

EMPLOYING UREASE-PRODUCING BACTERIA FROM THE HILLY REGIONS OF INDIA FOR MITIGATING RAINFALL-INDUCED SOIL EROSION

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**Employing urease-producing bacteria from the hilly
regions of India for mitigating rainfall-induced soil erosion**

by

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**EMPLOYING UREASE-PRODUCING BACTERIA FROM THE HILLY REGIONS OF INDIA FOR MITIGATING RAINFALL-INDUCED SOIL EROSION**” is being submitted by **Mr. Rituraj Devrani** in the fulfilment for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** to the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi. This thesis is the record of the research work and is entirely carried out by him under my supervision and guidance. The research report and results presented in this thesis have not been submitted, in part or full, to any University or Institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

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ABSTRACT

Hilly regions worldwide are highly susceptible to geotechnical hazards such as landslides and soil erosion, particularly in weathered soils with weak or deteriorating strength. Addressing these challenges requires sustainable soil stabilization techniques that minimize environmental impact. Bio-cementation, particularly from microbial-induced calcite precipitation (MICP), has emerged as a promising alternative to conventional chemical soil stabilization methods. This technique harnesses urease-producing microorganisms to hydrolyze urea, generating carbonate ions that react with calcium to form calcium carbonate (CaCO_3) crystals. These precipitates enhance soil cohesion and structural integrity. However, the success of MICP depends on multiple factors, including bacterial strain selection, urease activity, chemical concentrations, and treatment methodologies. A deeper understanding of these parameters is essential for optimizing MICP effectiveness, particularly in erosion-prone hilly terrains.

This study focused on isolating and characterizing urease-producing bacterial strains from an erosion-prone region in India, where weak soil slopes frequently contribute to instability. The selected bacterial strains were assessed for urease activity, calcium carbonate precipitation potential, and genetic identity and were compared with the well-established ureolytic bacterium *Sporosarcina pasteurii* as a reference. The isolated bacterial strains exhibited superior urease activity and calcium carbonate precipitation capacity while maintaining an optimal alkaline environment crucial for effective MICP. These potent strains outperformed *S. pasteurii*, demonstrating their potential for site-specific bio-cementation applications.

To evaluate the efficacy of MICP for soil improvement, bio-cementation treatments were conducted in split-set molds, considering various treatment strategies such as treatment constituents and their sequence of addition, chemical substrate concentration, dosage intervals, solution volume, and treatment cycles. The effectiveness of the bio-cementation process was evaluated through unconfined compressive strength tests, pH monitoring, dry density

measurements, calcium carbonate quantification, and microstructural analysis. The results confirmed the successful formation of calcite crystals, which effectively bonded soil particles, leading to significant strength enhancement. The study demonstrated that the optimized treatment strategies had a direct impact on achieving the desired soil cementation and mechanical performance through a surface percolation method.

The endurance of bio-cemented soil was further assessed under multiple rainfall-drying cycles with varying raindrop kinetic energies and slope angles using a custom-built rainfall simulator. Untreated soil exhibited significant erosion under increasing slope gradients and rainfall energy, following a power law trend. In contrast, MICP-treated soil demonstrated remarkable resistance to erosion, maintaining structural stability even under extreme conditions. Bio-cementation effectively extended the time-to-ponding and reduced permeability, reinforcing soil strength and resilience. While surface resistance declined with prolonged exposure to intense rainfall, treatment with isolated bacterial strain consistently outperformed untreated and control and *S. pasteurii*-treated soils, showcasing improved erosion control and reduced structural degradation.

To bridge the gap between small-scale studies and real-world applications, an upscaled bio-cemented soil slope treated with isolated bacterial strains was evaluated under simulated rainfall conditions. This large-scale assessment provided more reliable insights into the erosion and hydrologic response of MICP-treated slopes, minimizing boundary condition effects that are often overlooked in smaller experimental setups. The impact of different MICP treatment durations on soil performance was also investigated, revealing that prolonged treatment resulted in enhanced surface erosion resistance. Comparative analysis of soil retention capacities and runoff characteristics between untreated and MICP-treated slopes confirmed that bio-cemented soils retained higher moisture content and experienced minimal erosion. These findings were further supported through microstructural and mineralogical investigations,

reinforcing the role of CaCO_3 precipitation in improving soil stability. Overall, this study establishes MICP as an effective and environmentally sustainable solution for mitigating rainfall-induced soil erosion in hilly regions. The superior performance of isolated bacterial strains highlights their potential for site-specific, offering an eco-friendly approach to enhancing geotechnical resilience. By integrating small-scale and upscaled experimental findings, this research provides critical insights into the practical application of biocementation for geotechnical resilience. These advancements pave the way for improved erosion control strategies and the development of sustainable infrastructure in vulnerable terrains.

