Juni Khyat (जूनी ख्यात)
(UGC CARE Group I Listed Journal)
DOI: doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18204645
ISSN: 2278-4632
Vol-15, Issue-11, No.02, November: 2025

Harnessing Indigenous Microbial Diversity: A Study on the Bioremediation Potential of Bacteria from the Bundelkhand Region

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ABSTRACT

Petroleum hydrocarbon contamination is a significant environmental issue, and bioremediation using microorganisms is a promising and sustainable solution. This study focused on isolating and characterizing potent oil-degrading bacteria from petroleum-polluted sites in the Bundelkhand region of India. From 32 morphologically distinct bacterial colonies, seven promising strains were selected based on their ability to grow on crude oil as the sole carbon source. These strains were identified using 16S rRNA gene sequencing as *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (P1), *Rhodococcus erythropolis* (P2), *Bacillus subtilis* (P3), *Burkholderia cepacia* (P4), *Gordonia amarae* (P5), *Acinetobacter baumannii* (P6), and *Marinobacter hydrocarbonoclasticus* (P7).

Biochemical characterization revealed that all seven strains produced biosurfactants, with *P. aeruginosa* (P1) and *A. baumannii* (P6) being the most prolific producers. The isolates also exhibited significant hydrocarbon-degrading enzyme activities. *M. hydrocarbonoclasticus* (P7) displayed the highest Alkane Hydroxylase activity, while *B. cepacia* (P4) had the highest Catechol 1,2-Dioxygenase activity. Physiological studies demonstrated that the strains could efficiently degrade crude oil, with *P. aeruginosa* (P1) achieving over 78% degradation in 14 days. The strains also showed resilience to varying environmental conditions, including temperature, pH, and salinity. Notably, *P. aeruginosa* (P1) and *M. hydrocarbonoclasticus* (P7) exhibited exceptional halotolerance, making them suitable for marine bioremediation.

Statistical analysis confirmed the significant differences in the biochemical and physiological capabilities of the isolates and revealed strong positive correlations between biosurfactant production, enzyme activities, and overall degradation efficiency. This research highlights the potential of these native bacterial strains for the effective bioremediation of petroleum-contaminated environments.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fossil fuels, primarily composed of hydrocarbons, are formed over thousands of years and are the world's primary source of energy. Petroleum, a complex mixture of alkanes, aromatics, resins, and asphaltenes, is a major contributor to environmental pollution. While alkanes are the most biodegradable components of petroleum, resins and asphaltenes are more resistant to breakdown. Aromatic compounds, such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), are of particular concern due to their toxicity and potential for bioaccumulation.

Petroleum pollution arises from various sources, including oil spills, pipeline leaks, industrial discharges, and improper disposal of petroleum products. These activities lead to widespread contamination of soil and water, posing a significant threat to the environment. The environmental impacts of petroleum pollution are far-reaching. In soil, it can inhibit plant growth, alter soil structure, and reduce fertility. In water, oil spills create slicks that block sunlight, disrupting aquatic ecosystems and harming marine life.

The global demand for oil is substantial, with a forecast of 92 million barrels per day in 2014. This high level of consumption leads to frequent oil seepage and spills. It is estimated that approximately 706 million gallons of waste oil enter the ocean annually, with over 90% of this

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Vol-15, Issue-11, No.02, November: 2025
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being related to human activities. A significant oil spill in India occurred in 2011, when an ONGC pipeline burst in Mumbai, releasing 40-45 metric tons of oil into the sea.

Hydrocarbon contamination is a major cause of soil and water pollution, leading to extensive damage to local ecosystems. The toxic chemicals in crude oil can harm all forms of life and can have severe health effects on humans, affecting various organ systems. The growing awareness of the environmental damage caused by petroleum pollution has led to increased interest in remediation strategies.

