

IAS/IFoS MATHEMATICS by K. Venkanna

Curvilinear Co-ordinate Systems

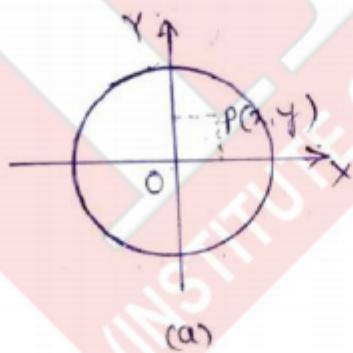
(I)

Here we are studying Non-Cartesian co-ordinate systems.

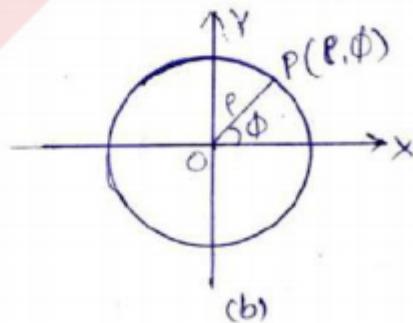
- The non-Cartesian co-ordinate Systems are special cases of the general orthogonal Curvilinear co-ordinates.
- We have introduced curvilinear co-ordinates by linking them with Cartesian co-ordinates.
- The expressions for gradient, divergence, curl and Laplacian operator are derived first in curvilinear and then in polar co-ordinates.
- These expressions will be useful in next section.

(II)

Plane Polar Co-ordinate System:



(a)



(b)

From the fig (a), it models a flat circular dinner plate. To specify any point P on its surface, we

have to draw two fixed coordinate axes at right angles to each other passing through O, the centre of the plate. This is the familiar Cartesian co-ordinate system. we can locate the point of interest by giving its distance from the two axes.

The position of point P can also be uniquely defined by measuring its radial distance from the origin and the angle ϕ between the x-axis and the line joining the point to the origin as shown fig(b).

point O is called the pole.

The distance P is called the radius vector of the point P and ϕ is its polar angle. These two coordinates taken together are called polar coordinates.

Coordinates of P.

Now we can specify the position of the point P as $P(\rho, \phi)$. We would now like to know how x and y are called related to ρ and ϕ . To relate the x & y coordinates of P to its ρ & ϕ coordinates, we can easily write referring to fig (b).

$$x = \rho \cos \phi \quad (-\infty < x < \infty)$$

$$\text{and } y = \rho \sin \phi \quad (-\infty < y < \infty) \quad \text{--- (1)}$$

It is quite easy to change from Cartesian coordinates to plane polar coordinates. By squaring these relations and adding, we will get

$$\rho = \sqrt{x^2 + y^2} \quad \text{--- } ②$$

and on dividing one by the other, we can write

$$\phi = \tan^{-1} \left(\frac{y}{x} \right) \quad \text{--- } ③$$

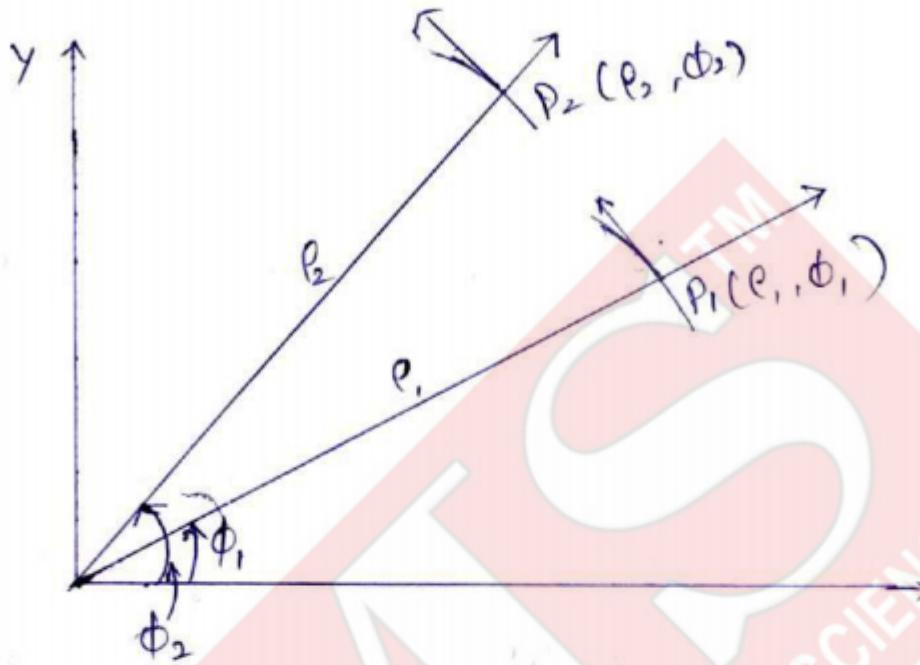
we take ρ to be +ve when it is measured from the origin along the line OP. Similarly, ϕ is taken to be +ve in the anticlockwise direction from x-axis. The range of variation of these coordinates is given by

$$0 < \rho < \infty, \quad 0 \leq \phi \leq 2\pi$$

we know that Cartesian coordinate system is orthogonal, i.e. the x and y axes meet at right angles at any point in the plane and their directions are fixed.

