Hybrid Solar Cell with TiO$_2$ Film: BBOT Polymer and Copper Phthalocyanine as Sensitizer

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Abstract. An organic-inorganic hybrid solar cell was fabricated using Titanium dioxide (TiO$_2$): 2,5-bis(5-tert-butyl-2-benzoxazolyl) thiophene (BBOT) film and Copper Phthalocyanine (CuPc) as a sensitizer. BBOT was used in photodetector in other reported research works, but as per best of our knowledge, it was not implemented in solar cells till date. The blend of TiO$_2$: BBOT blend was used to fabricate the film on ITO-coated glass and further a thin layer of CuPc was coated on the film. This was acted as photoanode and another ITO coated glass with a platinum coating was used as a counter electrode (cathode). An optimal blend of acetonitrile (solvent) (50–100 %), 1,3-dimethylimidazolium iodide (10–25 %), iodine (2.5–10 %) and lithium iodide, pyridine derivative and thiocyanate was used as electrolytes in the hybrid solar cell. The different structural, optical and electrical characteristics were measured. The Hybrid solar cell showed a maximum conversion efficiency of 6.51 %.

Keywords

BBOT, CuPc, electrolyte, organic, solar cell.

1. Introduction

Earth contains a finite amount of fossil fuels and continuous use of these fossil fuels in huge amount is resulting in the depletion and high cost of these resources. Fossil fuels are a non-renewable source of energy, which means that these resources once depleted cannot be replenished at a sufficient rate for sustainable economic extraction in meaningful human time-frames. In contrast, the many types of renewable energy resources, such as the wind and solar energy, are constantly replenished.

Solar energy in the direct or indirect form, is the source of most of the renewable energy, which can be used for heating homes, generating electricity and a variety of commercial and industrial uses. Therefore, to shift the dependency for energy from non-renewable to renewable resources, renewable energy has become an important topic for research [14]. Out of all the renewable energy sources, solar energy has the most advantages because it cuts down the need for a distribution network since it is possible to place the supply at or near the consumption area [11]. Photovoltaic effect was first observed by Becquerel [15]. The conventional solar cell or first generation based solar cell is made of crystalline silicon. With further research and modification of the first generation solar cell, the thin film solar cell came into picture. This was based on thin films of silicon and other materials which reduced the costs, normally associated with conventional semiconductor wafer production. Presently, the third generation solar is still a newly emerging field of research which is based on solar cell made of organic materials. This organic based solar cell has the advantage over the previous generation solar cell as far as the cost of materials and manufacturing is concerned [1] and [2]. The downside of the organic solar cell is the low efficiency. To overcome the major disadvantages of the pure organic solar cell, many significant changes have been made in the device structure, and also a new choice of materials consisting of both organic and inorganic materials was incorporated in the device. A solar cell based on organic and inorganic known as Hybrid solar cell has attracted attention due to its potential of reaching an efficiency of about 10 % [2], [3], [11], [5] and [7].
In recent research investigation of polymer solar cell, a power conversion efficiency of \( \sim 5 \% \) was obtained [8] and [9]. Copper phthalocyanine is chosen as sensitizer and 2,5-bis(5-tert-butyl-2-benzoxazolyl) thiophene (BBOT) for the organic blend of BBOT and \( \text{TiO}_2 \) in the active region of hybrid solar cell in this research because they have high optical stability, chemical stability and photovoltaic property [13].

2. Materials and Methods

The fabrication of hybrid solar cell involved following steps. Two pieces of ITO coated glass of the dimension of \( 2 \text{ cm} \times 1 \text{ cm} \) were cleaned with Ethanol (\( \text{C}_2\text{H}_5\text{OH} \)) and de-ionized (DI) water (Fig. 1(a)). The resistance of the conducting side of the glass was measured with a multimeter to be 19–25 \( \Omega \) on average. Then the glass slides were allowed for natural drying.

