

symposia on theoretical physics and mathematics

Lectures presented at the
1969 Seventh Anniversary
Symposium of the Institute
of Mathematical Sciences
Madras, India

10

Edited by
ALLADI RAMAKRISHNAN
Director of the Institute



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theoretical
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and mathematics**

10

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Introduction

This volume, the tenth in the series, comprises the proceedings of the Seventh Anniversary Symposium, as well as some important seminars held during 1968–1969 at the Institute of Mathematical Sciences, in Madras. The volume opens with an article by Professor Shreeram Abhyankar on the life and work of the famous Indian mathematician, Srinivasa Ramanujan, whose memory is being cherished by the Institute through a visiting professorship in his name. By a fortunate circumstance, we were able to include as a sequel an article by Professor Robert A. Rankin, in which is given a survey of problems, solved and unsolved, concerning Ramanujan's function $\tau(n)$.

The first half of the volume contains the mathematical contributions, mainly in analysis, and we are grateful to our visiting professors, J. G. Krzyż and Tord Ganelius, for participating in the symposium. The contribution of Krzyż deals with close-to-convex functions, while Ganelius considers the application of Fourier methods, in combination with a theorem of Poincaré on solutions of difference equations, to the characterization of regularly varying functions. V. I. Gavrillov discusses some uniqueness theorems on meromorphic functions on the unit disc, and K. Srinivasacharyulu proves a fixed point theorem for completely continuous perturbations on nonexpansive mappings. There is a lecture by B. Sz.-Nagy discussing the problem of investigating the behaviour of completely nonunitary operators on Hilbert space.

In the theoretical physics section, F. Riahi from Teheran, using the axiomatic approach, discusses nonrelativistic many-body scattering theory and the analytic properties of many-particle scattering amplitudes, which are far more complicated than the usual, well worked out, two-particle amplitudes. This is probably the direction in which theories on scattering, both relativistic and non-relativistic, will concentrate in future. José R. Fulco and Gordon L. Shaw make a critical analysis of the utilization of the peripheral model in relation to $\pi\pi$ phase shifts. A group theoretical study of spaces characterized by symmetries and their relations to various branches of physics is made by A. Sankaranarayanan, while V. Devanathan studies distortion effects in nuclear reactions.

In a series of three articles, Alladi Ramakrishnan and his collaborators summarize the results of the recent work at the Institute on *L*-matrices, dealing with the role of Pauli matrices as a primary tool of mathematical physics. Their investigations have almost led them to believe that "modern physics is Pauli matrices recollected in tranquility"! This may sound like a hyperbole, but it does emphasize that there is much more to Pauli matrices than meets the eye.

The next contribution is that of E. C. G. Sudarshan, who presents ideas currently agitating the minds of physicists on the possible existence of particles travelling faster than light. It brings out adequately the speculative spirit of a one-day symposium held at the Institute with Professor Sudarshan as the principal invited speaker.

Finally, V. Devanathan offers an article on the effects of short-range correlations in nuclear reactions.

Alladi Ramakrishnan

Contents of Other Volumes

VOLUME 1

- | | |
|--|--|
| Symmetries and Resonances
T. K. Radha | Pion-Nucleon Resonances
K. Venkatesan |
| Group Symmetries with <i>R</i> -Invariance
R. E. Marshak | The Influence of Pion-Nucleon
Resonance on Elastic Scattering
of Charged Pions by Deuterons
V. Devanathan |
| Regge Poles and Resonances
T. K. Radha | Pion-Hyperon Resonances
R. K. Umerjee |
| On Regge Poles in Perturbation Theory
and Weak Interactions
K. Raman | Some Remarks on Recent Experimental
Data and Techniques
E. Segre |
| Determination of Spin-Parity
of Resonances
G. Ramachandran | On New Resonances
B. Maglic |
| Pion Resonances
T. S. Santhanam | The Higher Resonances in the
Pion-Nucleon System
G. Takeda |