— we will note that each concurrent line cuts the concentric circles at one point only. when we draw a tangent at that point, we will note that the coordinate axes defining the directions of increasing ρ and increasing ϕ are at right angles. That is, the polar coordinates form an orthogonal coordinate system in the plane. But for two different points

$P_1(\rho_1, \phi_1)$ and $P_2(\rho_2, \phi_2)$, the directions of ρ and ϕ coordinate axes are not ^{the} same.



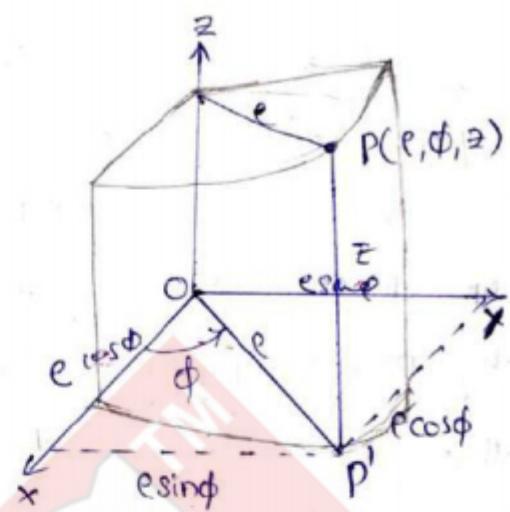
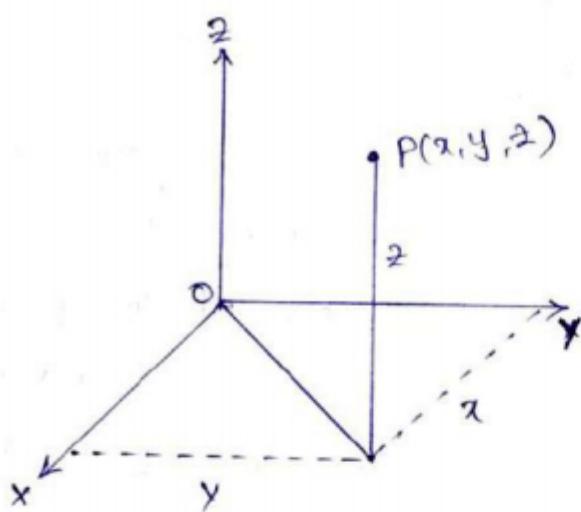
From this we may conclude that unlike in the Cartesian system, the directions of plane polar coordinate axes vary from point to point.

Cylindrical co-ordinate System:

(M1)

we know that in Cartesian co-ordinate system, the position of a point P in space is denoted by $P(x, y, z)$. we denote the cylindrical polar co-ordinates of this point by $P(r, \phi, z)$. By referring to below figure, we will note that r and z respectively denote the distance of 'P' from the z -axis, and the xy -plane while ϕ is the angle which the line joining the origin with the projection of P on xy -plane makes with the x -axis. It is called the azimuthal angle.

If we recall the equation $x^2 + y^2 = r^2$ with $r = \text{constant}$ defines a circle in a plane. This suggests that if we add a Cartesian z -axis to the plane polar co-ordinate system, so that z denotes the perpendicular distance from the xy -plane, we obtain a cylinder. That is, cylindrical polar co-ordinate system extends the plane polar co-ordinate system to three dimensions. So if a point has Cartesian co-ordinates (x, y, z) and cylindrical polar co-ordinates (r, ϕ, z) .



Representation of a point in Cartesian and Cylindrical co-ordinates.

$$x = r \cos \phi \quad (-\infty < x < \infty)$$

$$y = r \sin \phi \quad (-\infty < y < \infty)$$

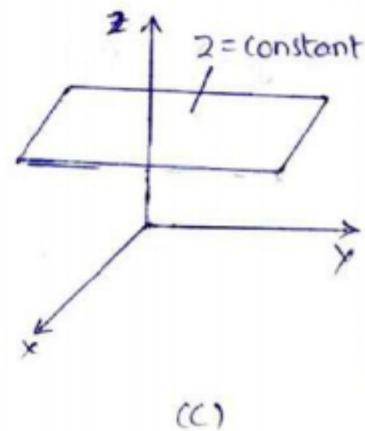
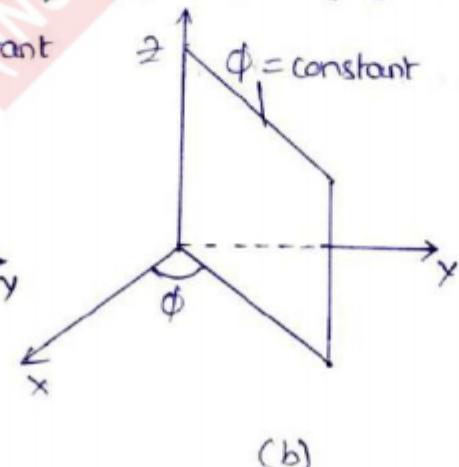
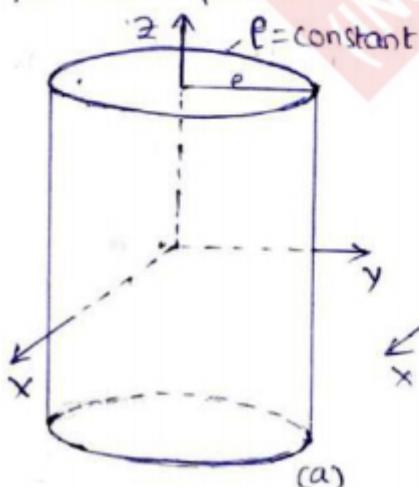
$$z = z \quad (-\infty < z < \infty)$$

$$r = \sqrt{x^2 + y^2} \quad (0 < r < \infty)$$

$$\phi = \tan^{-1}(y/x) \quad (0 \leq \phi \leq 2\pi)$$

$$z = z \quad (-\infty < z < \infty)$$

In case of plane polar coordinates, ϕ is undefined at the origin. But in cylindrical co-ordinates ϕ is undefined for all points on the z-axis ($x=0=y$).