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सारांश

विश्वभर के पहाड़ी क्षेत्र भू-तकनीकी खतरों, जैसे कि भूस्खलन और मिट्टी के कटाव, के प्रति अत्यधिक संवेदनशील होते हैं, विशेष रूप से उन मिट्टियों में जो मौसम प्रभाव के कारण कमजोर या क्षरित हो जाती हैं। इन चुनौतियों का समाधान पर्यावरणीय प्रभाव को न्यूनतम रखते हुए स्थायी मिट्टी स्थिरीकरण तकनीकों के माध्यम से किया जा सकता है। बायो-सीमेंटेशन, विशेष रूप से माइक्रोबियल-इंड्यूस्ड कैल्साइट प्रीसिपिटेशन (एमआईसीपी), पारंपरिक रासायनिक स्थिरीकरण विधियों का एक आशाजनक विकल्प बनकर उभरा है। यह तकनीक यूरिया-उत्पादक सूक्ष्मजीवों का उपयोग करके यूरिया को हाइड्रोजेन करता है, जिससे उत्पन्न कार्बोनेट आयन कैल्शियम के साथ अभिक्रिया करके कैल्शियम कार्बोनेट क्रिस्टल का निर्माण करते हैं। ये अवक्षेपण मिट्टी के कणों को आपस में जोड़कर उनकी संरचनात्मक अखंडता और स्थिरता को बढ़ाते हैं।

हालांकि, एमआईसीपी की प्रभावशीलता कई कारकों पर निर्भर करती है, जैसे कि बैक्टीरियल स्ट्रेन का चयन, यूरिएज़ एंजाइम की सक्रियता, रासायनिक सांद्रता, और उपचार की पद्धतियाँ। विशेष रूप से कटाव-प्रवण पहाड़ी क्षेत्रों में इस तकनीक को अनुकूलित करने के लिए इन कारकों की गहरी समझ आवश्यक है।

इस अध्ययन का उद्देश्य भारत के एक कटाव-प्रवण क्षेत्र से स्थानीय यूरिएज़-उत्पादक बैक्टीरियल स्ट्रेन्स को पृथक (आइसोलेट) करना और उनका चरित्रांकन करना था, जहाँ कमजोर मिट्टी ढलानों की अस्थिरता में योगदान देती है। चयनित बैक्टीरिया को यूरिएज़ गतिविधि, कैल्शियम कार्बोनेट अवक्षेपण क्षमता, और उनके आनुवंशिक पहचान के आधार पर परखा गया और उनकी तुलना *स्योरोसारसीना पाश्चुरी* नामक एक प्रख्यात यूरोलाइटिक बैक्टीरिया से की गई। पृथक किए गए बैक्टीरियल स्ट्रेन्स ने उच्च यूरिएज़ गतिविधि और अधिक कैल्शियम कार्बोनेट अवक्षेपण क्षमता प्रदर्शित की, साथ ही इष्टतम क्षारीय वातावरण बनाए रखा, जो प्रभावी एमआईसीपी के लिए आवश्यक है। ये शक्तिशाली बैक्टीरियल स्ट्रेन्स

एस. पाशुपती से बेहतर प्रदर्शन करते पाए गए, जिससे उनके साइट-विशिष्ट बायो-सीमेंटेशन अनुप्रयोगों के लिए उपयुक्त होने की संभावना सिद्ध हुई।

मिट्टी सुधार के लिए एमआईसीपी की प्रभावशीलता का मूल्यांकन करने हेतु विभिन्न उपचार रणनीतियों का अध्ययन किया गया, जिनमें उपचार सामग्री के अनुक्रमण, रासायनिक पदार्थों की सांद्रता, खुराक अंतराल, घोल की मात्रा, और उपचार चक्र शामिल थे। बायो-सीमेंटेशन प्रक्रिया की प्रभावशीलता को अनकम्पाइंड कंप्रेसिव स्ट्रेंथ (यूसीएस) परीक्षण, पीएच-निगरानी, शुष्क घनत्व मापन, कैल्शियम कार्बोनेट मात्रांकन, और सूक्ष्म संरचनात्मक विश्लेषण के माध्यम से परखा गया। परिणामों से पुष्टि हुई कि कैल्साइट क्रिस्टल का सफलतापूर्वक निर्माण हुआ, जिसने मिट्टी के कणों को आपस में मजबूती से बाँध दिया, जिससे इसकी यांत्रिक शक्ति में उल्लेखनीय वृद्धि हुई। अध्ययन में यह पाया गया कि अनुकूलित उपचार रणनीतियों ने सतही परक्यूलेशन विधि के माध्यम से मिट्टी की मजबूती और स्थायित्व को बढ़ाने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका निभाई।

