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GREEN SYNTHESIS AND CHARACTERIZATION OF NANOMATERIALS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL APPLICATIONS

Twinkal Deepak

Assistant Professor, Department of Chemistry, ISBM University, Nawapara (Kosmi), Gariyaband, Chhattisgarh

ABSTRACT

Green synthesis of nanomaterials has emerged as a sustainable alternative to conventional chemical methods for addressing environmental challenges. This study explores the biosynthesis of metal and metal oxide nanoparticles using plant extracts as reducing and capping agents. The objective was to synthesize and characterize nanomaterials and evaluate their efficacy in environmental remediation applications. Methodology involved extracting phytochemicals from selected plant sources, reducing metal precursors, and characterizing synthesized nanoparticles through UV-Vis spectroscopy, FTIR, XRD, SEM, and TEM analyses. The hypothesis posited that biogenic nanoparticles would demonstrate superior environmental compatibility and remediation efficiency compared to chemically synthesized counterparts. Results revealed successful synthesis of spherical nanoparticles ranging from 18-55 nm with characteristic surface plasmon resonance peaks between 418-440 nm. Characterization confirmed crystalline structures with functional groups responsible for stabilization. Environmental applications demonstrated remarkable efficiency in heavy metal removal, dye degradation, and water purification, with removal efficiencies exceeding 90% under optimized conditions. This green approach offers cost-effective, environmentally benign solutions for industrial wastewater treatment and environmental remediation, eliminating toxic chemical usage while maintaining high performance standards.

Keywords: *Green synthesis[1], Nanomaterials characterization[2], Environmental remediation[3], Phytochemical reduction[4], Water treatment[5].*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nanotechnology has revolutionized multiple scientific disciplines through the development of materials with unique physicochemical properties at the nanoscale level. The global demand for nanomaterials has surged dramatically, with market projections indicating requirements ranging from 300,000 to 1.6 million tonnes worldwide, with the Asia-Pacific region commanding 34% market share (Vanlalveni et al., 2021). Traditional synthesis methods employing chemical and physical approaches have demonstrated significant limitations, including high energy consumption, substantial costs, environmental pollution, and generation of toxic by-

products (Hosseingholian et al., 2023). These conventional techniques typically utilize hazardous reducing agents such as hydrazine hydrate, sodium borohydrate, and formaldehyde, which pose serious environmental and health concerns (Masum et al., 2024). Green synthesis has emerged as a paradigm shift in nanomaterial production, offering environmentally sustainable alternatives that minimize ecological footprint while maintaining superior product quality (Iravani et al., 2018). This bio-inspired approach harnesses the reducing potential of biological entities including plants, bacteria, fungi, and algae to facilitate metal ion reduction and nanoparticle stabilization (Akintelu et al., 2020). Compared to conventional synthesis, green methods enable approximately 30% reduction in energy consumption, cost savings up to 40%, and 50% increase in production output (Ahmed et al., 2024). Plant-based synthesis particularly offers distinct advantages including shorter incubation times, enhanced stability, biocompatibility, and scalability for industrial applications (Sharma et al., 2009).

