solar observations. It houses advanced instruments for studying the Sun's activity, such as sunspots, solar flares, and solar magnetic fields.
3. **Vainu Bappu Observatory** - Operated by the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA): Located in Kavalur, Tamil Nadu, this observatory operates a 2.34-meter optical telescope. It is utilized for research in stellar astrophysics, galaxy evolution, and other areas of observational astronomy.
4. **Gauribidanur Radio Observatory** - Operated by the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA): Situated in Gauribidanur, Karnataka, this observatory hosts a range of radio telescopes. It enables studies of radio emissions from celestial objects, including radio galaxies, pulsars, and quasars.
5. **Neutrino Observatory** - Operated by the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR): This observatory, located in Theni district, Tamil Nadu, focuses on the study of neutrinos, elusive subatomic particles. It aims to explore neutrino oscillations and provide insights into particle physics and astrophysics.
6. **Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT)** - Operated by the National Centre for Radio

Astrophysics (NCRA-TIFR): Located near Pune, Maharashtra, GMRT is a leading radio telescope array. It comprises 30 individual antennas and allows for detailed observations of a wide range of astronomical phenomena.

7. **Ooty Radio Telescope** - Operated by the Bharatiya Chitra Sankalan Akademi (BCSA-TIFR): Situated in Ooty, Tamil Nadu, this radio telescope focuses on radio astronomy studies, including pulsars, radio galaxies, and interstellar medium research.
8. **Devasthal Optical Telescope** - Operated by the Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES): Located in Devasthal, Uttarakhand, this observatory houses a 3.6-meter optical telescope. It facilitates research in various fields, including astrophysics, stellar astronomy, and solar physics.

These ground-based observatories contribute significantly to scientific research and enable space scientists to study various astronomical phenomena, including solar events, across different wavelengths. They play a crucial role in advancing our understanding of the universe and addressing key questions in astronomy and astrophysics.

## Technologies Associated

Space exploration is a multi-disciplinary endeavor that requires the convergence of diverse technological fields to materialize successful missions. From propulsion

systems to robotics, communication networks to life support systems, numerous cutting-edge technologies play a crucial role in enabling human beings to explore the vastness of space.

One such example of the multi-disciplinary nature of space exploration is the field of planetary rovers. Planetary rovers are robotic vehicles designed to explore the surfaces of celestial bodies such as the Moon and Mars. The development of these rovers necessitates expertise from multiple disciplines, including mechanical engineering, robotics, materials science, computer science, and planetary science.

Mechanical engineers play a vital role in designing the rover's structure, ensuring it can withstand the harsh conditions of space and the challenging terrain of the target planet. Robotics experts contribute to the development of the rover's mobility systems, such as wheels and joints, enabling it to traverse different terrains and collect data. Materials scientists work on developing lightweight yet durable materials that can withstand the extreme temperatures and radiation in space. Computer scientists develop the rover's software, enabling it to navigate autonomously and perform scientific experiments. Meanwhile, planetary scientists provide crucial input on the scientific instruments and payloads that the rover carries, ensuring they can collect valuable data about the planet's geology, atmosphere, and potential for life.

## Multi-disciplinary Nature of Space Exploration

Next, we will discuss how the subjects taught in the curriculum find their application in Space science research and exploration. You name a subject, and there are suitable applications. That is why space exploration is known as a multi-disciplinary area.

The multi-disciplinary nature of space exploration highlights the fact that it involves knowledge and expertise from various fields of study. Space exploration encompasses a wide range of scientific, engineering, and technological aspects, requiring collaboration and contributions from diverse disciplines. Importantly, space exploration requires a system-level thinking approach that transcends the boundaries of individual subjects. Integration of knowledge from multiple disciplines is crucial to address the complex challenges of space missions effectively. The ability to understand and collaborate across various domains ensures a holistic approach and fosters innovation and breakthroughs in space exploration.

### Applications of Physical Sciences and Technology

Students from different disciplines can find their curriculum useful in the domains of space exploration in the following ways:

(i) **Physics:** Physics forms the foundation of space exploration, providing the fundamental understanding of the laws of nature and the behavior of matter and energy in space. Every facet of space research and exploration is deep-rooted in Physics.

(ii) **Chemistry:** Chemistry plays a crucial role in space science and technology. The knowledge of Chemistry helps analyzing the composition of celestial bodies, understanding chemical reactions in space, and developing materials for spacecraft and equipment.

(iii) **Mathematics:** Mathematics is essential for modeling and simulations, orbital mechanics, trajectory calculations, and data analysis in space missions.

