

# Chitosan Functionalized $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{Au}$ Core-Shell Nanomaterials for Targeted Drug Delivery

S. S. Pati, L. Herojit Singh, A. C. Oliveira, V. K. Garg

**Abstract**—Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ -Au core shell nanoparticles have been prepared using a two-step wet chemical approach using  $\text{NaBH}_4$  as reducing agent for formation of Au in ethylene glycol. X-ray diffraction studies shows individual phases of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  and Au in the as prepared samples with crystallite size of 5.9 and 11.4 nm respectively. The functionalization of the core-shell nanostructure with Chitosan has been confirmed using Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy along with signatures of octahedral and tetrahedral sites of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  below  $600\text{cm}^{-1}$ . Mössbauer spectroscopy shows decrease in particle-particle interaction in presence of Au shell (72% sextet) than pure oleic coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles (88% sextet) at room temperature. At 80K, oleic acid coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  shows only sextets whereas the Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  and Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{Au}$  core shell show presence of 5 and 11% doublet, respectively.

**Keywords**—Magnetic nanoparticles,  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{Au}$  core shell, iron oxide, Au nanoparticles.

## I. INTRODUCTION

NANOMATERIALS assembled together can result in multifunctional materials leading to exploration of new industrial and biomedical applications [1]. Unlike single-component nanomaterials which usually contain only one unique property of the active ingredient, the ingredients of multi-component materials determine the versatile properties and applications of these materials [2]. Although these materials possess attractive and versatile applications, controlled synthesis of these materials is a difficult task. Magnetic iron oxide nanoparticles ( $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  and  $\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ ) are leading the way in medical research because of its strong magnetic property [3]. Super paramagnetic iron oxide nanoparticles with appropriate surface chemistry can be used for numerous *in vivo* applications, such as MRI contrast enhancement, tissue repair, detoxification of biological fluids, hyperthermia, drug delivery and cell separation.  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  NPs have been used as negative contrast agents for T2-weighted magnetic resonance (MR) imaging due to their high reflexivity, excellent contrast enhancement and low toxicity. On the other hand, gold nanoparticles provide attractive scaffolds for the creation of transfection agents [4]. Gold colloids are bio-inert and nontoxic. They also provide a multifunctional platform for both therapeutic and diagnostic purpose. Through functionalization, these particles can be engineered to accumulate preferentially at tumor sites using targeting ligands, providing a powerful tool for cancer gene

therapy.

Gold coated iron oxide nanoparticles ( $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{Au}$  and  $\gamma\text{-Fe}_2\text{O}_3@\text{Au}$ ) are known to have a wide range of promising applications in biomedical imaging because they exhibit facile functionalization, enhanced chemical stability, excellent biocompatibility, superparamagnetic capability and strong X-ray attenuation property [2], [5]. Gold-coated nanoparticles have great biocompatibility with the human body with the ability to interact with polypeptides, DNA, and polysaccharides. Chitosan [poly-b-(1-4)-2-amino-2-deoxy-D-glucose] has many favorable characteristics such as low toxicity and high biocompatibility [6]. It has been widely used in many fields, such as waste water treatment, biomedical applications as a drug carrier, therapy for repairing spinal damage and for preserving nervous cell and mitochondrial membranes from harmful reactive oxygen species. Gold nanocomposites utilizing Chitosan offer several potential benefits using the magnetic core for controllability, as well as the immobilization of biomolecules and other optical properties through their gold shell. Li et al. [1] demonstrated that  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{Au}$  core shell nanostars provide a unique multifunctional the ranostic platform for multi-mode imaging and photothermal therapy of tumors, which may find applications in theranostics of different types of cancer.  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{Au}$  core shell nanomaterials have also been used as a base material for development of sensitive and selective hydrolase biosensor based on self-assembly of methyl parathion hydrolase for detecting methyl parathion [5]. Li et al. demonstrated that oligonucleotide-gated silica shell-coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ -Au core shell nanotrisoctahedra can act as magnetically targeted and near-infrared light-responsive theranostic platform [7].

