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Green Nanotechnology for Soil Remediation and Fertility Enhancement

J.Kamalakar[1]*,
B RAJU[2], Divya D[3]

[1]Scientist (Soil Science), AICRP on IFS, C-NARE, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad-500030.
[2]Assistant professor (Soil Science), Agricultural College, Warangal-506007, PJTAU, Telangana State, india.
[3]Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Soil Science, Keladi Shivappa Nayaka University of Agricultural and Horticultural Sciences Iruvakki Shimoga Karnataka-577205

*Corresponding Author
J.Kamalakar*

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INTRODUCTION

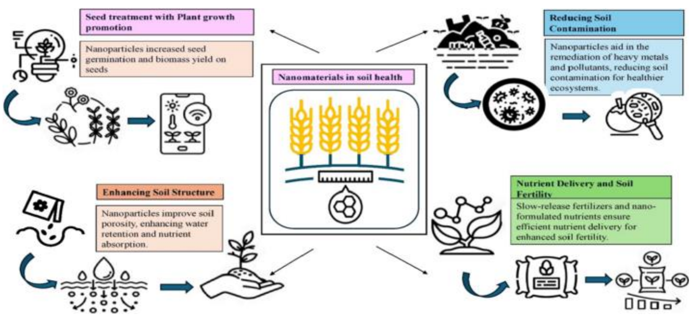
Soil is a fundamental natural resource necessary for global food security, ecological balance, and sustainable agriculture. However, rapid industrialization, excessive use of agrochemicals, heavy metal accumulation, and climate-induced degradation have severely impaired soil quality across the world. Conventional remediation techniques such as excavation, soil washing, and chemical treatment are often expensive, time-consuming, and environmentally damaging.Green nanotechnology, a branch of nanoscience that utilizes environmentally safe materials and biological systems to synthesize nanoparticles, offers an eco-friendly alternative for restoring soil health. It aims to minimize environmental risks while maximizing agricultural productivity.

This technology integrates:

- **Biosynthesized nanoparticles** from plants, fungi, or bacteria
- **Nano-based fertilizers** that improve nutrient uptake
- **Nano-adsorbents** for pollutant removal
- **Nano-remediation techniques** for restoring contaminated soils

2. Concept of Green Nanotechnology

Green nanotechnology involves the eco-friendly design, synthesis, and application of nanomaterials using safe, sustainable, and biological approaches. It focuses on reducing environmental risks while enhancing soil health and agricultural productivity.



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2.1 Principles of Green Nanotechnology

This approach emphasizes the use of biological organisms such as plants, microbes, and algae for nanoparticle synthesis, avoiding toxic chemicals commonly used in conventional methods. It relies on energy-efficient production techniques and prioritizes the creation of biodegradable, biocompatible nanomaterials. Overall, its goal is to minimize environmental footprint while maintaining high functional efficiency.

2.2 Types of Green Nanomaterials Used in Soil Science

Common eco-friendly nanomaterials include metal nanoparticles (Ag, Fe, Zn, Cu), metal oxide nanoparticles (TiO_2, ZnO, Fe_3O_4), nano-clays, nanocomposites, and carbon-based materials such as biochar-nanocomposites and graphene derivatives. Nano-enzymes (nanozymes) also play an important role in soil applications. Green-synthesized nanoparticles are considered safer because plant extracts and microbial metabolites naturally act as reducing and stabilizing agents.

3. Soil Remediation Using Green Nanotechnology

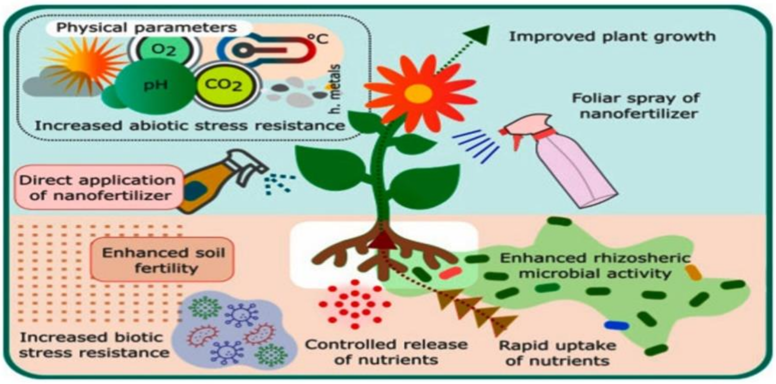
Soil contamination by heavy metals, pesticides, hydrocarbons, dyes, and industrial wastes is a major challenge worldwide. Green nanotechnology provides eco-friendly solutions by using biologically synthesized nanomaterials for effective remediation.

3.1 Remediation Mechanisms

Nanoparticles remove pollutants through adsorption due to their high surface area, enabling binding of heavy metals, organic pollutants, and excess salts. Redox-active nanomaterials such as nano-iron and nano-zinc convert toxic pollutants into safer forms. Photocatalytic nanoparticles like TiO_2 degrade organic contaminants under sunlight, while nano-enzymes mimic natural enzymes for detoxification. Nanoparticles also enhance phytoremediation by increasing root growth, antioxidant activity, and heavy metal uptake.

3.2 Green Nanomaterials Used

Plant-derived iron nanoparticles immobilize heavy metals and degrade pesticides. Nano-clays adsorb hydrocarbons and improve soil structure. Carbon-based nanomaterials remove dyes and enhance microbial activity. Biogenic metal oxides (ZnO, TiO_2, MgO) safely degrade organic pollutants.



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3.3 Applications

Green nanomaterials remediate heavy metals, pesticides, petroleum hydrocarbons, and improve saline soils using slow-release nano-gypsum.

