RNI No. RAJHIN/2007/26996
ISSN 0976-7452 Raaso
Refreed Journal

रासो

अन्तर्विषयी त्रैमासिक शोध पत्रिका

वर्ष-17, अंक-2, मार्च अप्रैल मई 2024

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इतिहास, संस्कृति, साहित्य एवं दर्शन की त्रैमासिक शोध पत्रिका

वर्ष-17 अंक - 2 मार्च-अप्रैल-मई-2024

☆ सम्पादकीय/सचिव
व्यवस्थापकीय कार्यालय
सृजन संस्थान,
आचमन, वेद विहार,
लोहाखान, अजमेर-06
दूरभाष : 0145-2426610
e-mail : rasoajmjournal@gmail.com

☆ प्रकाशक :
पुष्पा शर्मा
सृजन संस्थान,
द्वारा आचमन पब्लिकेशन्स,
अजमेर

☆ मुद्रक :
मैसर्स आर्य प्रिन्टर्स,
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अजमेर दूरभाष : 0145-2442701

सहयोग दर

* वार्षिक सदस्यता - 500 रु. (चार अंक) संस्थाओं हेतु - 600 रु. (चार अंक)
कृपया चैक/ड्राफ्ट/मनीऑर्डर श्रीमती पुष्पा शर्मा, प्रकाशक, आचमन पब्लिकेशन्स, अजमेर- 305006 के नाम भेजें।

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Biomass Conversion into Green Chemicals and Biofuels: A Sustainable Approach for the Future

Kripa Sharma
Asstt. Professor (Department of Science & Technology)
Hukumchand Noble Institute of Science & Technology, Ajmer

1.Introduction

A rapidly growing world population and increasing energy demand have intensified the search for sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels. Biomass-organic material derived from plants, microorganisms, and agricultural residues-offers a promising renewable feedstock that can be converted into green chemicals, biofuels, and bioenergy. Biomass is considered carbon-neutral because the CO_2 released during its conversion is roughly equal to that absorbed during plant growth.

Chemical conversion of biomass uses principles of green chemistry, catalysis, biotechnology, and thermochemical transformations to produce cleaner, non-toxic, and biodegradable products. In the era of climate policies such as the Paris Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), biomass conversion is gaining global significance.

2. Types and Sources of Biomass

Biomass resources used in chemical and fuel production are categorized as:

2.1 Lignocellulosic Biomass

The most abundant non-food source including:

Agricultural waste (rice husk, wheat straw, sugarcane bagasse), Forestry residue, Wood chips ,Composed of cellulose, hemicellulose, and lignin, which can be chemically broken down.

2.2 Algal Biomass

Microalgae and macroalgae containing high lipid content. Ideal for biodiesel and high-value chemicals.

2.3 Industrial and Municipal Waste

Food waste, Paper waste, Sewage sludge

शोध-पत्र में उल्लिखित सन्दर्भ एवं विचारों के लिए लेखक स्वयं उत्तरदायी है, सम्पादक नहीं।

2.4 Energy Crops : Specially grown plants

Switchgrass,Miscanthus, Jatropha Rich in oils, carbohydrates, and lignin.

3. Chemistry of Biomass Components

Biomass primarily contains:

3.1 Cellulose: A linear polymer of glucose $(C_6H_{10}O_5)n$. Hydrolyzed to glucose $\rightarrow$ fermented to ethanol, butanol, and organic acids.

3.2 Hemicellulose: A branched polymer of pentoses (xylose, arabinose) and hexoses. Converted into furfural, xylitol, ethanol.

3.3 Lignin: A highly aromatic polymer. Converted to phenolic compounds, bio-oils, resins, and carbon materials.

3.4 Extractives & Lipids : Essential oils, fatty acids, and triglycerides.

Ideal for biodiesel production via transesterification.

4. Biomass Conversion Technologies

Biomass can be converted through biochemical, thermochemical, and catalytic pathways.

4.1 Biochemical Conversion

4.1.1 Enzymatic Hydrolysis: Cellulases and hemicellulases break down polysaccharides into fermentable sugars.

Reaction:

$(C_6H_{10}O_5)n + nH_2O \rightarrow nC_6H_{12}O_6$

4.1.2 Fermentation

Microorganisms convert sugars to biofuels and chemicals.