In the present study, Chitosan functionalized iron oxide-Au core shell has been prepared using a simple wet chemical method by using  $\text{NaBH}_4$  as reducing agent. The structural and magnetic studies were performed using XRD, FTIR and Mössbauer measurements.

## II. MATERIAL SYNTHESIS AND EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS

**Materials Synthesis:** Chemicals used for synthesis of Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{Au}$  core shell nanomaterials were gold acetate ( $\text{CH}_3\text{COO}\text{Au}$ ), ferric chloride ( $\text{FeCl}_3.6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ), ferrous sulphate ( $\text{FeSO}_4.7\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ), oleic acid ((9Z)-Octadec-9-enoic acid), Chitosan (poly-b-(1-4)-2-amino-2-deoxy-D-glucose), hydrochloric acid (HCl) and acetone( $\text{CH}_3\text{CHO}$ ). All the chemicals were of analytical grade and procured from Merck. Distilled water with resistivity of  $15\text{M}\Omega\text{ cm}$  was used for all the experimental process. The core-shell nanostructure

V. K. Garg, S. S. Pati, L. Herojit Singh, A. C. Oliveira are with Institute of Physics, University of Brasília, 70919-970 Brasília, DF, Brazil (e-mail: vijgarg@gmail.com).

has been prepared in a two-step process.

- (a) **Synthesis of oleic acid coated magnetic nanoparticles:**  
The first step involves synthesis of fine grained  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles prepared through a conventional co-precipitation approach in presence of oleic acid as surfactant. Freshly prepared aqueous solution of  $\text{FeCl}_3 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (0.4 M) and  $\text{FeSO}_4 \cdot 7\text{H}_2\text{O}$  (0.2 M) were mixed in 1:1 volumetric ratio at a constant stirring speed of 600 rpm at 90 °C. The solution was allowed for 15 minutes of vigorous stirring for uniform mixing. 30 ml of NaOH (2M) solution was added rapidly to above precursor solution for precipitation of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles. 2 ml of oleic acid was added to the reaction mixture after 5 minutes of addition of NaOH to restrict the growth of nucleated nanoparticles. The nanoparticles were separated using a permanent magnet and washed several times with water and acetone for removal of inorganic and organic impurities.
- (b) **Synthesis of Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ @Au core shell nanostructure:** 150 mg of oleic acid capped  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles were dispersed in ethylene glycol by 30 minutes of ultra-sonication. After the dispersion was stabilized, gold acetate was added to the mixture along with 15 mg of Chitosan. The molar ratio of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  to Au was maintained at 1:2. Dilute
- (c) HCl solution was added to the above solution for providing slight acidic condition for dissolution of Chitosan. The solution was kept under vigorous stirring at 180°C for 3 hrs for adsorption of  $\text{Au}^+$  ions on the surface of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles.  $\text{NaBH}_4$  (2M) was added to the above solution drop wise for precipitation of Au shell over the  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles in presence of Chitosan. The reaction mixture was vigorously stirred for 30 minute to allow subsequent growth of the formed nanoshells. Initially, the particles were separated by magnet and then washed several times with acetone and water using centrifugation. Finally, obtained Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ @Au core shell nanostructures were dispersed in ethylene glycol.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fig. 1 confirms formation of pure spinel  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles with diffraction from (220), (311), (400), (511) and (440) crystal planes. The crystallite size was calculated using Scherrer's formula to be 5.9 nm. The lattice parameter was calculated to be 8.39 Å which is in agreement with the reported value of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  [8]. The diffraction pattern of Chitosan coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  shows pure cubic iron oxide phase and the crystallite size was calculated to be 6.6 nm.

Diffraction pattern of Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ @Au core shell nanostructure shows presence of both Au and  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles. The presence of Au diffraction patterns along with  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  confirms either formation of a core-shell or hybrid structure. The size of the gold nanoparticles calculated to be 11.4 nm which is 5.5 nm higher than that of the core  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ . So the expected shell thickness formed over the iron oxide core is 5.5 nm. The lattice parameter of Au found to be 4.08 Å which

is in agreement with the reported cubic gold structure [9].

