

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMPUTER APPLICATION & MANAGEMENT

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PRODUCER GAS AS A VIABLE ENERGY SOURCE**RAHUL BASU****PROFESSOR****SAMBHRAM INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY****MS PALYA****ABSTRACT**

The Offsetting of Carbon emissions is a major concern worldwide. The generation of power from Fossil fuels remains a major source for underdeveloped and developing countries. Use of waste material to produce Biogas by bacterial action results in a sludge, which has a high Nitrogen and Carbon content after Methane production. The sludge can be used as fertilizer, and also further processed to give Producer gas. Other waste materials like coconut husk, agricultural and cellulosic wastes could be used directly. The disadvantage of slow reaction times from biogas (methane) production by bacterial action is avoided. The Producer gas can be stored or used directly in place of LPG as a substitute for Methane which has hazardous qualities. In earlier times it was piped directly to homes for cooking and used as a petrol substitute in vehicles when petrol was scarce.

KEYWORDS

Energy sources, gas production.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Energy crisis of the 1970's when the Middle Eastern Oil producers held the world economies to ransom, there have been increasing efforts and attention to research and usage of renewable energies like hydropower, solar, biogas and wind power. It has not widely been realized that water, wind and more recently producer gas have been used in previous decades and centuries as power and motive sources. In a sense, efforts have been made to reinvent the (water) wheel, and Private and government funds have been spent on non productive academic research to improve (for example) solar cell efficiency to impractical levels, perpetual motion machines, and various Free Energy projects.

For a country like India which has a sizeable rural population subsisting on agriculture and depending on livestock, Biogas has provided a viable source of energy and has been subsidized by various Governmental incentives and schemes. The problem underlying such efforts is the extreme poverty in which the majority of the rural populace lives. In fact, traditional village lifestyles dictate the use of cow dung for cooking with fire, smearing the compounds and ground, placing cow dung cakes on the walls and so on. Till recently it was difficult to get people to use cow dung as a crop fertilizer, and the major fertilizer companies have made hay of this fact.

Biogas has certain desirable qualities with regard to the environment:

1. It is low cost and low tech
2. It requires low investment and capital
3. It uses waste products and does not require chemical additives
4. It produces a sludge which can be used further as a fertilizer
5. It can contribute to treatment of domestic and municipal wastes.

Most of the subsidies given by State and NGO's so far have been on Biogas, whereas Producer gas has been neglected in the resurgence of Renewable energy sources.

Apart from the payoffs in secondary energy generation (i.e., after Methane has been recovered from biomass by bacterial action), the remaining bio matter/biomass residue which consists of C and N with H₂O is capable of further reduction into the so called "Producer Gas". A further advantage is in reducing the biologically active component which may consist of any harmful bacteria, mosquito larvae and viruses and other vectors into inert form. The resultant solid matter is highly concentrated with Nitrogenous matter and thus suitable as fertilizer for agricultural usage. Although the initial biomatter which may be dung, composted material and waste food matter can be used and is frequently applied directly on the fields, the result of Producer gas reduction is more inert and as useful if not more suitable as a fertilizer. Besides, the decomposition of animal dung in the open after being applied as a surface additive for crops yields large amounts of methane and adds to the pollutants in the atmosphere, besides contributing to vector propagation like flies and mosquitoes.

In Ghana, W. Africa, one of the main reasons of development of biogas is to treat sewage which is largely untreated and run off into the bush outside the villages, in order to improve sanitation and reduce attendant risks of epidemics and diseases endemic to Africa,(1)

INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS IN THE AREA OF PRODUCER GAS

It appears that serious work has been done in the island nations of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, like the Philippines and Sri Lanka, subsidised by the International agencies like UN. In Africa, countries like Ghana have taken up Biogas projects at a national level in their National Strategic planning. According to a recent survey (1), the focus in Ghana has shifted from energy to sanitation, with construction of bio-toilets. The aim is to treat human wastes to a level where they can be safely discharged into drains. The remaining sludge is used as fertilizer.

In the Philippines, GEMCOR had set up gasifiers using coconut shell charcoal, resulting in cheap gas at lower rates than from wood or biomass. Boats have been fitted with engines running on producer gas, (2).

