

# Study of 338 galaxies of Virgo Cluster

Varsha Gupta, Gopal Upadhyaya

**Abstract**— The Virgo cluster is the nearest and best studied rich cluster of galaxies. Owing to its proximity, it provides great opportunity towards its detailed study. The present paper is based on the first exhaustive study on Virgo by Bruno Binggeli, Allan Sandage and G.A. Tammann (1985) that encompasses 2096 galaxies (including all member, possible member and background galaxies). This paper is an attempt to understand the true morphological structure and kinematics of the cluster by including new available data (velocity and distances) of 338 galaxies to VCC, mainly the dwarf Ellipticals (163) galaxies which in fact, dominate (in number) the cluster. The sample contains many fainter galaxies up to BT ~ 20 mag. The study reveals the complexity of its structure which certainly provides the evidence for un-relaxed dynamics and the evolutionary state of Virgo cluster.

**Key words** — Virgo cluster, structure, morphology, heliocentric velocity.



## INTRODUCTION

Study of cluster of galaxies has been pouring in valuable information about their formation and evolution. Virgo cluster, the nearest and largest rich cluster of galaxies in

Northern Hemisphere is an important cluster for extragalactic astronomy. Cosmographically, it lies at the center of Local Super cluster (also called Virgo super cluster) in whose outskirts Milky Way is situated in the Local group (G. de Vaucouleurs, 1956) [1].

The discovery of cluster itself dates back to 1784, when Charles Messier and collaborators noted the unusual concentrations of nebulae in Virgo and listed them as Messier objects, which were later identified as member galaxies of the Virgo cluster. Studies by Shapley & Ames (1926, 1932) [2], [3]; Hubble & Humason (1931) [4]; Smith (1936) [5]; de Vaucouleurs (1956, 1961) [1], [6]; Reaves (1956) [7]; Zwicky (1959) [8]; de Vaucouleurs & de Vaucouleurs (1973) [9] and many more have revealed much about the cluster.

Bruno Binggeli, Allan Sandage and G.A. Tammann in 1985 provided a solid platform for exhaustive studies on 'Virgo' by compiling a catalog, called Virgo Cluster Catalog or VCC which they further modified in 1987 and 1993 [10], [11], [12]. Followed by, the studies of Yasuda et al. 1997 [13]; Gavazzi et al., 1999 [14]; Schindler, Binggeli and Bohringer, 1999 [15] and many other workers further refined and redefined the Virgo structure. Moreover, Gavazzi and collaborators in 1999 presented an extended 3 D structure of Virgo cluster, showing elaborated subdivision of different cluster regions and estimated their distance by using Fundamental plane (FP) and Tully Fisher relations (TF) relations.

There appears unanimous consensus that Virgo cluster is an irregular cluster, lying at a distance of ~ 17 Mpc (Gavazzi et al., 1999 and references therein) with mean velocity of ~ 1094 kms<sup>-1</sup> [12]. It is made up of several clouds or groups of galaxies with two main components, cluster A associated with M87 and cluster B associated with M49 (whereas Gavazzi et al., 1999 placed M49 closer than cluster B, based on TF distance estimate). The galaxies in Virgo region are not at unique distance and evidence of infall has been reported [11], [14].

However, the idea of infall is still not settled. Authors keep on reporting diverse views on this issue (BST 1993 [12]; Mei et al., 2007 [16]; Chernin et al., 2010 [17]). The subclustering in the cluster provides the evidence of lack of dynamical equilibrium.

Virgo cluster is a home of ~ 2096 optically catalogued galaxies of all known Hubble types and diverse luminosities, ranging (in absolute magnitude) from the bright giant elliptical and spirals to faint dwarf and irregular galaxies, with dwarf Ellipticals in particular numerically dominating the cluster population.

