

**DEVELOPMENT OF CATALYST AND REACTOR
FOR ELECTROCHEMICAL CONVERSION OF
BIOMASS-DERIVED FURFURAL INTO VALUE-
ADDED CHEMICALS**

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BIOMASS-DERIVED FURFURAL INTO VALUE-
ADDED CHEMICALS**

by

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Submitted

In fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNDER THE SUPERVISION
OF
**PROF. SUDDHASATWA BASU
PROF. ANUPAM SHUKLA
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Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Development of Catalyst and Reactor for Electrochemical Conversion of Biomass-Derived Furfural into Value-Added Chemicals**” submitted by **Mr. Ram Ji Dixit** to the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is a record of the original bonafide research work carried out by him. He has worked under my supervision and has fulfilled the requirements, which to my knowledge, has reached the requisite standard for the submission of this thesis. The results contained 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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Ram Ji Dixit

Abstract

The biomass-derived furfural (FF) transforms into platform chemicals such as furfuryl alcohol (FA), hydrofuroin (HF), furoic acid (FU), and 2(5H)-furanone (FN) for their use in polymer, pharmaceuticals, and bio-fuel industries. Electrocatalytic hydrogenation (ECH) of FF is an appealing process because of the in-situ generation of adsorbed hydrogen, ambient temperature-pressure conditions, and the use of electrical energy generated from renewables. Herein, FF ECH in alkaline medium produced FA and HF, and their selectivity on Cu, Pt, and Ni-foam (NF, 10 cm²) electrocatalysts showed that their generation was dependent upon the availability of adsorbed hydrogen, which in turn varied with the choice of electrocatalyst and with applied potentials. The etching of Cu from a co-electrodeposited Ni-Cu electrode, followed by a re-electrodeposition of Cu led to the formation of Cu nanoplate, termed as Cu-NPNi/NF. The formation of Cu-nanoplates and bimetallic Ni-Cu for Cu-NPNi/NF resulted an increase in FA and HF formation rates as compared to Cu, Pt, and NF. As alkaline medium widened the scope for the type of materials, FF ECH using metal-oxide (In₂O₃, Co₃O₄, Pb₂Ru₂O_{7-x}) electrocatalysts was studied. Through experimental and theoretical studies, we demonstrated that the binding energy and coverage of competing furfural and hydrogen adsorption processes determined the selectivity of FA over HF ($S_{FA/HF}$). The Langmuir-Hinshelwood mechanism was found to be involved during FF ECH with pristine Pb₂Ru₂O_{7-x} electrocatalyst, which resulted in the high surface coverage of FF and hydrogen leading to selective FA formation.

For scaling up of the electrode to enhance FA and HF formation rates, a batch electrochemical reactor was fabricated in which thermally treated large surface area (100 cm²) 3D-graphite felt cathode yielded the HF formation rate and HF selectivity as 5.2 ± 0.16 mmol h⁻¹, and $65.7 \pm 1.9\%$ HF, respectively with a 97.8% conversion in 3 h of ECH. A silver deposited Ni-foam cathode (100 cm²) was employed in a fabricated continuous flow (flow rate = 10 mL min⁻¹)

Abstract

electrochemical reactor to obtain $10.5 \pm 0.5 \text{ mmol h}^{-1}$ FA formation rate and $78.2 \pm 2.1\%$ FA selectivity. Furthermore, the solar illumination reduced the electrical energy requirement as a photoelectrochemical cell (Cu-NPNi/NF|TiO₂) depicted a lower applied bias to attain a FA formation rate comparable to that achieved from an electrochemical cell (Cu-NPNi/NF|Pt). The FF ECH was paired with photoelectrochemical oxidation of FF to coproduce FA at cathode and FU, FN at photoanode validating the feasibility of solar illumination utilization in biomass conversion. Overall, FA and HF produced from FF ECH had high formation rates and a competitive market pricing, which could be scaled-up and commercialized by the industries.

सार

जैवभार-व्युत्पन्न फरफुरल (एफएफ) बहुलक, औषधि और जैव-ईंधन उद्योगों में उनके उपयोग के लिए फरफ्यूरिल अल्कोहल (एफए), हाइड्रोफ्यूरोइन (एचएफ), फ्यूरोइक एसिड (एफयू), और 2,5 एच-फुरानोन (एफएन) जैसे रसायनों में बदल जाता है। एफएफ का विद्युतरासायनिक हाइड्रोजनीकरण (वि.रा.ह.) अधिशोषित हाइड्रोजन के उत्पादन, परिवेश के तापमान-दबाव की स्थिति और नवीकरणीय ऊर्जा से उत्पन्न विद्युत ऊर्जा के उपयोग के कारण एक आकर्षक प्रक्रिया है।