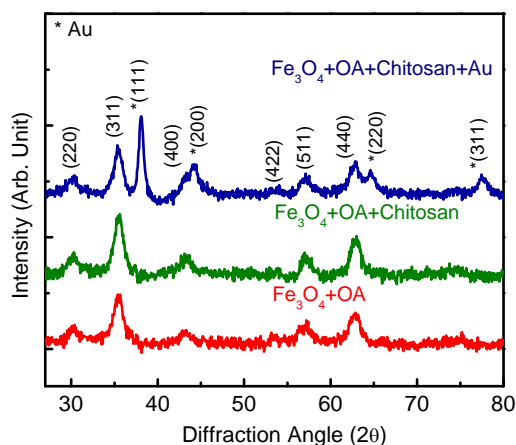


Fig. 1 X-ray diffraction patterns of oleic acid coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ , Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  and Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ @Au core shell nanoparticles

Rietveld analysis of as prepared core  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  and  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ @Au core-shell structure were performed using MAUD (Materials Analysis Using Diffraction) software and shown in Fig. 2. Oleic acid coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles are confirmed to be pure with little higher error parameters ( $\text{Rwp}=16\%$ ,  $\text{GOF}=1.8$ ). This can be attributed to the low intensity and broad peaks of fine grained nanoparticles. Refinement of functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ @Au core shell nanostructure confirms presence of Au and  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles with weight parameters ( $\text{Rwp}=2.55\%$ ,  $\text{Rexp}=1.51\%$  and  $\text{GOF}=1.7$ ) in accepted range.

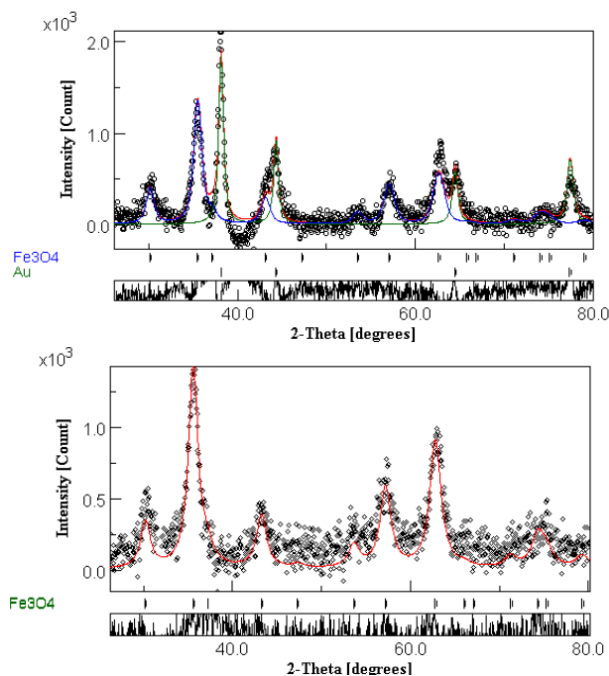


Fig. 2 Rietveld refinement of oleic acid coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  and Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ @Au core shell nanoparticles

Structural and bonding information of capping have been studied using Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR) studies (Fig. 3). In pure oleic acid coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles, absorption bands near  $3415\text{cm}^{-1}$  are due to presence of  $-\text{OH}$  groups of adsorbed water molecules. Absorption bands near  $2900$  and  $2850\text{cm}^{-1}$  can be attributed to the aliphatic  $-\text{CH}$  bonds of oleic acids.

The bands at  $2360$ ,  $1553$  and  $1429\text{cm}^{-1}$  are due to the  $\text{CO}_2$ ,  $-\text{COO}^-$  and  $-\text{CH}_2$  groups respectively. Metal oxide ( $\text{Fe}-\text{O}$ ) absorption bands from  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  were also observed at  $585$  and  $425\text{cm}^{-1}$  corresponding to tetrahedral and octahedral sites respectively. An additional peak observed at  $609\text{cm}^{-1}$  can be attributed to the bonding of Fe items with the O atoms of the carboxylic group in oleic acid. FTIR spectra of Chitosan coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  and core shell nanoparticles show a decrease in aliphatic absorption band near  $2900\text{cm}^{-1}$  along with other high intense absorption band at  $1050\text{cm}^{-1}$  due to  $-\text{CHOH}$  groups of cyclic ring in Chitosan. The peak near  $1550\text{cm}^{-1}$  shift towards higher wave number is due to the  $-\text{CONH}$  group of Chitosan. However, absorption bands due to metal-oxide bonds below  $600\text{cm}^{-1}$  remains intact irrespective of functionalization.