VOLUME 2

- | | |
|---|---|
| Origin of Internal Symmetries
E. C. G. Sudarshan | Some Applications of Separable
Potentials in Elementary Particle
Physics
A. N. Mitra |
| Construction of the Invariants of the
Simple Lie Groups
L. O'Raiheartaigh | Form Factors of the Three-Nucleon
Systems H^3 and He^3
T. K. Radha |
| On Peratization Methods
N. R. Ranganathan | Muon Capture by Complex Nuclei
V. Devanathan |
| Large-Angle Elastic Scattering at
High Energies
R. Hagedorn | Electrodynamics of Superconductors
B. Zumino |
| Crossing Relations and Spin States
M. Jacob | "Temperature Cutoff" in Quantum
Field Theory and Mass
Renormalization
S. P. Misra |
| The Multiperipheral Model for
High-Energy Processes
K. Venkatesan | Recent Developments in the Statistical
Mechanics of Plasmas
H. DeWitt |
| Regge Poles in Weak Interactions and
in Form Factors
K. Raman | |

- | | |
|---|---|
| Effective-Range Approximation Based
on Regge Poles
B. M. Udgaoonkar | Introduction to Quantum Statistics of
Degenerate Bose Systems
F. Mohling |
| Some Current Trends in Mathematical
Research
M. H. Stone | Recent Mathematical Developments in
Cascade Theory
S. K. Srinivasan |
| Semigroup Methods in Mathematical
Physics
A. T. Bharucha-Reid | Theory of a General Quantum System
Interacting with a Linear Dissipation
System
R. Vasudevan |

VOLUME 3

- | | |
|---|---|
| Many-Particle Structure of Green's
Functions
K. Symanzik | Theories of Particles of Arbitrary Spins
K. Venkatesan |
| Broken Symmetries and Leptonic
Weak Interactions
R. Oehme | Bethe-Salpeter Equation and
Conservation Laws in Nuclear
Physics
W. Brenig |
| Partial Muon Capture in Light Nuclei
A. Fujii | On a Class of Non-Markovian
Processes and Its Application
to the Theory of
Shot Noise and Barkhausen Noise
S. K. Srinivasan |
| Quantum Gauge Transformations
J. Lukierski | |

VOLUME 4

- | | |
|---|--|
| Introductory Address
V. Weisskopf | "Repulsive" Potential Approach to
Pion Resonances
A. N. Mitra |
| A New Approach to Scattering Theory
R. Blankenbecler | The Renormalizability of Higher
Spin Theories
J. Lukierski |
| Conserved Vector Currents and
Broken Symmetries
Ph. Meyer | Muon Capture by Complex Nuclei
V. Devanathan |
| Multiplet Structure and Mass Sum
Rules in the $SU(6)$ Symmetry
Scheme
V. Singh | Comments on Sum Rules
P. T. Landsberg and D. J. Morgan |
| Group Representations for Complex
Angular Momentum
K. Venkatesan | Inelastic Neutron Scattering and
Dynamics in Solids and Liquids
A. Sjölander |
| A Model of a Unitary S -Matrix for
Peripheral Interactions
K. Dietz | Axioms and Models
M. H. Stone |
| Equivalent Potential Approach for
Strong Interactions
L. A. P. Balazs | Characters of Semi-Simple Lie Groups
Harish-Chandra |
| | Sequent Correlations in Evolutionary
Stochastic Point Processes
S. K. Srinivasan |

VOLUME 5

- Lectures on Nested Hilbert Spaces
A. Grossmann
- Elementary Homology Theory
N. R. Ranganathan
- Application of Algebraic Topology
to Feynman Integrals
V. L. Teplitz
- Weak Interactions
R. J. Oakes
- Fundamental Multiplets
A. Ramakrishnan
- The Ground States of He^3 and H^3
K. Ananthanarayanan
- Remarks of the Present State of
General Relativity
S. Kichenassamy
- On the Conformal Group and its
Equivalence with the Hexa-
dimensional Pseudo Euclidean
Group
M. Baktavatsalou
- Certain Extremal Problems
K. R. Unni
- Fluctuating Density Fields and
Fokker-Planck Equations
S. K. Srinivasan
- Contraction of Lie Groups and
Lie Algebras
K. Venkatesan
- A Pattern in Functional Analysis
J. L. Kelley
- Correspondence Principles in
Dynamics
R. Arens