(iv) **Computer Science:** Computer science is integral to space exploration, involving tasks such as data processing, satellite control systems, spacecraft communication, and artificial intelligence for autonomous operations.

(v) **Electronics and Communication:** Electronics and communication are vital for designing and developing spacecraft instrumentation, communication systems, and satellite technology.

(vi) **Electrical Engineering:** Electrical engineering contributes to the design and development of power systems, control systems, sensors, and instruments used in space missions.

(vii) Mechanical Engineering: Mechanical engineering is crucial for designing and building spacecraft structures, propulsion systems, and mechanisms for deployment and movement.

(viii) Civil Engineering: Civil engineering principles are relevant in designing launch facilities, ground stations, and infrastructure for space exploration. In a more futuristic sense, civil engineers will play an important role to develop observatories and human establishments in extra-terrestrial world.

(ix) Robotics: Robotics plays a significant role in space exploration, aiding in the development of autonomous rovers, robotic arms, and other robotic systems for planetary exploration and spacecraft maintenance. Humanoid robots equipped with artificial intelligence may play significant role in space exploration.

(x) Aeronautical Engineering and Propulsion Engineering: Aeronautical and propulsion engineering are essential for developing advanced propulsion systems, designing spacecraft engines, and optimizing aerodynamic performance for space vehicles.

## Applications of Biology

Even, biology has an important role in space exploration. The application of biology in space science and exploration is a fascinating field that explores the impact of space on living organisms and the potential for sustaining life beyond Earth. Biology plays a crucial role

in understanding the effects of space conditions on human health, developing life support systems for long-duration space missions, and exploring the potential for extra-terrestrial life.

One significant aspect of biology in space exploration is studying the physiological and psychological effects of microgravity on astronauts. This includes investigating changes in bone density, muscle mass, cardiovascular function, and the immune system. Understanding these changes helps in developing countermeasures and ensuring the well-being of astronauts during space missions.

Furthermore, biology plays a vital role in studying the potential for life beyond Earth. Astrobiology, a multidisciplinary field that combines biology, chemistry, and physics, seeks to understand the origin, evolution, and distribution of life in the universe. Scientists explore extreme environments on Earth, such as deep-sea hydrothermal vents or Arctic regions, to study organisms that can survive in harsh conditions similar to those found on other celestial bodies.

Additionally, biology is essential in the development of life support systems and sustainable habitats for long-duration human space missions. Bio-regenerative systems utilize biological processes to recycle waste, purify water, and produce food, providing a self-sustaining environment for astronauts. This research has implications not only for space exploration but also for

sustainability on Earth, as it encourages innovative approaches to resource management and waste reduction.

In recent years, there have been advancements in the field of synthetic biology, which explores the potential for genetically engineering organisms to adapt and thrive in space environments. This could lead to the development of new technologies and materials that can withstand the challenges of space travel and colonization.

The application of biology in space science and exploration offers exciting possibilities for understanding the limits of life, developing technologies to support human presence in space, and potentially discovering extraterrestrial life. By studying the biological aspects of space, scientists aim to unlock the mysteries of the universe and ensure the success and sustainability of future space missions.

## Astrobiology

Astrobiology is yet another interdisciplinary field that directly fuses biology with space science that investigates the origins, evolution, and distribution of life in the universe. To be precise, Astrobiology combines elements of biology, chemistry, physics, and astronomy to study the conditions required for life and the potential for life beyond Earth. Astrobiologists explore extreme environments on Earth and study the possibilities of life in places like Mars, icy moons, and exoplanets. By examining the building blocks of life, the habitability of different environments, and the potential for extra-

terrestrial life, astrobiology aims to answer the fundamental question: Are we alone in the universe?

Thus, the multi-disciplinary nature of space exploration highlights the importance of diverse fields of study coming together. Students from physics, chemistry, mathematics, computer science, electronics and communication, electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, civil engineering, robotics, aeronautical engineering, and propulsion engineering can all contribute to the exciting field of space exploration. The integration of knowledge from various disciplines and the ability to think at a system level are key to advancing our understanding of the universe and achieving breakthroughs in space exploration.

## Astrochemistry

Astrochemistry is yet another interdisciplinary field that fuses Astronomy and Chemistry. Astrochemistry explores the chemical composition, reactions, and processes occurring in astronomical environments. It lies at the intersection of chemistry and astronomy, studying the formation and behavior of molecules in space, as well as their impact on the formation and evolution of celestial objects.