इसमें, क्षारीय माध्यम में एफएफ वि.रा.ह. ने एफए और एचएफ का उत्पादन किया, और Cu, Pt और Ni-Foam (NF, 10 सेमी²) विद्युतउत्प्रेरक पर उनकी चयनात्मकता से पता चला कि उनकी उत्पादन अधिशोषित हाइड्रोजन की उपलब्धता पर निर्भर थी, जो बदले में विद्युतउत्प्रेरक की पसंद और लागू क्षमता के साथ भिन्न थी। एक सह-विद्युतनिक्षेपण Ni-Cu इलेक्ट्रोड से Cu की नक्काशी, इसके बाद Cu के पुनः स्थिति ने Cu सूक्ष्मचदर का निर्माण किया, जिसे Cu-NPNi/NF कहा जाता है। NF के लिए Cu- सूक्ष्मचदर और द्विधातु Ni-Cu के गठन के परिणामस्वरूप Cu, Pt और NF की तुलना में एफए और एचएफ गठन दरों में वृद्धि हुई। चूंकि क्षारीय माध्यम ने विद्युतउत्प्रेरक के प्रकार के लिए दायरे को चौड़ा किया, धातु-ऑक्साइड (In₂O₃, Co₃O₄, Pb₂Ru₂O_{7-x}) विद्युतउत्प्रेरक का उपयोग करके एफएफ वि.रा.ह. का अध्ययन किया गया। प्रयोगात्मक और सैद्धांतिक अध्ययनों के माध्यम से, हमने प्रदर्शित किया कि प्रतिस्पर्धी फरफुरल और हाइड्रोजन सोखना प्रक्रियाओं की बाध्यकारी ऊर्जा और संग्रह ने एचएफ (एस_{एफए} / एचएफ) पर एफए की चयनात्मकता निर्धारित की। लैंगमुइर-हिंशेलवुड तंत्र को एफएफ वि.रा.ह. के दौरान विद्युतउत्प्रेरक P'-Pb₂Ru₂O_{7-x} के साथ शामिल पाया गया था, जिसके परिणामस्वरूप एफएफ और हाइड्रोजन की उच्च सतह संग्रह हुई जिससे चयनात्मक एफए गठन हुआ।

एफए और एचएफ गठन दरों को बढ़ाने के लिए विद्युतउत्प्रेरक को स्केल करने के लिए, एक गुट विद्युतरासायनिक उपकरण बनाया गया था जिसमें तापीय रूप से बनाए गए बड़े सतह क्षेत्र (100 सेमी²) 3 डी-ग्रेफाइट महसूस कैथोड ने एचएफ गठन दर और एचएफ चयनात्मकता को क्रमशः 5.2 ± 0.16 मिलीमोल घंटा⁻¹, और $65.7 \pm 1.9\%$ एचएफ के रूप में उत्पन्न किया, जिसमें वि.रा.ह के 3 घंटे में 97.7% रूपांतरण था। एक चांदी जमा NF कैथोड (100 सेमी²) को 10.5 ± 0.5 मिलीमोल घंटा⁻¹ एफए गठन दर और $78.2 \pm 2.1\%$ एफए चयनात्मकता प्राप्त करने के लिए एक निर्मित निरंतर प्रवाह (प्रवाह दर = 10 मिलीलीटर मिनिट⁻¹) विद्युतरासायनिक उपकरण में नियोजित किया गया था। इसके अलावा, सौर रोशनी ने प्रकाशिक विद्युत् रसायनिकी उपकरण (Cu-NPNi|TiO₂) के रूप में विद्युत ऊर्जा की आवश्यकता को कम कर दिया और विद्युतरासायनिक उपकरण (Cu-NPNi / NF) से प्राप्त एफए गठन दर को प्राप्त करने के लिए कम लागू पूर्वाग्रह को दर्शाया। जैवभार रूपांतरण में सौर रोशनी के उपयोग की व्यवहार्यता को मान्य करने के लिए एफएफ वि.रा.ह को कैथोड और एफयू, एफएन में एफएन को सह-उत्पादन करने के लिए एफएफ के प्रकाशिक विद्युत् रसायनिकी ऑक्सीकरण के साथ जोड़ा गया था। कुल मिलाकर, एफएफ वि.रा.ह से उत्पादित एफए और एचएफ में उच्च गठन दर और एक प्रतिस्पर्धी बाजार मूल्य निर्धारण था, जिसे उद्योगों द्वारा बढ़ाया और व्यावसायीकरण किया जा सकता था।