A fine solution of nanoporous \( \text{TiO}_2 \) powder (Global NanoTech), 2,5-Bis(5-tert-butyl-benzoxazo-2-yl) thiophene (BBOT) (Sigma Aldrich) (2:1) and acetic acid (\( \text{CH}_3\text{COOH} \)) (Nice chemicals) was prepared. A small portion of the conductive side of an ITO coated glass piece was covered with tape to avoid generation of \( \text{TiO}_2 \) film: BBOT blend during fabrication. A film of the blend was coated on the conductive side by using tape casting method, the colour of the film was light yellow (Fig. 1(b)). The dimension of the film was \( 2 \text{ cm} \times 1 \text{ cm} \). When the liquid part of the solution was evaporated naturally, it left a film of nanoporous \( \text{TiO}_2 \) and BBOT (Fig. 1(c)). After the growth of the film the tape was removed. The sample was annealed for 25 minutes at 400\( ^\circ \text{C} \) (Fig. 1(d)). After annealing the film colour changed to dark yellow (Fig. 1(e)). Now, a film of Copper Phthalocyanine (CuPc) was generated on the \( \text{TiO}_2 \) and BBOT film and was allowed for natural drying (Fig. 1(f)). For the fabrication of counter electrode, another glass slide was coated with platinum solution (Platisol, Solaronix) on the conductive side. Once both of the samples dried completely, they were clamped together facing two conductive sides using binder clips such that a conductive portion in both the slides was available to connect to the measurement probes (Fig. 2(a)). A small amount of electrolyte (HI-30, solaronix) was injected in the junction of the two slides (Fig. 2(b)). The electrolyte solution contained acetonitrile (50–100%), 1,3-dimethylimidazolium iodide (10–25%), iodine (2.5-10%). Thus the device was ready to analyse different electrical characteristics. Finally the device was ready for electrical measurements (Fig. 2(c)).

3. Working Principle

CuPc, which is a photo sensitizer, was fabricated on the top layer of the solar cell. CuPc absorbs photon from incident light. The BBOT particles, which were present next to the CuPc layer, are fluorescent in nature [17]. BBOT particles receive the photons donated by the CuPc layer and radiate the photons to the active material [18]. These radiated photons are absorbed and are trapped by the nanoporous \( \text{TiO}_2 \) particles, which are present in the blend. Some researchers have been
reported regarding fabrication of photodetector using BBOT [16]. The following mechanism was involved in conversion of electrical energy from the light energy [19], [20] and [21].

- Absorption: The incident photon is absorbed by the CuPc on the TiO$_2$ surface. After absorbing photon, the photosensitizer is excited from the ground state ($S$) to the excited state ($S^*$).

$$S \rightarrow S^*.$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

- Electron injection: The excited electrons are injected into the conduction band of the TiO$_2$ and BBOT blend. This oxidizes the photosensitizer ($S^*$).

$$S^* \rightarrow S^+ + e^- (\text{TiO}_2).$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

- Regeneration: The $I^-$ ion redox mediator, present in the electrolyte, donates electrons to the oxidized photosensitizer ($S^+$) and again regenerates the ground state ($S$), and the $I^-$ is oxidized to $I_3^-$.  

$$S^+ + \frac{3}{2} I^- \rightarrow S + \frac{1}{2} I_3^-.$$  \hspace{1cm} (3)

- Collection: The oxidized redox mediator ($I_3^-$), diffuses toward the counter electrode and electron is collected by the counter electrode. Iodide ($I^-$) is regenerated by reduction of triiodide ($I_3^-$) on the counter electrode.

$$\frac{1}{2} I_3^- + e^- \rightarrow \frac{3}{2} I^-.$$  \hspace{1cm} (4)

Figure 5(a) and Fig. 5(b) show the 2D and 3D AFM images of the film of TiO$_2$: BBOT blend. An average of 10 ~ 15 nm TiO$_2$ and BBOT nanoparticles were observed in the images.

The crystalline structures of the nanoporous TiO$_2$ film (Fig. 6(a) and TiO$_2$: BBOT (Fig. 6(b)) were con-

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Structural Characterizations

Atomic Force Microscopy (AFM) study was carried out to analyse the surface morphology of the TiO$_2$: BBOT.

Fig. 4: Working mechanism of the fabricated solar cell: (a) light absorption and exciton formation, (b) charge separation and (c) charge collection.

Fig. 5: (a) 2D and (b) 3D AFM images of the TiO$_2$: BBOT sample.

Fig. 6: HRXRD image.
firmed by the High Resolution X-Ray Diffraction analysis (HRXRD) (Panalytical, X’Pert Pro X-ray diffrac-
tometer). The TiO$_2$: BBOT film showed new peaks
due to the presence of the BBOT (Fig. 6(b)). These
peaks were not present in the pattern of pure TiO$_2$
(Fig. 6(a)). All the diffraction peaks refer to anatase
and rutile phases (JCPDS No. 84-1285 for anatase and
87-0920 for rutile) [7] and [12]. The pattern shows an
average size for both the phases.

