Chapter 7

Conclusions

The spirit within nourishes, and mind instilled Throughout the living parts activates the whole mass And mingles with the vast frame. *Virgil*

> Life is not so simple, man! B. Uma Shankar

We have presented in this thesis some results of investigations, both theoretical and computational, which demonstrate some of the features of simple networks of excitatory and inhibitory neuron-type elements. The main goal was to study the behavior of the simplest network model capable of producing chaotic behavior. Initially, a single pair of an excitatory and an inhibitory neuron is described and analyzed in detail. Then small networks of such pairs are studied in the context of control and synchronization of their activity. Finally, an attempt is made to utilize such networks for some image processing tasks, specifically, segmentation and adaptive smoothing.

In the following section, the most important results are briefly summarized, while the final section provides an outlook to further problems which can be looked at in the future, as an extension to the investigation reported here.

7.1 Summary of Main Results

• The intrinsic properties of an excitatory-inhibitory neural pair have been studied with four types of nonlinear activation functions, distinct from each other in terms of their (i) asymmetric or anti-symmetric nature and (ii) sigmoid or piecewise linear characteristics. Fixed point, oscillatory and chaotic behaviors have been found to occur for various parameter values for these different types of functions, leading to the conclusion that this wide range of dynamics is a generic feature of excitatory-inhibitory neural pairs, evolving in discrete time.

- In addition to generic features, behavior specific to each type of transfer function has also been observed. For example, in the case of the piecewise linear functions, the presence of border-collision bifurcations and multifractal fragmentation of the phase space are noted. Neural pairs with sigmoidal activation functions exhibit a period-doubling route to chaos, which is an universal feature of unimodal one-dimensional chaotic maps [134, 188]. The anti-symmetric activation functions show a transition from symmetry-broken chaos (with multiple coexisting but disconnected chaotic attractors) to symmetric chaos (when only a single chaotic attractor exists).
- Varying a *threshold/ bias* parameter or equivalently, introducing a constant amplitude external stimulus, leads either to transition between chaos and periodic behavior or to coexistence of multiple attractors, depending on the nature of the variation. In the case of anti-symmetric functions, this causes previously distinct attractors to be dynamically connected. *Hysteresis* effect, a possible mechanism for short-term memory, is observed as the parameter is varied.
- Networks composed of elements having piecewise linear activation functions are found to be amenable to analytical treatment under some simplifying assumptions. This makes the resultant dynamics effectively equivalent to that of an one-dimensional piecewise linear map with multiple "folds". These "folds" permit the creation and maintenance of localized coherent structures within a global chaotic activity. This is of relevance to the use of such networks for information processing. Applications to problems of auto-associative recall, pattern classification, nonlinear function approximation and periodic sequence generation are outlined. This serves to indicate the versatility of such networks and possible areas where they maybe successfully used.
- In the presence of low-amplitude, low-frequency external stimulation, the chaotic neural pair with anti-symmetric activation function is found to exhibit a type of nonlinear resonance phenomenon, which can be looked upon as a deterministic analogue of "stochastic resonance" (SR) [59]. By introducing a piecewise linear system to study this phenomenon, a detailed understanding of the resonance process is obtained. The chaotic trajectory of the system is found to switch between two halves of the phase space at a rate which 'resonates' with the frequency of an externally applied periodic perturbation (both multiplicative and additive). By periodically modulating the parameter at a specific frequency, we observe the existence of resonance where the response of the system (in terms of the residence-time distribution) is maximum. The possible application of nonlinear resonance for the enhancement of subthreshold signals is indicated by showing that the excitatory- inhibitory neural pair shows similar resonance behavior when the external input is a small amplitude periodic signal. The "characteristic frequency" at which the system response is maximum is obtained explicitly in terms of the network parameters, in the case of the piecewise linear activation function. It is found that as the amplitude of

the signal increases, the response of the system also increases up to a limit. An expression for the "critical signal amplitude", above which the response saturates, is also obtained.