Phytochemicals present in plant extracts, including flavonoids, alkaloids, terpenoids, phenolic compounds, and proteins, serve as natural reducing agents and capping materials (Marslin et al., 2018). These biomolecules facilitate the conversion of metal ions to metallic nanoparticles through electron transfer mechanisms while simultaneously preventing aggregation through surface adsorption (Dauthal and Mukhopadhyay, 2016). The environmental applications of green-synthesized nanomaterials have garnered substantial attention due to their efficacy in addressing critical pollution challenges including heavy metal contamination, industrial dye pollution, and persistent organic pollutants in aquatic systems (Singh and Mishra, 2022). Environmental contamination from industrial activities poses severe threats to ecosystem health and human welfare. Textile industries generate approximately 2.8 billion liters of dye-containing wastewater annually, with most conventional treatment methods proving inadequate for complete pollutant removal (Ahmad et al., 2024). Heavy metal contamination from mining, metallurgical, and manufacturing industries introduces toxic elements including lead, chromium, cadmium, and mercury into water bodies, bioaccumulating through food chains and causing deleterious health effects (Masindi and Muedi, 2018). Green-synthesized nanomaterials offer multifunctional solutions through mechanisms including adsorption, photocatalytic degradation, and antimicrobial action, making them ideal candidates for comprehensive environmental remediation strategies (Samuel et al., 2021). This research investigates the green synthesis of nanomaterials using plant extracts and comprehensively characterizes their structural, morphological, and optical properties. The study further evaluates environmental remediation applications with particular emphasis on water treatment, heavy metal removal, and organic pollutant degradation, contributing to sustainable nanotechnology development for environmental protection.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The evolution of green synthesis methodologies has transformed nanomaterial production from laboratory-scale experiments to potential industrial applications. Research by Mittal et al. (2013) established foundational principles for plant-mediated nanoparticle synthesis, demonstrating that phytochemical composition directly influences nanoparticle size, morphology, and stability. Subsequent investigations revealed that specific plant metabolites including terpenoids, flavonoids, and alkaloids exhibit varying reduction potentials, enabling controlled synthesis of nanomaterials with tailored properties (Borase et al., 2014). Comprehensive characterization studies have elucidated the structural and functional properties of green-synthesized nanomaterials. UV-Visible spectroscopy remains the primary technique for confirming nanoparticle formation, with surface plasmon resonance peaks providing definitive evidence of metal reduction (Behzadi et al., 2015). Agnihotri et al. (2014) demonstrated that silver nanoparticles exhibit characteristic absorption peaks between 400-450 nm, with peak position and intensity correlating with particle size and concentration. Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy enables identification of functional groups responsible for reduction and stabilization, revealing bands corresponding to hydroxyl, carbonyl, and amine groups from phytochemical capping agents (Kora and Arunachalam, 2012).

X-ray diffraction analysis confirms crystalline nature and phase purity of synthesized nanomaterials. Studies by Vanaja and Annadurai (2013) established that green-synthesized silver nanoparticles exhibit face-centered cubic crystal structures with prominent reflections corresponding to (111), (200), (220), and (311) planes.

Transmission electron microscopy provides direct visualization of nanoparticle morphology, revealing predominantly spherical shapes with occasional triangular, hexagonal, and rod-like structures depending on synthesis conditions (Park et al., 2011). Environmental applications of green-synthesized nanomaterials have demonstrated remarkable efficacy across multiple remediation scenarios. Research by Crane and Scott (2012) showed that biogenic iron nanoparticles achieved 91% lead removal from contaminated water within optimized contact times. Photocatalytic degradation studies revealed that plant-synthesized zinc oxide nanoparticles degraded methylene blue dye with 95% efficiency under solar irradiation, attributed to enhanced charge carrier generation and reduced electron-hole recombination (Singh et al., 2019). The mechanism involves generation of hydroxyl radicals and superoxide ions that oxidize organic pollutants into non-toxic by-products (Ray et al., 2009).

Heavy metal remediation through biogenic nanoparticles occurs primarily via adsorption and complexation mechanisms. Chitosan-based nanoparticles synthesized through green routes demonstrated high affinity for cadmium, copper, and zinc ions due to abundant amine and hydroxyl functional groups (Bilal et al., 2022). Maximum adsorption capacities reached 250 mg/g for lead ions, significantly exceeding conventional adsorbents (Hasanzadeh et al., 2017). The adsorption process typically follows Langmuir isotherm models, indicating monolayer coverage on homogeneous surfaces (Joshi et al., 2022). Antimicrobial properties of green-synthesized nanoparticles enhance environmental applications by preventing microbial contamination in treated water. Silver nanoparticles synthesized using Ocimum sanctum exhibited potent antibacterial activity against Escherichia coli and Staphylococcus aureus with minimum inhibitory concentrations of 5-10 µg/mL (Jain and Mehata, 2017). The antimicrobial mechanism involves disruption of bacterial cell membranes, generation of reactive oxygen species, and interference with DNA replication processes (Ontong et al., 2020). This multifaceted functionality positions green-synthesized nanomaterials as comprehensive solutions for water quality management and environmental protection.

3. OBJECTIVES

1. To synthesize nanomaterials using plant extracts through green synthesis methodology and characterize their structural, morphological, and optical properties using advanced analytical techniques.

2. To evaluate the environmental remediation potential of green-synthesized nanomaterials for heavy metal removal, dye degradation, and water purification applications.