Least square fitted Mössbauer spectra as prepared samples at  $300$  and  $80\text{K}$  are depicted in Fig. 4. Pure oleic acid coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles show presence of 12% of doublet due to presence of superparamagnetic particles along with 88% of surface components due to particle interactions. The area of doublet increases to 24% after functionalization of the oleic acid coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles with Chitosan as the particle-

particle interactions decreases due to presence of Chitosan coating (76% surface components). Decrease in surface components to 72% has been observed upon addition of Au to the system due to further decrease in particle-particle interaction in presence of gold shell.

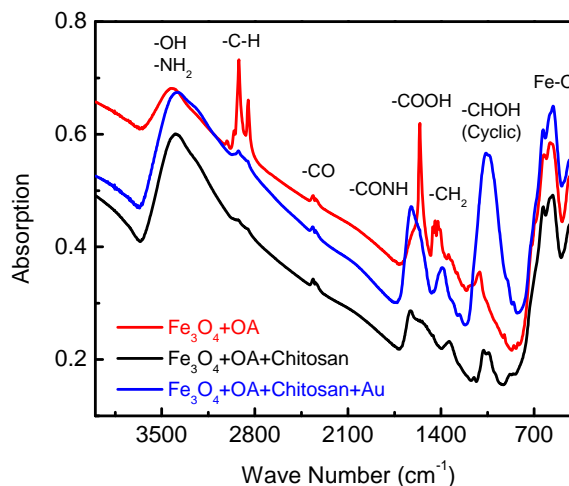


Fig. 3 FTIR spectra of oleic acid coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ , Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  and Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@Au$  core shell nanoparticles

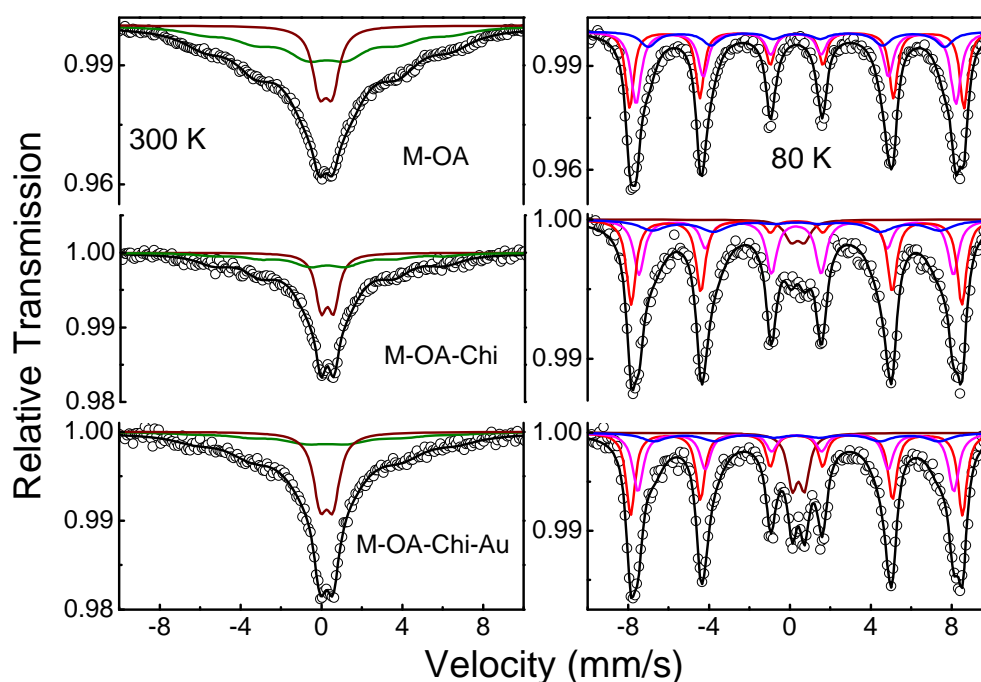


Fig. 4 Mössbauer spectra of oleic acid coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ , Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  and Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@Au$  core shell nanoparticles at  $300$  and  $80\text{K}$

