Magnetic ground state and excitations in mixed 3d-4d quasi-1D spin-chain oxide Sr_3NiRhO_6

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Entanglement of spin and orbital degrees of freedom, via relativistic spin-orbit coupling, in 4dtransition metal oxides can give rise to a variety of novel quantum phases. A previous study of mixed 3d-4d quasi-1D spin-chain oxide Sr₃NiRhO₆ using the magnetization measurements by Mohapatra et al. [Phys. Rev. B 75, 214422 (2007)] revealed a partially disordered antiferromagnetic (PDA) structure below 50 K [1]. We here report the magnetic ground state and spin-wave excitations in Sr_3NiRhO_6 using muon spin rotation and relaxation (μSR), and neutron (elastic and inelastic) scattering techniques. Our neutron diffraction study reveals that in the magnetic structure of $Sr_3NiRhO_6 Rh^{4+}$ and Ni^{2+} spins are aligned ferromagnetically in a spin-chain, with moments along the crystallographic c-axis. However, spin-chains are coupled antiferromanetically in the ab-plane. μ SR reveals the presence of oscillations in the asymmetry-time spectra below 50 K, supporting the long-range magnetically ordered ground state. Our inelastic neutron scattering study reveals gapped quasi-1D magnetic excitations with a large ratio of gap to exchange interaction. The observed spinwave spectrum could be well fitted with a ferromagnetic isotropic exchange model (with J = 3.7meV) and single ion anisotropy (D = 10 meV) on the Ni²⁺ site. The magnetic excitations survive up to 85 K, well above the magnetic ordering temperature of ~ 50 K, also indicating a quasi-1D nature of the magnetic interactions in Sr₃NiRhO₆.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Quasi-one-dimensional (1D) quantum spin-chain compounds have attracted a lot of attention in the last two decades due to a variety of interesting quantum phenomenon revealed by them. Among these, spin-chain compounds with general formula A_3MXO_6 (A here denote Sr, Ca, etc. and M, X denote transition metals) have attracted much attention in recent years [1-40], due to their peculiar properties such as time dependent magnetic order [24, 40], steps in the dc magnetization [13], order by disorder [21], and multiferroicity [19]. The crystal structures of these compounds contain spinchains, made up of alternating face-sharing XO_6 octahedra (OCT) and MO_6 trigonal prisms (TP), running along the crystallographic c-axis (Fig. 1) [2]. These chains are arranged on a triangular lattice in the *ab*-plane. In most of the compounds, where 3d transition metal ions occupy both OCT and TP sites, intrachain magnetic exchange interaction is ferromagnetic (FM) [28, 37]. This combined with an antiferromagnetic (AFM) interchain interaction and triangular lattice arrangement of spinchains gives rise to geometrically frustrated magnetism [12, 17, 18, 28, 35, 37]. Among these compounds, the cobalt base system $Ca_3Co_2O_6$ has been extensively investigated in last two decades [5, 10– 12, 14, 17, 18, 25, 28, 31, 35, 37, 40]. Due to spinorbit coupling (~ 70 meV) cobalt ions in $Ca_3Co_2O_6$ show Ising-like behaviour, with spin aligned ferromagnetically along the crystallographic *c*-axis.

