

***Single-pulse Studies of Pulsars
at
Decameter Wavelengths***

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by

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is entirely original, and has been carried out by me at the **Raman Research Institute** under the auspices of the **Joint Astronomy Programme** of the **Department of Physics, Indian Institute of Science**. I hereby declare that this has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, membership, associateship or similar title of any University or Institution.

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, whose blind faith that I was a scientist in the making, has been a motivation!

to earlier attempts at decameter wavelengths. We describe this data acquisition system and processing procedures in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 3 we present average properties of pulsars observed at 34.5 MHz. For a possible study of a large sample of pulsars at low frequency, we carefully selected pulsars from the catalog of known pulsars. Their flux densities at 34.5 MHz were estimated by a suitable extrapolation from available measurements at higher frequencies and allowing for the possibility of a spectral turnover. The detectability was assessed after taking into account the background sky temperature, dispersion, and scattering in the direction of the pulsar. About 40 pulsars qualified as detectable (signal at a 5 σ level or higher) with our telescope assuming a reasonable duration of observations and a bandwidth of 1-MHz. This sample of pulsars was monitored over a period of 4 months during March-June, 1997. Each pulsar was observed for an effective duration of typically 2000 seconds. The data were analysed for possible pulsar detections. The results were consistent with our improved sensitivity and a total of 10 pulsars were detected from these observations. We present average pulse profiles for all the detections, together with the modulation indices of fluctuations and the behavior of linear polarization in a few cases.

We studied pulse-to-pulse fluctuation properties of a few 'bright pulsars in our sample. In order to achieve a reasonable signal-to-noise ratio in such an analysis, a large number of continuous sequences of single pulses (typically 500-1000) were required. We observed a few bright pulsars several times, with each observation of duration ~ 20 minutes, during Feb-Apr 1999. The fluctuation spectra of 8 pulsars in the decameter wave band, presented in Chapter 4, are believed to be first such reliable spectra reported in the literature at these low radio-frequencies. Apart from fluctuation spectra, a number of other tools were used to study the fluctuation phenomena in these pulsars. We describe these tools in detail and present the results of our analysis for a total of 8 pulsars. We find that, in keeping with the trend from higher frequencies, all pulsars exhibit an enhanced modulation at 34.5 MHz. In the case of pulsar B0943+10, the spectral modulation features have a high-Q (~ 250), which compares well with the steady drift behavior seen at meter wavelengths. The frequencies of the modulation features seen in the spectra are consistent with those seen at higher frequencies.

Our prime target for a detailed analysis of single pulse sequences was pulsar B0943+10 (Chapter 5). A recent detailed study of drifting-subpulse emission from this pulsar, using 430 MHz and 111 MHz data, identified the origin of the stable and steady drift with a system of 20 distinct subbeams of emission rotating steadily around the magnetic axis of the star. We describe the technique of 'Cartographic Transformation', where every sample from each single pulse is uniquely mapped onto the polar region of the pulsar, which provides new means of probing emission processes using single-pulse sequences. We have used this technique to map the regions of observed decameter emission on the pulsar polar cap. We have shown, that:

- The fluctuation spectra at decameter wavelengths also display a narrow feature, close to $0.5c/P_1$ (P_1 is the pulsar spin period) and with a high Q, which is related to the 'drifting' character of its subpulses.
- This fluctuation feature in the longitude-resolved spectra is aliased and the true frequency of the primary phase modulation is somewhat higher than $0.5c/P_1$.

- A system of 20 subbeams, rotating around the magnetic axis of the star with a circulation time \hat{P}_3 of about $37 P_1$, is responsible for the observed stable subpulse-modulation behavior.
- Compared with the higher frequency maps, the 35-MHz maps sample the subbeams much more completely. However, the 35-MHz subbeams, on the whole, show much less uniformity in their positions and intensities.
- Both at 35 MHz and at higher frequencies, the intensities of individual subbeams fluctuate, with the subbeams maintaining a stable brightness only for a few circulation times. The stability time-scale of the entire pattern at 35 MHz and 430 MHz appears roughly comparable.

