

The reflecting surface of a spherical mirror forms a part of a sphere. This sphere has a centre. This point is called the centre of curvature of the spherical mirror. It is represented by the letter  $C$ . Please note that the centre of curvature is not a part of the mirror. It lies outside its reflecting surface. The centre of curvature of a concave mirror lies in front of it. However, it lies behind the mirror in case of a convex mirror. You may note this in Fig.9.2 (a) and (b). The radius of the sphere of which the reflecting surface of a spherical mirror forms a part, is called the radius of curvature of the mirror. It is represented by the letter  $R$ . You may note that the distance  $PC$  is equal to the radius of curvature. Imagine a straight line passing through the pole and the centre of curvature of a spherical mirror. This line is called the principal axis. Remember that principal axis is normal to the mirror at its pole. Let us understand an important term related to mirrors, through an Activity.

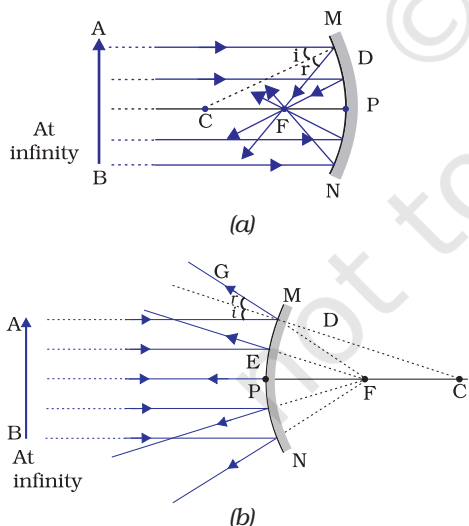
## Activity 9.2

**CAUTION:** Do not look at the Sun directly or even into a mirror reflecting sunlight. It may damage your eyes.

- Hold a concave mirror in your hand and direct its reflecting surface towards the Sun.
- Direct the light reflected by the mirror on to a sheet of paper held close to the mirror.
- Move the sheet of paper back and forth gradually until you find on the paper sheet a bright, sharp spot of light.
- Hold the mirror and the paper in the same position for a few minutes. What do you observe? Why?

The paper at first begins to burn producing smoke. Eventually it may even catch fire. Why does it burn? The light from the Sun is converged at a point, as a sharp, bright spot by the mirror. In fact, this spot of light is the image of the Sun on the sheet of paper. This point is the focus of the concave mirror. The heat produced due to the concentration of sunlight ignites the paper. The distance of this image from the position of the mirror gives the approximate value of focal length of the mirror.

Let us try to understand this observation with the help of a ray diagram.



**Figure 9.2**

(a) Concave mirror  
(b) Convex mirror

Observe Fig.9.2 (a) closely. A number of rays parallel to the principal axis are falling on a concave mirror. Observe the reflected rays. They are all meeting/intersecting at a point on the principal axis of the mirror. This point is called the principal focus of the concave mirror. Similarly, observe Fig. 9.2 (b). How are the rays parallel to the principal axis, reflected by a convex mirror? The reflected rays appear to come from a point on the principal axis. This point is called the principal focus of the convex mirror. The principal focus is represented by the letter  $F$ . The distance between the pole and the principal focus of a spherical mirror is called the focal length. It is represented by the letter  $f$ .

You will see in the above Activity that the nature, position and size of the image formed by a concave mirror depends on the position of the object in relation to points P, F and C. The image formed is real for some positions of the object. It is found to be a virtual image for a certain other position. The image is either magnified, reduced or has the same size, depending on the position of the object. A summary of these observations is given for your reference in Table 9.1.

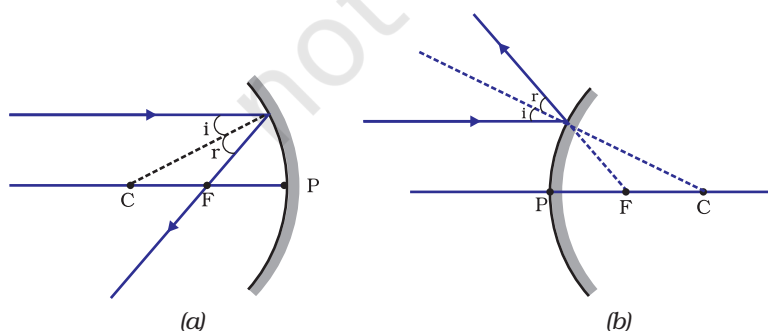
**Table 9.1** Image formation by a concave mirror for different positions of the object

| Position of the object | Position of the image | Size of the image              | Nature of the image |
|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| At infinity            | At the focus F        | Highly diminished, point-sized | Real and inverted   |
| Beyond C               | Between F and C       | Diminished                     | Real and inverted   |
| At C                   | At C                  | Same size                      | Real and inverted   |
| Between C and F        | Beyond C              | Enlarged                       | Real and inverted   |
| At F                   | At infinity           | Highly enlarged                | Real and inverted   |
| Between P and F        | Behind the mirror     | Enlarged                       | Virtual and erect   |

## 9.2.2 Representation of Images Formed by Spherical Mirrors Using Ray Diagrams

We can also study the formation of images by spherical mirrors by drawing ray diagrams. Consider an extended object, of finite size, placed in front of a spherical mirror. Each small portion of the extended object acts like a point source. An infinite number of rays originate from each of these points. To construct the ray diagrams, in order to locate the image of an object, an arbitrarily large number of rays emanating from a point could be considered. However, it is more convenient to consider only two rays, for the sake of clarity of the ray diagram. These rays are so chosen that it is easy to know their directions after reflection from the mirror.

The intersection of at least two reflected rays give the position of image of the point object. Any two of the following rays can be considered for locating the image.



**Figure 9.3**

- A ray parallel to the principal axis, after reflection, will pass through the principal focus in case of a concave mirror or appear to diverge from the principal focus in case of a convex mirror. This is illustrated in Fig.9.3 (a) and (b).