Initial interest in the compounds, where 3d transition metal ions occupy both OCT and TP sites, was motivated because correlation effects are more prominent in 3d transition metal than for the 4dand 5d transition metal ions. However, discovery of a Mott insulating state in Sr₂IrO₄ in the late 2000s [41] and the role of spin-orbit coupling (SOC) in stabilizing the Mott state awoke an interest in the compounds where spin-chains were made up of 3dand 5d spin-chain oxides. Subsequently, many Srbased compounds of the A_3MXO_6 family, namely Sr₃MIrO₆ with M=Co, Cu, Ni, and Zn, were investigated [4, 6, 7, 9, 22, 27, 33, 34, 38, 39]. For Sr_3CuIrO_6 [30], a large gap in the magnetic excitation spectrum was observed which was ascribed to an unusual exchange anisotropy generating mechanism, namely, strong FM anisotropy arising from AFM super-exchange interaction, driven by the alternating weak and strong spin-orbit coupling on the 3d Cu and 5d Ir magnetic ions, respectively. Non-collinear AFM ordering has been observed in Sr₃ZnIrO₆ and Sr₃ZnRhO₆ which has been ascribed to anisotropic intra-chain and inter-chain exchange interactions [23, 39], arising due to a strong spinorbit coupling. In Sr₃NiIrO₆, anisotropic symmetric interaction from strong spin-orbit coupling was theoretically proposed to result in a strong magnetic anisotropy and AFM intrachain interactions [42]. Therefore, in search of unusual magnetic behavior expected in the mixed 3d and 4d transitionmetal compounds via exchange pathways that are absent in the compound with only 3d transitionmetal ions, some of us reported interesting magnetic anomalies with partially disordered antiferromagnetism in Sr₃NiRhO₆, based on bulk magnetization techniques [1]. This kind of magnetism has garnered significant interest in recent years, as the magnetic ions of a given element occupy crystallographically equivalent positions, but only some of these ions exhibit magnetic ordering while others remain magnetically disordered due to geometrical frustration. Unlike spin liquids, where disorder is uniform and intrinsic, partially disordered magnets feature order and disorder coexisting in the same magnetic phase, resulting in unique physical properties and potential applications.

We here present the results of an extensive investigation of the magnetism of Sr_3NiRhO_6 using muon spin rotation and relaxation (μ SR), elastic and inelastic neutron scattering techniques, to gain a deeper microscopic insight into the nature of geometrically frustrated magnetism in this compound. The present study firmly establishes that this compound orders in a partially disordered antiferromagnetic (PDA) state below ~ 50 K (T_1). The PDA state undergoes a transition to a frozen PDA (F-PDA) below ~ 20 K (T_2). Further, our inelastic neutron scattering study confirms the 1D nature of the magnetism of this compound.

II. EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS

Polycrystaline samples were synthesized by the standard solid state reaction method starting with high purity materials $SrCO_3$ (99.99%), NiO



FIG. 1. (Color online) Crystal structure of Sr_3NiRhO_6 : A perspective view showing 1D spin-chains made up of alternating face-sharing NiO₆ trigonal prisms and RhO₆ octahedra (left). Right side shows triangular lattice arrangement of spin-chain in *ab*-plane. Red balls show O atoms. For clarity strontium atoms are not shown.

(99.99%), and RhO₂ (99.9%) in powder form, as discussed in ref. [1]. The magnetization measurements (dc and ac) were carried out using a Quantum Design SQUID VSM to confirm the quality of the specimen magnetically vis-a-vis the ones reported in Ref. [1] [See Appendices A and B]. The neutron diffraction experiments at 297 K were carried out using the five linear position sensitive detector (PSD) based powder diffractometer ($\lambda = 1.249 \text{\AA}$) at Dhruva research reactor, Trombay. Neutron diffraction experiments in the temperature range 5-100 K were performed using the time-of-flight GEM diffractometer at the ISIS facility, UK. The diffraction data were analyzed by the Rietveld method, using the FULLPROF program [43]. The inelastic neutron scattering (INS) measurements over 5-300 K were performed using the time-of-flight chopper spectrometer HET at the ISIS Neutron and Muon Facility, UK. Muon Spin Rotation and Relaxation (μSR) experiments were carried out using the MuSR spectrometer at the ISIS Neutron and Muon Facility, UK.

III. RESULTS

A. Crystal Structure: Neutron Diffraction

Figure 2 depicts the Rietveld refined neutron diffraction pattern at 297 K for Sr₃NiRhO₆ measured at Dhruva research reactor using a wavelength of 1.249 Å. The refined values of the lattice constants a = 9.585(1), and c = 11.041(1) Å (space group $R\overline{3}c$) are found to be in good agreement with those reported in the literature [1, 44, 45]. There



FIG. 2. (Color online) Observed (data points) and calculated (solid line through data the data points) neutron diffraction patterns for Sr_3NiRhO_6 at 297 K using a wavelength of 1.249 Å. The black solid line at the bottom shows the difference between the observed and the calculated patterns. Vertical lines show the positions of the nuclear Bragg peaks. The (*hkl*) values corresponding to a few strong Bragg peaks are also listed.