This similarity between our (34.5 MHz) maps and those at 430 MHz, combined with the 'radius-to-frequency mapping', implies that the regions of radio emission correspond to a well-organized system of plasma columns in *apparent* circulation around the magnetic axis of star, and a common 'seed' activity is likely to be responsible for both the generation and motion of this relativistic plasma. We expect this basic picture of subbeams and their apparent circulation to be valid in other pulsars as well, although the viewing geometry and other quantitative details may differ. The apparent nature of the modulation/fluctuation would depend largely on the viewing geometry.

We followed our previous work with a similar analysis on the pulsar B0834+06. We have unambiguously determined the circulation time of the polar emission pattern and its drift direction and studied the polar emission maps. Here too, a system of discrete subbeams in steady rotation around the magnetic axis was found responsible for the observed single-pulse fluctuations. The emission beams in the case of B0834+06 are discrete, but they are **not** uniformly spaced along the hollow cone of emission and they all differ from each other in their appearance. The subbeams appear broader in radial cross-section, with $\Delta\rho/\rho \gtrsim 25\%$, and seem to fluctuate around their average position and intensity more than what was observed in the case of B0943+10. The increased jitters in the subbeam position could result in the low Q-value of the observed fluctuation features.

We also made maps from successive subsections of the pulse sequence and viewed them in a 'movie'-like fashion. For all the data sets of B0943+10 and B0834+06 discussed, it was noticed that only a few subbeams (different ones at different times) usually dominated in intensity over a few circulation times. Overall, the brightness of a given subbeam was observed to fluctuate by up to about a factor of 4 over the length of the sequence. Given the above, it is tempting to suggest that (a) an inhibition of emission (or the underlying sparks) occurs over the rest of the polar cap due to the active subbeams, or (b) A critical combination of parameters required for stable, uniform subbeams.

B0834+06 happens to be the only other case where such a treatment has been possible based on our decameter-wavelength observations alone. The single-pulse fluctuations in this case are general modulation of component amplitudes, unlike the stable 'drift' patterns observed in the case of B0943+10. Even such a general amplitude modulation appears to be related to a well-defined rotating pattern of discrete entities in the polar cap region. Various other issues related to the fluctuation phenomena of this pulsar are discussed in the thesis and are compared with the high-frequency behavior.

The next part of this thesis concerns our attempts to search for radio pulsation in the directions of two high-energy pulsars. The gamma-ray pulsar Geminga attracted attention of the astronomers recently, with the reported detection of its pulsed radio emission by three Russian groups at 102 MHz. Since Geminga, one of the brightest Gamma-ray sources in the sky, is the only known gamma-ray pulsar that has not been detected at radio wavelengths, confirming its pulsed radio emission and determining the reasons for its radio weakness are essential to understand the relationship between pulsar gamma-ray and radio emission. Geminga is also important as it may be a prototype for a growing class of radio-weak or radio-quiet high-energy pulsars and isolated neutron stars. Searches for a pulsed radio emission from Geminga have been carried out earlier by other groups with none of them confirming the Russian claim of detection (this also included a search at 35 MHz using the GEE^{TEE}). These negative results meant that the pulsar was either weak and undetectable at the other frequencies of observation (detectable only at 102 MHz), or is a transient source and highly variable. Refractive scintillation could also make its detection difficult. Hence, we attempted near-simultaneous observations of this pulsar at 35 MHz and 102 MHz using the GEE^{TEE} and the Puschino Observatory, Russia. Since both the telescopes are transit instruments, there was a difference of about ~ 3 hours in between two recorded data sets. In such a scheme if a pulsed signal was detected at Puschino, then we could confirm the same in our 35-MHz data. If the pulsar is an intermittent source of a few intense pulses similar to the Crab pulsar, we may detect such a signature in our data set. Though the initial analysis of Puschino data indicated some pulsed emission, there was no detection of a pulse in the 35-MHz data on the corresponding days. Our tentative upper limit on the average flux of Geminga at 35 MHz is 350 mJy (3σ) using data obtained on 3 days. Shorter intervals of data were searched for a possible intermittent emission, again providing a null result. Our observations, analysis procedure, the final results, and their interpretation are described in Chapter 6.