VOLUME 6

- On Locally Isomorphic Groups
and Cartan-Stiefel Diagrams
B. Gruber
- Linear Response, Bethe-Salpeter
Equation, and Transport Coefficients
L. Picman
- The Description of Particles of
Arbitrary Spin
P. M. Mathews
- Radiative Corrections in β -Decay
G. Källén
- What Are Elementary Particles
Made Of?
E. C. G. Sudarshan
- Recent Developments in Cosmology
J. V. Narlikar
- An Introduction to Nevanlinna Theory
W. K. Hayman
- Normalization of Bethe-Salpeter
Wave Functions
Y. Takahashi
- Non-Lagrange Theories and
Generalized Conservation
Y. Takahashi
- Cosmic X-Rays, γ -Rays, and Electrons
R. R. Daniel
- β -Decay and μ -Capture Coupling
Constants
S. C. K. Nair
- Functions of Exponential Type
K. R. Unni
- A Model for Processing Visual Data
with Applications to Bubble
Chamber Picture Recognition
(Summary)
R. Narasimhan
- On Functional Methods in the
S-Matrix Theory
J. Rzewuski
- An Impact Parameter Formalism
T. Kotani
- Some Properties of the
Fourier-Bessel Transform
G. Källén
- The A_1 and K^{**} (1320)
Phenomena—Kinematic
Enhancements of Mesons?
G. and S. Goldhaber
- The Photoproduction and Scattering
of Pions from H^3 and He^3
K. Ananthanarayanan
- Relativistic Extensions of $SU(6)$
H. Ruegg
- A Survey of π -N Scattering, and of
the $T=\frac{1}{2}$ Amplitudes
B. J. Moyer

VOLUME 7

- | | |
|---|--|
| Superconductivity
G. Rickayzen | Quark Model for Baryons and Resonances
A. N. Mitra |
| Singularities of Multiple Scattering Processes
F. Pham | Riemann Mapping Theorem
S. K. Singh |
| Some Notions of Local Differential Topology
F. Pham | Field of Mikusinski Operators
S. K. Singh |
| Formal Aspects of Potential Theory
M. Scadron | On Cosine Functional Equations
P. L. Kannappan |
| Some Simple Bootstrap Models
B. M. Udgaoonkar | A Novel Approach to the Theory of Fluids—Onset of Turbulent Motion
S. K. Srinivasan |

VOLUME 8

- | | |
|--|--|
| A General Outlook on the Problem of Quasars
N. Dallaporta | Muon Capture as a Probe for Nuclear Structure
M. Rho |
| On the Unification of Physical Theories
A. Mercier | Functional Differential Equations
S. G. Deo |
| A Note on the Representations of Dirac Groups
A. Ramakrishnan and I. V. V. Raghavacharyulu | On Some Convex Functions and Related Inequalities
C. J. Eliezer |
| Relativistic Wave Equations for Higher Spin and Their Quantization
P. M. Mathews | On Harmonic Differential Forms in a General Manifold
N. Prakash |
| Contributions to the Relativistic Generalization of the Kinetic Theory of Gases and Statistical Mechanics
J. I. Horvath | Developments in the Theory of Univalent Functions
K. S. Padmanabhan |
| Variational Methods in Scattering Theory
C. J. Joachain | Generalized Analytic Continuation
H. S. Shapiro |
| The $(\pi^+, 2p)$ Reactions on Nuclei
T. Bressani <i>et al.</i> | Congruent Embedding into Boolean Vector Spaces
N. V. Subrahmanyam |
| | Raikov Systems
J. H. Williamson |
| | Certain Problems in the Design of Programmed-Motion Systems
A. S. Galilulin |

VOLUME 9

- Intermediate Vector Mesons and
CP-Violations
S. Okubo
- FD Effects in Partial Wave Disper-
sion Relations and the Dynamical
Generation of Resonances
Philip W. Coulter and
Leon L. Shaw
- Isospin Symmetries and Weak
Transition Form Factors
P. Divakaran
- Applications of Current Algebra for η
Decay—A Summary
R. Ramachandran and
Aditya Kumar
- Can $Y_0^*(1405)$ be a Bound State of
Three Quarks?
G. Rajasekaran
- The Zero Temperature Heisenberg
Ferromagnet as a Field Theory
Daniel A. Dubin
- Electromagnetic Interaction of
Particles with Spin
R. H. Good, Jr.
- On the Algebra of L -Matrices
Alladi Ramkrishnan
- L -Matrices and Propagators with
Imaginary Parameters
Alladi Ramkrishnan
- A Hierarchy of Idempotent Matrices
Alladi Ramkrishnan and
R. Vasudevan
- Photon Statistics and Coherence in
Light Beams
R. Vasudevan
- Stochastic Integration and Differential
Equations—Physical Approach
S. K. Srinivasan
- Some Aspects of Operational Research
Alec M. Lee
- Nevanlinna Theory and Gap Series
W. H. J. Fuchs
- Uniform Distribution and Densities on
Locally Compact Abelian Groups
L. A. Rubel
- Lectures on Vector Spaces of
Analytic Functions
L. A. Rubel