Now refer to fig (a), which shows a cylinder of radius ρ and whose axis of symmetry is along the z -axis. We will note that for any point on the surface of cylinder, ρ is constant. That is, $\rho = \text{constant}$ defines a circular cylindrical surface. This is also called the $\phi = \text{constant}$ surface. For different values of ρ , we will obtain co-axial right circular cylinders. Their common axis of symmetry is z -axis.

The $\rho = \text{constant}$ surface defined by $\phi = \text{constant}$ is half-plane bounded on one edge by the z -axis (fig b)

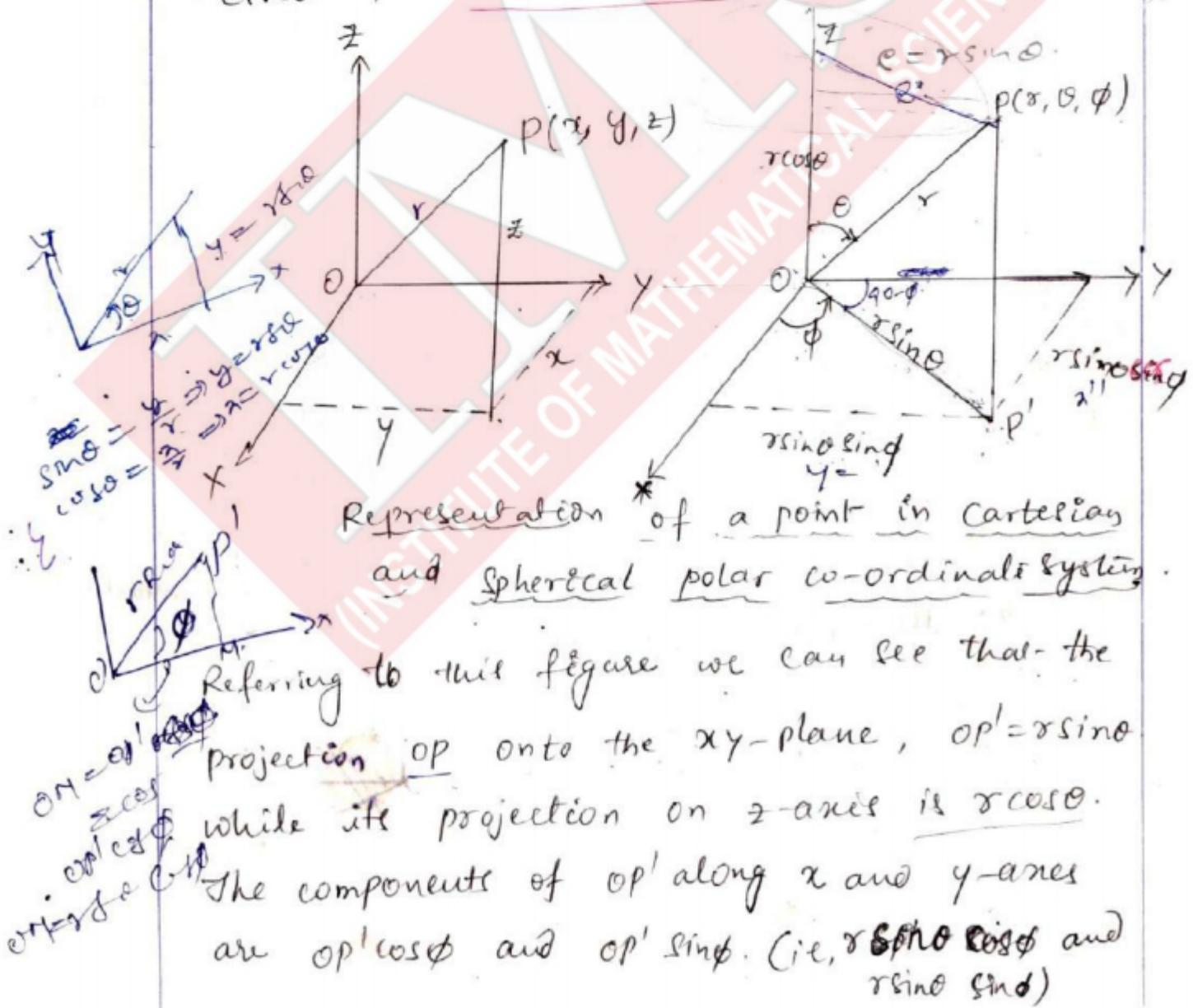
But the $\rho\phi = \text{constant}$ surface given by $z = \text{constant}$ is a plane parallel to the xy plane (fig c) just as in the Cartesian Co-ordinate system.

(N)

Spherical polar co-ordinate System:

In spherical polar co-ordinate system, the position of a point is specified by the radial distance r , the polar angle θ and the azimuthal angle ϕ as shown in the figure.

We can see that while θ is measured in the clockwise direction from the z -axis, ϕ is measured in the anticlockwise direction from the x -axis.