Table of Contents

Title	Page No.
<i>Certificate</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>संर</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Table of contents</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of figures</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>List of tables</i>	<i>xviii</i>
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	<i>xix</i>
Chapter 1: Introduction	1-12
1.1 Biomass: An alternative energy source	1
1.2 Biomass conversion	2
1.3 Biomass-derived FF	3
1.4 Value-added chemicals from biomass-derived FF	4
1.5 Applications of generated value-added chemicals	4
1.6 Electrocatalytic hydrogenation of FF	5
1.7 Mechanism of FF ECH	7
1.8 Electrode scale-up for FF ECH	8
1.9 Pairing of FF ECH with photoelectrochemical oxidation	10
Chapter 2: Literature Review	13-30
2.1 FF conversion into value-added chemicals using catalytic process	13
2.2 FF ECH and determinants affecting FF conversion	16
2.2.1 Electrocatalysts, electrolyte pH and its morphology	16

Table of Contents

2.2.2 Applied potential	20
2.2.3 Initial FF concentration	21
2.2.4 Electrolysis duration	21
2.3 Electrochemical reactor and the use of 3D-electrodes	22
2.4 Solar illumination for photoelectrochemical oxidation paired with FF ECH	25
2.5 Research gap	27
Chapter 3: Experimental	31-47
3.1 Chemicals	31
3.2 Electrocatalyst preparation	31
3.2.1 Preparation of nanoporous Cu-Ni electrocatalyst	31
3.2.2 Preparation of P'-In ₂ O ₃	32
3.3.3 Preparation of V _o -In ₂ O ₃	33
3.3.4 Preparation of P'-Co ₃ O ₄	33
3.3.5 Preparation of V _o -Co ₃ O ₄	34
3.3.6 Preparation of P'-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x}	34
3.3.7 Preparation of V _o 1-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} , and V _o 2-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x}	34
3.3.8 Preparation of T-GF, T-GF-Co ₃ O ₄ , and ed-Ag/NF	34
3.3.9 Synthesis of TiO ₂ NTs photoanode	35
3.4 Physical Characterization	35
3.5 Preparation of working electrode for metal oxide and O _{vac} -metal oxide electrocatalysts	36
3.6 Electrochemical Analysis	37
3.7 DFT calculations	40
3.8 Fabrication of electrochemical reactor	41
3.8.1 Electrochemical batch reactor for HF formation	41

Table of Contents

3.8.2 Electrochemical continuous flow reactor for FA formation	43
3.9 Product analysis	44
3.10 Electrical energy saving efficiency	47
Chapter 4: Electrocatalytic hydrogenation of furfural using non-noble-metal electrocatalysts in alkaline medium	48-67
4.1. Results and Discussion	48
4.1.1 Preparation and optimization of electrocatalysts	48
4.1.2 Electrocatalytic hydrogenation of furfural in alkaline electrolyte	53
4.1.3 Correlation of % selectivity and rate of formation for various electrodes	62
4.2 Conclusion	66
Chapter 5: Tuning product selectivity during electrocatalytic hydrogenation of biomass-derived furfural through metal-oxide oxygen-vacancy control	68-87
5.1 Results and Discussion	68
5.1.1 Synthesis and structure characterization	68
5.1.2 Electrochemical characterization	74
5.1.3 Binding energy and orientation of reactants on electrocatalyst surfaces	77
5.1.4 Discussion	79
5.1.5 FF ECH kinetics study with P'-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} electrocatalyst	81
5.2 Conclusion	86
Chapter 6: Electrode scale-up and the fabrication of batch and continuous electrochemical reactors to enhance the product formation rate	88-100
6.1 Results and Discussion	88
6.1.1 Electrochemical characterization of electrocatalysts	88
6.1.2 Physical characterization of electrocatalysts	90
6.1.3 HF formation through FF ECH using HC800	92

Table of Contents

6.1.4 FA formation through FF ECH using EHG	96
6.2 Conclusion	100
Chapter 7: Electrocatalytic hydrogenation of furfural paired with photoelectrochemical oxidation of water and furfural in the batch and flow cells	101-117
7.1 Results and discussion	101
7.1.1 Physical characterization of TiO ₂ NTs photoanode	101
7.1.2 Furfural electrocatalytic hydrogenation with electrochemical and photoelectrochemical water oxidation	103
7.1.3 Paired furfural electrocatalytic hydrogenation with TEMPO mediated oxidation in a photoelectrochemical cell	106
7.1.4 Flow photoelectrochemical cell	113
7.2 Conclusions	116
Chapter 8: Summary and future direction	118-122
8.1 Summary	118
8.2 Future direction	120
References	123
Resume of Author	150

