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Design & Fabrication of Bio-Composites Material for Automotive / Engineering Application

Abhishek Rajbhar[1], Suresh B[2], H P J Aalibaaba[2], Chandra Shekar Reddy K[4]

U.G. Students, Department of Mechanical Engineering, BITM, Ballari, Karnataka, India[1–4]

Abstract: The automotive and engineering sectors are undergoing a significant transition toward sustainability, driven by the need to reduce carbon footprints and improve fuel efficiency through vehicle lightweighting [1], [2]. This paper investigates the design and fabrication of biocomposite materials, which integrate natural fiber reinforcements—such as hemp, bamboo, jute, and fique—into various polymer matrices [3], [4]. We evaluate several manufacturing techniques, specifically compression molding, injection molding, and hand lay-up, which are selected based on production volume and geometric complexity [5], [6], [7].

Our findings indicate that these materials can achieve mechanical properties comparable to traditional synthetic composites; for instance, fique-epoxy biocomposites have demonstrated tensile strengths of approximately 36.6 MPa and flexural strengths of 21.2 MPa [3]. Furthermore, bio-hybrid structures using hemp and bamboo have exhibited impact energies as high as 18.33 J, significantly outperforming standard materials [4]. Despite challenges related to moisture absorption and fiber-matrix adhesion, the high thermal stability (up to 430.6 °C) and carbon-neutral lifecycle of these composites make them essential for the future of "green" manufacturing and industrial recyclability [4], [7], [8].

Keywords: Biocomposites; Natural Fibers; Automotive Engineering; Sustainable Materials; Lightweighting; Mechanical Characterization; Green Manufacturing; Polymer Matrices.

INTRODUCTION

Biocomposite materials, which integrate natural fibers with polymer resins or bio-based matrices, have emerged as a sustainable alternative to traditional synthetic composites in the automotive and engineering sectors [1], [2]. The primary driver for this shift is the global emphasis on sustainability and the need to reduce the carbon footprint of industrial manufacturing [1], [3]. In the automotive industry, biocomposites are particularly valued for their high strength-to-weight ratio, which contributes significantly to vehicle lightweighting and, consequently, improved fuel efficiency [3], [4]. These materials offer several advantages over glass or carbon fiber counterparts, including lower cost, reduced weight, non-toxicity, and high impact resistance [2].

LITERATURE REVIEW

The performance of biocomposites is heavily influenced by the choice of natural fibers and the matrix material. Research has explored a wide variety of plant-derived fibers, including hemp, flax, jute, bamboo, coir, and fique [5], [6], [7]. These fibers are often treated with reagents like alkali or silane before reinforcement to overcome their naturally hydrophilic character and improve interfacial bonding with hydrophobic polymer matrices [2].
Matrix materials commonly used include thermoplastics like Polylactic Acid and polyether ether ketone, as well as thermosetting resins such as epoxy [7], [8]. PLA-based biocomposites are particularly notable for being fully biodegradable [9]. Studies have shown that biocomposites can match the mechanical properties of traditional materials; for instance, bio-polyamide 11 reinforced with lignocellulosic fibers has demonstrated safety factors and maximum deformations similar to standard polypropylene-glass fiber composites used in car door handles [10].

METHODOLOGY

The fabrication of biocomposites involves several established techniques, chosen based on the desired part dimensions and production volume:

- **Compression Molding:** This is the most popular method for automotive applications due to its short cycle times and low labor costs [8]. It is used to produce components such as battery trays, front ends, and noise shields [8].

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- **Injection Molding:** A standard technique for thermoplastic biocomposites, where a screw-type plunger forces the material into a mold to create complex shapes [9].
- **Hand Lay-up:** Frequently used for small-scale production or large panels, where resin is manually applied to fiber mats using simple tools [4], [5].
- **Resin Film Infusion:** Used to create scaled car parts like hoods and doors with uniform thickness and good homogeneity [7].

Critical processing parameters that must be controlled include fiber volume fraction, moisture content of the fibers, and the temperature and pressure during curing [5].

RESULT

Recent experimental data highlights the viability of these materials:

- **Mechanical Strength:** Fique-epoxy biocomposites have achieved tensile strengths of 36.6 MPa and flexural strengths of 21.2 MPa, making them comparable to existing commercial automotive products [7].
- **Impact Energy:** Innovative bio-hybrid structures using hemp and bamboo have demonstrated impact energies up to five times higher (18.33 J) than traditional materials (3.6 J), which is essential for crash safety in vehicle parts [6].
- **Thermal Stability:** Biocomposites typically maintain stability up to 430.6 °C, which is well above the maximum operating temperatures for most automotive interior and exterior components [6].

DISCUSSION

The integration of biocomposites offers a clear path toward "green" manufacturing, as these materials are carbon-neutral—the released during their biodegradation is recycled by the plants used for future fibers [4]. Furthermore, using biocomposites helps meet industry goals for vehicle recyclability; currently, approximately 80% of a car's materials can be recycled, and bio-based nanocomposites are expected to increase this ratio [4].

However, challenges remain. The inherent moisture absorption and hydrophilicity of natural fibers can restrict their use in exterior components where environmental exposure is high [4], [11]. Future research is focusing on the use of nanofillers and advanced chemical treatments to solve these adhesion and moisture issues, potentially allowing biocomposites to replace even more heavy-duty structural components [4], [11].

CONCLUSION

Biocomposite materials represent the future of sustainable engineering. They provide a unique combination of lightweight properties, environmental compatibility, and sufficient mechanical performance for a wide range of automotive accessories and structural parts [11], [12]. While moisture sensitivity remains a technical hurdle, the transition toward fully recyclable, bio-degradable "green" vehicles is being accelerated by both legislative pressures and technological innovations in fiber-matrix interface design [11], [13].

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