are six formula units (Z = 6) of Sr₃NiRhO₆ in a crystallographic unit cell. The refinement also confirms that Ni²⁺ and Rh⁴⁺ ions are located at the TP and OCT sites, respectively. We have also performed a detailed analysis of neutron diffraction pattern at 100 K, collected using the time-of-flight GEM diffractometer at the ISIS facility, UK, covering a wide *Q*-range (Fig. 13, Appendix C). The unit cell parameters and other structural parameters obtained from the refinement of the neutron diffraction patterns at 100 K are given in Table I.

B. Magnetic Structure: Neutron Diffraction

To investigate the magnetic ground state of Sr_3NiRhO_6 , we have performed neutron diffraction experiments over 5-100 K. Fig. 3(a-b) shows Rietveld refined neutron diffraction patterns obtained from the GEM instrument at 5 and 100 K. The neutron diffraction patterns at 100 K can be fitted by considering only the nuclear phase. The nuclear peaks as inferred from 100 K data are shown in (Fig. 3(a)) to compare with the pattern shown in (Fig. 3(b)). As shown in Fig. 3(b), an additional peak in the neutron diffraction pattern is clearly visible at $Q \sim 0.76$ Å⁻¹ at 5 K compared with the 100 K data. The temperature dependence of the integrated intensity of the additional Bragg peak is shown in the inset of Fig. 3(a). The difference pattern between 5 and 100 K [Figs. 3(cd)], obtained from the detector bank-2 and bank-3, highlights distinct magnetic Bragg peaks, indicating long-range magnetic ordering. The propagation vector for the observed magnetic peaks is k = (0, 0, 1)in the hexagonal setting of the space group $R\bar{3}c$. In the primitive rhombohedral cell setting, Kovalev's notation, k=(1/3, 1/3, 1/3). Analysis of magnetic structure has been carried out using the standard irreducible representation theory with help of software BASIREPS [43]. In Sr₃NiRhO₆, Rh⁴⁺ and Ni²⁺ ions are located at the 6b (0, 0, 0) and 6a (0, 0, 1/4) sites, respectively. The magnetic reducible representations for these sites can be decomposed as direct sum of irreducible representations as

$$\Gamma(6b) = 1\Gamma_1^{(1)} + 1\Gamma_2^{(1)} + 2\Gamma_3^{(2)} \tag{1}$$

and

$$\Gamma(6a) = 1\Gamma_1^{(1)} + 1\Gamma_2^{(1)} + 2\Gamma_3^{(2)}.$$
 (2)

The representations Γ_1 and Γ_2 are onedimensional, while representation Γ_3 is two dimensional. In the formalism of propagation vectors, the magnetic moment of the atom "j" in the asymmetric magnetic unit cell with the origin at the lattice point R_L , can be written as the Fourier series of the form

$$\boldsymbol{m}_{L,j} = \sum_{\mathbf{k}} \mathbf{S}_{j}^{k} \exp(-2\pi i \boldsymbol{k}.\boldsymbol{R}_{L}).$$
(3)

These Fourier coefficients, $S_j^{\mathbf{k}}$, can be written as a linear combination of the basis vectors of the irreducible representation of the propagation vector group G_k . In the Bertaut method [46], the magnetic structure is derived by coupling the basis vectors corresponding to the same representation at different sites. Therefore, we first consider the representations Γ_1 and Γ_2 to describe the magnetic structure. The basis vectors for Γ_1 and Γ_2 representations are shown in Table II. In the Γ_1 representation, spins along the *c*-axis are antiferromagnetically coupled, while in the Γ_2 spins along the *c*-axis are ferromagnetically coupled. The observed magnetic structure of the present compound can be fitted using the representation Γ_2 . In the magnetic structure magnetic moments, in a spinchain, are aligned ferromagnetically along the crystallographic c axis, however, spin-chains are coupled antiferromagnetically in the *ab*-plane with net zero moment in the unit cell. The refined values of ordered magnetic moment for 6a (Ni²⁺) and 6b (Rh^{4+}) sites are 0.88 (1) and 0.12 (1) μ_B , respectively. The observed value of magnetic moment is

