Comparison of Sulphur and Zirconium Doped TiO$_2$ Nanoparticles for H$_2$S Gas Destruction

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Abstract—This study draws a comparison between destruction potential of TiO$_2$ nanoparticles when its doped with Sulphur and Zirconium. When TiO$_2$ gets excited, it induces into electron pairs and holes due to the presence of Sulphur in the nanoparticles, the energy of these pairs of electrons will be enhanced since $S$ donates additional electrons during the reaction. While Zr has been found to improve the thermal stabilization of TiO$_2$ and it also increases its surface area. Fixed bed catalysis system was used to assess the destruction potential of H$_2$S gas using S and Zr doped TiO$_2$ nanoparticles. The gas samples obtained were analysed using Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectroscopy to ascertain the percentage destruction of H$_2$S gas before and after passing the gas samples from the doped TiO$_2$ nanoparticles. The results showed around 90% destruction of H$_2$S gas using S-doped TiO$_2$ nanoparticles while doping with Zr proved to be very less effective for degradation of H$_2$S gas as compared to S doped nanoparticles.

Index Terms—S doped, TiO$_2$, H$_2$S, nanoparticles.

I. INTRODUCTION

US EPA list of extremely hazardous substances contains Hydrogen Sulfide and is also included in another category under US Clean Air Act which regulates the substances “known or may be anticipated to cause death, injury or serious adverse effects to human health or the environment upon accidental release” [1]. Even lower concentrations of H$_2$S gas can be dangerous. One of the studies carried out in Iceland, revealed how H$_2$S gas exposure at a concentration of around 7.00 µg/m$^3$ were related to increased hospital visits were associated as shown in Fig. 1 [2]. Owing to the considerable environmental concerns, the removal of H$_2$S gas is very important. Lot of research has been carried out for the removal of this toxic gas. Numerous techniques are being used world over to degrade H$_2$S gas, including Claus and Super Claus processes, incineration of the toxic compounds, activated carbon catalytic wet oxidation and many more [3]. In addition to different H$_2$S removal techniques, catalysis and photocatalysis has a lot of potential for the destruction of numerous pollutant gases including H$_2$S gas.

In different studies carried by our research group, we used pure and doped TiO$_2$ nanoparticles for assessing the destruction potential of H$_2$S gas. Dopants used were Sulphur and Zirconium. Reasons for using the Sulphur doping being that energy of TiO$_2$ is enhanced when it gets excited due to presence of Sulphur which induces into electron pairs and results into creation of holes thereby providing mechanism for H$_2$S gas to be adsorbed on its surface [4]. Sulfur-doped TiO$_2$ has been studied quite extensively owing to its highest photocatalytic efficiencies and hence proved to be a good photocatalyst [5]-[7].While Zr has been found to improve the thermal stabilization of TiO$_2$ and it also increases its surface area [8], [9]. In another study, the photocatalytic decomposition efficiency of Zr-doped TiO$_2$ films, measured with stearic acid coating was increased by 50% as compared to undoped TiO$_2$ films [10]. Moreover, many studies have explored Zirconium Dioxide (ZrO$_2$) due to its wide band gap (ca. 5.0 eV) and extra-positive (4.0 V vs NHE) and added-negative (-1.0 V vs NHE) reducing potentials in its valence and conduction bands, respectively, corresponding to those of TiO$_2$, and found it as a promising alternative photocatalyst for the degradation of large variety of pollutants [11]-[14].

Fixed bed catalysis system was used to assess the destruction of H$_2$S gas in our studies. It was observed that doping with Sulphur increased the destruction efficiency of TiO$_2$ considerably as compared to Zirconium doped nanoparticles.
II. METHODOLOGY

A. Materials

All reagents used were of analytical grade. All the solutions were prepared in distilled water (E.C. 2.8µS/cm) which was obtained from the distillation apparatus (Model WSB/4, Hamilton Laboratory Glass Ltd.). Argon (Ar) gas (98%) and H₂S gas (8%) used were acquired from OC specialist gases Ltd. UK. Chemicals used for synthesis of nanoparticles included Titanium Tetrachloride (TiCl₄ 98.0%) from Fluka, Hydrochloric acid (HCl, 98.0%) and Sulfuric acid (H₂SO₄, 98.2%) from J. T. Baker and Sodium Hydroxide (NaOH) from Merck, while Zirconium Oxidechloride (ZrOCl₂·8H₂O) Merck was used as a precursor for Zr doping.

B. Synthesis of Nanoparticles

Co precipitation method was used to synthesize the pure and doped TiO₂ nanoparticles at atmospheric pressure and room temperature [15].

1) S-doped TiO₂ nanoparticles

Sulfur doped (S-doped) TiO₂ nanoparticles were synthesized by method described in another study as stated above [15]. In this case, H₂SO₄ percentage of was increased from 15 to 25% in order to control the concentration of sulfur in the doped TiO₂ nanoparticles to get 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5 and 3% sulfur doping of the nanoparticles.