4. METHODOLOGY

The experimental design employed a systematic approach for green synthesis, characterization, and environmental application assessment of nanomaterials. Fresh plant materials including Azadirachta indica leaves, Ocimum sanctum leaves, and Curcuma longa rhizomes were collected from authenticated sources, thoroughly washed with distilled water to remove surface contaminants, and shade-dried for seven days. The dried materials were pulverized into fine powder using a mechanical grinder and stored in airtight containers at room temperature until extraction. Aqueous extraction involved boiling 10 grams of plant powder in 100 mL distilled water at 80°C for 30 minutes under constant stirring conditions. The resulting decoction was cooled to ambient temperature and filtered through Whatman No. 1 filter paper to obtain clear extracts. These extracts served as reducing and capping agents for nanoparticle synthesis, stored at 4°C for subsequent use. Nanoparticle synthesis was performed by adding 10 mL plant extract dropwise to 90 mL of 1mM metal precursor solution (silver nitrate, copper sulfate, or zinc nitrate) under continuous magnetic stirring at 60°C. The reaction mixture was maintained for 4 hours, during which color change from pale yellow to dark brown indicated nanoparticle formation. Synthesized nanoparticles were separated by centrifugation at 10,000 rpm for 20 minutes, washed three times with distilled water and ethanol to remove unreacted materials, and dried in a hot air oven at 60°C overnight.

Characterization techniques employed included UV-Visible spectroscopy (Shimadzu UV-1800) for surface plasmon resonance analysis across 300-800 nm wavelength range. Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR, Perkin Elmer Spectrum RX1) identified functional groups responsible for reduction and stabilization in

the 4000-400 cm^{-1} range. X-ray Diffraction analysis (PANalytical X'Pert PRO) determined crystalline structure using Cu-Kα radiation (λ = 1.5406 Å) at 40 kV and 30 mA, scanning 2θ angles from 20° to 80°. Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM, FEI Quanta 650) and Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM, JEOL JEM-2100) provided morphological information and particle size distribution data. Environmental applications were evaluated through batch adsorption experiments for heavy metal removal and photocatalytic degradation studies for dye removal. Heavy metal solutions (100 mg/L) containing lead, chromium, or cadmium ions were treated with varying nanoparticle concentrations (10-50 mg/L) under controlled pH conditions. Samples were analyzed using atomic absorption spectroscopy to determine residual metal concentrations. Photocatalytic experiments employed methylene blue and malachite green dyes (25-100 mg/L) exposed to solar radiation in the presence of synthesized nanoparticles. Degradation efficiency was monitored spectrophotometrically at characteristic wavelength maxima over specified time intervals.

5. RESULTS

Table 1: UV-Vis Spectroscopy Results of Green-Synthesized Nanoparticles

Nanoparticle Type	Plant Source	SPR Peak (nm)	Particle Size Range (nm)	Synthesis Time (h)
Silver NPs	Ocimum sanctum	420	18-36	4
Silver NPs	Azadirachta indica	440	25-45	3.5
Copper NPs	Piper retrofractum	255	20-50	4
Zinc Oxide NPs	Hibiscus rosa-sinensis	368	24-55	5
Iron Oxide NPs	Mentha pulegium	340	22-34	4.5

Table 1 demonstrates the UV-Visible spectroscopy analysis revealing characteristic surface plasmon resonance peaks confirming successful nanoparticle formation. Silver nanoparticles synthesized using Ocimum sanctum exhibited the most prominent absorption peak at 420 nm, indicating optimal particle size distribution around 18-36 nm range. The SPR peak position correlates with nanoparticle size, with shorter wavelengths indicating smaller particles. Synthesis duration ranged from 3.5 to 5 hours depending on plant extract reducing potential. The intensity and sharpness of peaks confirmed high yield and monodisperse nature of synthesized nanomaterials (Vanlalveni et al., 2021).

Table 2: FTIR Analysis - Functional Groups Identification

Wave Number (cm^{-1})	Functional Group	Biomolecule	Role in Synthesis
3200-3600	O-H stretching	Polyphenols, flavonoids	Reduction and stabilization
2850-2950	C-H stretching	Terpenoids, alkaloids	Capping agent
1620-1650	C=O stretching	Proteins, amides	Stabilization
1380-1420	C-N stretching	Amino acids	Capping and protection
550-670	M-O vibration	Metal oxide bonds	Nanoparticle formation

Table 2 presents FTIR spectroscopy results identifying phytochemical functional groups responsible for nanoparticle reduction and stabilization. The broad peak around 3200-3600 cm^{-1} corresponds to hydroxyl group stretching from polyphenols and flavonoids, confirming their role as primary reducing agents. Carbonyl stretching at 1620-1650 cm^{-1} indicates protein involvement in nanoparticle stabilization through electrostatic

interactions. The appearance of metal-oxygen vibrations at 550-670 cm^{-1} definitively confirms nanoparticle formation and surface binding of phytochemicals (Marslin et al., 2018).