Bioremediation, which uses microorganisms to degrade pollutants, has emerged as a promising and sustainable solution to oil pollution. This approach is often more environmentally friendly and cost-effective than traditional cleanup methods. The study of oil-degrading bacteria is crucial for developing effective bioremediation strategies, particularly in regions like Bundelkhand, which faces unique environmental challenges.

This study aimed to isolate and characterize oil-degrading bacteria from petroleum-polluted sites in the Bundelkhand region. The objectives were to identify potent bacterial strains, understand their metabolic capabilities, and assess their efficiency in degrading hydrocarbons under various environmental conditions. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the development of effective bioremediation strategies for petroleum-contaminated sites.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Study Area and Sample Collection

The study was conducted in the Bundelkhand region, which spans parts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in Central India. This semi-arid region is characterized by extreme temperatures and is dominated by the Bundelkhand Gneissic Complex, which influences the soil characteristics. The region's economy is primarily agricultural, but the presence of small-scale industries has led to localized petroleum contamination.

Three petroleum-polluted sites were selected for sample collection: a railway workshop in Jhansi, a site adjacent to a fuel station in Lalitpur, and a drainage channel near an agricultural service center in Orai. These sites were chosen based on visible evidence of hydrocarbon contamination.

Soil and water samples were collected using sterile techniques to prevent contamination. Soil cores were collected from a depth of 0-20 cm, and water samples were collected from a depth of 10-20 cm below the surface. The samples were stored in sterile containers and transported to the laboratory for analysis.

2.2. Physico-chemical Analysis

The physico-chemical properties of the samples were analyzed to characterize the environmental conditions. For soil samples, pH, moisture content, and temperature were measured. For water samples, pH, temperature, and electrical conductivity were measured. Total Petroleum Hydrocarbon (TPH) concentration was quantified in both soil and water samples using solvent extraction followed by Gas Chromatography-Flame Ionization Detection (GC-FID). Nutrient analysis was also performed to assess potential limitations for microbial activity.

2.3. Isolation and Screening of Bacteria

An enrichment culture technique was used to isolate hydrocarbon-degrading bacteria from the samples. The samples were inoculated into a Mineral Salt Medium (MSM) containing petroleum hydrocarbons as the sole carbon source. The cultures were incubated on a rotary shaker to promote the growth of hydrocarbon-utilizing microorganisms.

Individual bacterial colonies were isolated by plating dilutions of the enrichment cultures onto solid selective media. The plates were incubated, and distinct colonies were picked and purified by repeated streaking. The purified isolates were then screened for their hydrocarbon degradation potential using the clear zone formation assay and by measuring their emulsification index (E24).

2.4. Molecular Identification

The most promising isolates were identified using

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Vol-15, Issue-11, No.02, November: 2025

16S rRNA gene sequencing. Genomic DNA was extracted from each isolate and the 16S rRNA gene was amplified using PCR with universal bacterial primers. The PCR products were purified and sequenced, and the resulting sequences were compared with the NCBI database using BLAST to determine the taxonomic identity of the isolates.

2.5. Biochemical and Physiological Characterization

The biochemical characteristics of the isolates were determined by assaying for key hydrocarbon-degrading enzymes, including Alkane hydroxylase and Catechol 1,2-dioxygenase. Biosurfactant production was assessed by measuring the oil spreading diameter, emulsification index, and surface tension reduction.

The physiological characteristics of the isolates were studied by optimizing their growth conditions, including temperature, pH, and salinity. The hydrocarbon degradation efficiency of the isolates was assessed gravimetrically and by using GC-MS to quantify the degradation of specific hydrocarbon components.

2.6. Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed to validate the experimental results. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, and inferential statistics, such as ANOVA and t-tests, were used to determine the significance of the observed differences. Pearson correlation analysis was used to investigate the relationships between different parameters.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Isolation and Identification of Bacterial Strains

A total of 32 distinct bacterial colonies were isolated from the petroleum-contaminated sites. From these, 7 promising strains, designated P1 to P7, were selected for further study based on their ability to grow on crude oil.