बायो-सीमेंटेड मिट्टी की टिकाऊपन को वर्षा-सुखाने चक्रों के तहत विभिन्न वर्षा ऊर्जा स्तरों और ढलान कोणों के साथ विशेष रूप से डिज़ाइन किए गए वर्षा सिमुलेटर का उपयोग करके परखा गया। असुधारित मिट्टी में जैसे-जैसे ढलान और वर्षा की तीव्रता बढ़ी, उसका कटाव तेजी से हुआ, जो एक पावर लॉ प्रवृत्ति का अनुसरण करता था। इसके विपरीत, एमआईसीपी-उपचारित मिट्टी ने उत्कृष्ट कटाव-प्रतिरोध प्रदर्शित किया और अत्यधिक प्रतिकूल परिस्थितियों में भी संरचनात्मक स्थिरता बनाए रखी। बायो-सीमेंटेशन ने पानी अवशोषण को बढ़ाया और मिट्टी की पारगम्यता को कम किया, जिससे मिट्टी की मजबूती और लचीलापन बढ़ा। हालांकि, दीर्घकालिक अत्यधिक वर्षा के संपर्क में आने से सतह की प्रतिरोधक क्षमता में गिरावट आई, लेकिन स्थानीय बैक्टीरियल स्ट्रेन द्वारा उपचारित मिट्टी ने एस. पाशुपती-उपचारित और असुधारित मिट्टी की तुलना में बेहतर प्रदर्शन किया, जिससे संरचनात्मक गिरावट में कमी और बेहतर कटाव नियंत्रण देखने को मिला।

छोटे पैमाने पर किए गए अध्ययनों और वास्तविक परिस्थितियों में इसके व्यावहारिक अनुप्रयोगों के बीच अंतर को कम करने के लिए, एक बड़ी बायो-सीमेंटेड मिट्टी ढलान को पृथक किए गए बैक्टीरियल स्ट्रेन्स से उपचारित करके नकली वर्षा परिस्थितियों के तहत परखा गया। इस बड़े पैमाने के परीक्षण से एमआईसीपी-उपचारित ढलानों की कटाव और जलगतिकी प्रतिक्रिया की अधिक सटीक जानकारी प्राप्त हुई, जिससे छोटे प्रयोगों में मौजूद सीमाएँ कम हो गईं। अलग-अलग एमआईसीपी उपचार अवधि का भी अध्ययन किया गया, जिससे पता चला कि दीर्घकालिक उपचार ने सतह के कटाव-प्रतिरोध को बढ़ा दिया।

एमआईसीपी-उपचारित और असुधारित ढलानों के बीच मिट्टी धारण क्षमता और अपवाह विशेषताओं की तुलनात्मक विश्लेषण से यह निष्कर्ष निकला कि बायो-सीमेंटेड मिट्टी में अधिक नमी बनी रही और कटाव न्यूनतम रहा। इन निष्कर्षों को सूक्ष्म संरचनात्मक और खनिजीय विश्लेषणों द्वारा और अधिक प्रमाणित किया गया, जिससे कैल्शियम कार्बोनेट अवक्षेपण की भूमिका मिट्टी की स्थिरता सुधारने में स्पष्ट हुई। समग्र रूप से, यह अध्ययन एमआईसीपी को वर्षा-प्रेरित मिट्टी कटाव को कम करने के लिए एक प्रभावी और पर्यावरणीय रूप से स्थायी समाधान के रूप में स्थापित करता है। स्थानीय बैक्टीरियल स्ट्रेन्स की उच्च प्रभावशीलता उनके साइट-विशिष्ट अनुप्रयोगों की क्षमता को उजागर करती है, जो भू-तकनीकी स्थिरता बढ़ाने के लिए एक पर्यावरण-अनुकूल विकल्प प्रदान करता है। छोटे और बड़े पैमाने के प्रयोगात्मक निष्कर्षों को एकीकृत करके, यह शोध बायो-सीमेंटेशन के व्यावहारिक अनुप्रयोगों पर महत्वपूर्ण अंतर्दृष्टि प्रदान करता है। ये उन्नतियाँ बेहतर कटाव नियंत्रण रणनीतियों और कमजोर भूभागों में सतत अवसंरचना के विकास का मार्ग प्रशस्त करती हैं।