Products:

Bioethanol (Saccharomyces cerevisiae)

Biobutanol (Clostridium acetobutylicum)

Lactic acid (Lactobacillus)

Succinic acid

4.1.3 Anaerobic Digestion

Organic matter $\rightarrow$ Biogas $(CH_4 + CO_2)$

Used for electricity and heat.

4.1.4 Algal Cultivation & Extraction

Algae are grown in photobioreactors; lipids extracted for biodiesel.

4.2 Thermochemical Conversion

4.2.1 Pyrolysis - Heating biomass at 350-650°C without oxygen to produce:

Bio-oil

Biochar

Syngas

Fast pyrolysis produces bio-oil, which can be upgraded into green chemicals.

4.2.2 Gasification

High temperature (700-1200°C) partial oxidation H_2). syngas

Syngas methanol, hydrogen, Fischer-Tropsch fuels.

4.2.3 Combustion

Direct burning of biomass for heat and power.

4.3 Catalytic Conversion & Green Chemistry

Catalysts convert biomass-derived molecules into valuable chemicals.

4.3.1 Transesterification of Lipids

Vegetable oils + Methanol → Biodiesel (Fatty Acid Methyl Esters)

Uses catalysts like: NaOH, KOH ,Enzyme lipases

4.3.2 Dehydration Reactions

Glucose 5-HMF (5-Hydroxymethylfurfural), Xylose Furfural. Used in bioplastics and resins.

4.3.3 Hydrogenolysis & Hydrodeoxygenation

Bio-oil upgrading into hydrocarbons.

5. Green Chemicals from Biomass

Biomass-derived chemicals are safer and biodegradable. Major products include:

5.1 Platform Chemicals

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) identifies 12 key platform chemicals such as: 5-HMF

Levulinic acid, Succinic acid, Xylitol, Glycerol

These serve as building blocks for polymers, solvents, and pharmaceuticals.

5.2 Biopolymers

Polylactic acid (PLA)

Polyhydroxyalkanoates (PHA)

Starch-based plastics

Used in packaging, textiles, and biomedical applications.

5.3 Bio-based Solvents

Green solvents obtained from biomass include:

Ethyl lactate, Bio-butanol, Terpenes

Used in paints, coatings, pharmaceutical formulations.

6. Biofuels from Biomass

6.1 First-Generation Biofuels

From edible crops (sugarcane, corn). Not fully sustainable due to food-fuel conflict.

6.2 Second-Generation Biofuels

From lignocellulosic biomass.

Includes: Cellulosic ethanol, Fischer-Tropsch diesel, Biohydrogen

6.3 Third-Generation Biofuels

From algae.: High productivity; suitable for aviation fuel.

6.4 Fourth-Generation Biofuels

Genetically engineered microorganisms for direct fuel production.

7. Environmental Benefits

7.1 Reduced Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Biofuels reduce CO_2 by 40-80% compared to fossil fuels.

7.2 Waste Utilization : Agricultural waste products → valuable

Reduces landfill burden.

7.3 Biodegradability

Green chemicals degrade naturally, reducing soil and water pollution.

7.4 Energy Security

Lowers dependence on imported fossil fuels.

8. Challenges in Biomass Conversion

8.1 Recalcitrance of Lignocellulose

Complex structure requires expensive pretreatment.

8.2 High Production Cost

Enzymes, catalysts, and bioreactors raise costs.

8.3 Competition with Food Crops

First-generation biofuels raise food prices.

8.4 Technological Limitations

Scaling up from lab to industry is difficult.

8.5 Land & Water Use : Energy crops require resources, though less than fossil extraction.

Hydrothermal Liquefaction (HTL)

Converts wet biomass ? biocrude Highly efficient for algae and sewage sludge.

8.6 Nanocatalysts

Metal nanoparticles (Ni, Cu, Pt) improve reaction rates and selectivity.

8.7 Integrated Biorefineries

Zero-waste systems producing multiple products:

Fuels, Chemicals, Heat,Fertilizer (biochar)

9. Conclusion

Biomass conversion into green chemicals and biofuels represents a transformative solution for sustainable development. Through biochemical, thermochemical, and catalytic approaches, biomass can be efficiently converted into renewable fuels and eco-friendly chemicals. While challenges such as high cost and complex pretreatments remain, recent innovations in biotechnology, catalysis, and process engineering have significantly improved the efficiency and feasibility of conversion technologies. With ongoing research and supportive policies, biomass-based industries are poised to reshape the global energy and chemical landscape, providing cleaner and greener alternatives to fossil fuels.

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