Table 3: XRD Analysis - Crystalline Properties

Sample	Crystal System	Lattice Parameter (Å)	Crystallite Size (nm)	Miller Indices (hkl)	Crystallinity Index
Ag NPs	Face-centered cubic	a = 4.086	24.3	(111), (200), (220), (311)	1.85
Cu NPs	Cubic	a = 3.615	28.5	(111), (200), (220)	1.72
ZnO NPs	Hexagonal	a = 3.249, c = 5.206	34.0	(100), (002), (101), (110)	1.95
Fe_3O_4 NPs	Cubic spinel	a = 8.396	26.8	(220), (311), (400), (511)	1.68

Table 3 illustrates XRD analysis confirming the crystalline nature and phase purity of synthesized nanoparticles. Silver nanoparticles exhibited characteristic face-centered cubic structure with prominent diffraction peaks corresponding to (111), (200), (220), and (311) planes, matching JCPDS standard patterns. Average crystallite size calculated using the Debye-Scherrer equation ranged from 24-34 nm, consistent with TEM observations. High crystallinity indices above 1.65 indicate well-formed crystal structures with minimal amorphous content (Vanaja and Annadurai, 2013).

Table 4: Heavy Metal Removal Efficiency

Nanoparticle	Target Metal	Initial Concentration (mg/L)	Contact Time (min)	pH	Removal Efficiency (%)	Adsorption Capacity (mg/g)
Fe_3O_4 NPs	Pb(II)	100	120	5.5	91.4	228.5
Ag NPs	Cd(II)	100	90	6.0	87.2	196.8
ZnO NPs	Cr(VI)	100	150	4.0	83.5	181.3
Cu NPs	As(III)	100	180	7.0	79.6	165.7

Table 4 presents heavy metal removal performance demonstrating exceptional adsorption capacity of green-synthesized nanoparticles. Iron oxide nanoparticles achieved the highest removal efficiency of 91.4% for lead ions within 120 minutes at pH 5.5, with maximum adsorption capacity reaching 228.5 mg/g. The removal mechanism involves electrostatic attraction between negatively charged nanoparticle surfaces and positively charged metal cations, followed by complexation with surface functional groups. Optimal pH conditions varied depending on metal species and nanoparticle surface chemistry (Hasanzadeh et al., 2017).

Table 5: Photocatalytic Dye Degradation Performance

Catalyst	Dye Type	Initial Concentration (mg/L)	Light Source	Time (h)	Degradation Efficiency (%)	Rate Constant (h^{-1})
ZnO NPs	Methylene Blue	25	Solar	4.0	95.3	0.725
Ag NPs	Malachite	25	Visible	3.5	90.5	0.682

	Green					
TiO_2 NPs	Rhodamine B	25	UV	2.5	96.0	0.856
NiSe NPs	Methylene Blue	50	Visible	5.0	88.7	0.415

Table 5 demonstrates photocatalytic degradation efficiency of various dyes using green-synthesized nanomaterials. Titanium dioxide nanoparticles exhibited the highest degradation rate of 96% for Rhodamine B under UV irradiation within 2.5 hours. The degradation mechanism involves photogeneration of electron-hole pairs, which react with water and oxygen to produce highly reactive hydroxyl radicals and superoxide ions that oxidatively decompose organic dye molecules. Degradation kinetics followed pseudo-first-order models, with rate constants ranging from 0.415 to 0.856 h^{-1} depending on catalyst type and reaction conditions (Singh et al., 2019).

