

The Potential of Fields in Einstein's Theory of Gravitation

Zafar Ahsan

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Preface

The theory of relativity has developed in two phases—special theory of relativity and general theory of relativity. Special theory of relativity adapted the concept of inertial frame to the basic law of constancy of the velocity of light dispensing with the concept of absolute space and time of Galilean–Newtonian mechanics, while the general theory of relativity came into existence as an extension of the special theory of relativity.

With the tools of Riemannian geometry, Einstein was able to formulate a theory that predicts the behaviour of objects in the presence of gravitational, electromagnetic and other forces. Through his general theory of relativity, Einstein redefined gravity. From the classical point of view, gravity is the attractive force between massive objects in three-dimensional space. In general relativity, gravity manifests as a curvature of four-dimensional spacetime. Conversely, curved space and time generates effects that are equivalent to gravitational effects. J. A. Wheeler has described the results as ‘matter tells spacetime how to bend and spacetime returns the complement by telling matter how to move’. On other hand, cosmology is the science of the universe as a whole, and the study of cosmology requires several kinds of physics. Since the dominant force on the cosmic scale is gravitation, this is the basic ingredient that is taken care of by Einstein’s general theory of relativity. The matter distribution of fluids, gases, fields, etc., in the spacetime is given by the Einstein field equations. A cosmological model is a model of our universe that predicts the observed properties of the universe and explains the phenomena of the early universe. In a more restricted sense, cosmological models are the exact solutions of the Einstein field equations for a perfect fluid.

The global geometry of the spacetime is determined by the Riemann curvature tensor, which can be decomposed in terms of the Weyl conformal tensor, Ricci tensor and metric tensor. This decomposition involves certain irreducible tensors. In empty spacetime, the pure gravitational radiation field is described by the Weyl conformal tensor. However, when gravitational waves propagate through matter, the Weyl conformal tensor is still pertinent. In 1962, C. Lanczos thought that the Weyl conformal tensor can also be derived from a simpler tensor field. Moreover, it is known that an electromagnetic field is generated through the covariant

differentiation of a vector field. The question now is: Whether it is possible or not to generate the gravitational field through a potential? The answer is yes; one can generate the gravitational field through the covariant differentiation of a tensor field. This tensor field that can act as a potential to the gravitational field is now known as the Lanczos potential. Further, certain physical problems in general relativity are often conveniently described using a tetrad formalism adapted to the geometry of the particular situation.

The present book deals with a detailed study of the Lanczos potential in general relativity and comprises eight chapters. Chapters 1–3 deal with a detailed study of tetrad formalism and its important examples—Newman–Penrose and Geroch–Held–Penrose formalisms. These discussions will then be used in the study of the Lanczos potential. Chapter 4 defines the Lanczos potential, and the equation by means of which the gravitational field is created has been derived. Such equation is called Weyl–Lanczos equation, and this equation and other related results are expressed in terms of Newman–Penrose and Geroch–Held–Penrose formalisms. Chapter 5 gives a general prescription on how to generate a gravitational field of algebraically special fields, which is supported by a number of examples, while Chap. 6 deals with yet another method to obtain the Lanczos potential for a perfect fluid spacetime, and these results are then used to generate the gravitational field of some cosmological models. Chapter 7 defines the Lanczos potentials for some well-known solutions of Einstein field equations, which have been obtained using tetrad formalisms. Apart from tetrad formalism, there are also some other methods to obtain the Lanczos potential. Such methods have been discussed in this chapter and applied to find the Lanczos potential for Gödel cosmological model. Chapter 8, contains some more applications of the Newman–Penrose formalism. A method for finding the solution of Einstein–Maxwell equations, using NP formalism, has been discussed in detail. The interaction between a Petrov type N gravitational field and null electromagnetic field has been considered, and a metric describing this situation has been obtained. A systematic and detailed study of symmetries of the spacetime (which are also known as collineations) has also been made in this chapter. Each chapter of this book ends with a list of references which by no means is a complete bibliography of the Lanczos potential and tetrad formalism; only the work referred to in this book has been included in the list.