4. Green Nanotechnology for Fertility Enhancement

Green nanotechnology not only remediates polluted soils but also enhances soil fertility by improving nutrient delivery, soil structure, and biological activity. Nano-fertilizers, engineered at the nanoscale, offer better solubility, controlled nutrient release, and higher nutrient-use efficiency (NUE). These include nano-nitrogen, nano-phosphorus, nano-potassium, nano-micronutrient fertilizers (Zn, Fe, B, Mn), nano-biofertilizers, and polymer-coated nano-nutrients.

4.2 Mechanisms of Soil Fertility Improvement

Green nanoparticles enhance nutrient availability by increasing phosphorus solubility in alkaline soils, improving iron availability in calcareous soils, and promoting zinc mobility for enzyme activation. Nano-clays and biochar-nanocomposites improve soil aggregation, porosity, aeration, and water retention, contributing to better soil structure. Green nanotechnology also strengthens microbial activity by supplying micronutrients, detoxifying harmful substances, and stabilizing soil pH. Additionally, nanoparticles stimulate plant growth by enhancing root development, chlorophyll synthesis, photosynthetic efficiency, and metabolic enzyme activity, resulting in healthier and more productive crops.

5. Integration with Biological and Ecological Processes

Green nanotechnology works in harmony with natural ecological processes, ensuring safe application while strengthening soil health. By integrating nanomaterials with biological systems, it promotes efficient nutrient cycling, enhanced soil functions, and sustainable crop production.

5.1 Nano-Biofertilizers

Nano-biofertilizers combine nanoparticles with beneficial microbes to improve nitrogen fixation, phosphorus solubilization, potassium mobilization, and the production of growth-promoting hormones. This synergy increases nutrient availability and supports healthier plant growth.

5.2 Nano-Mycorrhiza Interactions

Nanoparticles stimulate mycorrhizal colonization on plant roots, enhancing the uptake of essential nutrients such as phosphorus, micronutrients, and water. This interaction strengthens plant tolerance to soil stress.

5.3 Nano-Biochar Synergy

Biochar infused with nanoparticles improves soil quality by adsorbing pollutants, slowly releasing nutrients, and providing stable habitats for soil microorganisms. This synergy supports long-term soil fertility, boosts microbial activity, and contributes to sustainable soil management in eco-friendly agricultural systems.

6. Environmental and Safety Considerations

Although green nanotechnology significantly reduces toxicity compared to conventional nanomaterials, careful assessment is essential to ensure environmental safety. Overapplication of nanoparticles may lead to their accumulation in soil, potentially disrupting microbial communities and altering natural nutrient cycles. In some cases, nanoparticles may leach into groundwater, posing additional ecological risks.

6.2 Regulation and Standardization

To ensure safe usage, governments and regulatory bodies must establish nano-safety guidelines, define permissible field application standards, and develop certification systems for eco-friendly nanomaterials. Standardized testing protocols are crucial for evaluating long-term environmental impacts.

6.3 Green Synthesis as a Safer Alternative

Biogenic synthesis using plants, fungi, algae, and microbes minimizes hazardous by-products and enhances biodegradability. These natural reducing agents create stable, environmentally compatible nanoparticles, making green synthesis a safer and more sustainable alternative for agricultural applications.

7. Challenges in Large-Scale Adoption

Despite its potential, the large-scale adoption of green nanotechnology in agriculture faces several challenges. The cost of producing green-synthesized nanoparticles remains high, and scalable, energy-efficient production methods require further optimization. A major limitation is the lack of field-scale trials, as most research is conducted under controlled laboratory conditions, making it difficult to predict real-world performance.

Farmer awareness is another barrier; many lack knowledge about nano-fertilizers, nano-remediation techniques, and their safe application. Effective extension services and training programs are needed to bridge this gap. Additionally, the successful implementation of green nanotechnology requires strong interdisciplinary collaboration. Nanotechnologists, soil scientists, agronomists, and environmental engineers must work together to develop practical, safe, and economically viable solutions for sustainable agriculture. Strengthening research networks and integrating field-based studies will play a critical role in overcoming these adoption challenges.

8. Future Prospects

Green nanotechnology offers transformative opportunities for sustainable agriculture, with future innovations expected to optimize soil health, nutrient use, and environmental protection. Smart nano-sensors represent a major advancement, enabling real-time monitoring of soil nutrient status, moisture content, contaminants, pH, and salinity. These sensors support precision soil management and timely interventions.

8.2 Self-Regulating Nano-Fertilizers

Next-generation nano-fertilizers will be capable of releasing nutrients according to plant demand,

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reducing losses, improving NUE, and minimizing environmental impacts.

8.3 CRISPR–Nanotechnology Integration

Combining nanocarriers with CRISPR gene-editing tools may help develop pollution-tolerant, stress-resistant crops capable of thriving in degraded soils.

8.4 Nano-enabled Precision Agriculture

Nanocarriers will enable targeted delivery of nutrients, pesticides, and remediation agents, improving efficiency and reducing input waste.

8.5 Eco-friendly Nanocomposites

Advanced materials such as biochar–nano-clay composites and microbial–nano hybrids will further enhance soil fertility, pollutant removal, and long-term soil sustainability.

9. CONCLUSION

Green nanotechnology offers a sustainable, efficient, and transformative approach to soil remediation and fertility enhancement. By integrating biological principles, eco-friendly synthesis, and advanced nanomaterials, it provides solutions to major agricultural challenges including pollution, nutrient inefficiency, declining fertility, and soil degradation. Although challenges related to regulation, cost, and awareness exist, the future of green nanotechnology is promising and aligned with global goals of climate-smart and sustainable agriculture.

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