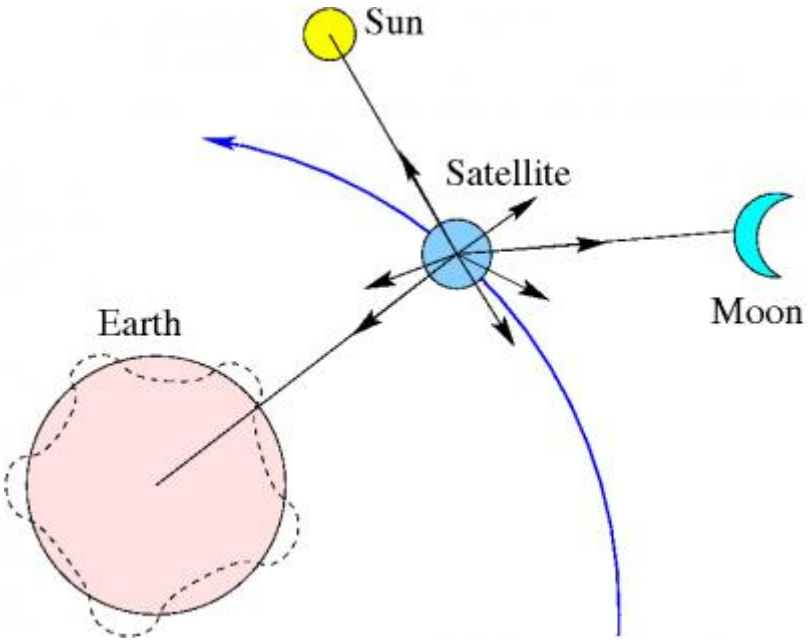
Satellite perturbations and their handling

Dr. M.Elangovan



Satellite perturbations refer to the deviations or disturbances in the orbital motion of a satellite caused by various factors such as gravitational interactions with other celestial bodies, atmospheric drag, and the nonspherical shape of the Earth. These perturbations can lead to changes in a satellite's orbit and can affect its long-term stability and position. Handling these perturbations is crucial for maintaining the accuracy and reliability of satellite-based systems like GPS, weather forecasting, and communication networks.

Here are some common satellite perturbations and how they are handled:

1. Gravitational Perturbations:
    - Gravitational interactions with the Moon, Sun, and other celestial bodies can cause small but cumulative changes in a satellite's orbit. These perturbations are typically accounted for in satellite design and mission planning.
    - Sophisticated mathematical models, such as numerical integration techniques, are used to predict the satellite's future trajectory accurately. Adjustments to the satellite's orbit may be made through occasional course corrections or manoeuvres.
2. Atmospheric Drag:
    - Satellites in low Earth orbit (LEO) experience atmospheric drag due to the presence of trace amounts of air molecules. This drag leads to a gradual decrease in a satellite's altitude and can cause it to re-enter the Earth's atmosphere.
    - Satellite operators may periodically raise the satellite's orbit by firing thrusters or deploying drag-inducing devices to counteract atmospheric drag.
3. Solar Radiation Pressure:

- Solar radiation pressure results from the pressure exerted by sunlight on a satellite's solar panels or other surfaces. This pressure can affect a satellite's orbit.
- Satellite designers can shape the satellite and its solar panels to minimize the impact of solar radiation pressure. They may also use propulsion systems to counteract these forces.

4. Nonspherical Shape of the Earth:
    - The Earth is not a perfect sphere, and its gravitational field varies slightly with location. This leads to deviations in satellite orbits.
    - Advanced gravitational models, such as spherical harmonics or geopotential models, are used to account for the Earth's non-spherical shape in satellite orbit calculations.
5. Lunar and Solar Perturbations:
    - Perturbations caused by the gravitational influence of the Moon and the Sun can be addressed through precise mathematical modeling and orbital correction manoeuvres, as needed.
6. Third-Body Perturbations:
    - Perturbations caused by other celestial bodies, such as asteroids and planets, can also be considered in satellite orbit calculations.

In practice, a combination of mathematical modeling, predictive algorithms, and onboard propulsion systems are used to manage satellite perturbations. Additionally, ground control stations continuously monitor the satellite's orbit and may execute manoeuvres to maintain the desired orbit, ensuring the satellite's long-term functionality and mission success.