Hence, for a point p having cartesian co-ordinates (x, y, z) and spherical polar co-ordinate (r, θ, ϕ) ,

we can write

$$\begin{aligned} x &= op' \cos \phi = r \sin \theta \cos \phi & (-\infty < x < \infty) \\ y &= op' \sin \phi = r \sin \theta \sin \phi & (-\infty < y < \infty) \\ z &= op' \cos \theta = r \cos \theta & (-\infty < z < \infty) \end{aligned}$$

$$r = \sqrt{x^2 + y^2 + z^2} \quad (0 \leq r < \infty)$$

$$\theta = \tan^{-1}\left(\frac{\sqrt{x^2 + y^2}}{z}\right) \quad (0 \leq \theta \leq \pi)$$

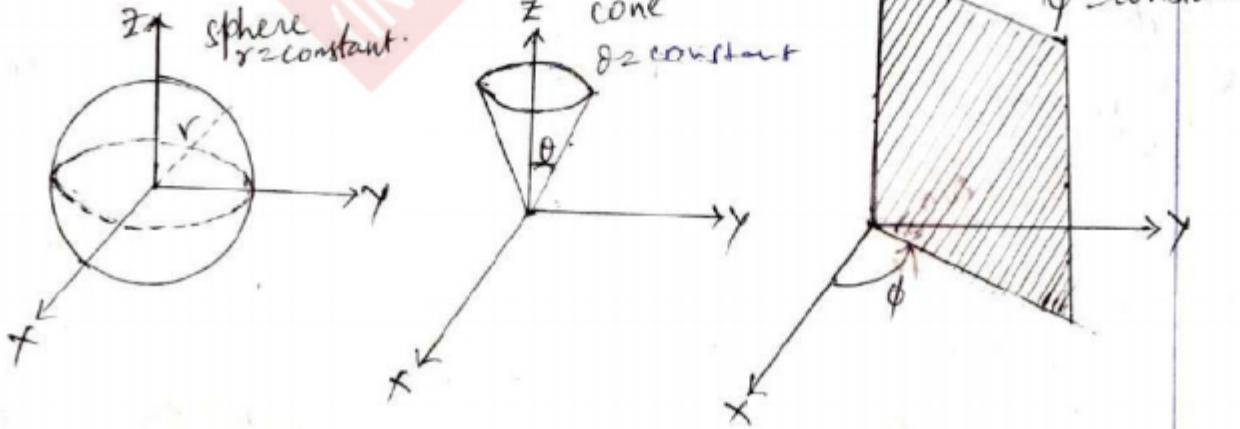
$$\text{and } \phi = \tan^{-1}\left(\frac{y}{x}\right). \quad (0 \leq \phi \leq 2\pi)$$

$$\begin{aligned} x^2 + y^2 &= r^2 \sin^2 \theta (\sin^2 \phi + \cos^2 \phi) \\ &= r^2 \sin^2 \theta \\ \Rightarrow r \sin \theta &= \sqrt{x^2 + y^2} \\ \therefore \frac{r \sin \theta}{r \cos \theta} &= \frac{\sqrt{x^2 + y^2}}{z} \\ \Rightarrow \tan \theta &= \frac{\sqrt{x^2 + y^2}}{z} \\ \Rightarrow \theta &= \tan^{-1}\left(\frac{\sqrt{x^2 + y^2}}{z}\right) \end{aligned}$$

The surfaces defined by $r = \text{constant}$,

$\theta = \text{constant}$ and $\phi = \text{constant}$ are as shown below.

It is instructive to note that in spherical co-ordinates, $\phi = \text{constant}$ is the half plane as in cylindrical co-ordinates.



The co-ordinate surfaces are

$r = \text{constant}$; spheres having centre at the
say, c_1 origin (or origin if constant = 0)
 $i.e., c_1 = 0$)

$\theta = \text{constant}$; cones having vertex at the
say, c_2 origin (lines if $c_2 = 0$ or π ,
and the xy -plane
if $c_2 = \pi/2$)