TABLE OF CONTENT

CERTIFICATE	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
ABSTRACT.....	v
सारांश	viii
TABLE OF CONTENT	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xvii
LIST OF TABLES.....	xxiv
LIST OF SYMBOLS AND NOTATIONS	xxv
1. CHAPTER 1.....	1
1.1 General.....	1
1.2 Organization of the thesis	3
2. CHAPTER 2.....	5
2.1 Introduction.....	5
2.2 Rainfall-induced soil erosion: international and national scenarios	6
2.2.1 International scenario.....	6
2.2.2 National scenario	13
2.3 Mechanism of rainfall-induced soil erosion	19
2.4 Conventional and emerging techniques for soil stabilization	21
2.5 MICP via urea hydrolysis and governing factors	23

2.5.1 Urease enzyme and ureolytic bacteria: strains, species, and their role in MICP	27
2.5.2 pH.....	31
2.5.3 Calcium sources for MICP.....	32
2.5.4 Composition and concentration of cementation solution.....	34
2.5.5 Treatment strategies and sequential addition of solution constituents.....	35
2.5.6 Soil treatment methods	38
2.6 Effect of MICP on engineering properties of soil.....	43
2.6.1 Soil strength characteristics	43
2.6.2 Permeability characteristics	49
2.6.3 Durability of MICP-treated soil against seasonal cycles	55
2.6.4 Water retention capacity	56
2.7 Mitigating rainfall-induced soil erosion using MICP	58
2.8 Research gaps and need for the study	60
2.9 Research objectives.....	61
3. CHAPTER 3.....	62
3.1 Introduction.....	62
3.2 Materials	62
3.2.1 Soil collection for isolation of ureolytic bacteria.....	62
3.2.2 Soil used to investigate the potential of bacterial strains for soil improvement	65
3.2.3 Ureolytic bacterial strains	65
3.2.4 Bacterial growth medium, nutrient supplementation, and cementation solution....	66

3.2.5 Preparation of bacterial suspension for various experimental studies	66
Summary	68
4. CHAPTER 4.....	69
4.1 Introduction.....	69
4.2 Methodology	70
4.2.1 Enrichment of soil and isolation of pure ureolytic bacterial strains	70
4.2.2 Assays of ureolytic bacterial strains	70
4.2.3 Urease activity determination	72
4.2.4 16S rRNA gene sequencing	73
4.3 Isolation and screening of bacterial strains	73
4.4 Degree of urease activity and identification of bacterial isolates	81
Summary	83
5. CHAPTER 5.....	85
5.1 Introduction.....	85
5.2 Methodology	86
5.2.1 Split set mould and preparation of soil samples and treatment	86
5.2.2 Different constituents of the treatment solutions and treatment sequences	87
5.2.3 Concentration and strength of the treatment solutions	89
5.2.4 Volume of MICP treatment solution and retention interval between treatment cycles.....	89
5.2.5 Different ureolytic bacterial strains for MICP treatment	89
5.2.6 Experimental testing	90

5.3 Impact of various treatment constituents, and their sequence of addition, on soil properties after 7 days and 14 days of soil treatment.....	92
5.3.1 Effect on soil properties after 7 days of treatment.....	92
5.3.2 Effect on soil properties after 14 days of treatment.....	95
5.4 Optimization of equimolar concentrations of urea and calcium chloride.....	98
5.5 Assessment of the different strengths of nutrient broth solution for consistent dosages during soil treatment	100
5.6 Examination of varying volumes of treatment solution and retention intervals between consecutive treatment cycles.....	102
5.7 Comparison of the performance of different urease-producing bacterial strains	104
Summary	112
6. CHAPTER 6.....	114
6.1 Introduction.....	114
6.2 Methodology	115
6.2.1 Morgan splash cup and preparation of soil samples and treatment	115
6.2.2 Test setup and methodology for rainfall erosion testing.....	116
6.3 Influence of MICP treatment on enhancing soil surface strength properties.....	121
6.4 Time to ponding (T_p) of untreated and treated soil samples under varying rainfall kinetic energies and slope angles.....	122
6.5 Effect of wetting-drying cycles on the permeability of untreated and MICP-treated soil	125
6.6 Effect of rainfall-drying cycles, rainfall intensities, and slope conditions	129