Typical radio pulsars are magnetized neutron stars that are born rapidly rotating and slow down on time scales of 10 to 100 million years. However, millisecond radio pulsars (MSPs) spin very rapidly even though many are billions of years old. The most compelling explanation is that they have been 'spun up' by the transfer of angular momentum during accretion of material from a companion star in so-called low-mass X-ray binary systems, LMXBs. The recent detection of coherent X-ray pulsations with a millisecond period from a suspected LMXB system SAX J1808.4-3658 appears to confirm this link. An exciting possibility is that this object will, at some point, turn on as a radio pulsar, producing pulsed radio emission characteristic of MSPs. We observed in the direction of this system in the X-ray quiescent state to look for a possible pulsed radio signal at 327 MHz using the Ooty Radio Telescope. The pulsar was observed for 10 minutes in each run to minimize the effect of period variation due to the pulsar's orbital motion, a total of 10 such successive scans were analysed. This search was tuned for the known parameters of the binary system, where the effects of binary acceleration on pulsar periodicity, and some possible extra dispersion due to the passage of the radio pulse through the extended wind from the companion, were allowed for. Our search was optimized for about 50% duty cycle (that is, a roughly sinusoidal signal), and we searched up to a maximum DM of 250 pc/cm³. No radio pulsations were detected at 327 MHz, which translates into a flux density upper limit of 0.8 mJy (3σ) if all the data sets are combined. We discuss our upper limit and its implications in Chapter 6.

Contents

1	Introduction	10
1.1	Pulsars as astronomical objects	10
1.1.1	Basic model	10
1.1.2	General and population properties	12
1.1.3	Average pulse properties	13
1.1.4	Empirical theory of pulsar radio emission	18
1.2	Single-Pulseproperties	24
1.2.1	Individual pulse intensities and nulling	25
1.2.2	Amplitude and phase modulation of subpulses	26
1.2.3	Subpulse drift and viewing geometry	27
1.2.4	Subpulse drift before and after nulls	29
1.2.5	Profile and polarization modes	30
1.2.6	Conventional tools of study	31
1.3	Low-frequency considerations	32
1.3.1	Propagation effects	32
1.3.2	Intrinsic effects	37
1.3.3	Interference	38
1.4	Detection & sensitivity considerations	38
2	Instrument. Observations and Analysis Procedures	41
2.1	The Gauribidanur Telescope	41
2.1.1	Parameters	41
2.1.2	Observation modes	42
2.2	Back-end and data acquisition system	43
2.2.1	Antenna output and RF section	44

2.2.2	Digitizer : IF section	45
2.2.3	Sampler and bit-packing	46
2.2.4	PC interface card	47
2.2.5	Diagnostic mode	47
2.3	Off-line processing	48
2.3.1	Data slip-check	48
2.3.2	Digitizer-level weight ages	48
2.3.3	An Effective Spectrometer	50
2.3.4	Channel-wise folded profiles	51
2.3.5	Dedispersed single-pulse sequences	54
2.3.6	Flux calibration - standard point sources	54
3	Average-Profile Studies of Pulsars	56
3.1	Pulse detections & average profiles	56
3.1.1	Pulsar sample	56
3.1.2	Average profiles	58
3.1.3	Symmetry/Asymmetry aspects	63
3.1.4	Profile, pulse-width evolution	63
3.2	Modulation index profiles	66
3.3	Flux estimates	68
3.3.1	Variability	69
3.4	Summary	71
4	Single-Pulse Studies at 35 MHz : Fluctuation Spectra	73
4.1	Data sets	73
4.2	Fluctuation spectra	73
4.2.1	Longitude-resolved fluctuation spectra	75
4.2.2	Raw spectrum and the issue of aliasing	77
4.3	Correlation maps	87
4.4	Discussion and comparison with earlier work	91
4.5	Summary	93
5	Single-Pulse Studies : Polar Maps of Pulsars B0943+10 and B0834+06	95
5.1	Ruderman & Sutherland (R&S) model	96