$\phi = \text{constant}$; planes through the z -axis.
say, c_3

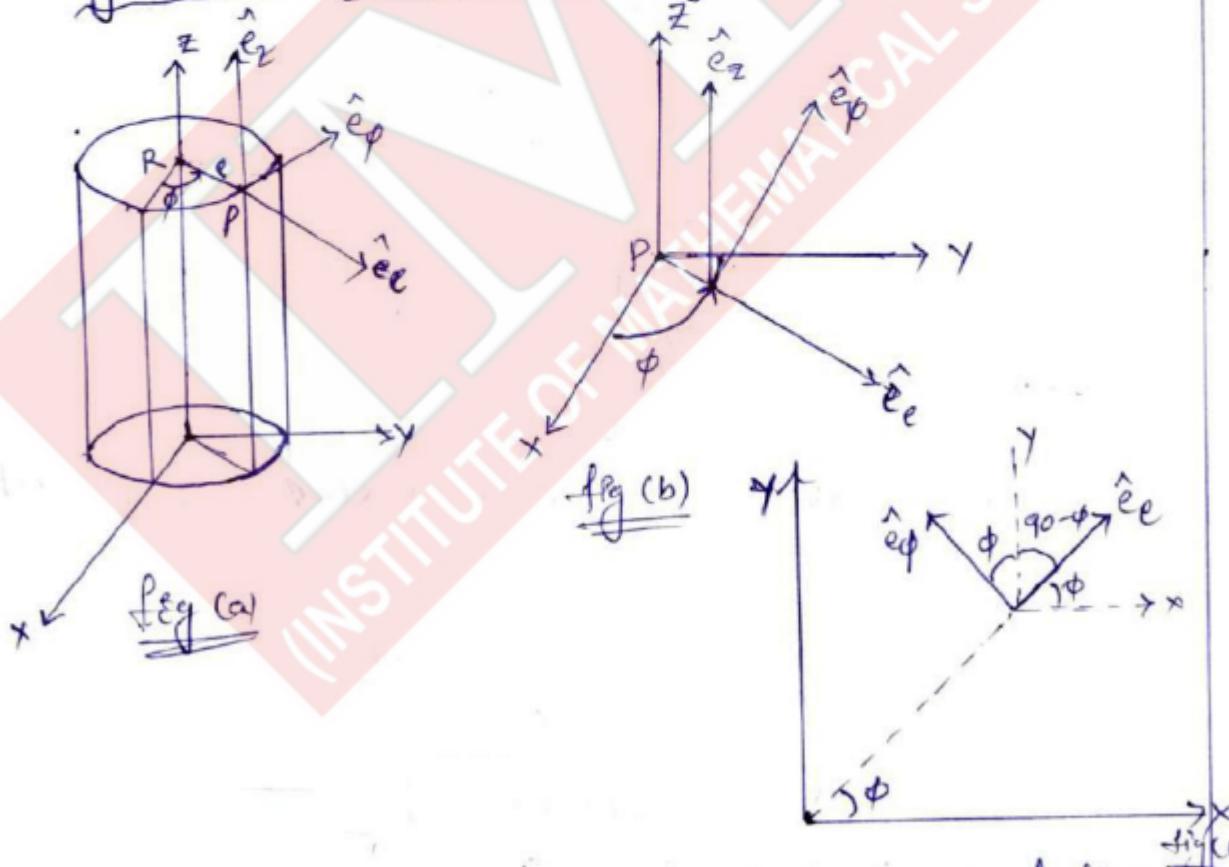
Expressing a vector in polar coordinates:

A vector A in cartesian co-ordinates can be written as

$$A = A_x \hat{i} + A_y \hat{j} + A_z \hat{k} \quad \text{--- (1)}$$

where \hat{i} , \hat{j} , and \hat{k} are unit vectors along the x, y and z axes respectively. This means that to express A in polar co-ordinates, we must relate \hat{i} , \hat{j} , \hat{k} with the unit vectors associated with the system of interest.

Cylindrical co-ordinate system:



for cylindrical co-ordinate system, we define the unit vectors \hat{e}_r , \hat{e}_ϕ and \hat{e}_z at a given point P as follows: let R be the point on the

z -axis with the same z -co-ordinate as P . Then we define \hat{e}_ρ to be the unit vector P which is normal to the cylindrical surface $\rho = \text{constant}$ through P . So \hat{e}_ρ will be in the direction of RP , i.e., along the direction of increasing ρ , as shown in fig (a).

Similarly, we define \hat{e}_ϕ to be the unit vector normal to the half plane $\phi = \text{constant}$ through P in the direction of increasing ϕ .

The unit vector \hat{e}_z is defined normal to the plane $z = \text{constant}$ through P in the direction of increasing z .

$$\begin{aligned} \text{we have } \hat{e}_\rho &= \frac{RP}{|RP|} \\ &= \frac{x\hat{i} + y\hat{j}}{r} \end{aligned}$$

on substituting for $x = r \cos \phi$, $y = r \sin \phi$

we get

$$\hat{e}_\rho = \frac{r \cos \phi \hat{i} + r \sin \phi \hat{j}}{r}$$

$$\boxed{\hat{e}_\rho = \cos \phi \hat{i} + \sin \phi \hat{j}} \quad \text{--- (2)}$$

Since \hat{e}_ϕ makes an angle $(\frac{\pi}{2} + \phi)$ with the x -axis and an angle ϕ with the y -axis, we can write

(8)

$$\hat{e}_\phi = \cos\left(\frac{\pi}{2} + \phi\right) \hat{i} + \sin\left(\frac{\pi}{2} + \phi\right) \hat{j}$$

$$\hat{e}_\phi = -\sin\phi \hat{i} + \cos\phi \hat{j} \quad \text{--- (2)}$$

Since \hat{e}_z is parallel to z-axis, its projection along the x and y-axes will be zero.

hence $\hat{e}_z = \hat{k} \dots \quad \text{--- (3)}$

These relations can readily be inverted. To this end, we have to multiply (2) by $\cos\phi$ and (3) by $-\sin\phi$.

Add the resulting expressions and use the

identity $\cos^2\phi + \sin^2\phi = 1$.

we get

$$\hat{i} = \cos\phi \hat{e}_\theta - \sin\phi \hat{e}_\phi$$

Similarly we write

$$\hat{j} = \sin\phi \hat{e}_\theta + \cos\phi \hat{e}_\phi$$

and $\hat{k} = \hat{e}_z$.

We know that directions of the Cartesian unit vectors ($\hat{i}, \hat{j}, \hat{k}$) are uniquely fixed.

But for the unit vectors $\hat{e}_\theta, \hat{e}_\phi$ and \hat{e}_z the directions vary from point to point.

Computing their dot and cross products, we can easily check that these vectors are normal to each other and form a right handed system.

In cartesian co-ordinates, the position vector is given by $\vec{r} = \hat{x}\hat{i} + \hat{y}\hat{j} + \hat{z}\hat{k}$.