2) Zr-doped TiO₂ nanoparticles

The same process was used for Zirconium (Zr) doping of TiO₂ nanoparticles synthesis with minor modification. Molar ratio was used to determine the weight of Zr salt required to achieve equivalent Zr dopant percentage in the TiO₂ nanoparticles. Zr doped TiO₂ nanoparticles were synthesized by adding required amount of Zirconium Chlorated solution into the TiO₂ suspension. The solution was then titrated with 3M NaOH to raise the pH to 4. The precipitates formed were then collected and washed with distilled water. The precipitates were then dried at 105°C, overnight and calcined at 500°C for 6 hrs to get Zr-doped TiO₂ nanoparticles [16].

C. Characterization

Scintag XDS 2000 diffractometer with Cu Kα radiation having 1.5406 Å wavelength was used for recording the X-ray Diffraction (XRD) patterns of samples at a voltage and current of 40 kV and 30mA, respectively. XRD analysis was carried out from 0° to 70° (2θ) with a step time of 3-6 seconds for different results and step size of 0.05° to confirm the structure and phase and assessing the crystallinity.

Energy Dispersive X-ray Fluorescence Spectrometer (JEOL Model JSX-3202 M) was used to get the XRF spectra of the samples. 30 kV and 0.54 mA tube voltage and current were applied, respectively. Scan energy range was 0-41 keV and collimator was of 4mm diameter.

SEM model JEOL JSM 6490-A was used to generate high resolution images of the nanoparticles.

D. Experimental Settings

Fixed bed catalysis system was used to carry out experiments for evaluating the net destruction of H₂S gas. The experimental arrangement is shown in Fig. 2. Before running the experiment, the whole system was flushed with Ar gas to remove any residuals in the system. 0.1 gm of the catalyst was loaded in the centre of the glass tube with quartz wool at both ends. This tube was placed in the centre of the furnace along with the thermocouple to control the temperature. All the experiments were carried out at 450°C. H₂S gas was passed through these catalyst samples and three gas samples were collected after every hour in wash bottles. These samples were then analyzed using GC-MS [16].

E. H₂S Gas Analysis

The H₂S gas analysis was carried out by using the Gas-Chromatography-Mass Spectroscopy (GC-MS) for the gas samples collected after the catalytic experiments. In addition to GC-MS, Biogas analyzer was also used for detection of H₂S gas after passing it through the nanocatalysts. H₂S concentrations were measured using the GPA 1.8 Gas Pod which was fitted with the analyzer. The detection limit of 2S gas using this gas pod is 0-10000 ppm.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

All the gas samples obtained from the experiments were analyzed using GC-MS. The net reduction in the H₂S gas peak areas was calculated by difference in the peak areas of the reference samples and the samples collected after an interval of one hour. Three samples were collected in all the experiments. The different peak areas obtained from the GC-MS analysis of the gas samples after passing H₂S gas through TiO₂ nanoparticles are presented graphically in Fig. 3 [16].

0P, 1P and so on shows the samples with percentage of dopant concentration, e.g., 0P means pure TiO₂, 1P means 1% S doped nanoparticles and so on. Similarly, 1 ZrP means 1% Zr doped nanoparticles.

The results of the GC-MS analysis show that the highest reduction in concentrations of H₂S gas after 3 hours of the experiments, have been observed for the TiO₂ nanoparticles doped with 2% Sulfur. The destruction efficiency of 91.71% achieved after three hours of the experiment using pure TiO₂ nanoparticles is quite significant [15]. It was observed that the
efficiency increased with increase in S-dopant concentration initially till it reached 2% where the highest efficiency of 93.84% was achieved after 3 hrs of the experiment. But as the S concentration increased further, there was a slight decrease in the H$_2$S destruction percentage. The initial gradual increase in the destruction efficiency can be explained that the destruction efficiency is increased due to S-S affinity [17] between S-doped TiO$_2$ nanoparticles and S of H$_2$S being passed through it.

This increase in destruction efficiency did not seem to be consistent probably due to the fact that by increasing the S concentration, presumably the TiO$_2$ surface becomes saturated with S preventing further S adsorption. Another reason could be due to decrease in the amount of surface hydroxyl groups because of increase in S-dopant concentrations as found in another study [18]. This resulted in decrease in the H$_2$S destruction efficiency by the doped TiO$_2$ nanoparticles.

However, this shows that S-doping plays a positive role in the higher destruction efficiency of H$_2$S gas at a high temperature of 450°C, despite of the fact that the destruction efficiency of the pure TiO$_2$ nanoparticles is also quite significant [16].