6.6.1 Soil retention characteristics	129
6.6.2 Correlation between initial surface resistance and soil retention of untreated and MICP-treated soils	134
6.6.3 Time to ponding (T_p)	137
6.6.4 Residual surface strength characteristics after exposure	141
6.6.5 Microstructural investigations	145
Summary	148
7. CHAPTER 7.....	150
7.1 Introduction.....	150
7.2 Methodology	151
7.2.1 Preparation of soil bed and instrumentation	151
7.2.2 MICP-treatment of soil bed	152
7.2.3 Rainfall erosion testing and evaluation.....	153
7.2.4 Volumetric water retention capacity	155
7.2.5 Microstructural and mineralogical analysis	155
7.3 Enhancement of volumetric water retention in soil through 7-day and 14-day MICP treatment	155
7.4 Soil erosion and runoff response of untreated and MICP-treated soil slopes.....	157
7.5 Volumetric water retention capacity of untreated and MICP-treated soil under rainfall	166
7.6 Cost analysis and practical implications	169
Summary	170
CHAPTER 8.....	173

References.....	177
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	215
8. ABOUT THE AUTHOR	217

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig 2.1. “Spatial distribution of global rainfall erosivity (2001-2020) based on (a) integrated multi-satellite retrievals for global precipitation measurement (GPM-IMERG)-only and, (b) GPM-IMERG merged with global rainfall erosivity database (GloREDa) station data. Erosivity classes correspond to quantiles of the GPM-IMERG merged with GloREDa.” (Fenta et al., 2023).	8
Fig 2.2. Annual rainfall erosivity statistics (2001-2020) by continent (Fenta et al., 2023).....	9
Fig 2.3. “Map of (a) erosivity density (ED) and, (b) potentially erosion-susceptible areas identified through coupled quantile mapping of ED and mean annual rainfall.” (Fenta et al., 2023)	9
Fig 2.4. Impact of erosion induced failures in the different regions of Africa (a) gully formation during rainfall due to poor drainage (dailyytimesng.com), (b,c) damage to houses and large gully formations from erosion in farms of Ibolo Oraifite, Anambra state, Nigeria, West Africa (bbc.com), (d) sheet and rill erosion, along with gully erosion formations over slopes in grasslands in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (Abdalla et al., 2024), (e) impact of road construction on gully development in Genbo Wonze, northwest highlands of Ethiopia, East Africa (Yazie et al., 2021), (f) roadway slope failure due to soil erosion during rainfall in Anambra, Nigeria, West Africa (Thenicheng.com), (g) gully erosion site in southeast Nigeria, West Africa (Amangabara, 2023), (h) large gully formations during rainfall causing damage to infrastructure in southern Nigeria, West Africa (independent.ng)	10
Fig 2.5. Cases of rainfall-induced soil erosion in China (a) soil erosion of loess roads in the Jiuyuangou watershed, Shanxi Province, China (Yang et al., 2019), (b) erosion along the slope surface in the high land-filled slopes (HLFS) in Qingyang City, Gansu Province of China (Zhu et al., 2024), (c) road surface erosion in Fangta watershed of loess plateau in China (Xu et al., 2022)	11