TABLE I. Structural parameters (atomic positions, thermal parameters, obtained from the refinement of the neutron diffraction patterns at 100 K for Sr₃NiRhO₆. The lattice constants are a = 9.569(1) Å, c = 11.025(2) Å. All crystallographic sites are fully occupied.

| Atom | Site | x | y | z | $B_{iso}(\text{\AA}^2)$ |
|------|------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------|
| Sr | 18e | 0.3661(5) | 0 | 0.25 | 0.29(2) |
| Rh | 6b | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.28(3) |
| Ni | 6a | 0 | 0 | 0.25 | 0.23(3) |
| 0 | 36f | 0.1720(1) | 0.0209(3) | 0.1129(2) | 0.33(3) |

much smaller than theoretically expected value of 2 and 1 μ_B for Ni²⁺ and Rh⁴⁺, respectively (assuming q = 2). The observed small value of the ordered moment could be attributed to enhanced quantum fluctuations associated with geometrical frustration and the low dimensionality of the present system. The symmetry analysis mandates that an amplitude modulated structure with no vanishing moment at any site (Fig. 4(a)) differs from a partially disordered antiferromagnetic (PDA) structure (Fig. 4(b)) by a global phase that cannot be determined using powder diffraction. Nevertheless, equivalence of the two magnetic structure models was validated without relying on symmetry assumptions. Therefore, we also fitted the observed neutron diffraction pattern using the space group $P\bar{1}$, and propagation vector k = (0, 0, 0) and obtained similar chi-square (χ^2) values for the amplitude modulated and PDA configurations. In the PDA state, 2/3of ferromagnetically coupled spin-chains are ordered in the AFM structure, while the remaining 1/3are in the incoherent state (with net zero ordered state moment). The schematics of PDA and amplitude modulated structure suitable for Sr₃NiRhO₆ are shown in Fig. 4. It can be noted that, based on the behavior of ac susceptibility (Appendix B) where a large shift in the peak position was observed with frequency, the magnetic ground state can be considered as F-PDA state below 20 K. In the F-PDA state, spins in the 1/3 incoherent chains of PDA state freeze randomly, indicating that magnetic ground state might not be thermodynamically stable. This F-PDA state is compatible with the PDA structure (Fig. 4(b)) from neutron diffraction.

C. Muon spin relaxation

In order to investigate the microscopic nature of magnetic order in Sr_3NiRhO_6 we have used the μSR technique, which is very sensitive to the local mag-

TABLE II. Basis vectors of positions 6a and 6b for the representations Γ_1 and Γ_2 .

| IR | Basis | vectors | \mathbf{for} | 6b | site | Basis | vectors | for | 6a | site |
|----|-------|---------|----------------|----|-----------------------|-------|---------|-----|----|------|
|----|-------|---------|----------------|----|-----------------------|-------|---------|-----|----|------|

| | (0, 0, 0) | (0, 0, 1/2) | (0, 0, 1/4) | (0, 0, 3/4) |
|------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------|
| Γ_1 | $(0 \ 0 \ 1)$ | $(0\ 0\ -1)$ | $(0 \ 0 \ 1)$ | $(0 \ 0 \ -1)$ |
| Γ_2 | $(0 \ 0 \ 1)$ | $(0 \ 0 \ 1)$ | $(0 \ 0 \ 1)$ | $(0 \ 0 \ 1)$ |

netic moment and its environments, because the implanted muons in the sample experience magnetic field of nearest neighbors. Figure 5 shows the zerofield (ZF)- μ SR spectrum of Sr₃NiRhO₆ at various temperatures over 1.4-100 K. In the paramagnetic regime $(T > T_1)$, due to thermal fluctuations, the magnetic moments become disordered, leading to a random orientation of the spins in both time and space. As a result, the expectation value of the local magnetic field at the muon site $\langle B_{\mu} \rangle = 0$, which prevent coherent muon spin precision. For polycrystalline samples, this results in an exponential relaxation of the muon polarization signal. Below $T < T_1$, ZF spectra exhibit two minima (i.e. oscillation with time), indicating the onset of a long-range magnetic ordering. Our analysis shows that there are two muon sites, one site with a field greater than the frequency response of the MuSR spectrometer at ISIS pulsed muon facility due to the pulsed width of 80ns. In the first approximation, the observed spectra seem to be typical for Kubo-Toyabe-type relaxation. However, a careful analysis has shown that a Gaussian damped oscillatory function (mentioned below), probably due to a static order with wide field distribution, is more suitable for fitting the μ SR asymmetry spectra.