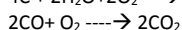
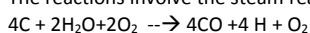
A number of raw materials have been researched for Producer gas, including coconut, sugar cane bagasse, rice husks, corn cobs, coffee bean husks, peanut shells, cotton gin trash and stalks. The list could use organic trash, which has been reported in the recent issue of Scientific American, (3) (Dec 2010, p24). Indian cities with their large slums and attendant sanitation problems could take a leaf from these efforts initiated by India's neighbours.

During times of petrol scarcity as in the last world war, engines were developed to run on coal gas and gas from wood, which would be towed behind the vehicles.

PRIMARY REACTIONS AND PRODUCTS FROM BIOMASS GASIFICATION

The gaseous products from carbon biomass are CO, CO₂, H₂, CH₄, N₂, water. Trace amounts of higher hydrocarbons are present also.

The reactions involve the steam reaction on carbon with limited oxygen:



Also there are sub reactions of C with H, H₂ and H₂O, similarly with CO and H.

These reactions need the addition of heat which is supplied by burning additional raw material, and a supply of steam.

USE IN IC ENGINES

As a result of the impending shortage in worldwide fossil fuel supplies which include petrol and diesel, increasing efforts have been made to look at alternatives to the IC engine which has so far not been modified beyond the basic piston-cylinder-valve design (4 stroke and 2 stroke variants). Strong interests in the

Petroleum and automotive industry has resisted and thwarted attempts to develop alternative designs and implementation of these in Industry. One can see this in viewing the basic undergraduate syllabi for Indian Engineering colleges which still use books written before the 1970's, whilst books on steam turbines and gas turbines are also rewritten from outdated foreign texts, (pre independence 1947).

Modification of engines to use Producer gas is not difficult, provided one understands the nature of the combustion and power cycle in the IC engine. Basically, one cannot run the engine at a speed beyond the rate at which the fuel gas ignites and burns (flame velocity). In addition, the compression and air/fuel ratio are important. If too high a compression results, there is possibility of the gas igniting spontaneously, (knocking), which would damage the engine. Producer gas is capable of higher Octane numbers than petrol, (OCTANE number being a measure of the compression ratio at which detonation occurs). As a result, higher engine thermal efficiencies can be achieved with Producer gas. Further refinements are possible but may need more research for Indian scenarios. Recently analysis of the higher water content in producer gas and Syn gas has been presented where the water content of over 15% as compared to 3% for natural gas may lead to corrosion in gas turbines. (4)

PRODUCER GAS FOR POWER GENERATION

1kg air-dry wood (15-20% mc) gives about 2.3 cub.meters of gas

1 litre petrol = 2.5 to 3kg wood

1 litre diesel = 3 to 3.5 kg wood

1 kWh requires 1 to 1.3 kg charcoal, 2 to 4 kg woodchips or 2.4 to 3.2 kg rice husk.

Feasibility and viability of a gasifier project depends on many factors, including cost of fuel, labour costs, money and finance, design life, value of the energy produced, cost of disposal of the residue, and value of the sludge for fertiliser. Further benefits are there when the electricity if generated can be sold to the grid.

The existence of a national energy programme and incorporation of such schemes into the development plans at state and national level would enhance such energy schemes.

At present the focus has been blurred by the large corporations battling it out for offshore oil rights, trying to sell cheap gas guzzling cars to the public, the conflicts (oil generated) in the middle east, and other political agendas.

The attendant benefits of health and sanitation have been almost ignored in the energy plans at the higher levels.

In Tanzania, a programme for design of gasifiers for maize mills in rural areas was taken up by the Small Industries Development Organisation and the Netherlands Twente University, (5). A similar system was developed at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. In El Salvador, with GEKA of Karlsruhe, coffee bean husks are burnt and the gas mixture fed to further dry coffee beans. In Valdosta, Georgia and Auburn, Alabama peanut shells have been used to give heat for drying. In Asia, rice husks are very commonly available as a byproduct, but according to the FAO in 1975, no mill existed which used steam produced by husk fired boilers. India and Thailand directly used rice husks as a form of boiler heat fuel, with some other countries also following suit. Parboiled rice in India is made mostly (50% usage) by husk fired boilers, with some mills in Sri Lanka, Guyana, and Italy doing the same. The Govt of Malaysia had given funds for development of two pilot plants at rice mills using one ton of rice husks per hour. Electric power output of about 350KW/hour has been obtained in 1983 (6,7).