Contents

Contents of Other Volumes.....	ix
The Contributions of Ramanujan to Mathematics.....	1
SHREERAM ABHYANKAR, <i>Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana</i>	
Regularly Varying Functions and Poincaré's Theorem on Difference Equations.....	7
TORD H. GANELIUS, <i>Cornell University, Ithaca, New York,</i> and <i>University of Göteborg, Göteborg, Sweden</i>	
Some New Results On Operators On Hilbert Space.....	19
BÉLA SZ.-NAGY, <i>Bolyai Institute, Szeged, Hungary</i>	
On Close-to-Convex Functions.....	23
J.G.KRZYŻ, <i>Marie Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland</i>	
On Uniqueness Theorems.....	29
V. I. GAVRILOV, <i>University of Moscow, Moscow, USSR</i>	
Ramanujan's Function $\tau(n)$	37
ROBERT A. RANKIN, <i>University of Glasgow, Glasgow, Scotland</i>	
Fixed-Point Theorems.....	47
K. SRINIVASACHARYULU, <i>University of Montreal, Montreal, Canada</i>	
Unitary Generalization of Pauli Matrices.....	51
ALLADI RAMAKRISHNAN, <i>Matscience, Madras, India</i>	
Generalized Clifford Basis and Infinitesimal Generators of Unitary Groups.....	59
ALLADI RAMAKRISHNAN and I. V. V. RAGHAVACHARYULU, <i>Matscience, Madras, India</i>	
L -Matrices and the Fundamental Theorem of Spinor Theory.....	63
ALLADI RAMAKRISHNAN, T. S. SANTHANAM, and P. S. CHANDRASEKARAN, <i>Matscience, Madras, India</i>	
Some Results in Nonrelativistic Many-Body Scattering Theory.....	69
F. RIAHI, <i>Aria-Mehr University, Tehran, Iran</i>	

On a Group Theoretical Connection Among the Physical Hierarchies.	85
A. SANKARANARAYANAN, <i>Douglas Advanced Research Laboratories, Huntington Beach, California</i>	
Phase Shifts at Low Energy Determined from the Peripheral Model.	101
JOSÉ R. FULCO, <i>University of California, Santa Barbara, California</i> and GORDON L. SHAW, <i>University of California, Irvine, California</i>	
Effects of Short-Range Corrections in Nuclei on Some Reaction Processes	115
V. DEVANATHAN, <i>University of Madras, Madras, India</i>	
Nuclear Distortion Effects on the Emitted Pion in Photo-Pion Reactions.	123
V. DEVANATHAN, <i>University of Madras, Madras, India</i>	
The Theory of Particles Traveling Faster Than Light—I.	129
E. C. G. SUDARSHAN, <i>Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York</i>	
Author Index	153
Subject Index	155

The Contributions of Ramanujan to Mathematics

SHREERAM SHANKAR ABHYANKAR

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Recently on behalf of the Sir C. P. Ramasway Aiyar Foundation, Professor Alladi Ramakrishnan asked me to give a lecture to be entitled “The Contributions of Ramanujan to Mathematics.”

Ever since I was a schoolboy I had heard wonderful stories about the world-famous Indian mathematical genius Srinivasa Ramanujan—naturally I felt very honored to be asked to speak about him. However, I was being asked to speak not just about Ramanujan, but specifically about his contributions to mathematics. And so, to prepare myself for this assignment, I started reading the collected mathematical works of Ramanujan, and also Hardy’s lectures on Ramanujan’s work. I soon realized that his work is very beautiful and profound, and at the same time quite mysterious, and written in a terse and cryptic style. I therefore came to the conclusion that I really could not measure up to the task—at any rate not on such short notice. It would take me at least five years of concentrated study to gain a reasonable degree of understanding of his work. So what I really ought to have done is to postpone the assigned lecture for such a period. However, I could not resist the temptation of sharing with you some interesting stories about Ramanujan. I hope that this occasion will inspire some of you to undertake a study of his mathematical work. I, for one, have now already been so inspired. Thus, with a promise to do some justice to the title of today’s lecture at

* Division of Mathematical Sciences.

some time in the future, let me present some interesting stories about Ramanujan.