FIG. 3. (Color online) Rietveld refined neutron diffraction patterns at (a) 100 and (b) 5 K from the detector bank-2 of the GEM diffractometer. Upper (lower) vertical lines show the positions of the nuclear (magnetic) Bragg peaks. Observed (open circles) and calculated (solid line) neutron diffraction patterns. Solid green line at the bottom shows the difference between the observed and the calculated patterns. The inset in (a) shows the temperature dependent intensity of the magnetic Bragg peak. Observed (open circles) neutron powder diffraction pattern at 5 K after subtraction of the nuclear pattern at 100 K and calculated (solid lines) pattern considering only magnetic phase with zero background from the (c) detector bank-2 and (d) detector bank-3 over low values of Q from the GEM TOF diffractometer. The GEM detector banks 2 and 3 are positioned at scattering angles of 17.980° and 34.960°, respectively. Due to their distinct scattering angles, each detector bank has a different scaling factor. These scaling factors were estimated by fitting the data collected at 100 K.

$$A_{t} = A_{0} \cos(\omega t + \phi) \exp(-\sigma^{2} t^{2}/2) + A_{1}[w_{1} exp(-\lambda_{1} t) + (1 - w_{1}) exp(-\lambda_{2} t)] + A_{BG}$$
(4)

Here A_0 is the asymmetry associated with the oscillatory component (some time called transverse component), A_1 is the longitudinal component caused by the field component parallel to initial muon spin-polarization and $A_{\rm BG}$ is the background contribution to the asymmetry, representing the muons that missed the sample and stopped in the Ag sample holder. The value of $A_{\rm BG}=0.038$ was



FIG. 4. (Color online) Possible magnetic structures of Sr_3NiRhO_6 below T_1 (a) Amplitude modulated and (b) PDA structure. Chain with no spin in (b) represent incoherent spin-chain with net zero moment.



FIG. 5. (Color online) (a-d) ZF- μ SR spectrum of Sr₃NiRhO₆ at indicated temperatures. The solid curves are the fits to the μ SR data by Eq. 4.

estimated from the fitting of 160 K spectra and was kept fixed during the analysis of other temperature data. Further the value of $w_1 = 0.5$ was kept fixed during the analysis to account the two muon sites, especially in the ordered state. In the paramagnetic state the response from the both the muon stopping sites was assumed identical. Figures 6 (a) and (b) show the *T*-dependences of the muon precession frequency $f = \omega_{mu}/2\pi$ and its asymmetry A_0 , respectively. The characteristic spin lattice relaxation rates λ_1 and λ_2 are shown in Figure 6 (c). Both fand A_0 have finite value below ~50 K, around which a kink has been observed in the dc magnetization study (Fig. 9(b), in the Appendix A) and neutron diffraction (Fig. 3) study shows the presence of long-



FIG. 6. (Color online) (a) *T*-dependences of muon precession frequency for Sr₃NiRhO₆. Solid lines are guide to the eye. (b) *T*-dependences of a normalized ZF asymmetry. (c) *T*-dependences of characteristic spin lattice relaxation rates λ_1 and λ_2 .

range magnetic order in PDA state. A change in the spin lattice relaxation rate λ_2 is clearly visible at ~ 20 K, which may be related to the onset of F-PDA state. A simple dipole field calculation shows several frequency components with a large standard deviation are possible for the PDA state. This is consistent with the observed Gaussian damped oscillatory function for the μ SR asymmetry spectra.