Owing to its proximity, it could be mapped to an unsurpassed level of depth and morphological detail, rendering it presently the most studied richest cluster of galaxies in terms of number of known galaxies. In particular, this cluster is an important stepping stone towards determination of the distance scale of the universe.

However even today, the criteria set by BST, still serve as an important standard for many studies on 'Virgo'. Therefore in order to understand the real structure and kinematics of galaxies of Virgo cluster, the present paper is divided into two sections-

Section 1: Study of structure and kinematics of Virgo cluster as explained by BST 85, BST 87 and the revised structure presented by BST 93.

Section 2: Reanalysis of morphological and Kinematic structure by updating the velocity and distance values of 338 galaxies of VCC.

### Section 1:

Earlier studies showed that the structure of Virgo cluster is quite complex. It is an irregular cluster with significant sub structures. It mainly consists of two significant sub clusters (cluster A and cluster B) and few clouds (termed as W, W', M and an elongated Southern extension or SE). Main cluster A containing M87/NGC4486 (considered as heart of the Virgo cluster) is separated from cluster B containing M49/NGC4472. The clouds are considered as the separate entities, with distinct structural and kinematical properties. It is also noticed that the Virgo cluster is a home of all known morphological



bers, neither from the morphological criteria nor from velocities. Those areas were marked as 'cloud regions' (namely; 'W cloud', 'W' cloud', 'M cloud', and the 'Southern Extension'). They also observed that early type galaxies (E, S0, dE, dS0) were much more concentrated towards the cluster center(s) than late type galaxies (spirals and Irregulars).

The real structure and kinematics of Virgo cluster became clearer when Bruno Binggeli, C.C. Popsecu and G. A. Tammann in 1993 (hereafter BTS93) supplemented the VCC and the study of BST1987. They increased the kinematic size of Virgo Cluster to total 708 galaxies (out of 2096 galaxies listed in VCC) by adding 144 new velocity data to the previous known for 564 galaxies. With this new (enlarged) kinematic sample of VCC and by using the same criteria, earlier set by BTS87 (for certain cluster member and background galaxy), they once again analyzed the kinematics of Virgo cluster.

BST93 plotted the velocity histogram (shown in figure 3) and found that the new velocity data were fully consistent with their previous morphological work (except for few cases).

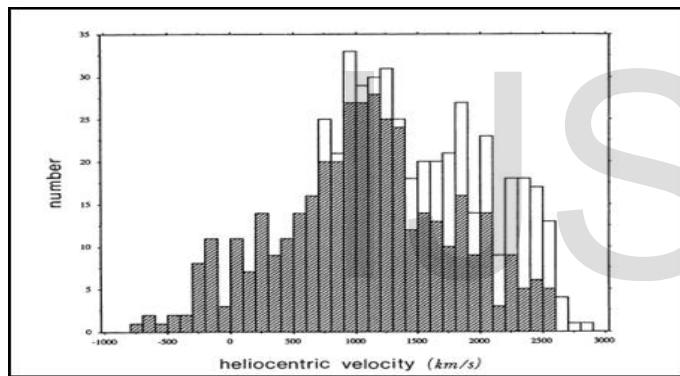


Fig. 3 Velocity distribution of all members and possible members of VCC  
(courtesy: BST93)

By analyzing the velocity histogram they confirmed that those galaxies having  $v_{\odot} < 500 \text{ kms}^{-1}$  are bona fide cluster member. Whereas, spoiled velocity range between  $700 \text{ kms}^{-1} < v_{\odot} < 3000 \text{ kms}^{-1}$  was obtained which clearly indicate that not every galaxy with  $v_{\odot} < 3000 \text{ kms}^{-1}$  is automatically a cluster member and therefore they are included as possible member.