6. DISCUSSION

The comprehensive characterization results confirm successful green synthesis of nanomaterials with desirable physicochemical properties suitable for environmental applications. The UV-Visible spectroscopy analysis revealed characteristic surface plasmon resonance peaks between 420-440 nm for silver nanoparticles, consistent with previous reports by Sharma et al. (2009) and Jain and Mehata (2017), confirming complete reduction of silver ions to metallic silver nanoparticles. The intensity and sharpness of SPR peaks indicate high nanoparticle concentration and narrow size distribution, critical factors for consistent environmental remediation performance. FTIR spectroscopy results elucidate the molecular mechanisms underlying biogenic synthesis, identifying specific phytochemical functional groups responsible for metal ion reduction and nanoparticle stabilization. The prominent hydroxyl and carbonyl groups correspond to polyphenolic compounds including flavonoids, tannins, and phenolic acids abundant in plant extracts (Marslin et al., 2018). These biomolecules donate electrons to reduce metal ions while simultaneously adsorbing onto nanoparticle surfaces, preventing aggregation through electrostatic and steric stabilization mechanisms. This dual functionality eliminates the need for external reducing agents and stabilizers, making the process environmentally benign and cost-effective. X-ray diffraction analysis confirmed crystalline structures matching standard reference patterns, indicating high purity without contaminating phases. The face-centered cubic structure of silver nanoparticles and hexagonal structure of zinc oxide correspond to thermodynamically stable configurations. Crystallite sizes calculated from peak broadening using the Debye-Scherrer equation showed excellent agreement with TEM measurements, validating the accuracy of characterization methods. The high crystallinity indices above 1.65 suggest well-defined crystal structures with minimal defects, which directly correlate with enhanced catalytic and adsorption properties (Vanaja and Annadurai, 2013).

The heavy metal removal performance demonstrates the practical applicability of green-synthesized nanomaterials for water treatment. The exceptional adsorption capacity of 228.5 mg/g for lead removal by iron oxide nanoparticles significantly exceeds conventional adsorbents like activated carbon (50-100 mg/g) and ion exchange resins (80-120 mg/g), as reported by Crane and Scott (2012). The adsorption mechanism involves multiple interactions including electrostatic attraction, surface complexation, and ion exchange between metal cations and surface functional groups. The pH-dependent adsorption behavior reflects the influence of surface charge and metal speciation on removal efficiency. At optimal pH values, maximum surface charge density and favorable metal speciation combine to enhance adsorption capacity (Hasanzadeh et al., 2017). Photocatalytic dye degradation results align with research objectives demonstrating effective organic pollutant removal from contaminated water. The mechanism involves bandgap excitation under light irradiation, generating electron-hole pairs that migrate to the nanoparticle surface. Electrons react with dissolved oxygen to produce superoxide radicals, while holes oxidize water molecules to form hydroxyl radicals. These highly reactive species attack organic dye molecules, breaking down complex aromatic structures into simpler, non-toxic products including carbon dioxide and water (Singh et al., 2019). The superior performance of titanium dioxide nanoparticles under UV irradiation results from optimal bandgap energy (3.2 eV) and high charge carrier mobility. The synergistic

combination of adsorption and photocatalytic degradation mechanisms positions green-synthesized nanomaterials as comprehensive solutions for environmental remediation. Initial rapid adsorption concentrates pollutants on nanoparticle surfaces, followed by photocatalytic degradation that regenerates adsorption sites and prevents saturation. This dual functionality extends operational lifespan and reduces maintenance requirements compared to single-mechanism systems. The antimicrobial properties of silver nanoparticles provide additional benefits by preventing microbial contamination in treated water, addressing multiple water quality parameters simultaneously (Ontong et al., 2020).

Economic and environmental sustainability analyses reveal significant advantages of green synthesis over conventional methods. The elimination of toxic chemicals reduces production costs by 30-40% while simultaneously minimizing environmental impact through zero-waste processes (Ahmed et al., 2024). Plant-based reducing agents are renewable, biodegradable, and locally available, reducing supply chain dependencies and transportation emissions. The ambient temperature synthesis conditions minimize energy consumption, contributing to lower carbon footprint and operational costs. These factors collectively position green synthesis as economically viable and environmentally responsible for large-scale industrial implementation.

7. CONCLUSION

This research successfully demonstrated the green synthesis, comprehensive characterization, and environmental application of nanomaterials using plant extracts as reducing and capping agents. The synthesized nanoparticles exhibited optimal physicochemical properties including spherical morphology, narrow size distribution (18-55 nm), high crystallinity, and abundant surface functional groups. Environmental remediation applications revealed exceptional performance in heavy metal removal (up to 91.4% efficiency) and photocatalytic dye degradation (up to 96% efficiency), significantly surpassing conventional treatment methods. The green synthesis approach offers sustainable, cost-effective, and environmentally benign alternatives to chemical synthesis methods, eliminating toxic reagents while maintaining superior product quality and performance. Future research should focus on scaling up production processes, investigating long-term stability and reusability, and developing composite nanomaterials with enhanced multifunctional properties for comprehensive environmental protection strategies.

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