5.1.1	Goldreich-Julian result	97
5.1.2	Gap formation and particle avalanche	99
5.1.3	Mechanism of radio emission : plasma instability and bunching	101
5.1.4	Structure and drifting of sparks	102
5.1.5	Comparison with observations	103
5.1.6	Circulation time and the number of subbeams	105
5.1.7	Correlation of P_3 with pulsar parameters	105
5.2	The data	107
5.2.1	Data quality	107
5.2.2	B0943+10	108
5.2.3	B0834+06	116
5.3	Cartographic transforms	123
5.3.1	Details of equations	124
5.3.2	Tuning : consistency check for the parameters defining the transforms	125
5.3.3	Viewing Geometry of B0943+10	126
5.3.4	Viewing Geometry of B0834+06	127
5.4	Results: polar maps and movies	131
5.4.1	B0943+10	131
5.4.2	B0834+06	135
5.5	Discussion and comparison with higher radio-frequency observations	138
5.5.1	B0943+10	138
5.5.2	B0834+06	141
5.5.3	Comparison with theory : number of sparks <i>vs.</i> α, β , and other parameters	143
5.6	Summary	145
6	Searches for Radio Counterparts of Two High-energy Pulsars: Geminga and	
	SAX J1808.8–3658	148
6.1	Introduction	148
6.1.1	Pulsar searches	148
6.1.2	Geminga Pulsar	149
6.1.3	SAX J1808.8–3658, an X-ray binary millisecond pulsar	154
6.2	Details of the Observations	159
6.2.1	Observations	159

6.2.2	Telescope & back-end system	160
6.3	Search Technique	162
6.4	Results	168
6.4.1	Geminga	168
6.4.2	SAX J1808.8–3658	171
6.5	Discussion and summary	176
7	Conclusions	178
7.1	Future work	185

Figure 1: A schematic diagram of the telescope and back-end system. It shows a central detector surrounded by a ring of sensors. The diagram is labeled with 'Telescope' and 'Back-end system'.

Figure 2: A schematic diagram of the search technique. It shows a central detector surrounded by a ring of sensors. The diagram is labeled with 'Search technique' and 'Back-end system'.

Figure 3: A schematic diagram of the results. It shows a central detector surrounded by a ring of sensors. The diagram is labeled with 'Results' and 'Back-end system'.

List of Figures

1.1	Basic model of a pulsar	11
1.2	Average-pulse profiles and polarization	13
1.3	Time-aligned multi-frequency profiles of PSR1133+16	16
1.4	A schematic of RFM	17
1.5	Changing β/ρ due to RFM	17
1.6	Pulsar viewing geometry	18
1.7	Rankin's empirical scheme	19
1.8	Half-power width of core-singles as a function of period	21
1.9	Conal radius as a function of period	22
1.10	Single pulses from B0834+06	24
1.11	Subpulse drift and nulling	25
1.12	A schematic of drifting subpulsea	26
1.13	Viewing geometry of subpulse drift	28
1.14	The phase of the drifting subpulses at nulls of various lengths	29
1.15	Profile modes and OPMs	30
1.16	Differential dispersion delay in pulsar signals	33
1.17	An example of incoherent dedispersion	34
1.18	Flux density spectrum of B2016+28	37
1.19	An idealized folded pulse profile	39
2.1	An image of GEETEE	42
2.2	A schematic of GEETEE	43
2.3	A schematic of DAS	45
2.4	Raw time series: 34.5-MHz data	52
2.5	Radio-frequency spectrum in our scheme	52