BST93 were of the view that there must be number of well-known clouds of galaxies in the near background which overlap with the broad velocity distribution of the Virgo cluster and due to their proximity these cloud galaxies (which were earlier considered as separate entities) are not sufficiently distinct from the cluster member by morphology. Therefore these galaxies entered the VCC as 'possible members'. The revised structure of Virgo cluster by BST93 showing the cleansed sample containing main cluster A and cluster B is shown in figure 4 and different cloud regions along with Southern Extension (SE) are shown in figure 5. They also proposed the

mean heliocentric velocity of Virgo cluster to be  $\langle v_{\odot} \rangle_{VC} = 1050 \pm 35 \text{ kms}^{-1}$  and found that it is nearly 5 % lower than  $\langle v_{\odot} \rangle_{VC} = 1094 \pm 35 \text{ kms}^{-1}$ , as recommended by BTS87.

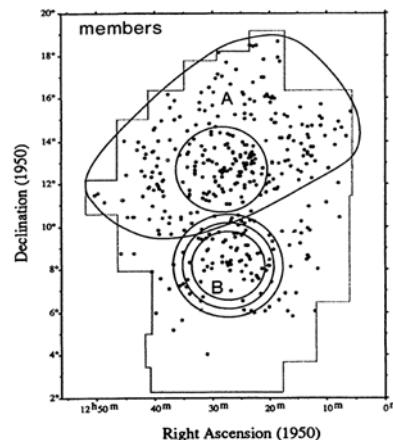


Fig.4 Cleansed sample of Virgo cluster containing cluster A and cluster B  
(courtesy: BTS93)

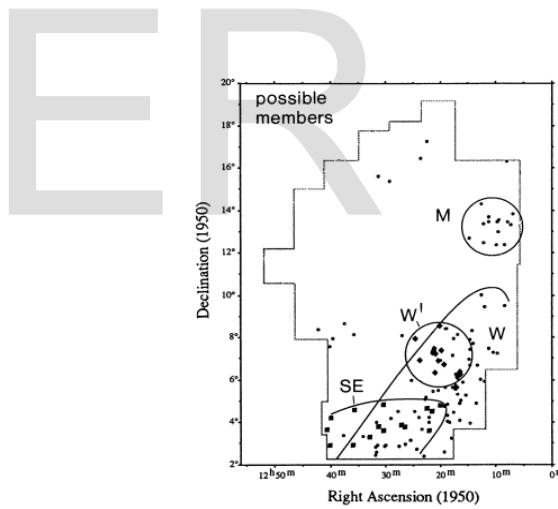


Fig.5 Different cloud regions & along with SE identified by BTS  
(courtesy: BTS93)

Because of relative proximity, the Virgo cluster has been studied in detail at many wavelengths (H $\alpha$ , H $I$ , CO, near IR, radio continuum and X-ray) by many astronomers. As a result, enormous data is now available. In the next section we pickup updated velocity and distance data from GOLD Mine database (as of Sep. 2008 it contains the data of total 3649 galaxies in the Coma supercluster, Virgo cluster, Cancer and Abell cluster) and NASA/IPAC Extragalactic Database (NED), with a view to analyse the effect of inclusion of this recent data in VCC.

## Section 2:

From section 1, it is clear that for any irregular cluster with complex substructure like Virgo, inclusion of every new velocity data is an important gain that helps in putting the morphological judgment on the test where (and only where) a decision for M (Member) or B (Background) is to be made. Where the membership is left open (Possible members/Cloud member), the new kinematic information could be used to decide between 'M' or 'B'. Therefore in the present paper, the galactic position, distance and velocity data of 338 galaxies (by including the member, possible member and background galaxies of VCC) are updated by lifting the data as available worldwide on Goldmine site (can be referred on <http://goldmine.mib.infn.it/>), described by Gavazzi et al., 2003) [19] and NASA/IPAC Extragalactic Database (ref. on <http://ned.ipac.caltech.edu/forms/gmd.html>) [20].