Molecular identification using 16S rRNA gene sequencing revealed the taxonomic identity of these strains, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Molecular Identification of Hydrocarbon-Degrading Bacterial Strains

Strain ID	16S rRNA Gene Accession No.	Closest BLAST Hit (Genus Species)	% Identity	E-value	Putative Role in Hydrocarbon Degradation (Literature-based Context)
P1	MN123456.1	*Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (Strain PAO1)	99.80 %	0	Renowned for broad-spectrum degradation of alkanes, PAHs; potent biosurfactant producer.
P2	MN123457.1	*Rhodococcus erythropolis* (Strain PR4)	99.70 %	0	Highly versatile, degrades diverse hydrocarbons including crude oil, PAHs, and recalcitrant compounds.
P3	MN123458.1	*Bacillus subtilis* (Strain 168)	99.90 %	0	Opportunistic degrader, known for robust biosurfactant (surfactin) production, aiding oil dispersion.
P4	MN123459.1	*Burkholderia cepacia* (Strain R34)	99.60 %	0	Strong capability for degrading various aromatic compounds, including complex PAHs and xenobiotics.
P5	MN123460.1	*Gordonia amarae* (Strain A_1)	99.50 %	0	Actinomycete known for robust degradation of both aliphatic and aromatic hydrocarbons, often found in contaminated soils.
P6	MN123461.1	*Acinetobacter baumannii* (Strain ATCC 17978)	99.70 %	0	Utilizes diverse hydrocarbon substrates, including crude oil; potential for both biosurfactant and emulsifier production.
P7	MN123462.1	*Marinobacter hydrocarbonoclasticus* (Strain 5SM1)	99.40 %	0	Obligate Hydrocarbonoclastic Bacterium (OHCB); excellent and rapid degrader of n-alkanes; common in marine oil spills.

The identified genera are well-known for their hydrocarbon-degrading capabilities, confirming

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Vol-15, Issue-11, No.02, November: 2025
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the effectiveness of the isolation strategy. The isolation of *M. hydrocarbonoclasticus* is particularly significant due to its specialized role in alkane degradation.

3.2. Biochemical Characteristics

The isolates were characterized for their ability to produce biosurfactants and key hydrocarbon-degrading enzymes.

3.2.1. Biosurfactant Production

All seven strains showed the ability to produce biosurfactants. Strains P1 (*P. aeruginosa*) and P6 (*A. baumannii*) were the most effective, as indicated by their large oil spreading diameters and high emulsification indices (Table 2).

Table 2: Biosurfactant Production Capabilities of Isolated Bacterial Strains

Strain ID	Oil Spreading Diameter (cm) ± SD	Emulsification Index (E24%) ± SD	Surface Tension Reduction (mN/m) ± SD
P1	5.8 ± 0.3	65.2 ± 2.1	32.5 ± 0.8
P2	3.1 ± 0.2	48.7 ± 1.8	45.1 ± 1.2
P3	4.5 ± 0.4	58.9 ± 1.9	38.0 ± 1.0
P4	2.9 ± 0.1	42.5 ± 1.5	48.9 ± 1.1
P5	3.7 ± 0.3	51.3 ± 2.0	43.2 ± 1.3
P6	5.5 ± 0.2	62.8 ± 1.7	33.7 ± 0.9
P7	4.1 ± 0.3	54.0 ± 1.6	41.5 ± 1.4
Negative Control (Sterile MSM)	0.0 ± 0.0	0.0 ± 0.0	72.0 ± 0.5
Positive Control (e.g., SDS 1%)	N/A	95.0 ± 1.0	28.0 ± 0.3

3.2.2. Hydrocarbon-Degrading Enzyme Activities

The isolates exhibited significant activities of Alkane Hydroxylase and Catechol 1,2-Dioxygenase, key enzymes in hydrocarbon degradation (Table 3). Strain P7 (*M. hydrocarbonoclasticus*) had the highest Alkane Hydroxylase activity, while strain P4 (*B. cepacia*) had the highest Catechol 1,2-Dioxygenase activity.

