

NANOSTRUCTURED COMPOSITES OF
MOLYBDENUM-BASED COMPOUNDS
($\text{Mo}_2\text{C}/\text{Mo}_2\text{N}/\text{MoS}_2/\text{MoP}$) AND GRAPHENE AS
ELECTROCATALYSTS FOR HYDROGEN
EVOLUTION REACTIONS

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INDIA
OCTOBER 2016

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ELECTROCATALYSTS FOR HYDROGEN
EVOLUTION REACTIONS

by

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Department of Chemistry

Submitted

in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

to the



Indian Institute of Technology Delhi
October 2016

Dedicated to my Parents and Teachers

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled, “**Nanostructured Composites of Molybdenum-based Compounds ($\text{Mo}_2\text{C}/\text{Mo}_2\text{N}/\text{MoS}_2/\text{MoP}$) and Graphene as Electrocatalysts for Hydrogen Evolution Reactions**” being submitted by **Mr. Kasinath Ojha** to the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** in Chemistry, is a record of bonafide research work carried out by him. Mr. Kasinath Ojha has worked under our guidance and supervision, and has fulfilled the requirements for the submission of this thesis, which to our knowledge has reached the requisite standard.

The results contained in this dissertation have not been submitted in part or full, to any other university or institute for award of any degree or diploma.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My doctoral dissertation and the research work would not have been possible without the support and help of many people. First and foremost, I am extremely grateful to my supervisor, Prof. Ashok Kumar Ganguli, for giving me the opportunity to work in this ever evolving and highly demanding field of energy. I also thank him for his patience, constant guidance, support and suggestions throughout this journey. I have always been motivated and inspired by his enthusiasm towards science. I am amazed to see his sincerity, dedication and punctuality even after achieving so much in his life. I am also thankful to my co-supervisor Dr. Pramit K. Chowdhury for his brilliant insights and suggestions in various research problems. I am grateful to the Head, Prof Ravi Shankar and former Head's Prof A. K. Singh and Prof. A. Ramanan, Department of Chemistry, IIT Delhi for providing the necessary facilities in the department. I also thank NRF IIT Delhi and INST Mohali for the State of Art research facilities. I am thankful to all the non-teaching staff members of the department for their kind help and cooperation.

I am extremely thankful to Dr. Hristo Kolev (Institute of Catalysis, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) for helping me with the XPS measurements of my Mo₂C and MoP samples. I would also like to thank Dr. John Moulder and Dr. Sankar Raman (Physical Electronics, USA) for XPS measurements of Mo₂N sample. I am extremely grateful to Prof. Shobhana Narasimhan, Debdipto Acharya, Sourav Mondal and Nisha Mammen (TSU, JNCASR, Bangalore) for the DFT calculations and HBE analysis of Mo₂C-Mo₂N composites and doped systems. I would like to thank Prof. Vijayamohanan K Pillai (Director, CECRI) for valuable discussions on electrochemistry of Mo₂N. I also want to thank Prof. S. Sampath (IPC, IISC Bangalore) for helping with specific capacitance measurements and discussions.

I am thankful to Dr. P. P. Ingole for allowing me to access his Lab and also for several fruitful discussions on my research projects.

I wish to express my gratitude for my seniors and colleagues, Dr. Saroj, Dr. Jahangeer, Dr. Sonalika, Dr. Aparna Dr. Menaka, Dr. Masood, Dr. Jai Prakash, Dr. Aditya, Dr. Parthsarthy, Dr. Oruganti, Dr. Debashree, Dr. Sunita, Dr. Soma, Dr. Sharmila, Neha, Nibedita, Zeba, Nitin, Vaishali, for making the lab environment cordial and for helping me whenever required. I am really grateful to my senior-cum-friends Dr. Aparna Ganguly, Dr. Debashree Das, Dr. Mrinmoyee Basu and Dr. Manu Sharma for their invaluable support both professionally and personally. I thank Dr. Bharat, Dr. Arabinda, Dr. Gohil, Soumen, Sandeep and Anjali for making the Lab and IIT life more fun and memorable.

Thanks to my friends specially Soumen Sinhababu, Jayanta Kundu, Sourav Sarkar and Dr. Ajanta Barh for being there with me throughout this journey. I thank Sourav for encouraging me for everything. I owe everything to my family Mr. Binay Krishna Ojha, Mrs. Sandhya Ojha, and my brother Sukhen. Without your support and encouragement it would have not been possible. I also thank our football team the AAFC gang for all the fun and joy during the play. Thanks for making my PhD less boring and more fun. I am sincerely thankful to all those who have helped me in the successful completion of this work. I acknowledge the financial support of UGC, Govt. of India for fellowships.

Kasinath Ojha

ABSTRACT

Two of the outstanding challenges for society are to move towards a clean environment and availability of sufficient energy and interestingly hydrogen is the key to both these challenges. Hence tremendous interest exists on hydrogen generation from electrochemical or photoelectrochemical water splitting. Unlike carbon based fuels, hydrogen having highest energy density per unit mass, is eco-friendly as it produces only water after combustion as a direct fuel or after transformation to electricity in fuel cells. Hydrogen evolution reaction (HER) is a green and renewable process to get hydrogen from electrolysis of water. Among earth abundant non-noble metals, molybdenum-based materials are important for hydrogen evolution reaction because of its low cost, good conductivity and catalytic efficiency.

This thesis deals with composites of Mo based compounds (Mo_2C , Mo_2N , MoS_2 and MoP) with reduced graphene oxide. Electrocatalytic activity and stability of these composites for hydrogen evolution reactions were investigated.