Considering distance to Virgo cluster,  $D \approx 17$  Mpc and those galaxies belonging to cluster A (as assigned by Gavazzi et al., 1993) are certain members of the cluster while all those galaxies that belong to different clouds having  $< 3000$   $\text{km s}^{-1}$  are excluded from the present study. However we do not deny the fact that many of cloud galaxies (with heliocentric velocity  $v_{\odot} < 3000$   $\text{km s}^{-1}$ ) could also be the cluster member.

Fig. 6 shows the distribution of galaxies of VCC (including member, cloud member, and background galaxies) with their modified galactic positions (from epoch 1950 to J2000). The kinematic structure of Virgo cluster is reanalyzed on the basis of new (previously unknown) and updated velocity data of the sample galaxies (including background galaxies for which no velocity and distance values available in BST85 or in BST93) by plotting a scatter diagram (Velocity vs. Declination), shown in fig 7.

It is observed that all member galaxies in our sample (between  $8^{\circ} < \delta < 17^{\circ}$ ) have velocity  $v_{\odot} < 3000$   $\text{km s}^{-1}$ , a well-defined gap is observed near  $v_{\odot} = 3000$   $\text{km s}^{-1}$ , beyond which there are no cluster members. All the background galaxies are found to have  $v_{\odot} > 3000$   $\text{km s}^{-1}$ , (i.e. beyond the velocity gap). Whereas in VCC, Binggeli et al. considered some background galaxies having  $v_{\odot} < 3000$   $\text{km s}^{-1}$ , and classified these low velocity galaxies as possible members but Gavazzi and collaborators placed them into different clouds (these galaxies are not considered in our sample of 338 galaxies). The observations once again confirm the previous findings of BST93.

To find the morphological distribution of sample galaxies in the cluster, we have plotted velocity histograms (figure 8 & 9), showing distribution of different morphological types of 338 galaxies. It is once again clear from their distribution that the cluster is a blend of all known morphological types of galaxies with dEs (dwarf Ellipticals) in particular dominating (in number) the cluster population.

Table 2 shows the updated positions (in J2000) and velocity data and distances of 338 galaxies.

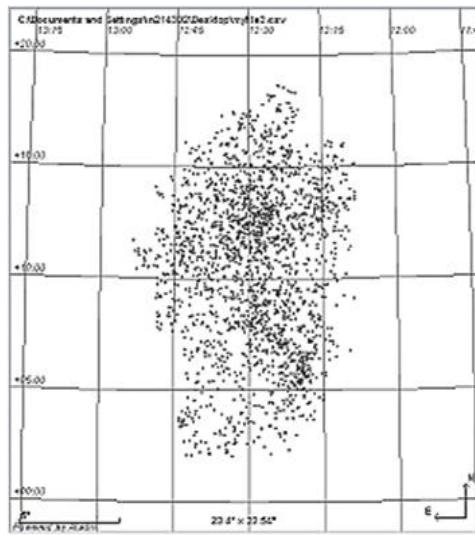


Fig. 6 Distribution of all galaxies of VCC as per their updated galactic positions in J2000

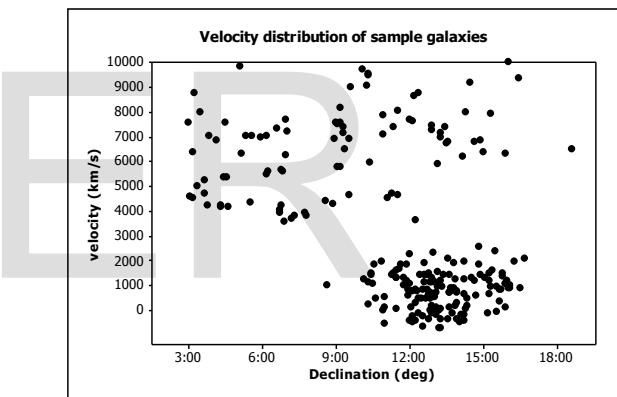


Fig. 7 Velocity distribution of 338 galaxies (including member, possible member and background galaxies of VCC)