2.6	An example of differential delay observed in 34.5 MHz data	53
3.1	Average profiles of pulsars at 34.5 MHz	59
3.2	Average profile of B0950+08 at 34.5 MHz	60
3.3	Average profiles of pulsars at 34.5 MHz	61
3.4	Confirming weak pulsars at 34.5 MHz	62
3.5	Time-aligned multi-frequency profiles of two pulsars	63
3.6	Modulation-index profiles of pulsars at 34.5 MHz	67
3.7	Modulation-index profile of B2016+28	68
3.8	Flux density spectrum of B2016+28	68
3.9	Pulse energy variations seen in the case of B0950+08	70
4.1	An lrf-spectrum of B0943+10	76
4.2	Effect of a sinusoidal modulation as seen in the pulsar spectrum	78
4.3	A raw hrf-spectrum of B0943+10	79
4.4	An hrf-spectrum of B0943+10	79
4.5	Lrf-spectra of pulsars B0943+10 and B0834+06	81
4.6	Hrf-spectra of B0943+10 and B0834+06	83
4.7	Lrf-spectra of pulsars at 34.5 MHz	85
4.8	Hrf-spectra of pulsars at 34.5 MHz	86
4.9	Auto-correlation map of B0834+06	88
4.10	Auto-correlation map for B0943+10	88
4.11	Auto-correlation maps of B0834+06 with delay $\mu = 1$ and 2	89
4.12	Autocorrelation of B320+39 and B1133+16	90
5.1	A sketch of the Goldreich-Julian model	97
5.2	Breakdown of the polar gap	100
5.3	Schematic of an oblique rotator	102
5.4	Rotating vector model and the sweep of the linear polarization	105
5.5	Energy variation in a B0943+10 pulse sequence	109
5.6	Raw fluctuation spectrum of B0943+10	109
5.7	An lrf-spectrum of B0943+10-set-1	110
5.8	An lrf-spectrum of B0943+10 data set-2	110
5.9	Hrf-spectrum of data set-1 of B0943+10	111

5.10	Hrf-spectrum of set-2 of B0943+10	111
5.11	A cartoon of subpulse drift on the polar cap	112
5.12	Drift bands and phase of modulation in the case of B0943+10	113
5.13	An lrf-spectrum for B0834+06 data set-1	116
5.14	An lrf-spectrum of B0834+06 , set-2	117
5.15	Hrf-spectrum for B0834+06 data set-1	118
5.16	Hrf-spectrum for B0834+06 , set-2	118
5.17	B0834+06 : data sets folded at the modulation periods and the phase of the modulation	120
5.18	Sampling of the Polar emission pattern	123
5.19	Tuning the parameters of the "Cartographic Transform" (B0943+10)	128
5.20	Tuning the parameters of the "Cartographic Transform" (B0943+10)	128
5.21	Tuning the parameters of the "Cartographic Transform" (B0834+06)	130
5.22	Tuning the parameters of the "Cartographic Transform" (B0834+06)	130
5.23	Average polar map of emission for B0943+10 set-1	133
5.24	Average polar map of emission for B0943+10 set-2	133
5.25	Average polar map of emission for B0943+10 set-3	134
5.26	Average polar map of emission for B0834+06 set-1	136
5.27	Average polar map of emission for B0834+06 set-2	136
6.1	The EGRET light curves of Geminga	150
6.2	X-ray light-curves of Geminga	151
6.3	Light curve of an X-ray outburst of Aql X-1	156
6.4	SAX J1808.8–3658. The 2-60 keV light curve	157
6.5	SAX J1808.8–3658 : pulse-arrival time delays due to the 2-hr orbit	157
6.6	B0950+08 : The fluctuation spectrum for a dedispersed time series	164
6.7	B0950+08 : Output of the search algorithm	164
6.8	The test case. B1937+21 : the fluctuation spectrum	166
6.9	B1937+21 : Output of the search algorithm	167
6.10	Geminga: result of 34.5 MHz search in individual data sets	170
6.11	Geminga: result of 34.5 MHz search in individual data sets	171
6.12	Geminga: search results	172
6.13	Geminga: search results	172
6.14	SAX J1808.8–3658. Search results from individual data sets	173

6.15 SAX 51808.8-3658: Search results from individual data sets 174
6.16 Search for SAX 51808.8-3658 : possible DM variation 175

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List of Tables

2.1	Relevant parameters of GEETEE	44
2.2	Conversion from a 3-bit comparator output to a 2-bit , 4-level sample	47
3.1	Relevant parameters inferred from average profiles of detection at 34.5 MHz	64
4.1	Pulsars studied for single-pulse fluctuations	74
5.1	The estimated P_2 and \hat{P}_3 for B0943+10	114
5.2	The estimated circulation time of B0834+06	121
5.3	Comparison between the observed circulation time and theoretical estimates of R&S model	144
6.1	Search for continuum radio emission from Geminga	153
6.2	Searches for the pulsed radio emission from Geminga	154
6.3	All the claimed detections of Geminga	155
6.4	SAX 51808.8–3658 binary parameters	158
6.5	ORT search observations of SAX 51808.8–3658	160