Express it in terms of cylindrical co-ordinates

(e, ϕ, z) and the associated unit vectors

$$\hat{e}_e, \hat{e}_\phi, \hat{e}_z.$$

Sol: The position vector is given by

$$\vec{r} = \hat{x}\hat{i} + \hat{y}\hat{j} + \hat{z}\hat{k}$$

substituting $x = e \cos \phi$, $y = e \sin \phi$, $z = z$

$$\text{and } \hat{i} = \cos \phi \hat{e}_e - \sin \phi \hat{e}_\phi$$

$$\hat{j} = \sin \phi \hat{e}_e + \cos \phi \hat{e}_\phi$$

$$\hat{k} = \hat{e}_z$$

we get

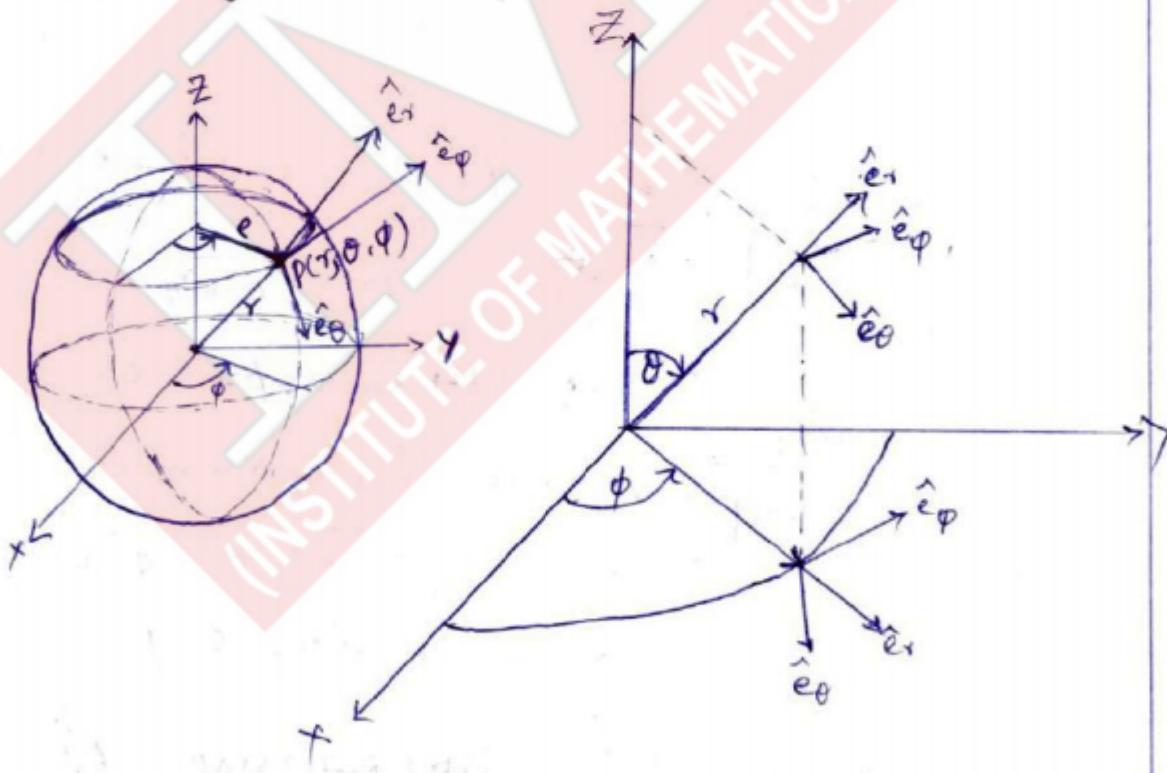
$$\begin{aligned} \vec{r} &= e \cos \phi (\cos \phi \hat{e}_e - \sin \phi \hat{e}_\phi) + e \sin \phi (\sin \phi \hat{e}_e + \cos \phi \hat{e}_\phi) + z \hat{e}_z \\ &= e (\cos^2 \phi \hat{e}_e - \sin^2 \phi \hat{e}_\phi) + e (\sin \phi \cos \phi \hat{e}_e + \sin \phi \cos \phi \hat{e}_\phi) + z \hat{e}_z \\ &= e \hat{e}_e + z \hat{e}_z. \end{aligned}$$

Spherical co-ordinate system

(7)

for the spherical polar co-ordinates, we define the unit vectors as follows:

At the point $P(r, \theta, \phi)$, the unit vector \hat{e}_r is normal to the surface $r = \text{constant}$, \hat{e}_θ is normal to the surface $\theta = \text{constant}$ and \hat{e}_ϕ is normal to the surface defined by $\phi = \text{constant}$ through the given point. Their directions are along increasing r , θ and ϕ respectively as shown in the figure.