By studying the chemistry of astronomical objects, such as stars, planets, comets, and interstellar clouds, scientists can gain insights into the origins of these celestial bodies and understand the fundamental processes that govern their evolution. Astrochemists investigate the formation

of complex molecules, the role of chemistry in star and planet formation, the chemistry of planetary atmospheres, and the presence of organic molecules in space.

Astrochemistry differs from astrophysics in its specific focus on the chemical aspects of astronomical objects. While astrophysics broadly covers the physics of celestial bodies, astrochemistry addresses the chemical reactions and processes occurring within those objects. It examines the formation and destruction of molecules, the impact of radiation and particle interactions on chemical reactions, and the role of chemical processes in shaping the cosmos.

Astrochemistry employs a range of observational and laboratory techniques to study the chemical composition of space. Observations are made using telescopes, spectroscopy, and other instruments capable of detecting molecular signatures in different regions of the electromagnetic spectrum. Laboratory experiments simulate the extreme conditions found in space to understand the chemical reactions that occur in such environments.

## **System-thinking: The Undercurrent of Unity**

I had a teacher (Late Professor Sisir Kumar Bhanja at St. Xavier's College, Kolkata) in my undergraduate level, who used to tell me *“You should be able to see the undercurrent of unity.”*

Very less people can see that. However, it is not impossible. Professionally, I have seen such people. They are the true human assets. They are system-thinkers. They understand the subsystems thoroughly, but also understand the interactions between the subsystems that dictate the overall system behavior.

Developing a multi-disciplinary, system-level view of space science and exploration is indeed imperative, as it facilitates understanding of the complex interconnections and broader context of the field. It is not important only to grasp the physical concepts about the celestial bodies, processes, and interaction, but also to develop space-borne or even ground-based instruments for observations. It is a rare combination that an individual is good at both science and engineering, but once this combination is achieved, wonders can happen! You can train yourself to achieve such a multi-faceted talent from school level. Now, the question is, how can we take a few steps towards that?

While there is no royal road to achieve system-thinking, here are a few suggestions on how students can cultivate such a perspective:

**Unconventional combination of subjects:** While specific domains have their importance, students can opt for elective courses or minors in related fields. For example, an engineering student interested in space science can take courses in astrophysics, planetary science, or space policy. Similarly, a physics student can explore courses in aerospace engineering or satellite communications. This interdisciplinary exposure helps

bridge the knowledge gaps and provides a holistic understanding.

**Engage in Projects:** While seeing is believing, *doing* is assimilating. Engage in projects that require collaboration across different disciplines. This could involve working with students or faculty members from diverse backgrounds such as engineering, computer science, biology, or even social sciences. By participating in such projects, students can learn to appreciate the interconnectedness of different fields and gain exposure to new perspectives and methodologies.

**Attend Conferences and Workshops:** Participate in conferences, workshops, and seminars that focus on space science and exploration. These events often bring together experts from various disciplines who share their research and insights. Attending such gatherings can broaden understanding of the different aspects and challenges involved in space science. It also provides opportunities for networking and collaboration with professionals in diverse fields.

**Engage in Space-related Clubs and Organizations:** Joining space-related clubs or organizations on campus can provide exposure to a wide range of disciplines and activities related to space exploration. These groups often organize events, workshops, and discussions that cover different aspects of space science, including engineering, policy, and more. Active participation in such organizations can foster a multi-disciplinary mindset and encourage collaboration with students from various backgrounds.

**Stay Updated with Current Research:** It could be a bit of extra mile for a high school student, but you can always start with popular science magazines. Gradually, you will be able to follow the topics related to space science and technology. Paving this way, keep abreast of the latest research and developments in space science and exploration. Once you grow matured, start reading scientific journals and articles, that cover a wide range of topics. This habit of exploring different disciplines within space science can help students develop a system-level understanding by connecting the dots between various areas of research.

**Seek Mentorship:** Connect with professors or professionals who have expertise in interdisciplinary fields related to space science and exploration. Seek their guidance and mentorship to understand how different domains converge and how to cultivate a multi-disciplinary perspective. Mentors can provide valuable insights, recommend resources, and offer opportunities for involvement in interdisciplinary projects or research.

Remember, developing a multi-disciplinary, system-level view takes time and effort. It requires an open mindset, curiosity, and a willingness to explore beyond one's primary domain of study. By actively seeking opportunities to integrate knowledge from diverse fields, students can gain a broader understanding of space science and exploration, which will be valuable in their future career.