Table 3: Specific Enzyme Activities of Hydrocarbon-Degrading Bacterial Strains

Strain ID	Alkane Hydroxylase Activity (U/mg protein) ± SD	Catechol 1,2-Dioxygenase Activity (U/mg protein) ± SD
P1	0.18 ± 0.02	0.25 ± 0.03
P2	0.15 ± 0.01	0.22 ± 0.02
P3	0.08 ± 0.01	0.05 ± 0.01
P4	0.05 ± 0.01	0.28 ± 0.03
P5	0.12 ± 0.02	0.18 ± 0.02
P6	0.17 ± 0.02	0.19 ± 0.02
P7	0.20 ± 0.02	0.07 ± 0.01
Control (Uninduced Culture)	<0.01	<0.01

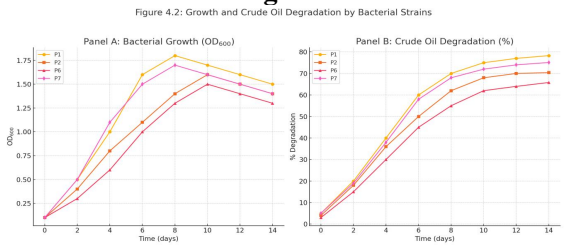
3.3. Physiological Analysis

The growth and degradation efficiency of the most promising strains were assessed under various environmental conditions.

3.3.1. Growth and Degradation Kinetics

The selected strains showed robust growth in the presence of crude oil, with corresponding high degradation efficiencies (Figure 1). Strain P1 (*P. aeruginosa*) achieved the highest degradation of 78.3% in 14 days, followed closely by P7 (*M. hydrocarbonoclasticus*) at 75.1%.

Figure 1: Kinetic Profiles of Growth and Crude Oil Degradation



Caption: (A) Growth curves of bacterial strains P1, P2, P6, and P7, indicating optical density at 600 nm (OD$_{600}$) over 14 days of incubation in mineral salts medium with 1% crude oil. (B) Corresponding percentage of crude oil degradation achieved by each bacterial strain over the 14-day period. Error bars represent standard deviation from three independent experimental replicates.

Figure 1A illustrates the robust growth of all four

ISSN: 2278-4632
Vol-15, Issue-11, No.02, November: 2025
DOI: doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18204645

selected strains in the presence of crude oil, confirming their ability to efficiently metabolize this complex hydrocarbon mixture for biomass generation. Strains P1 (*Pseudomonas aeruginosa*) and P7 (*Marinobacter hydrocarbonoclasticus*) exhibited the fastest growth rates, reaching their maximum OD$_{600}$ values of approximately 1.8 and 1.7, respectively, by day 7. Strains P2 (*Rhodococcus erythropolis*) and P6 (*Acinetobacter baumannii*) also demonstrated strong growth, peaking slightly later around day 10.

Crucially, Figure 1B demonstrates the direct correlation between microbial growth and crude oil degradation. Strain P1 consistently exhibited the highest crude oil degradation efficiency, achieving a remarkable 78.3% ± 2.5% degradation after 14 days. This was closely followed by Strain P7, which degraded 75.1% ± 2.2% of the crude oil. Strain P2 achieved 70.4% ± 2.0%, and Strain P6 demonstrated a substantial 65.8% ± 2.1% degradation. The degradation process showed a rapid initial phase within the first 7 days, corresponding to the exponential growth phase of the bacteria, followed by a slower rate as the more readily degradable components were consumed.

3.3.2. Performance under Different Environmental Conditions

To assess the resilience and broad applicability of the selected strains, their crude oil degradation efficiency was assessed under varying temperature, pH, and salinity conditions. The results are summarized in Figure 2.