By considering the components of the unit vectors $\hat{e}_r, \hat{e}_\theta, \hat{e}_\phi$ in the directions of unit vectors $\hat{i}, \hat{j}, \hat{k}$.

we have

$$\hat{e}_r = \sin\theta \cos\phi \hat{i} + \sin\theta \sin\phi \hat{j} + \cos\theta \hat{k}$$

$$\hat{e}_\theta = \cos\theta \cos\phi \hat{i} + \cos\theta \sin\phi \hat{j} - \sin\phi \hat{k}$$

$$\hat{e}_\phi = -\sin\phi \hat{i} + \cos\phi \hat{j}.$$

Conversely

$$\hat{i} = \sin\theta \cos\phi \hat{e}_r + \cos\theta \cos\phi \hat{e}_\theta - \sin\phi \hat{e}_\phi.$$

$$\hat{j} = \sin\theta \sin\phi \hat{e}_r + \cos\theta \sin\phi \hat{e}_\theta + \cos\phi \hat{e}_\phi$$

$$\hat{k} = \cos\theta \hat{e}_r - \sin\theta \hat{e}_\theta.$$

(OR)

At any point P, we have $x = r \sin\theta \cos\phi$,

$$y = r \sin\theta \sin\phi$$

$$z = r \cos\theta.$$

so that $\vec{r} = r \sin\theta \cos\phi \hat{i} + r \sin\theta \sin\phi \hat{j} + r \cos\theta \hat{k}$.

If $\hat{e}_r, \hat{e}_\theta, \hat{e}_\phi$ be the unit vectors at P

then

$$\hat{e}_r = \frac{\frac{\partial \vec{r}}{\partial r}}{|\frac{\partial \vec{r}}{\partial r}|} = \frac{\sin\theta \cos\phi \hat{i} + \sin\theta \sin\phi \hat{j} + \cos\theta \hat{k}}{\sqrt{\sin^2\theta \cos^2\phi + \sin^2\theta \sin^2\phi + \cos^2\theta}}$$

$$= \sin\theta \cos\phi \hat{i} + \sin\theta \sin\phi \hat{j} + \cos\theta \hat{k}$$

$$\hat{e}_\theta = \frac{\frac{\partial \vec{r}}{\partial \theta}}{|\frac{\partial \vec{r}}{\partial \theta}|} = \frac{r \cos\theta \cos\phi \hat{i} + r \cos\theta \sin\phi \hat{j} - r \sin\theta \hat{k}}{r \sqrt{\cos^2\theta \cos^2\phi + \cos^2\theta \sin^2\phi + \sin^2\theta}}$$

$$= \cos\theta \cos\phi \hat{i} + \cos\theta \sin\phi \hat{j} - \sin\theta \hat{k}$$

$$\hat{e}_\phi = \frac{\frac{\partial \vec{r}}{\partial \phi}}{|\frac{\partial \vec{r}}{\partial \phi}|} = \frac{-r \sin\theta \sin\phi \hat{i} + r \sin\theta \cos\phi \hat{j}}{r \sin\theta}$$

$$= -\sin\phi \hat{i} + \cos\phi \hat{j}.$$

Differential Element of vector Lengths

(10)

In spherical co-ordinates, the position vector of a point moving through space is given by

$$\vec{r} = r\hat{e}_r \quad \text{--- (1)}$$

$$\therefore \vec{r} = \hat{x}\hat{i} + \hat{y}\hat{j} + \hat{z}\hat{k}$$

Substituting $x = r \sin \theta \cos \phi$
 $y = r \sin \theta \sin \phi$
 $z = r \cos \theta$

and $\hat{i} = \sin \theta \cos \phi \hat{e}_x + \cos \theta \cos \phi \hat{e}_\theta - \sin \phi \hat{e}_\phi$
 $\hat{j} = \sin \theta \sin \phi \hat{e}_x + \cos \theta \sin \phi \hat{e}_\theta + \cos \phi \hat{e}_\phi$
 $\hat{k} = \cos \theta \hat{e}_x - \sin \theta \hat{e}_\theta$.

then

$$\begin{aligned} \vec{r} &= r \sin \theta \cos \phi (\sin \theta \cos \phi \hat{e}_x + \cos \theta \cos \phi \hat{e}_\theta - \sin \phi \hat{e}_\phi) \\ &\quad + r \sin \theta \sin \phi (\sin \theta \sin \phi \hat{e}_x + \cos \theta \sin \phi \hat{e}_\theta + \cos \phi \hat{e}_\phi) \\ &\quad + r \cos \theta (\cos \theta \hat{e}_x - \sin \theta \hat{e}_\theta) \\ &= \hat{e}_x (r \sin^2 \theta \cos^2 \phi + r \sin^2 \theta \sin^2 \phi + r \cos^2 \theta) \\ &\quad + \hat{e}_\theta (r \sin \theta \cos \phi \cos \theta + r \sin \theta \cos \theta \sin \phi \\ &\quad - r \cos \theta \sin \theta) + \\ &\quad \hat{e}_\phi (-r \sin \theta \cos \theta \sin \phi + r \sin \theta \sin \theta \cos \phi) \\ &= \hat{e}_x [r \sin^2 \theta (\cos^2 \phi + \sin^2 \phi) + r \cos^2 \theta] \\ &= r\hat{e}_r. \end{aligned}$$

Substituting the value of \hat{e}_r in (1)

we get $\vec{r} = r (\hat{i} \sin \theta \cos \phi + \hat{j} \sin \theta \sin \phi + \hat{k} \cos \theta)$

To compute $d\vec{r}$, we would recall that r, θ , and ϕ will change as \vec{r} changes.

Hence we can write

$$d\vec{r} = dr (\hat{i} \sin \theta \cos \phi + \hat{j} \sin \theta \sin \phi + \hat{k} \cos \theta) \\ + r (\hat{i} \cos \theta \cos \phi d\theta - \hat{i} \sin \theta \sin \phi d\theta + \\ \hat{j} \sin \theta \cos \phi d\phi + \hat{j} \cos \theta \sin \phi d\theta - \hat{k} \sin \theta d\phi)$$

In spherical co-ordinates, small line elements along $\hat{e}_r, \hat{e}_\theta$ and \hat{e}_ϕ are given by $dr, r d\theta$ and $r \sin \theta d\phi$ respectively.