List of Figures

Figure No.	Title	Page No.
Figure 1.1	Biomass sources used for energy applications	2
Figure 1.2	Basic design of H-cell performing FF ECH	6
Figure 1.3	The mechanism of FF ECH to generate FA and HF in alkaline electrolyte.	9
Figure 1.4	The mechanism of FF ECH paired with FF PECO	10
Figure 1.5	Half-cell reactions at photoanode	11
Figure 1.6	FF ECH paired with TEMPO mediated FF PECO	11
Figure 2.1	Conversion of FF into value-added chemicals	14
Figure 2.2	Product selectivity at various operational parameters (organic solvent (acetonitrile), electrolysis duration, initial FF concentration, and pH of electrolyte) for FF ECH at Cu catalyst.	17
Figure 2.3	Strategy to perform FF ECH in flow electrochemical reactor using 3D-electrodes	23
Figure 2.4	(a) TEMPO mediated HMF oxidation at n-type semiconductor photoanode paired with HER at metal cathode. (b) TEMPO mediated HMF oxidation at metal anode paired with HER at metal cathode	26
Figure 3.1	A photograph of the RDE setup	37
Figure 3.2	H-cell used for FF ECH for the formation of FA and H	37
Figure 3.3	A Schematic diagram and a photograph of batch and continuous flow PEC	40
Figure 3.4	A Schematic diagram and a photograph of HC800 electrochemical reactor	42
Figure 3.5	A Schematic diagram of the electro-hydrogenator (EHG)	44
Figure 3.6	A photograph of the electro-hydrogenator (EHG)	44

Figure 4.1	Cyclic voltammetry for reduction and oxidation of (a) Ni using 0.6 M NiSO ₄ .6H ₂ O with 0.5 M H ₃ BO ₃ (Ni (II)), (b) Cu using 0.02 M CuSO ₄ .5H ₂ O with 0.5 M H ₃ BO ₃ (Cu (II)), (c) Ni-Cu using 0.6 M NiSO ₄ .6H ₂ O, 0.02 M CuSO ₄ .5H ₂ O with 0.5 M H ₃ BO ₃ (Ni (II) + Cu (II)). Inset figures are respective experiments with small potential window. (d) Chronoamperometry using Ni (II) + Cu (II) electrolyte for 40 min at -0.85 V followed by 80 min at 0.5 V. Q _c is charge involved during reduction and Q _a is charge involved during oxidation. Substrate: Ni-foam, scan rate: 50 mV s ⁻¹	49
Figure 4.2	SEM of (a) 0.01 10 Ni-Cu/ NF, (b) 0.01 10 NPNi/ NF, (c) 0.02 40 Ni-Cu/ NF. EDX of (d) 0.02 40 Ni-Cu/ NF, (e) 0.02 40 NPNi/ NF (NPNi/ NF), (f) 0.02 15 Cu – 0.02 40 NPNi/ NF (Cu–NPNi/ NF). (g) Atomic % vs. Elements for the samples prepared by 40 min of Ni–Cu deposition at -0.85 V (-0.85 V, 40 min) and -0.85 V, 40 min samples followed by 80 min of oxidation at 0.5 V using 1 M NiSO ₄ .6H ₂ O, 0.02 M CuSO ₄ .5H ₂ O with 0.5 M H ₃ BO ₃ as electrolyte.	50
Figure 4.3	Polarization curve using NF, and x y NPNi/ NF as working electrode and 0.5 M NaOH as electrolyte at the scan rate of 50 mV s ⁻¹ , where x is concentration of CuSO ₄ .5H ₂ O in Ni-Cu electroplating solution, and y is Ni-Cu co-electrodeposition duration.	51
Figure 4.4	Cyclic voltammograms for (a) NF, (b) NPNi/NF, (c) Cu-NPNi/NF at the scan rates of 20 mV s ⁻¹ , 50 mV s ⁻¹ , 100 mV s ⁻¹ , 200 mV s ⁻¹ using 0.5 M NaOH as electrolyte. (d) Relation between current density and scan rate.	52
Figure 4.5	Rate of formation of furfuryl alcohol (R _{FA}) and hydrofuroin (R _{HF}) at -1.45 V after 1 h of electrolysis using 0.5 M NaOH + 50 mM Furfural as electrolyte and 0.02 z Cu – 0.02 40 NPNi/ NF as working electrode, where z is the Cu electrodeposition duration on 0.02 40 NPNi/ NF.	52
Figure 4.6	SEM images for (a) Pristine Ni-foam (NF), (b) NPNi/NF, (c) Cu–NPNi/NF. (d) XRD of Cu-NPNi/NF. Elemental mapping of (e) NPNi/NF, (f) Cu–NPNi/NF	53
Figure 4.7	(a) ¹ H-NMR spectra, (b) ¹³ C-NMR spectra of FA and HF. HF was present in the form of enantiomeric mixture which is represented by atom numbers without prime (') and with prime	55