D. Inelastic Neutron Scattering

To estimate the value of magnetic exchange interactions between localized electron magnetic moments and anisotropy parameters, we have performed INS experiments on Sr_3NiRhO_6 . Figure 7(a)



FIG. 7. (Color online) (a) Color coded inelastic neutron scattering intensity maps, energy transfer vs momentum transfer (Q) of Sr₃NiRhO₆ measured with an incident energy $E_i = 50$ meV on HET. (b) The simulated spin-wave spectra using SpinW program [47] with exchange parameters, J = 3.7 meV and a single ion anisotropy D = 10 meV for Ni²⁺ spins.

shows the INS response, a color-coded contour map of the intensity, energy transfer E versus momentum transfer Q for Sr₃NiRhO₆ measured at T = 5 K (with $E_i = 50$ meV) from the low-angle detectors banks up to Q = 3 Å⁻¹. The INS spectra show a spin-wave gap of 20 meV and bandwidth of 34 meV. The intensity of the INS signal, energy integrated over 18-23 meV, decreases with increasing value of Q and follows the form factor of Ni²⁺ $(I \propto |f_{Ni}(Q|^2))$, which is very similar to that observed in Sr₃NiIrO₆ [38]. This confirms that the magnetic signal arises from Ni²⁺ spin waves. To



FIG. 8. (Color online) (a-f) Temperature evolution of the INS spectra measured over 20–200 K.

analyze the observed spin wave excitation, we have used the following phenomenological spin Hamiltonian, containing terms only having intra-chain exchange interactions:

$$H = -\sum_{i} [J\mathbf{S}_{i} \cdot \mathbf{S}_{i+1} + DS_{z}^{2}]$$
(5)

Here *i* is the site index for the Ni²⁺ (TP) ions in the chain, J represents the isotropic Heisenberg coupling between the Ni²⁺ spins, and the z axis is directed along the chains. D > 0 is the singleion anisotropy parameter, and S_z refers to the spin component along the c-axis (chain direction). We have not included interchain interactions in the phenomenological spin Hamiltonian because they are expected to be very weak and thus do not affect the spin-wave dispersion along the chains significantly. In addition, we have not observed any feature associated with Rh⁴⁺ spin-waves and/or Ni-Rh intrachain exchange interactions in magnetic excitation spectra, probably due to very small signals and/or these features are present at higher energy as seen for Ir mode near $\sim 90 \text{ meV}$ in Sr₃NiIrO₆ [48]. From the observed spectrum, we can set an upper limit of 0.03 meV for the inter-chain AFM interaction. Within the framework of linear spin-wave theory, the dispersion for the spin Hamiltonian (5) is given by :

$$\hbar\omega_L = 2S[(D+J) - J\cos(\pi L)].$$
 (6)

Figure 7(b) shows the powder spectrum simulated by linear spin-wave theory for J = 3.7 meV and $D = 10 \,\mathrm{meV}$ using spinW [47], which reveals good agreemnt with the observed spin-wave excitations. The temperature dependence of INS spectra is shown in Fig. 8. Surprisingly, the spin wave excitation survive up to T = 85 K (1.5 times T_1), suggesting that intrachain FM correlation builds much above magnetic ordering temperature. Similar behavior has been observed for other compound of A_3MXO_6 family such as $Ca_3Co_2O_6$ [28, 35] and Sr_3NiIrO_6 [38] (spin-1 and spin-1/2 alternating chain). The observed behavior can be attributed to a quasi-1D nature of the magnetic interactions in Sr_3NiRhO_6 . Upon heating above 85 K, we observe a reduction of the gap and a transfer of spectral weight from higher energy into the spin-gap region.