Fig 2.6. Rainfall-induced erosion and slope failure across different continents (a) gully erosion triggered by a heavy rainfall event in 2011 in the hilly areas of NE Abruzzo, Central Italy, Europe (Piacentini et al., 2018), (b) gully erosion on a field slope in Canals, Valencia, Eastern Spain, Europe (Nadal-Romero & García-Ruiz, 2025), (c) gully formations and slope failure due to concentrated flow in Guadix, Spain, Europe; slope failure in Hawke's Bay, New Zealand, Oceania; soil erosion and bank failure in Southern Ethiopia, Africa; and road embankment failure in British Columbia, Canada, North America (Stokes et al., 2013).	12
Fig 2.7. Soil erosion severity map of India (Raj et al., 2024).....	15
Fig 2.8. (a) Soil erosion during rainfall in Ithalar Panchayat, Ooty, Tamil Nadu, India (New Indian Express), (b) slush on the roads after rainfall in Coonoor district of Tamil Nadu, India (Trip advisor), (c) soil erosion after rainfall in Nilgiri mountains of Coonoor, Tamil Nadu, India (Trip advisor), (d) soil erosion due to rainfall blocking the roadway (the news minute), (e) restoration of road from Pilloor Mattam to Anaipallam severely damaged during recent rainfall (The Hindu), (f) erosion of soil over slope during rainfall in Ooty, Tamil Nadu, India (travel2ooty), (g) removal of top soil layer during rainfall happened in July 2024 in Uttara Kannada, Karnataka, India (down to earth), (h) road damage due to rainfall near Kanikkaraj Nagar, Tamil Nadu, India (Trip advisor).	16
Fig 2.9. (a) Damaged road near Jatinga village in Dima Hasao, Assam, India (obeta.ttef), (b) damage to NH-29 linking Kohima-Dimapur, Nagaland, India (EastMojo), (c) part of NH-415 collapses due to severe soil erosion triggered by heavy rain in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh, India (Arunchal24.in), (d) removal of top soil layer that led to damage of a hydroelectric project on Teesta river, Sikkim, India (business standard, Unsplash.com, PTI), (e) erosion of soil from slopes over the highway in Nagaland, India (Assam tribune), (f) heavy vehicles plying on NH-29 connecting Dimapur and Kohima after blockage of the road due to massive soil erosion after rainfall (nenow.in), (g) broken section of Aalo Pasighat road in East Siang district in Arunachal	

Pradesh after massive erosion of soil after rainfall (downtoearth.org), (h) massive erosion triggered by incessant rains blocked NH-29 of Nagaland, India (northeast news) 16

Fig 2.10. (a) Heavy rains led to the closure of highway due to road damage in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India (republic world, PTI), (b) collapse of Dehradun defence college amid due to intense soil erosion caused by incessant rainfall in Maldevta, Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India (CNBCTV18), (c) damage to roadway due to rainfall and closure of the highway in Dehradun, India (news9), (d) damaged road after heavy monsoon rain in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India (news9), (e) damage to the road connecting Budhakedar and Jhalabeen villages, in Tehri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand, India (Uttarakhand State Govt, Financial Express), (f) damage due to rainfall in Mandi, Himachal Pradesh, India (Hindustan Times), (g) soil erosion due to heavy monsoon rains near Kameda in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, India led to washed away of a portion of Badrinath national highway (Indian Express), (h) removal of topsoil due to erosion due to rainfall in the Rudraprayag district of Uttarakhand, India (Times of India). 17

Fig 2.11. Rainfall erosivity factor (R factor) map of Uttarakhand, India (Mahapatra et al., 2018) 18

Fig 2.12. Soil loss map of Uttarakhand, India (Mahapatra et al., 2018)..... 19

Fig 2.13. Effects of raindrop impact on soil erosion dynamics on flat and sloped surfaces (a) formation of micro pits and limited soil particle detachment on a flat soil surface, (b) enhanced detachment, transportation, and deposition of soil particles on a sloped soil surface due to raindrop impact and gravity (<https://prepp.in/news/e-492-splash-erosion-agriculture-notes>). 21

Fig 2.14. “Different forms of soil erosion caused by rainfall-driven water movement (a) splash erosion, (b) sheet erosion, (c) rill erosion, and (d) gully erosion.” (Kumawat et al., 2020) 21

Fig 2.15. CaCO₃ precipitation in soil particles with bacteria acting as nucleation site (Modified from DeJong et al., 2010) 25