List of Figures

(λ) in the spectra. Applied potential: -1.45 V, electrolysis duration: 3 h, Electrolyte: 0.5 M NaOH + 50 mM FF

- Figure 4.8** (a) Rate of formation of FA (R_{FA}), (b) Rate of formation of HF (R_{HF}), (c) % Conversion of FF at potentials: -1.15 V; -1.25 V; -1.35 V; -1.45 V, working electrodes: NF, Cu, Pt, NPNi/NF, and Cu-NPNi/NF, electrolyte: 0.5 M NaOH + 50 mM FF, and electrolysis duration: 1 h. (d) Change in concentration of FF, FA and HF with respect to time for blank (B, without potential) and with electrolysis (E+B) at -1.45 V using Cu-NPNi/NF. 0.5 M NaOH + 50 mM FF was used as electrolyte for all the reaction conditions. **56**
- Figure 4.9** Nafion 117 membrane (a) pristine, (b) after 3 h of furfural adsorption at the intersection of anode and cathode compartment of H-cell **60**
- Figure 4.10** Change in furfural concentration in anode compartment with respect to time **60**
- Figure 4.11** (a) R_{FA} and R_{HF} , (b) % Conversion of FF for 5-consecutive runs of FF ECH. (c) XRD pattern before and after 5-consecutive runs of FF ECH. (d) SEM image of electrocatalyst after 5-consecutive runs. Electrocatalyst: Cu-NPNi/NF, applied potential: -1.45 V, electrolysis duration of each run: 1 h, electrolyte: 0.5 M NaOH + 50 mM FF. **61**
- Figure 4.12** XPS spectra of Ni-2p for (a) NF, (b) NF after FF ECH (NF, FF), (c) NPNi/NF, (d) NPNi/NF after FF ECH (NPNi/NF, FF), (e) Cu-NPNi/NF, (f) Cu-NPNi/NF after FF ECH (Cu-NPNi/NF, FF). FF ECH operating conditions: -1.45 V, 1 h, 50 mM FF + 0.5 M NaOH **63**
- Figure 4.13** (XPS spectra of O-1s for (a) NF, (b) NF after FF ECH (NF, FF), (c) NPNi/NF, (d) NPNi/NF after FF ECH (NPNi/NF, FF), (e) Cu-NPNi/NF, (f) Cu-NPNi/NF after FF ECH (Cu-NPNi/NF, FF). FF ECH operating conditions: -1.45 V, 1 h, 50 mM FF + 0.5 M NaOH. **64**
- Figure 4.14** XPS spectra of Cu-2p for (a) Cu-pure from Cu sheet (b) Cu-NPNi/ NF before reaction (c) Cu-NPNi/ NF after FF reduction (Cu-NPNi/ NF, FF) **65**
- Figure 5.1** XRD pattern of P'-In₂O₃, V₀-In₂O₃, P'-Co₃O₄, V₀-Co₃O₄, P'-Pb₂Ru₂O_{7-x}, V₀1-Pb₂Ru₂O_{7-x}, V₀2-Pb₂Ru₂O_{7-x} electrocatalysts **69**