E. Domain Wall Formation and Dynamics

Having determined the value of exchange and

anisotropy parameters, we now discuss the low energy magnetic excitation in Sr_3NiRhO_6 . From the observed large value of D (D >> J), it is clear that the lowest energy excitation in Sr_3NiRhO_6 , should be a single domain-wall (assuming negligible interchain exchange interaction J_{inter}) with energy cost $2JS^2$ (85 K), which can move easily along the chain without any energy cost. The single domain-wall here refers to the two FM regions of opposite polarity. At finite temperature, the total free energy of the system has contribution from entropy (S = $k_BT \log_e N$) also the resulting free energy, therefore, is $F = 2JS^2 - k_BT \log_e N$. An important point to be noted here is that for FM chains, the domain wall can propagate only via a thermally activated process. These thermally activated domain walls lead to high degeneracy in the PDA state at finite temperatures, resulting in more domain wall formation. However, at low temperatures, their propagation becomes extremely slow. Due to this, fluctuating hightemperature multidomains may lead to randomness and disorder at lower temperatures. This results in a transition from PDA to F-PDA-like state, as observed for Ca_3CoRhO_6 [5, 49]. The observed frequency dependence of real $\chi_{ac}^{'}$ and imaginary $\chi_{ac}^{''}$ components of ac susceptibility (Appendix A, Figs. 12 and 11) and its persistence under an applied dc magnetic field of $\sim 70 \,\mathrm{kOe}$, with only a small reduction in its intensity, at ~ 20 K, could be consistently interpreted with the idea of F-PDA-like state.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we have investigated the magnetic ground state in Sr₃NiRhO₆ using muon spin rotation and relaxation (μ SR), neutron diffraction and inelastic neutron scattering techniques. The neutron diffraction study, combined with ac susceptibility and μ SR measurements, indicates the presence of a partially-disordered antiferromagnetic (PDA) state below T_1 . Below T_2 , the 1/3 incoherent spinchains of PDA structure freeze into a F-PDA-like state (Appendix B). Our INS study showed dispersing magnetic excitations, whose quasi-1D character evidences the prevalence of FM intrachain (anisotropy gap D three times larger than the exchange interation J) over AFM interchain interactions. The observed large value of D (D >> J) in these triangular lattice antiferromagnets, with FM intrachain interaction, results in the formation of domain walls. Freezing of domain walls results into formation of a F-PDA-like state below T_2 . The present study shows that a F-PDA-like state, as the ground state of the triangular lattice antiferromagnetic system, presents a complicated spin configuration due to geometrical frustration at low temperatures. The values of exchange parameters obtained in the present study will be helpful to carry out large scale Monte Carlo calculations to estimate the equal time correlation functions and for the development of theoretical models to understand the domain wall dynamics of the PDA state in geometrically frustrated magnets.

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Appendix A: Dc Magnetization

Figure 9 shows the dc magnetization measurements for Sr₃NiRhO₆ under various applied magnetic field of 1, 25, 10, and 70 kOe. Under zero field cooled (ZFC) condition [Fig 9(a))], magnetization increases gradually with decreasing the temperature. A kink is observed in the ZFC magnetization at ~ 50 K (T_1), indicating the onset of a magnetic phase transition [(Fig 9(b))]. Both field cooled (FC) and ZFC magnetizations increase sharply below T_1 . At low temperature ~15 K(T_2), a sharp drop in the ZFC magnetization along with a bifurcation in the FC and ZFC magnetization has been observed, which could be due to (i) a possible spin freezing due to the presence of competing exchange interactions and (ii) domain wall freezing. In addition, at ~ 10 K, a small kink has also been observed in the magnetization curves. Similar two characteristic temperatures T_1 and T_2 have been reported in literature for the other compounds of the A_3MXO_6 family, such as Ca₃CoRhO₆ [8, 49, 50], and Sr_3NiIrO_6 [9, 27]. For both compounds, neutron diffraction studies have confirmed a partially disordered antiferromagnetic (PDA) state or amplitude modulated structure [in latter case [34])].

High temperature inverse magnetic susceptibility (χ^{-1}) , shown in Fig 9(c), follows Curie-Weiss law with a paramagnetic Curie temperature $(\theta_{\rm CW})$ of 16.2 K. The derived value of the effective moment



FIG. 9. (Color online) (a) Temperature variation of the dc magnetization under various applied magnetic field for Sr_3NiRhO_6 . (b) Temperature dependence of the field cooled (FC) and zero field cooled (ZFC) magnetization for Sr_3NiRhO_6 under applied magnetic field of 10 kOe. (c) Temperature variation of high temperature inverse magnetic susceptibility under applied magnetic field of 10 kOe.

from the slope of the fitting results in 2.3 $\mu_{\rm B}$ /f.u. The observed value of the effective paramagnetic moment is less than the theoretically expected value of 3.2 $\mu_{\rm B}$ /f.u, considering S = 1/2 and 1 for Rh⁴⁺ and Ni²⁺, respectively (with g = 2). The observed small value of the magnetic moment could be due to strong covalent mixing, expected in 4d transition metal oxides. Since $\theta_{\rm CW}$ represent the combined effect of all exchange interactions, the observed positive value indicates that dominant exchange interaction in Sr₃NiRhO₆ is FM.