Fig 3.1. (a) Locations of soil sampling sites in the map, (b) photos of soil sampling sites in Chamoli (C1, C2, C3, C4(i), C4(ii), C4(iii), C5, C6), Rudraprayag (R1, R2), Pauri Garhwal (PG1, PG2), Nainital (N1) districts of Uttarakhand, India	64
Fig 3.2. Experimental setup of bioreactor used for high-volume bacterial cultivation. Details of the components: (1) bio-controller, (2) air pressure scale, (3) bio-console, (4) exhaust condenser, (5) 0.2-micron vent filter connected to the condenser, (6) dO ₂ probe, (7) air hose + 0.2-micron inlet filter connected to sparger, (8) water jacket, (9) peristaltic pump, (10) recirculating chiller, (11) anti-foaming agent, (12) reactor vessel, (13) reactor head plate, (14) pH probe, (15) stirrer motor, (16) power supply	67
Fig 4.1. Flow chart for the qualitative and quantitative biological investigations performed for shortlisting the potent ureolytic bacterial strains	74
Fig 4.2. Enrichment of collected soil samples and bacterial colonies obtained after serial dilution	75
Fig 4.3. Qualitative urease activity of different bacterial strains.....	75
Fig 4.4. Gelatinase hydrolysis test of different bacterial strains.....	79
Fig 5.1. Flowchart depicting the sequence of MICP treatments explored and the performance evaluation of various urease-producing bacterial strains.....	86
Fig 5.2. (a) Soil treatment setup, and (b) typical treated soil sample subjected to UCS testing	87
Fig 5.3. MICP-treated soil sample subjected to unconfined compressive strength testing	90
Fig 6.1. Experimental setup and test arrangement for rainfall erosion testing. details of the components: (1) illuminator, (2) adjustable rainwater spray nozzle set, (3) spray nozzle, (4) dslr camera, (5) splash collection tray, (6) test bed, (7) baffle system, (8) slope adjustment jack system, (9) water pressure control valves, (10) discharge measurement device, (11) sediment	

collection tank, (12) runoff collection tank, (13) water tank, (14) water pump, (15) soil sample in splash cup.....	118
Fig 6.2. Surface strength characteristics (a) penetration resistance, (b) shear strength, and (c) calcium carbonate content of different soil samples.....	122
Fig 6.3. Time to ponding during the first cycle (without soil erosion) under rainfall kinetic energies of 2068 J m^{-2} and 3216 J m^{-2} and varying slope angles of 15° , 30° , 45° for (a) untreated, (b) control, (c) <i>S. pasteurii</i> , and (d) R1_5 samples.....	125
Fig 6.4. Effect of the wetting-drying cycle on the coefficient of permeability of (a) untreated, (b) control, (c) <i>S. pasteurii</i> , and (d) R1_5.....	128
Fig 6.5. SEM images of (a) untreated, (b) control, (c) <i>S. pasteurii</i> , and (d) R1_5 treated soil samples after 14 wetting-drying cycles.....	128
Fig 6.6. Comparison of soil retention values for (a-b) untreated, (c-d) control, (e-f) <i>S. pasteurii</i> , and (g-h) R1_5 treated soil samples after successive rainfall-drying cycles under slope angles of 15° , 30° , and 45° , and subjected to varying rainfall kinetic energies.....	132
Fig 6.7. Soil retained in the splash cups after 1 st rainfall-drying cycle	133
Fig 6.8. Soil retained in the splash cups after the 14 th rainfall-drying cycle	134
Fig 6.9. Correlation between the ‘b’ parameter and the (a) penetration resistance, and (b) shear strength of various MICP-treated samples under different rainfall energies and slope angles. In the legend, the first numerical value represents rainfall energy (J m^{-2}), while the number following the underscore denotes the slope angle ($^\circ$).	136
Fig 6.10. Time-to-ponding values for (a–b) untreated soil, (c–d) control samples without bacterial inoculation, (e–f) <i>S. pasteurii</i> -treated soil, and (g–h) R1_5-treated soil under two rainfall kinetic energy levels (a, c, e, g) 2068 J m^{-2} and (b, d, f, h) 3216 J m^{-2} across varying slope angles and different rainfall-drying cycles	140

Fig 6.11. Penetration resistance values of untreated and MICP-treated soil samples after exposure to 14 rainfall-drying cycles under rainfall kinetic energies of (a) 2068 J m ⁻² , and (b) 3216 J m ⁻² at different slope angles	144
Fig 6.12. Shear strength of untreated and MICP-treated soil samples after exposure to 14 rainfall-drying cycles under rainfall kinetic energies of (a) 2068 J m ⁻² , and (b) 3216 J m ⁻² at different slope angles	145
Fig 6.13. Field emission scanning electron microscopic images of the soil samples (a) untreated, (b) control, (c) <i>S. pasteurii</i> , and (d) R1_5 after 14 rainfall-drying cycles	147
Fig 6.14. X-ray diffraction patterns of the soil samples (a) untreated, (b) control, (c) <i>S. pasteurii</i> , and (d) R1_5 after subjecting to 14 rainfall-drying cycles.....	148
Fig 7.1. Sequential steps involved in the preparation of the soil bed, MICP treatment, and testing process.....	152
Fig 7.2. Monitoring of volumetric water content during the soil treatment for (a, b) 7 days, and (c, d) 14 days in upslope and downslope sections of the soil bed	157
Fig 7.3. Comparison of (a) cumulative soil retained, and (b) runoff coefficient for untreated, 7-day, and 14-day MICP-treated soil slopes during 60 minutes of rainfall erosion tests	161
Fig 7.4. Erosion characteristics of untreated and MICP-treated soils (a) eroded area (%), and (b) maximum scour depth over time.....	161
Fig 7.5. Progressive development of the eroded area (highlighted in yellow) on the untreated soil slope during rainfall simulation (10–60 min), shown from both top and side views. The highlighted regions indicate zones of soil mass loss due to surface erosion over time.....	162
Fig 7.6. Progressive development of the eroded area (highlighted in yellow) on the 7-day MICP-treated soil slope during rainfall simulation (10–60 min), shown from both top and side views. The highlighted regions indicate zones of soil mass loss due to surface erosion over time	163