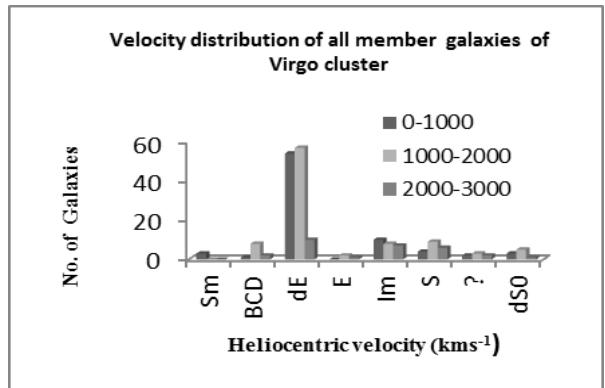


Fig.8 Velocity distribution of 338 galaxies

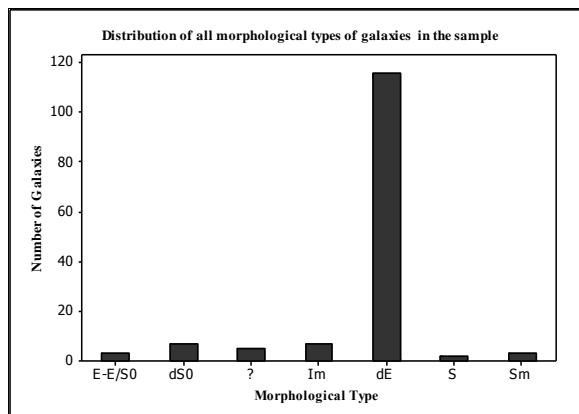


Fig. 9 Morphological distribution of 338 galaxies

### Conclusion:

After analyzing the updated velocity data, supported by distance values of 338 galaxies (from GoldMine & NED/IPAC database), it is finally concluded that:

In 282 of the 338 cases listed in table 2, it is observed that the updated velocity data are consistent with the previous morphological studies. In all these cases, the membership status is either confirmed or in case of Possible Member, a definitive solution could be found.

It is in contrast to the remaining 56 cases (or we can say failures) where we found that the 'Member galaxies' with the inclusion of new velocity data, turned out to be in 'Background'. It is also observed that in 16 of 56 cases (tabulated in table 3), the Member galaxy became the Background galaxy, followed by the change in Hubble type. Whereas, for the remaining 40 cases (as tabulated in table 4) only change in membership from Member to Background is found but not in Hubble type. Among these, six galaxies changed their Hubble type from Im to Sm with the inclusion of new velocity data and distance values. For the rest (mainly dEs) it comes with change in membership only but not in Hubble type.

There appears many fainter galaxies as shown in table 4, which were earlier included as 'certain Member' of particular morphological type in VCC (owing to the unavailability of velocity and distance data). These turned out to be in 'Background' with the inclusion of new velocity and distance values followed by change in morphological type.

It is also observed that there is very little or no variation in the velocity values picked up from two different database (GOLDMine and NASA/IPAC Extra galactic or NED database) The worst case happened to be with VCC 773, earlier considered as Possible Member by BST85. Its membership status, still remain uncertain as: it becomes background galaxy with the inclusion of new velocity data collected GOLDMine. Whereas with NED data it is either Member or Possible Member.

Besides, asymmetric velocity distribution of dwarf elliptical galaxies is observed (high, low and also blue shifted velocities,

Table 2) which gives the clear indication that the cluster is not yet relaxed. It is still in the process of evolution as predicted earlier by BST 93, Gavazzi et al. 93 and many more.

The present study clearly brings out that the inclusion of new velocity and distance data has changed the membership status of many galaxies of Virgo cluster. However there still remain many galaxies whose velocity data are not yet found. Therefore it is believed that as and when these data are made available, a clearer picture of structure of Virgo cluster will emerge.



















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