Some portions of this book were completed at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), Nilai, Malaysia, during my stay as Visiting Professor. I am highly thankful to Prof. Musa Ahmad, Vice Chancellor of the university, and Dr. Nurul Sima, Head, Department of Mathematics, for their excellent support and encouragement. Thanks are also due to the learned referee for his valuable suggestions and comments. I am also grateful to my publisher for having faith in me and specially to Mr. Shamim Ahmad for introducing me to the world of Springer and his guidance during the preparation of the manuscript.

Contents

1	The Tetrad Formalism	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	The Tetrad Representation	1
1.3	Directional Derivative and Ricci Rotation Coefficient	3
1.4	The Commutation Relation and the Structure Constants	6
1.5	The Ricci and the Bianchi Identities	7
	References	9
2	The Newman–Penrose Formalism	11
2.1	Introduction	11
2.2	Complex Null Tetrad and the Spin-Coefficients	12
2.3	The Riemann, Ricci and Weyl Tensors	14
2.4	The Commutation Relations	17
2.5	The Ricci Identities (NP Field Equations)	18
2.6	The Physical and Geometrical Meanings of the Spin-Coefficients and the Optical Scalars	20
	References	24
3	The Geroch–Held–Penrose Formalism	25
3.1	Introduction	25
3.2	Spacetime Calculus	26
3.3	GHP Equations	30
3.4	The Geometry of the Null Congruences	33
	References	40
4	Lanczos Potential and Tetrad Formalism	41
4.1	Introduction	41
4.2	Lanczos Potential	42
4.3	Weyl–Lanczos Equation and Tetrad Formalism	47
	References	49

5	Lanczos Potential for Algebraically Special Spacetimes	51
5.1	Introduction	51
5.2	Lanczos Potential for Petrov Type II Spacetimes	51
5.3	Lanczos Potential for Petrov Type D Spacetimes	54
5.4	Lanczos Potential for Petrov Type III Spacetimes	56
5.4.1	Kaigorodov Metric	56
5.4.2	A Type III Solution with Twist	57
5.5	Lanczos Potential for Petrov Type N Spacetimes	59
5.5.1	Generalized pp-Waves	60
5.5.2	Pure Radiation Metric	61
5.5.3	Kaigorodov Metric	62
5.5.4	Twist-Free Gravitational Field	63
	References	64
6	Lanczos Potential and Perfect Fluid Spacetimes	67
6.1	Introduction	67
6.2	General Observers and NP Formalism	67
6.3	Perfect Fluid Spacetimes and Lanczos Potential	73
6.3.1	Shear-Free and Irrotational Spacetimes	73
6.3.2	Bianchi Type I Universes	75
6.3.3	Gödel Spacetime	78
	References	80
7	Lanczos Potential For the Spacetime Solutions	81
7.1	Introduction	81
7.2	Some Special Metrics	81
7.2.1	Charged Rotating Black Hole	82
7.2.2	Kerr Black Hole	83
7.2.3	Reissner–Nördstrom Metric	84
7.2.4	Schwarzschild Exterior Solution	84
7.2.5	Vaidya Metric	86
7.2.6	Kantowski–Sachs Solution	87
7.3	Change of Tetrad and Lanczos Potential	88
7.3.1	Gödel Solution	90
7.3.2	Taub Metric	91
7.3.3	Petrov Metric	91
7.3.4	Kaigorodov Metric	92
7.3.5	Kasner Metric	93
7.3.6	Schwarzschild Exterior Solution	94
7.3.7	C-Metric	94
7.3.8	Siklos Metric	95

- 7.4 Some Other Methods 96
 - 7.4.1 Method of Local and Isometric Embedding 96
 - 7.4.2 Method of the Lovelock’s Theorem 98
 - 7.4.3 Method of the Wave Equation 99
- References 100
- 8 Newman–Penrose Formalism, Solution of Einstein–Maxwell Equations and Symmetries of the Spacetime 103**
 - 8.1 Introduction 103
 - 8.2 A Solution of Einstein–Maxwell Equations 103
 - 8.2.1 Equations for PR Fields and Their Simplifications 105
 - 8.2.2 The Solution Describing the Interaction of PR Fields 111
 - 8.3 Symmetries of Type N Pure Radiation Fields 112
 - 8.3.1 NP Formalism and Collineations for PR Fields 113
 - References 121
- Concluding Remarks 123**

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