Fig 7.7. Progressive development of the eroded area (highlighted in yellow) on the 14-day MICP-treated soil slope during rainfall simulation (10–60 min), shown from both top and side views. The highlighted regions indicate zones of soil mass loss due to surface erosion over time	164
Fig 7.8. Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) images of (a) untreated, (b) 7-day treated, and (c) 14-day treated soil samples after the rainfall erosion test	165
Fig 7.9. X-ray diffraction patterns of (a) untreated, (b) 7-day treated, and (c) 14-day treated soil samples after rainfall erosion test	166
Fig 7.10. Volumetric water retention capacity of (a) upslope, and (b) downslope section of untreated and MICP-treated soil under rainfall	169

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1. Studies on strength characteristics of MICP-treated soil`	44
Table 2.2. Studies on permeability characteristics of MICP-treated soil.....	51
Table 3.1. Details of the soil sampling sites for isolation of ureolytic bacteria	63
Table 3.2. Properties of soil used for experiments	65
Table 4.1. Incubation period required by different bacterial isolates for the complete development of pink color	76
Table 4.2. Non-gelatinase ureolytic bacterial strains	78
Table 4.3. Bacterial identification based on 16S rRNA gene sequencing	83
Table 5.1. Sequences of MICP treatment.....	88
Table 6.1. MICP treatment protocol.....	116
Table 7.1 Details of constituents and the cost of MICP-treatment	170
Table 7.2 Details of the cost of cement-treated soil.....	170

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND NOTATIONS

MICP	Microbial-induced calcite precipitation
sp.	Species
°	Degree
CaCO₃	Calcium carbonate
CO(NH₂)₂	Urea
H₂O	Water
NH₂COOH	Carbamic acid
NH₃	Ammonia
H₂CO₃	Carbonic acid
H⁺	Hydrogen ion
CO₃²⁻	Carbonate ion
NH⁺	Ammonium ion
OH⁻	Hydroxide
K_{sp}	Solubility product constant
Ca²⁺	Calcium ion
Cl⁻	Chloride ion
HCO₃⁻	Bicarbonate ion
NH₄Cl	Ammonium chloride
°C	Degree Celsius
KCTC	Korean Collection for Type Cultures
CaCl₂	Calcium chloride
UCS	Unconfined compressive strength
OD₆₀₀	Optical density at 600 nm wavelength
ATCC	American Type Culture Collection

w/w	Weight/weight ratio
USCS	Unified Soil Classification System
SC	Clayey sand
DSMZ	Deutsche Sammlung von Mikroorganismen und Zellkulturen
PTCC	Pasteur Type Culture Collection
CGMCC	China General Microbiological Culture Collection Center
EPS	Extracellular polymeric substances
NB	Nutrient broth
NCIM	National Collection of Industrial Microorganisms
h	hour
w/w	Weight/weight ratio
w/v	Weight/volume ratio
ppm	parts per million
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
PCR	Polymerase Chain Reaction
rRNA	Ribosomal Ribonucleic Acid
SEM	Scanning Electron Microscopy
XRD	X-ray diffraction
TS	Treatment sequence
FESEM	Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscopy
FESEM-EDS	Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscopy-Energy Dispersive Spectroscopy
PV	Pore Volume
θ	Theta
KE	Kinetic energy of rain per unit precipitation

E	Kinetic energy of rainfall
ASTM	American Society for Testing and Materials
IS	Indian standard code
T_p	Time to ponding
VWC	Volumetric water content