One of Ramanujan's distinguishing characteristics was his love and understanding of numbers, i.e., positive integers. Every number was, so to speak, his personal friend. One amusing anecdote—but a true one—regarding this is what happened once when Ramanujan was lying ill in a hospital in England and the famous English mathematician Hardy went to visit him. Hardy had arrived in a taxi and had happened to notice that the taxi number was 1729. Upon entering Ramanujan's bedroom Hardy remarked that his taxi number was 1729 which seemed to him to be a rather dull number, and he hoped it was not an unfavorable omen. "No," replied Ramanujan immediately, "it is a very interesting number; it is the smallest number which can be expressed as a sum of two cubes in two different ways; namely, $1729 = 12^3 + 1^3 = 10^3 + 9^3$." Hardy then asked Ramanujan whether he could also tell the solution of the corresponding problem for fourth powers. After a moment's thought Ramanujan replied that he knew no obvious example but supposed that the first such number must be very large. Indeed, the simplest known example of this is very large, namely, the following one found by Euler:

$$158^4 + 59^4 = 134^4 + 133^4 = 635,318,657$$

Another of Ramanujan's interests was in algebraical formulas, especially those concerned with infinite series, infinite products, infinite continued fractions, and so on. With his insight for and mastery over algebraic formulas, he has never been surpassed by any other mathematician, and can be compared only with the two famous European mathematicians Euler and Jacobi. Many of the algebraic formulas which Ramanujan discovered are of such an astonishing nature that most mathematicians could not even dream of them. Indeed, according to Ramanujan, it was the goddess of Namakkal who used to visit him in his dreams and tell him the formulas. In any case, it is a remarkable fact that frequently, upon rising from bed, he would note results and rapidly verify them, although often he was not able to supply a rigorous proof.

By the time Ramanujan was in his early twenties, he had two notebooks filled with theorems and formulas that he had discovered.

Owing to his passionate interest in mathematics Ramanujan had completely neglected all other subjects, and as a result twice failed the first-year college examination. His formal education stopped at that level. Thus, Ramanujan was an entirely self-taught mathematician.

Some time after leaving college, Ramanujan obtained employment

as a clerk in the accounts department of the Madras Port Trust. However, his pursuit of mathematics never slackened.

The fact that Ramanujan was very much a self-taught mathematician showed up in his mathematical work in two ways. First, not having had the advantage of knowing the work of past mathematicians, a substantial part of his work turned out to be rediscovery. Second, he never developed a clear-cut idea of what is meant by a proof; if a significant piece of reasoning occurred somewhere and the total mixture of evidence and intuition gave him certainty, he looked no further. As a consequence, some of his theorems and formulas turned out to be incorrect. In spite of these two aspects of his work, Ramanujan discovered an amazing number of beautiful and profound formulas and theorems.

As I have just said, Ramanujan was often not able to supply rigorous proofs of his results. Indeed, after his untimely death, a number of mathematicians expended considerable effort in deciphering his notebooks and giving rigorous mathematical proofs of many of the results conjectured by him. Nevertheless, a few of Ramanujan's conjectures remain unproved to this day.

Ramanujan continued his pursuit of mathematics completely on his own until he reached the age of twenty-six. Then, taking the advice of some of his friends, he wrote a letter to G. H. Hardy, who was a professor at Cambridge University. The major part of the letter consisted of the statements of about 120 results, mostly formulas, extracted from Ramanujan's notebooks. Of course, Hardy was most surprised to receive such a letter from an unknown clerk. All the distinguishing features of Ramanujan's work which I have mentioned before, stood out quite clearly in that letter. Namely, Hardy found that out of the formulas stated in the letter some were known, some were easy to prove, some were quite difficult to prove, some he could not prove, and some were false. However, as Hardy has remarked, each one of Ramanujan's formulas, whether true or false, is extremely fascinating.

Soon after this, it was arranged that Ramanujan go to Cambridge. The next six years were a time of very fruitful collaboration between Hardy and Ramanujan. Hardy has said that his discovery of Ramanujan and their happy collaboration was the one most romantic incidents in Hardy's life.

To give a very small sample of Ramanujan's work, I shall now state some of his results concerning partitions. These show both his deep knowledge of numbers and his mastery of algebraical formulas.

Let $p(n)$ denote the number of partitions of a positive integer n , i.e.,