4.2. Optical Characterizations

The UV-VIS optical absorption measurement
(250 – 1000 nm) was done on the nanoporous
TiO$_2$, BBOT, CuPc and CuPc: BBOT: TiO$_2$ sam-
ple at room temperature by a UV-visible near infrared
spectrophotometer (Lambda 950, Perkin Elmer)
(Fig. 7). The nanoporous TiO$_2$ film shows a peak in
UV region (375 nm) (Fig. 7(a)). The BBOT showed
large absorption spectra in the UV-visible region with a
peak at 352 nm (Fig. 7(b)). CuPc also had absorption
spectra in visible region with main peaks at 618 nm and
722 nm and a small hump at 575 nm (Fig. 7(c)). CuPc:
BBOT: TiO$_2$ sample had absorption peaks at 562 nm,
643 nm and 726 nm. The $(\alpha h\nu)^2$ versus eV curves of
the nanoporous TiO$_2$ film and CuPc:BBOT:TiO$_2$ sam-
ple are shown by Fig. 8. In case of nanoporous TiO$_2$,
the main band gap is shown for $\sim 3.29$ eV, which was
also reported by other authors [20]. However, TiO$_2$
film exhibits the band gap at $\sim 2.01$ eV, which may
correspond to the CuPc. Another major hump is ob-
tained at $\sim 3.67$ eV which may be due to sub band
gap transition of the nanoporous TiO$_2$. The band gap
shifting was reported in other journals as well [20].

![Absorption spectra](image-url)

(a) nanoporous TiO$_2$ film.

(b) BBOT.

(c) CuPc.

(d) TiO$_2$: BBOT: CuPc.

Fig. 7: Absorption spectra.
4.3. Electrical Characteristics

Figure 9 shows the Illuminance vs Voltage (L-V) characteristics of the solar cell at room temperature. The illumination of incident light was measured by lux meter (HTC LX-101A) and a multimeter (FLUKE 289 TRUE RMS) was used to measure the voltage. The voltage was increasing with incident light and was saturated after a certain limit (0.645 V). The I-V characteristics study (Fig. 11(a)) was done using an I-V meter (Agilent technologies). The following parameters are measured as: open circuit voltage $V_{oc} = 0.6047$ V, short circuit current $I_{sc} = 16.9$ mA, maximum power point voltage $V_{mp} = 0.44$ V and maximum power point current $I_{mp} = 14.8$ mA. Figure 11(b) represents the current density vs voltage (J-V) characteristics graph, where device active-area was 2 cm$^2$ and short circuit current density $J_{sc}$ was 8.45 mA·cm$^{-2}$.

5. Calculation

During the calculation of maximum conversion efficiency at room temperature, the irradiation $G$, which was served as input power, was measured as 1000 W·m$^{-2}$ i.e. 0.1 W·cm$^{-2}$ and Air Mass (AM) of 1.5.

Fill Factor: $FF = \frac{V_{mp} \cdot I_{mp}}{V_{oc} \cdot I_{sc}} = \frac{0.44 \cdot 14.8}{0.6047 \cdot 16.9} = 0.6372$. 
Efficacy: $\eta = \frac{V_{oc} \cdot I_{sc} \cdot FF}{P_{in}} \cdot 100 = $  
$= \frac{0.6047 \cdot 16.9 \cdot 0.6372}{0.1 \cdot 1000} \cdot 100 = 6.51 \%$.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have demonstrated the fabrication of nanoporous TiO$_2$: BBOT: CuPc film based hybrid solar cell. A layer of Copper Phthalocyanine (CuPc) was used as sensitizer and optimal blend of electrolytes was used to maximize the cell efficiency. ITO coated glass was used for both - the front and counter electrodes and a platinum solution coating was used on the counter electrode to maximize the collection of electrons and to reduce the current loss. The AFM and HRXRD studies confirmed the nanoporous morphology of the cell and the crystalline structure of the TiO$_2$ film respectively. The optical absorption study revealed the absorption properties of the TiO$_2$, CuPc and BBOT individually and their absorption contributions in the blend. The I-V characteristics graph defined the value of the cell was measured to be 6.51 %, which is much higher than other research works reported earlier for this type of solar cell.

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