On collecting coefficients of $dr, r d\theta$ and $r \sin \theta d\phi$, this expression becomes

$$d\vec{r} = (\hat{i} \sin \theta \cos \phi + \hat{j} \sin \theta \sin \phi + \hat{k} \cos \theta) dr \\ + (\hat{i} \cos \theta \cos \phi + \hat{j} \cos \theta \sin \phi - \hat{k} \sin \theta) r d\theta \\ + (-\hat{i} \sin \phi + \hat{j} \cos \phi) r \sin \theta d\phi \quad \text{--- (1)}$$

$$\text{Since } \hat{e}_r = \sin \theta \cos \phi \hat{i} + \sin \theta \sin \phi \hat{j} + \cos \theta \hat{k}$$

$$\hat{e}_\theta = \cos \theta \cos \phi \hat{i} + \cos \theta \sin \phi \hat{j} - \sin \theta \hat{k}$$

$$\hat{e}_\phi = -\sin \phi \hat{i} + \cos \phi \hat{j}$$

∴ From (1) we find their differential element of vector length in spherical polar co-ordinates can be written as

$$d\vec{r} = \hat{e}_r dr + \hat{e}_\theta r d\theta + \hat{e}_\phi r \sin \theta d\phi. \quad \text{--- (2)}$$

→ In cylindrical polar co-ordinates, the position vector of a point moving through space is given by $\vec{r} = \rho \hat{e}_\rho + z \hat{e}_z$

Substituting the value of \hat{e}_ρ in \vec{r} , we get

$$\vec{r} = \rho (\hat{i} \cos \phi + \hat{j} \sin \phi) + \hat{k} z$$

A small change in \vec{r} gives rise to changes in ρ, ϕ and z .

so we can write

$$\begin{aligned} d\vec{r} &= d\rho (\hat{i} \cos \phi + \hat{j} \sin \phi) + \rho (-\hat{i} \sin \phi + \hat{j} \cos \phi) d\phi \\ &\quad + \hat{k} dz \\ &= \hat{e}_\rho d\rho + \rho d\phi \hat{e}_\phi + \hat{e}_z dz. \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

$$(\because \hat{i} \cos \phi + \hat{j} \sin \phi = \hat{e}_\rho; -\hat{i} \sin \phi + \hat{j} \cos \phi = \hat{e}_\phi \text{ and } \hat{k} = \hat{e}_z)$$

where $d\rho$, $\rho d\phi$ and dz denote small line element in the increasing directions of ρ, ϕ and z respectively.

Differential Element of vector Area

From (4), we can identify that in spherical co-ordinates $d\rho$, $\rho d\phi$ and $\rho \sin \phi d\theta$ are respectively, analogous to dx , dy and dz in Cartesian co-ordinate system.

Similarly from eqn (i), we can identify that in cylindrical co-ordinates dr , $p d\phi$ and dz analogous to dx , dy and dz , respectively.

We can use this analogy to obtain expressions for components of differential element of vector area.

In Cartesian co-ordinate system, the area of the face normal to x -axis is given by

$$dA_x = dy dz$$

We can use the same definition for non-Cartesian co-ordinates as well.

In terms of cylindrical co-ordinates, we can write

$$\begin{aligned} dA_r &= (dr)_\phi (dr)_z \\ &= p d\phi dz \quad \text{--- (i)} \end{aligned}$$

Similarly

$$\begin{aligned} dA_\phi &= (dr)_r (dr)_z \\ &= dr dz \quad \text{--- (ii)} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{and } dA_z &= (dr)_r (dr)_\phi \\ &= p dr d\phi \quad \text{--- (iii)} \end{aligned}$$

On combining eqns (i), (ii) and (iii), we can express the differential element of vector area in cylindrical co-ordinates as

$$dA = dA_r \hat{e}_r + dA_\phi \hat{e}_\phi + dA_z \hat{e}_z$$

$$(iv) dA = \rho d\phi dz \hat{e}_p + dr d\phi \hat{e}_\theta + r d\rho d\phi \hat{e}_z \quad (5)$$

we can follow the same procedure and show that differential element of vector area in spherical co-ordinates can be expressed as

$$dA = r \sin\theta d\theta d\phi \hat{e}_r + r \sin\theta dr d\phi \hat{e}_\theta + r d\theta d\phi \hat{e}_\phi$$

In Cartesian co-ordinates, an element of volume is defined as

$$dv = dx dy dz$$

we use the same definition in non-Cartesian co-ordinates

In cylindrical co-ordinates

$$\begin{aligned} dv &= (dr) e_r (dr) \phi (dx)_z \\ &= (dr)(r d\phi) dz \\ &= r dr \sin\theta d\phi dz \end{aligned} \quad (iv)$$

~~$r = \sqrt{x^2 + y^2}$~~
 ~~$\theta = \tan^{-1} y/x$~~
 ~~$dx = r d\phi dz$~~
 ~~$dy = r d\phi dz$~~

In spherical co-ordinates

$$\begin{aligned} dv &= (dr)_r (dr)_\theta (dr)_\phi \\ &= (dr)(r d\theta)(r \sin\theta d\phi) \\ &= r^2 dr \sin\theta d\theta d\phi \end{aligned} \quad (v)$$