Because of the large diameter of the Zr, 1% and 2% Zr-doped TiO$_2$ nanoparticles were also prepared to check H$_2$S destruction efficiency of the metal Zr when it was doped on TiO$_2$ nanoparticles, since in another study, it was found that photocatalytic activity of the Zr-doped TiO$_2$ increased by 50% when compared with undoped TiO$_2$ films [10]. The destruction efficiency of Zr doped TiO$_2$ was found to be comparatively very low as compared to pure and doped TiO$_2$ nanoparticles, which was found to be 27% and 17% for 1% and 2% doped nanoparticles, respectively. The results were somewhat similar using the biogas analyzer for the detection of H$_2$S gas, before and after passing through the nanocatalysts (spent samples). It was observed that by increasing the Zr dopant concentration, the H$_2$S destruction efficiency decreased. In this study, due to very low (18-30%) H$_2$S destruction efficiency achieved in the initial two experiments as compared to the efficiency using pure and S-doped nanoparticles, further experiments were not carried out by varying the Zr dopant concentrations. Besides, Energy Dispersive XRF was performed for all the nanoparticles before (fresh samples) and after the experiments (spent samples). From the analysis of the spent samples, it was found that the average amount of S adsorbed on the surface of the TiO$_2$ nanoparticles for all the S-doped nanoparticles showed slight variation from 2.59 and 2.72% for all the samples. The S adsorption on the Zr-doped TiO$_2$ nanoparticles was quite low ranging from 0.5-0.8% only and showing that S was not favourably being adsorbed on the surface of the Zr-doped TiO$_2$ nanoparticles and it was therefore likely that the H$_2$S destruction efficiency was not going to be quite noticeable in this case. These results are tabulated as Table I. The results clearly indicate that the doping of Sulphur played a very positive role towards enhancement of H$_2$S gas destruction, while Zirconium doping further decreased the TiO$_2$ efficiency than observed using pure TiO$_2$ nanoparticles. It was also revealed that further increase in Zr dopant concentration, decreased the H$_2$S destruction, so additional experiments using higher Zr dopant concentration were not carried out as done for S doped nanoparticles. The reduction in destruction efficiency of Zr doped TiO$_2$ nanoparticles can be attributed to less affinity of Zr towards S. However, the results obtained from these findings were not found to be in agreement with another study in which photocatalytic efficiency of Zr doped TiO$_2$ increased by 50% under visible light irradiation [9]. In another study, it was observed that the photoreactivities of the Zr doped TiO$_2$ materials were associated with the amounts of dopants and the shapes of the nanorods. Probably, in our Zr-doped TiO$_2$ nanoparticles were lacking optimal Zirconium to Titanium ratio and regular shapes which exhibited highest photoreactivities [19].

![Graph](image)

**TABLE I: QUANTITATIVE ELEMENTAL ANALYSIS OF TiO$_2$ NANOPARTICLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample ID</th>
<th>Titanium (Ti) Mass %</th>
<th>Mol %</th>
<th>Sulfur (S) Mass %</th>
<th>Mol %</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
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<tr>
<td>0P</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.91</td>
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<td>98.57</td>
<td>0.96</td>
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<td>95.86</td>
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<td>4.14</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>98.87</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5.99</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1ZrP</td>
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<td>99.32</td>
<td>1.19*Zr</td>
<td>0.68*Zr</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1ZrPS</td>
<td>98.03</td>
<td>98.53</td>
<td>1.19*Zr</td>
<td>0.68*Zr</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5ZrP</td>
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<td>2.17*Zr</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.17*Zr</td>
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**IV. CONCLUSIONS**

Different results obtained by the passing H$_2$S gas over different concentrations of Sulphur and Zirconium dopants...
were compared in this study. It was observed that the 2% S-doped nanoparticle (2P) showed the maximum destruction of H$_2$S gas after 3 hours using fixed bed catalysis reactions at a high temperature of 450$^\circ$C. However, doping of Zr was not found to be favourable for the destruction of H$_2$S gas. It was revealed in one of the study that the by increasing the Zr concentration in the precursor solution and increasing the reaction temperatures, promotes regular shapes of the nano materials which further enhances the Zr photocatalytic efficiencies [19]. But this was not the case in our study as very low H$_2$S gas destruction efficiencies were achieved. Therefore, further studies need to be carried out in order to ascertain this fact as to why the efficiency of Zr doped TiO$_2$ nanoparticles reduced at high temperatures contrary to the findings of another study in which the efficiency increased even under visible light photocatalysis. Probably, this could be attributed to different experimental conditions in this case; the conditions were evaluated under high temperatures. It can therefore be concluded that the best H$_2$S destruction efficiency could be achieved by using S-doped nanoparticles in catalytic experiments at a high temperature, while TiO$_2$ doping with Zr is not a feasible option for destruction of H$_2$S gas as compared to S-doped nanoparticles.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The author’s declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION
NS was involved in setting up and carrying out the experimental analysis and results compilation, where as RWA was involved in formatting and vetting the draft of manuscript.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT
The authors gratefully acknowledge the National Centre for Physics, Quaid-e-Azam University Campus, Islamabad, Pakistan for granting access to the fixed bed catalysis system and Higher Education Commission of Pakistan for funding this research work.

REFERENCES