OVERALL EFFICIENCY AND ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF THE SCHEME

Since Producer gas production requires heat and steam production as input, there is an expenditure of energy involved which debits from the overall total of energy. The heating can be obtained by diverting part of the biogas obtained in the primary digestion stage to be used for heating and producing steam and high temperatures in gasifying the sludge residue for Producer gas. Alternatively, dried biomass used for the initial biogas production could be ignited and used for the secondary producer gas stage. So far no study has been done on the efficiency and economics of the scheme.

FUTURE STUDIES AND AVENUES OF RESEARCH

It may be possible to invoke the genetic modification of microbes to directly excrete hydrocarbons. Turning water, photonic energy and Carbon dioxide into hydrocarbons is a very old process developed by Nature, which uses chlorophyll. Perhaps more useful than solid carbohydrates, would be a liquid hydrocarbon that could directly be put to use as fuel. Algae are known to efficiently convert Carbon dioxide into fatty acids, and similarly potato plants into carbohydrates. Converting this potato starch into alcohol is a long and expensive process. There has been a search for micro organisms that could do this, (8). Alternatively, sugars can be turned into alcohol, but again there are attendant costs. Much more attractive and useful would be a way to convert raw materials directly into hydrocarbon fuels. Apart from micro organisms, mobile robots are being proposed that would "eat" garbage and unwanted plants and convert these into hydrocarbon fuel forms. (9)

The direct conversion of cellulose to alcohol (cellulolysis) using lignocellulose (wood cellulose containing lignin a component of wood), has been researched at Argonne Labs (10). The process depends on cellulase enzymes produced by bacteria. *Saccaromyces cerevisiae*, *Zymomonas mobilis*, *E. Coli.*, are some bacteria targeted for bio engineering to produce ethanol via the cellulolysis route.

Producer gas has been applied as a raw material for bacterial conversion to ethanol also, using the bacteria *Clostridium Ljungdahlii*, which ingests CO, CO₂ and H₂ producing Ethanol and water. This process involves Gasification, fermentation and distillation to yield alcohol. The alternative is to use a catalytic reactor. (Catalysis involves intermediate compounds that get involved in the reaction but are unchanged in composition at the end).

The effect of physical and chemical parameters on bacterial fermentation of cellulose has been studied by various groups (10,11). Another bacteria *acetivibro cellulolyticus* produces acetate, ethanol, water and carbon dioxide.

Recently, groups have tried to bioengineer bacteria to give oil for fuel directly. The group LS9 with UC Berkeley has engineered a bacterium to make enzymes to convert biomass into diesel oil, (13). A recent patent 7794969 uses cyanobacteria to produce n-alkanes, (14).

The end is not in sight, and clearly microorganisms exist or can be modified to excrete oils which can be used as fuels, possible without further processing. However the overall effect on the effect on life on the planet and the ecology and environment must be carefully evaluated before attempting such bioengineering on a large scale in order to satiate the need of some industrial groups which have stuck to old designs for motive engines. The alternative would be to invest in alternative designs for motive power converters.

The I.C. engine was a byproduct of the Industrial revolution and the industrialisation of the Midwest USA, with resultant mass migrations, prior to which electric cars, steam cars and other variants were in vogue in the early 20th century. In fact the steam engine served Indian railroads for well over a century before the diesel engines took over. Hence one must not get carried away by the demons of Science and Finance and attempt to change the natural order of nature and life by introducing artificial genetic alterations. Life in all probability is at a delicate tipping point today. In order to propagate a failing and inefficient design, the I.C. Engine, which is limited by the laws of thermodynamic efficiency, and further inherent limitations one must not tinker with natural life and biological designs which have optimised over millennia.

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