List of Figures

Figure 5.2	XPS spectra of P'-In ₂ O ₃ , and V _o -In ₂ O ₃	70
Figure 5.3	XPS spectra of P'-Co ₃ O ₄ , and V _o -Co ₃ O ₄	71
Figure 5.4	XPS spectra of P'-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} , V _o 1-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} , V _o 2-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x}	72
Figure 5.5	(a) LSV of P'-In ₂ O ₃ , V _o -In ₂ O ₃ , P'-Co ₃ O ₄ , V _o -Co ₃ O ₄ , P'-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} , V _o 1-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} , V _o 2-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} electrocatalysts in the presence of NaOH (0.5 M NaOH) and NaOH+FF (0.5 M NaOH with 50 mM FF) electrolyte. RDE setup, applied potential: -0.5 V to -1.5 V vs. Ag/AgCl/sat KCl, scan rate: 20 mV sec ⁻¹ . (b) The correlation of applied potential to generate -10 mA cm ⁻² ($\eta_{J=-10 \text{ mA cm}^{-2}}$) in NaOH electrolyte with the hydrogen binding energy (BE _H) determined from DFT	75
Figure 5.6	(a) Selectivity of FA over HF (S _{FA/HF}), (b) Rate of formation of furfuryl alcohol (R _{FA}) and % furfural conversion (%C _{FF}) for P'-In ₂ O ₃ , V _o -In ₂ O ₃ , P'-Co ₃ O ₄ , V _o -Co ₃ O ₄ , P'-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} , V _o 1-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} , V _o 2-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} electrocatalysts. H-cell, applied potential: -1.45 V vs. Ag/AgCl/sat KCl, electrolysis duration: 1 h, electrolyte: 0.5 M NaOH with 50 mM FF	76
Figure 5.7	(a) Vertical FF orientation, (b) Horizontal FF orientation on the catalyst surface	76
Figure 5.8	Optimized adsorbed furfural structures, bond lengths between metal and -O moiety of -CHO group, and furfural binding energies (BE _{FF}) on (a) In ₂ O ₃ (222), (b) V _o -In ₂ O ₃ (222), (c) Co ₃ O ₄ (111), (d) V _o -Co ₃ O ₄ (111), (e) Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O ₇ (111), (f) V _o -Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O ₇ (111) surfaces	77
Figure 5.9	Adsorbed FF structures and corresponding FF binding energies (BE _{FF}) on (a, b) In ₂ O ₃ (111), (c, d) V _o -In ₂ O ₃ (111), (e) Co ₃ O ₄ (111), (f) V _o -Co ₃ O ₄ (111), (g) Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O ₇ (111), (h) V _o -Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O ₇ (111) surfaces	78
Figure 5.10	The changes with the applied potentials in (a) % Furfural conversion (%C _{FF}); (b) Total current density (J _T), and partial current densities for furfuryl alcohol (J _{FA}) and hydrofuroin (J _{HF}); (c) Rate of formation and % selectivity of FA and HF (R _{FA} , %S _{FA} , R _{HF} , %S _{HF}). H-cell, electrocatalyst: P'-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} , applied potential: -0.9 V, -1.15 V, -1.30 V, -1.45 V vs. Ag/AgCl/sat KCl, electrolysis duration: 1 h, electrolyte: 0.5 M NaOH with 50 mM FF	82

List of Figures

Figure 5.11	(a) Concentration profile of FF, FA, HF. (b) Determination of reaction order by relating concentrations of FF (C_{FF}) at $t=t$, and $t=0$ with time. H-cell, electrocatalyst: $P'-Pb_2Ru_2O_{7-x}$, applied potential: -1.45 V vs. Ag/AgCl/sat KCl, electrolyte: 0.5 M NaOH with 50 mM FF	83
Figure 6.1	LSV for UT-GF and T-GF electrode, electrolyte: 0.5 M NaOH, scan rate: 50 mV sec ⁻¹	89
Figure 6.2	LSV for OER determination using various $Co(OAc)_2$ loading as x mg $Co(OAc)_2$ cm _{GF} ⁻³ ($0 < x < 420$), electrolyte: 0.5 M NaOH, scan rate: 50 mV sec ⁻¹	90
Figure 6.3	XRD pattern of T-GF- Co_3O_4	91
Figure 6.4	(a) SEM, (b-d) EDX of T-GF- Co_3O_4	92
Figure 6.5	(a) XRD pattern, (b) SEM image, (c) EDX mapping of ed-Ag/NF	93
Figure 6.6	R_{HF} determination for different electrode combination, applied bias: 5V, electrolysis duration: 1h, catholyte: 100 mM FF with 0.5 M NaOH, anolyte: 0.5 M NaOH	94
Figure 6.7	(a) R_{HF} and % S_{HF} were determined using catholyte (x mM with 0.5 M NaOH, $10 < x < 100$), electrolysis duration: 1 h, applied bias: 5 V; (b) R_{HF} was determined at various applied bias, electrolysis duration: 1 h, catholyte: 100 mM FF with 0.5 M NaOH; (c) The concentration of FF and HF with respect to time, applied bias: 5 V, catholyte: 100 mM FF with 0.5 M NaOH; (d) HPLC chromatogram obtained before and after FF ECH using the reaction conditions: applied bias: 5 V, catholyte: 100 mM FF with 0.5 M NaOH, electrolysis duration: 3 h	95
Figure 6.8	(a) R_{FA} and % S_{FA} were determined using catholyte (x mM with 0.5 M NaOH, $10 < x < 100$), flow rate: 5 mL min ⁻¹ , applied bias: 7 V; (b) R_{FA} was determined at various applied bias, flow rate: 5 mL min ⁻¹ , catholyte: 25 mM FF with 0.5 M NaOH; (c) R_{FA} was determined by varying the flow rate, applied bias: 7 V, catholyte: 25 mM FF with 0.5 M NaOH; (d) HPLC chromatogram obtained before and after FF ECH using the reaction conditions: applied bias: 7 V, catholyte: 25 mM FF with 0.5 M NaOH, flow rate: 10 mL min ⁻¹	97