To understand the magnetization behavior in Sr₃NiRhO₆, we have measured dc magnetization as function of applied magnetic field at various temperatures over 1.5-60 K (Fig. 10). A paramagnetic-like behavior has been observed above T_1 (50 K). Below T_1 , a curvature has been observed in the magnetization curves, which becomes prominent below 40 K. For $10.5 \leq T \leq 20$ K, a step like shape of the magnetization is clearly visible. The value of the magnetization in the plateau region is $\sim 0.2 \,\mu_{\rm B}$, which is close to 1/3 of the expected value of the full ordered moment (obtained from neutron diffraction study discussed in the main text) considering a fully polarized FM state, with parallel alignment of all Rh⁴⁺ and Ni²⁺ spins in a unit cell. The observed step-like behavior could be due to a magnetic field induced transition to a ferrimagnetic state, where two thirds of the spin-chains have spin up and the remaining one third have spin down. For $8.25 \leq T \leq 11$ K, the revised leg of the M(H) curve, while approaching a zero field, shows that hysteresis is present. The observed hysteresis occupies all field range for 8.2 < T < 10.5 K, however, it is very weak for 2 < T < 7.5 K, with no saturation of the magnetization under highest applied magnetic field of 7 T.

Appendix B: Ac Susceptibility

To probe the origin of the bifurcation in the FC and ZFC magnetization and get a better insight of the magnetic dynamics in Sr_3NiRhO_6 , we have measured ac susceptibility as a function of temperature at various frequencies. A peak in the ac susceptibility has been observed (Fig. 11) at ~20 K in both real and imaginary part of the ac susceptibility. Peak shifts to the higher temperature by increasing the frequency of the applied ac field indicated the onset of glassiness around 20 K. Surprisingly, the observed shift in the position of the ac susceptibility peak is much larger than expected for a conventional spinglass system. It may be remarked that under applied dc magnetic field of 70 kOe, the peak in both



FIG. 10. (Color online) Isothermal dc magnetization for Sr_3NiRhO_6 at various temperatures. The arrows indicate direction of external magnetic field variation.

 $\chi_{ac}^{'}$ and $\chi_{ac}^{''}$ persists, with only a small reduction in its intensity. These observations reveal that the $\chi_{ac}^{'}$ signal in zero field is made up of a FM part and a spin-glass part. Under applied dc magnetic field of 70 kOe, the spin-glass part gets suppressed, however, the FM part behave like clusters (created by negligible motion of domain wall) with some glassy

dynamics.



FIG. 11. (Color online) The temperature dependence of (a) real and (b) imaginary parts of ac susceptibility for Sr_3NiRhO_6 at varied frequencies under zero applied dc magnetic field.

Appendix C: Additional Neutron Diffraction Patterns

A neutron diffraction pattern has been recorded over wide Q-range (Fig. 13) using GEM TOF diffractometer at ISIS Facility, to examine if there is any anti-site mixing for Ni/Rh. The analysis has revealed no improvement of the fit when varying the occupancies of both Ni and Rh from their expected values. This rules out the possibility of anti-site mixing in our sample.



FIG. 12. (Color online) The temperature dependence of (a) real and (b) imaginary parts of ac susceptibility for Sr₃NiRhO₆ at varied frequencies under dc magnetic field of 70 kOe. Inset in (a) shows field variations of the center of the peak observed in χ'_{ac} .



FIG. 13. (Color online) Observed (open circles) and calculated (solid lines) neutron diffraction patterns at 100 K for Sr_3NiRhO_6 over high values of Q from the GEM TOF diffractometer. The green solid line at the bottom shows the difference between the observed and the calculated patterns. Vertical lines show the positions of the nuclear Bragg peaks.

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