In chapter 2, we have synthesized reduced graphene oxide based composites of Mo_2C rods using carbonization of anilinium complex of molybdenum in inert environment at $750\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$. First a complex was synthesized by reacting aniline with ammonium molybdate at $50\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ in pH of 3.5. For the synthesis of rGO based composites, we used rGO which was synthesized using graphite oxidation followed by thermal exfoliation at $1100\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ for 10 mins. Different amount of rGO was used to get different composites with Mo_2C . The composite samples were marked as MC-G50, MC-G100, MC-G350 and MC-G500 for 50 mg, 100 mg, 350 mg and 500 mg of rGO respectively. We have also used different carbon like activated carbon sheets and graphite to check HER activities of these composites. All

the composites were characterized using powder XRD, TGA and Raman. The structure and morphology of the composites were analyzed using FESEM, TEM and elemental analysis were carried out using XPS and EDAX.

In chapter 3, we have investigated the facile synthesis of different morphologies of Mo₂N using g-C₃N₄ as N-source and have investigated the effect of the g-C₃N₄ loading on the morphology of Mo₂N and their hydrogen evolution activity. We have demonstrated that thin elongated hexagonal sheets of Mo₂N nanoparticles are much better electrocatalyst for hydrogen generation from water than earlier reported on modified Mo₂N based systems. Mo₂N nanostructures were synthesized using anilinium complexation method in presence g-C₃N₄ followed by heating at 700 °C in N₂ atmosphere. Different amount of g-C₃N₄ were used to get various morphologies of Mo₂N nanostructures. These samples were named as MN60, MN100, MN300, MN600 and MN900 for having g-C₃N₄ of 60 mg, 100 mg, 300 mg, 600 mg and 900 mg respectively. Bulk Mo₂N was synthesized by heating ammonium molybdate and guanidium hydrochloride mixture at 700 °C in H₂ atm. All the materials were characterized using powder XRD, TGA, Raman, FESEM and TEM. Elemental analysis was carried out by EDAX and XPS.

In chapter 4, we have investigated in-situ synthesis of Mo₂C-Mo₂N composite nanowires. We have investigated the efficiency and durability for electrochemical hydrogen evolution in acidic medium. We explored the role of carbide and nitride for enhancing the stability and efficiency. In details study of electrochemical hydrogen evolution, it was found that synergistic effect of carbon and nitrogen from Mo₂C and Mo₂N nanostructures in the production of hydrogen from water was responsible for such HER activity. We have shown Mo₂N rich composites having higher N-doped surfaces and interfaces exhibit much higher

electrocatalysis which is supported by the DFT calculations of HBE on N-doped Mo₂C surfaces.

In chapter 5, we have investigated the role of interfaces or heterojunctions in HER activity of composite materials like Mo₂N-MoS₂, and Mo₂N-Mo₂C-MoS₂. The synergistic effect and the role of the interfaces were demonstrated in detail. These composites were synthesized using hydrothermal method followed by annealing at 500 °C in inert atmosphere. Composites were characterized using PXRD, Raman and electron microscopy. In chapter 6, we have synthesized rGO-MoP composites for hydrogen evolution from water in acidic medium. The synthetic mechanism were well characterized and revealed the role of complexation method to stabilize the precursor and to get well interconnected MoP nanocrystals where interparticle interactions play significant role in catalysis as reflected in HER studies. The mechanism of the HER process was investigated in detail using impedance spectroscopy and Tafel slope.

In conclusion, we have observed that MoP is the most efficient and durable electrocatalyst for hydrogen evolution reactions compared to other Mo-based compounds e.g. Mo₂N, Mo₂C and MoS₂. Our finding reveals that the electrocatalytic efficiency was observed in order of MoP > Mo₂C > MoS₂ > Mo₂N. It was found that the anions played very crucial role in the electrocatalytic activity for HER as the electronegativity of the anions changes in the order of P (2.19) < C (2.55) < S (2.58) < N (3.04). New composites and doped systems containing hetero anions like MP|S, MS|N and MP|C (M= Mo, Ni, Co, Fe, Cu etc.) can be investigated for various electrochemical reactions and conversions. Transition metal doped systems can also be explored.

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NOTATIONS/ABBREVIATIONS

Å	Angstrom
°C	Centigrade
µm	Micrometer
cm	centimeter
h	Hours
PXRD	Powder X-ray diffraction
TEM	Transmission Electron Microscopy
FESEM	Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscopy
EDX	Energy Dispersive X-ray Analysis
TGA	Thermogravimetric analysis
FTIR	Furrier transformed Infra-red spectroscopy
CV	Cyclic Voltammetry
LSV	Linear Sweep Voltammetry
ECSA	Electrochemically Active Surface Area
EIS	Electrochemical Impedance Spectroscopy
HER	Hydrogen Evolution Reaction
OER	Oxygen Evolution Reaction
RHE	Reversible Hydrogen Electrode
j_0	Exchange Current Density
GCE	Glassy Carbon Electrode
CPE	Constant Phase Element
C_{dl}	Double layer Capacitance
EDLC	Electrochemical Double Layer Capacitor
R_{ct}	Charge Transfer Resistance
R_s	Solution Resistance
Φ	Bode Phase angle
Θ	Surface coverage by hydrogen
HBE	Hydrogen binding energy
DFT	Density Functional Theory

XPS	X-ray Photoelectron spectroscopy
BET	Brunauer-Emmett-Teller
eV	Electron – Volt
K	Kelvin
°	Degree (angle)
λ	Wavelength
Ω	Ohm