Figure 7.1	(a) FE-SEM images (magnified view in inset); (b) EDX elemental mapping and spectrum; (c) XRD pattern; (d) UV-Visible absorption spectra of TiO ₂ NTs photoanode	102
Figure 7.2	X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy of (a) Ti 2p; (b) O 1s region of TiO ₂ NTs.	103
Figure 7.3	(a) Linear sweep voltammetry for electrochemical cell (EC), photoelectrochemical cell in presence of light (PEC-light), photoelectrochemical cell in absence of light (PEC-dark), scan rate was 20 mV sec ⁻¹ ; (b) Rate of formation of furfuryl alcohol (R _{FA}) at an applied bias of 0.5 V, 1 V, 1.5 V, 2 V using EC and PEC for 4 h; percent conversion of furfural (%C _{FF}) and % yield of furfuryl alcohol (%Y _{FA}) for 4 h in (c) EC at 1 V, 2 V; and (d) PEC at 1 V. Catholyte: NaBi+FF, anolyte: NaBi. EC: Cu-Ni/NF cathode with Pt anode. PEC: Cu-Ni/NF cathode with TiO ₂ NTs photoanode	104
Figure 7.4	Photoelectrochemical cell (PEC) (a) Linear sweep voltammetry using anolytes at the scan rate of 20 mV sec ⁻¹ ; (b) Chronoamperometry. Anolytes: NaBi, NaBi+FF, and NaBi+FF+7.5 mM TEMPO, NaBi+FF+22.5 mM TEMPO. Catholyte: NaBi+FF. Reaction condition: applied bias of 1 V for 4 h for chronoamperometry. PEC: Cu-Ni/NF cathode with TiO ₂ NTs photoanode	106
Figure 7.5	Preparative PEC, photoanode The variable FF concentration with anolyte (NaBi+x' mM FF+7.5 mM TEMPO), catholyte (NaBi+x' mM FF), and 1 V applied bias to determine (a) FE _{FU} , FE _{FN} , I _{FU} , I _{FN} ; (b) R _{FU} , R _{FN} ; (c) %C _{FF} , %Y _{FU} , %Y _{FN} . The variable applied bias with anolyte (NaBi+FF+7.5 mM TEMPO) and catholyte (NaBi+FF) to determine (d) FE _{FU} , FE _{FN} , I _{FU} , I _{FN} ; (e) R _{FU} , R _{FN} ; (f) %C _{FF} , %Y _{FU} , %Y _{FN} . The variable TEMPO concentration with anolyte (NaBi+FF+x mM TEMPO), catholyte (NaBi+FF), and 1 V applied bias to determine (g) FE _{FU} , FE _{FN} , I _{FU} , I _{FN} ; (h) R _{FU} , R _{FN} ; (i) %C _{FF} , %Y _{FU} , %Y _{FN} . Electrolysis duration: 4 h. PEC: Cu-Ni/NF cathode with TiO ₂ NTs photoanode	107
Figure 7.6	Preparative PEC, cathode The variable FF concentration with anolyte (NaBi+x' mM FF+7.5 mM TEMPO), catholyte (NaBi+x' mM FF), and 1 V applied bias to determine (a) FE _{FA} , I _{FA} ; (b) R _{FA} ; (c) %C _{FF} , %Y _{FA} . The variable applied bias with anolyte (NaBi+FF+7.5 mM TEMPO) and catholyte (NaBi+FF)	110

to determine (d) FE_{FA} , I_{FA} ; (e) R_{FA} ; (f) $\%C_{FF}$, $\%Y_{FA}$. The variable TEMPO concentration with anolyte (NaBi+FF+x mM TEMPO), catholyte (NaBi+FF), and 1 V applied bias to determine (g) FE_{FA} , I_{FA} ; (h) R_{FA} ; (i) $\%C_{FF}$, $\%Y_{FA}$. Electrolysis duration: 4 h. PEC: Cu-Ni/NF cathode with TiO_2 NTs photoanode