- Control mechanisms for the chaos observed in excitatory-inhibitory neural pairs have been studied. Two types of control have been proposed: (i) proportional variable feedback and (ii) small-amplitude periodic forcing. A physical understanding of the control mechanism is obtained in the case of a single excitatory-inhibitory pair. Control of a 3-neuron pair network has been studied through computer simulations. A possible connection between undesirable stabilization of periodic cycles by external periodic stimulus and the phenomenon of epileptic hallucination is suggested.
- Collective dynamics and synchronization of small assemblies of neural pairs are analyzed. Both unidirectional and bidirectional couplings between the neural pairs have been studied. For bidirectional coupling, intermittent synchronization is observed in the case of two coupled neural pairs, while the case of three coupled neural pairs show the more interesting feature of "mediated" synchronization. For unidirectional coupling, the phenomena of "frustrated synchronization" has been studied in detail. The well-known Lorenz system of equations has been used as a model system for ease of theoretical analysis. A 'desynchronization' parameter has been defined, which shows a scaling relation with the scaled coupling parameter.
- The utility of chaotic dynamics in certain image processing tasks such as, segmentation and adaptive smoothing, has been studied. A two-dimensional network of locally coupled excitatory-inhibitory pairs is used to study *segmentation*. Bilevel segmentation is achieved through different dynamical responses of neural pairs corresponding to "object" and "background". An approximate expression for the critical input stimulus magnitude, that leads to transition between the two different dynamical responses, is obtained in the case of an isolated neural pair. Noisy, synthetic images as well as "real-life" images are used to show the effectiveness of the segmentation procedure.
- Adaptive smoothing of gray-level images is achieved with a three layer network of excitatory, inhibitory and excitatory neurons, respectively. The output of this network is then used to find the edges of the input image by using a standard difference operator. The network has been used on several "real-life" images, and the results compare favorably to those of some standard methods of edge detection. The network architecture has been inspired by the structure of the outer plexiform layer of the retina and it has been proposed as a model for retinal information processing.

7.2 Outlook

In this work, we have stressed on 'simple' network models: 'simple' not only in terms of the size of the networks considered when compared to the brain (consisting of $\sim 10^{11}$ neurons and $\sim 10^{15}$ synapses), but 'simple' also in terms of the properties of the constituent elements (i.e., the 'neurons') themselves, in that, most of the physiological details of real neurons are ignored. Biological neurons are far more complicated, and a lot of computation is achieved at the level of the single neuron itself [105].

The point is to see what is essential and what is unnecessary detail for the proper functioning of biological neuronal networks. To do that one has to throw away as much of the complexity as possible to make the model tractable - while at the same time retaining those features of the system which make it interesting. So, while our modeling is indeed inspired by neuroscience, we are not concerned with actually mimicking the activity of real neuronal systems.

Our prime concern is what functional role chaos might be playing in the brain. As the brain itself is still a relatively poorly understood system, we have instead tried to look at what *artificial* networks can do with chaos. Hopefully, this will give us a clearer understanding of how chaos might actually be used in the brain to perform cognitive tasks. By resorting to a simple model, where we can perform detailed theoretical analysis, we can obtain a deep understanding of its behavior. This can then be used fruitfully to study the more complex entity, that is the brain.

In the work reported here, many interesting features were observed. However, to see their relevance to the actual biological situation, we have to make a connection between our results and the behavior of the brain. Such attempts have already been made, as for example, in Chapter 4, where, undesired control of neurobiological chaos is sought to be connected to the phenomenon of epileptic hallucinations. However, to take these efforts further, the complexity of the model needs to be increased systematically in a step-by-step manner, with detailed analysis of the new features thus revealed, in each step of the way.

For example, in this work we have been concerned exclusively with 'neurons' evolving in discrete time intervals. Biological neurons are better modeled by differential equations which evolve in continuous time. However, this is not really a limitation as any N-dimensional discrete-time dynamical system may be related to a corresponding (N + 1)-dimensional continuous-time dynamical system through the concept of *Poincare sections* [188]. It follows that the discrete-time model we have studied has a higher dimensional differential equation analogue, which will show qualitatively similar behavior. Several differential equation models already exist which describe the activity of single neurons, with varying degrees of fidelity. A popular model which is biologically motivated and yet simple enough for ease of analysis is the Bonhoeffervan der Pol (BVP) system of equations. Such systems have been shown to exhibit chaos when subjected to forced oscillations of specific amplitude and frequency [148]. However, large networks of BVP or similar systems have, as yet, not been studied in detail. Investigation of the collective behavior of such continuous-time neural network models, and linking the results to those reported here, should go a long way in establishing the genericity of our findings.

Real biological systems reside in an extremely noisy environment. This is incorporated in neural models by using stochastic updating rule and/or explicit introduction of a term representing external noise. The former can be represented as a form of multiplicative noise, whereas the latter is a strictly additive form of noise [192]. Physiologically, additive noise may originate from threshold fluctuations of a dendritic potential, while multiplicative noise could be due to stimulus-induced stochastic release of vescicles, containing neurotransmitter chemicals, from the synapses. We plan to introduce similar features in our model in the future. In dissipative chaotic systems, the effect of external noise seems to be limited to destroying the fine structure of the bifurcation sequence [41]. The interaction of deterministic chaos and stochastic noise in the network will be interesting to study.