## International Cooperation in Space Exploration

The multi-disciplinary nature of space exploration extends to other technologies as well. For instance, propulsion systems require expertise in aerospace engineering, thermodynamics, and materials science to develop efficient engines capable of propelling spacecraft over vast distances. Communication systems involve the integration of electrical engineering, signal processing, and antenna design to establish reliable communication links between spacecraft and Earth.

The collaborative effort across disciplines is crucial for space exploration as it brings together diverse perspectives and expertise, enabling the development of innovative solutions and the successful realization of complex missions. Space exploration continues to drive technological advancements, pushing the boundaries of human knowledge and inspiring future generations to explore the wonders of the universe.

International cooperation plays a pivotal role in advancing space exploration by fostering collaboration, sharing resources, and leveraging expertise from various nations. The scale and complexity of space missions often necessitate joint efforts and partnerships between countries to achieve common goals and maximize scientific discoveries.

One of the key aspects of international cooperation is the formation of joint science working groups. These groups bring together scientists and researchers from different countries to collaborate on mission planning, data analysis, and scientific discoveries. By pooling their knowledge and resources, scientists can tackle complex research questions and gain a more comprehensive understanding of celestial phenomena.

Joint missions are another crucial aspect of international cooperation. Collaborative missions allow countries to combine their technical capabilities and resources to undertake ambitious projects that would be challenging or cost-prohibitive for a single nation. Examples include the International Space Station (ISS), a multinational research laboratory orbiting Earth, which serves as a platform for scientific experiments and technological advancements.

The joint development of hardware is another area where international cooperation shines. By sharing expertise and resources, countries can collectively develop advanced spacecraft, telescopes, and other instruments that enable ground-breaking scientific discoveries.

Coordinated observations and inter-calibration of science instruments between multiple missions are crucial for gathering accurate and complementary data. When multiple missions observe the same celestial object or phenomenon, the data can be cross-validated, improving the scientific understanding and reducing uncertainties. International collaboration allows for better coordination

and harmonization of observations, leading to more robust and reliable scientific results.

International cooperation also extends to safety and emergency response. Countries collaborate on astronaut rescue and recovery plans, ensuring the safety of astronauts in case of contingencies during space missions. This cooperative effort underscores the shared commitment to the well-being and success of human space exploration.

Professional exchange programs are essential for fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing among scientists, engineers, and technicians. International exchange programs allow experts to work together, learn from each other's experiences, and build long-lasting relationships. These exchanges facilitate the transfer of technical expertise and promote cultural understanding, enhancing the global space community.

Furthermore, international cooperation in space exploration promotes diplomacy and peaceful relations among nations. It serves as a platform for countries to come together, transcending geopolitical boundaries, and work towards a common scientific endeavor that benefits all of humanity.

To sum up, international cooperation is of paramount importance in space exploration. Joint science working groups, collaborative missions, shared hardware development, coordinated observations, inter-calibration of science instruments, astronaut rescue and recovery

plans, professional exchange programs, and other aspects foster synergy among nations, accelerate scientific progress, and enable breakthrough discoveries. By joining forces, countries can overcome technical, financial, and logistical challenges, pushing the boundaries of our knowledge and inspiring future generations to explore the wonders of the universe.

## Summary

This booklet covers in brief the general aspects of space science and space exploration. The objective has been to present, in a nutshell, the holistic view of the domain of space science and technology to the inquisitive minds, which would provoke system level of thinking. The motivation behind this work is an attempt to offer a comprehensive vision of the space science, as well as to help the readers to grasp the significance of each of the apparently different aspects and appreciate the collective harmony.

To summarise, this work highlighted the diverse aspects of space science and the interconnectedness of various disciplines, along with the importance of international cooperation in unravelling the mysteries of the cosmos. The article delved into the concepts of Earth's geosphere, biosphere, near-Earth space, solar system, Milky Way galaxy, and the observable universe.

The booklet also touched upon the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)'s space science program. ISRO's

contributions, such as lunar and Mars missions, highlighted the country's commitment to advancing space exploration and technology. The discussion also underscored the significance of system level thinking in space science and technology. It emphasized the interconnectedness of various disciplines and the necessity of considering the broader picture when approaching complex problems. This holistic approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the cosmos and enables the development of innovative solutions.

Finally, this work stressed the importance of international cooperation. Collaboration between nations allows for the sharing of resources, expertise, and data, leading to accelerated scientific progress. It fosters a spirit of exploration that transcends borders and unites humanity in our collective quest for knowledge.

If 'space science and exploration' is an ocean, this booklet will provide you an opportunity to sail through the backwaters, and wonder how adventurous the ocean could be .