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ -Au core shell nanoparticles

have been prepared using a two step wet chemical approach using  $\text{NaBH}_4$  as reducing agent for formation of Au in

ethylene glycol. X-ray diffraction studies shows individual phases of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  and Au in the as prepared samples with crystallite size of 5.9 and 11.4 nm respectively. The functionalization of the core-shell nanostructure with Chitosan has been confirmed using Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy along with signatures of octahedral and tetrahedral sites of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  below  $600\text{cm}^{-1}$ . Mössbauer spectroscopy shows decrease in particle-particle interaction in presence of Au shell (72% sextet) than pure oleic coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  nanoparticles (88% sextet) at room temperature. At 80K, oleic acid coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  shows only sextets whereas the Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$  and Chitosan functionalized  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{Au}$  core shell show presence of 5 and 11% doublet, respectively. Our results show an efficient and simple method to functionalize  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{Au}$  core shell nanostructures with thin shell thickness. Further, the method provides an opportunity to control the shell thickness by controlling the precursor solution.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was supported by Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) – the Brazilian Ministry of Education – (MEC), in the national program of “Science Without Borders” project “Study of mechanism of drug delivery” (Project no. A127/2013); HSL and SSP also thank CAPES for the post-doctoral fellowship.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Li, Jingchao, Yong Hu, Jia Yang, Ping Wei, Wenjie Sun, Mingwu Shen, Guixiang Zhang, and Xiangyang Shi. "Hyaluronic acid-modified  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{Au}$  core/shell nanostars for multimodal imaging and photothermal therapy of tumors." *Biomaterials* 38 (2015): 10-21.
- [2] Ghosh Chaudhuri, Rajib, and Santanu Paria. "Core/shell nanoparticles: classes, properties, synthesis mechanisms, characterization, and applications." *Chemical reviews* 112, no. 4 (2011): 2373-2433.
- [3] Laurent, Sophie, Delphine Forge, Marc Port, Alain Roch, Caroline Robic, Luce Vander Elst, and Robert N. Muller. "Magnetic iron oxide nanoparticles: synthesis, stabilization, vectorization, physicochemical characterizations, and biological applications." *Chemical reviews* 108, no. 6 (2008): 2064-2110.
- [4] Saha, Krishnendu, Sarit S. Agasti, Chaekyu Kim, Xiaoning Li, and Vincent M. Rotello. "Gold nanoparticles in chemical and biological sensing." *Chemical Reviews* 112, no. 5 (2012): 2739-2779.
- [5] Zhao, Yuting, Weiying Zhang, Yuehe Lin, and Dan Du. "The vital function of  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4@\text{Au}$  nanocomposites for hydrolase biosensor design and its application in detection of methyl parathion." *Nanoscale* 5, no. 3 (2013): 1121-1126.
- [6] Salehizadeh, Hossein, Elham Hekmatian, Meisam Sadeghi, and Kevin Kennedy. "Synthesis and characterization of core-shell  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ -gold-chitosan nanostructure." *Journal of nanobiotechnology* 10, no. 1 (2012): 1-7.
- [7] Li, Wei-Peng, Pei-Yi Liao, Chia-Hao Su, and Chen-Sheng Yeh. "Formation of Oligonucleotide-Gated Silica Shell-Coated  $\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ -Au Core-Shell Nanotrisoctahedra for Magnetically Targeted and Near-Infrared Light-Responsive Theranostic Platform." *Journal of the American Chemical Society* 136, no. 28 (2014): 10062-10075.
- [8] Okudera, H.; Kihara, K.; Matsumoto, T. Temperature dependence of structure parameters in natural magnetite: single crystal X-ray studies from 126 to 773 K, *Acta Crystallographica Section B*, 1996, 52, 450-457.