One important point not addressed here is the issue of *learning*. The connection weights $\{W_{ij}\}$ have been assumed constant, as they change at a much slower time scale compared to that of the neural activation states. However, modification of the weights due to learning will also cause changes in the dynamics. Such bifurcation behavior, induced by weight changes, will have to be taken into account when devising learning rules for specific purposes. The interaction of chaotic activation dynamics at a fast time scale and learning dynamics on a slower time scale might yield richer behavior than that seen in the present model [47]. The first step towards such a program would be to incorporate time-varying connection weights in the model. In [196], time-dependence of a suitable system parameter was shown to give rise to interesting dynamical behaviors, e.g., transition between periodic oscillations and chaos. This suggests that varying the environment can facilitate memory retrieval if dynamic states are used for storing information in a neural network. The introduction of temporal variation in the connection weights, independent of the neural state dynamics, should allow us to develop an understanding of how the dynamics at two time-scales interact with each other.

Parallel to this we have to look at the *learning dynamics* itself. Freeman [54], among others, has suggested an important role of chaos in the Hebbian model of learning [84]. This is one of the most popular learning models in the neural network community and is based on the following principle postulated by Hebb [84] in 1949:

When an axon of cell A is near enough to excite cell B and repeatedly or consistently takes part in firing it, some growth process or metabolic change takes place in one or both cells such that A's efficiency, as one of the cells firing B, is increased.

According to the principle known as *synaptic plasticity*, the synapse between neurons A and B increase its "weight", if the neurons are simultaneously active. By

invoking an "adiabatic approximation", we can separate the time scale of updating the connection weights from that of neural state updating. This will allow us to study the dynamics of the connection weights in isolation.

The final step will be to remove the "adiabatic approximation", so that the neural states will evolve, guided by the connection weights (as studied in the thesis), while the connection weights themselves will also evolve, depending on the activation states of the neurons, as:

$$W_{ij}(n+1) = \mathcal{F}_{\epsilon}(W_{ij}(n), X_i(n), X_j(n)),$$

where X(n) and W(n) denote the neuron state and connection weight at the *n*th instant, \mathcal{F} is a nonlinear function that specifies the learning rule, and ϵ is related to the time-scale of the synaptic dynamics. The cross-level effects of such synaptic dynamics interacting with the chaotic network dynamics might lead to significant departure from the overall behavior of the network described here.

The proposed extensions and modifications of the neural network model presented here will most probably lead to behavior yet unexpected. Considering that the model already exhibits such complex behavior, the incorporation of the details suggested above should provide results, which will be comparable to actual neurobiological data.

On a broader front, chaos may play a substantial role in resolving the *stability*plasticity dilemma that confronts a wide range of complex adaptive systems, including neural networks. This dilemma can be framed in terms of the following questions:

- How can a learning system be designed to remain plastic (adaptive) in response to significant events and yet remain stable in response to irrelevant events ?
- How does the system know when to switch between its stable and plastic modes to achieve stability without rigidity and plasticity without disorder ?

Transitions between chaotic and ordered behavior are a general feature of complex adaptive systems and form the subject matter of the recently emerged discipline of Artificial Life (A-Life). It studies how local rules of interaction between elements of a complex system can give rise to collectively emergent global behavior of the system. This phenomena has been studied in the relatively simple system of cellular automata (CA) models by Langton [109]. CA are rule driven systems, defined by specifying the transformation rules that map a given initial state of the system to the final state. They can show a wide variety of behavior, ranging from highly ordered to totally chaotic. By using a variable parameter, changing which alters the behavior of the system, it has been seen that, at the region where transition from ordered to chaotic behavior occurs, the system exhibits complexity in the sense that it is capable of universal computation. Langton has extended this finding to the generalization that "complexity occurs at the edge of chaos". The substance of this assertion is that while an ordered system is too rigid to learn from experience, and chaotic systems are too unstable to exist in a competitive environment, complexity arises only in those systems having the right blend of order and chaos. Only systems poised at the "edge of chaos", the critical state at which complexity is most likely to emerge, are rigid enough to survive, while being capable of suitably adapting themselves to a changing environment. While these findings are only for the specific system of CA, and not yet universally accepted, they are nonetheless highly suggestive. The brain, being a complex adaptive system also, might be indulging in a similar kind of tradeoff between order and chaos. Studying chaotic models of neural activity thus might provide us with an an understanding of how complexity emerges not only in the brain, but in a broad family of complex adaptive systems, of which it is a member.

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