Figure 7.7	Electrolytes NaBi, NaBi+FF, and NaBi+FF+7.5 mM TEMPO used in a 3-electrode undivided PEC to determine (a) EIS (solar illumination); (b) OCP measurement (solar illumination); (c) CV measurement at 20 mV sec ⁻¹ (dark); d. C_{dl} (dark)	112
Figure 7.8	Flow photoelectrochemical cell (flow PEC) (a) Percent furfural conversion ($\%C_{FF}$) in anode and cathode compartments; (b) Rate of generation of furoic acid (R_{FU}) in anode compartment; (c) Furfuryl alcohol (R_{FA}) in cathode compartment. Flow rate: 0.3, 1.5, and 7.5 mL min ⁻¹ . Catholyte: NaBi+FF, anolyte: NaBi+FF+7.5 mM TEMPO. Applied bias: 1 V. PEC: Cu-Ni/NF cathode with TiO_2 NTs photoanode	114
Figure 7.9	Chronoamperometry in a flow PEC at the flow rate of 0.3, 1.5, 7.5 mL min ⁻¹ . Catholyte: NaBi+FF, anolyte: NaBi+FF+7.5 mM TEMPO. Reaction condition: applied bias of 1 V. PEC: Cu-Ni/NF cathode and TiO_2 NTs photoanode	116
Figure 8.1	A Schematic of integrated biomass digester and electrochemical reactor for on-site biomass conversion into the value-added chemicals	121

List of Tables

Table No.	Title	Page No.
Table 2.1	State-of-art technology flow sheet and operational parameters for the formation of FA, HF, FU, and FN from FF used in industries	15
Table 2.2	FA and HF formation through FF ECH reported in the state-of-art technology	24
Table 4.1	Elemental concentration of Ni, Cu, O obtained by EDXS and XPS for NF, NPNi/NF, and Cu–NPNi/NF before and after FF ECH	54
Table 4.2	% Selectivity for FA (% S_{FA}) and HF (% S_{HF}) analyzed using 50 mM FF with 0.5 M NaOH electrolyte along with electrolysis duration of 1 h	54
Table 4.3	Comparison of FF conversion along with the rate of formation (R , $\mu\text{mol h}^{-1} \text{cm}^{-2}$), and selectivity (S , %) for FA and HF at different initial FF concentration	58
Table 4.4	FF ECH analyzed using Nafion [®] coated Cu-NPNi/NF. (R , $\mu\text{mol h}^{-1} \text{cm}^{-2}$) selectivity (S , %)	59
Table 5.1	Parameters calculated from XRD and XPS for P'-In ₂ O ₃ , V _o -In ₂ O ₃ , P'-Co ₃ O ₄ , V _o -Co ₃ O ₄ , P'-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} , V _{o1} -Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} , V _{o2} -Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} electrocatalysts	73
Table 5.2	Comparison of FA formation from FF ECH using P'-Pb ₂ Ru ₂ O _{7-x} electrocatalyst with the FA formation via thermal catalytic hydrogenation in the state-of-art literatures	85
Table 7.1	Electrical energy saving efficiency comparing EC and PEC	105

List of Abbreviations

ECH	Electrocatalytic hydrogenation
FF	Furfural
FA	Furfuryl alcohol
HF	Hydrofuroin
FU	Furoic acid
FN	2(5H)-Furanone
NF	Nickel foam
HER	Hydrogen evolution reaction
TCH	Thermal catalytic hydrogenation
GF	Graphite felt
T-GF	Thermal treated GF
UT-GF	Untreated GF
OER	Oxygen evolution reaction
HC800	Batch electrochemical reactor
EHG	Electro-hydrogenator
EC	Electrochemical cell
PEC	Photoelectrochemical cell
TEMPO	2,2,6,6-Tetramethylpiperidinyloxyl

List of Abbreviations

PECO	Photoelectrochemical oxidation
CV	Cyclic voltammetry
LSV	Linear sweep voltametry
NMR	Nuclear magnetic resonance
HPLC	High-performance liquid chromatography
ECSA	Electrochemical active surface area
SEM	Scanning electron microscopy
XRD	X-ray diffraction
XPS	X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy
EDX	Energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy
R_{FA}	Rate of formation of FA
R_{HF}	Rate of formation of HF
R_{FU}	Rate of formation of FU
R_{FN}	Rate of formation of FN
% S_{FA}	Percentage selectivity of FA
% S_{HF}	Percentage selectivity of HF
% C_{FF}	Percent conversion of FF
$S_{FA/HF}$	Selectivity of FA over HF
H_{ads}	Adsorbed hydrogen
FF_{ads}	Adsorbed furfural

List of Abbreviations

θ_{FF}	Surface coverage by FF_{ads}
θ_{H}	Surface coverage by H_{ads}
BE_{FF}	Binding energy of FF_{ads}
BE_{H}	Binding energy of H_{ads}
O_{vac}	Oxygen-vacancy
J_{T}	Total current density
J_{FA}	Partial current density for FF
J_{HF}	Partial current density for HF
% Y	Percentage yield
η_{s}	Electrical energy saving efficiency