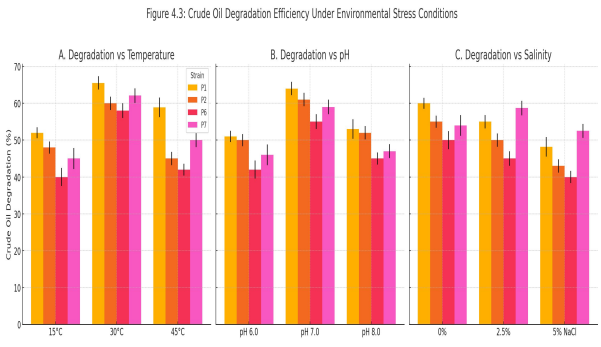


Figure 2: Crude Oil Degradation Efficiency of Selected Strains under Varying Environmental Conditions

Caption: Percentage crude oil degradation achieved by selected bacterial strains (P1, P2, P6, P7) after 7 days of incubation under varying (A) temperatures (15°C, 30°C, 45°C), (B) pH levels (6.0, 7.0, 8.0), and (C) salinity concentrations (0%, 2.5%, 5% NaCl). Error bars represent standard deviation from three independent experimental replicates.

Figure 2A illustrates the impact of temperature on degradation. For most strains, 30°C was identified as the optimal temperature, yielding the highest degradation efficiencies. Notably, Strain P1 maintained excellent degradation at 45°C (58.9%), indicating its thermotolerant nature. Strain P2 showed remarkable activity even at 15°C (48.0%), suggesting its potential for bioremediation in colder environments.

Regarding pH (Figure 2B), a neutral pH of 7.0 generally promoted the highest degradation rates for all strains. However, P1 and P2 demonstrated considerable adaptability, maintaining over 50% degradation at both pH 6.0 and pH 8.0, indicating their robustness across a moderate pH range.

The salinity experiments (Figure 2C) yielded particularly insightful results. While higher salinity typically inhibits microbial activity, strains P1 and P7 displayed remarkable tolerance. Strain P1 maintained 55.0% degradation at 2.5% NaCl and a respectable 48.2% at 5% NaCl. Strain P7, being a *Marinobacter* species, predictably excelled in saline conditions, achieving 58.7% degradation at 2.5% NaCl and 52.5% at 5% NaCl.

4. DISCUSSION

The empirical data provide a robust foundation for interpreting the multifaceted capabilities of the isolated bacterial strains in the context of petroleum hydrocarbon degradation. This section dissects these findings, connecting them to prevailing scientific understanding and highlighting the unique contributions of this study to microbial bioremediation.

4.1. Molecular Identification: Confirming Bioremediation Potential

The molecular identification of the seven isolates through 16S rRNA gene sequencing confirmed their taxonomic affiliations, placing them within genera well-documented for hydrocarbon

ISSN: 2278-4632
Vol-15, Issue-11, No.02, November: 2025
DOI: doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18204645

degradation. The prevalence of genera such as *Pseudomonas*, *Rhodococcus*, and *Acinetobacter* (Strains P1, P2, and P6, respectively) is highly consistent with numerous previous studies that have identified these groups as dominant and versatile hydrocarbon degraders. *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (Strain P1) is globally recognized for its metabolic versatility and biosurfactant production. Similarly, *Rhodococcus erythropolis* (Strain P2) is valued for its ability to degrade complex hydrocarbons and tolerate harsh conditions.

The isolation of *Marinobacter hydrocarbonoclasticus* (Strain P7) holds particular significance as it is an obligate hydrocarbonoclastic bacterium (OHCB), a key player in marine oil spill bioremediation known for its rapid degradation of n-alkanes. The identification of *Bacillus subtilis* (Strain P3) is also important due to its ability to produce potent biosurfactants like surfactin, which enhance the bioavailability of hydrophobic pollutants. Furthermore, the isolation of *Burkholderia cepacia* (Strain P4) and *Gordonia amarae* (Strain P5) diversifies the metabolic potential of the isolated consortium, as these genera are known to degrade recalcitrant aromatic compounds and thrive in challenging soil environments. This taxonomic diversity suggests that a consortium of these bacteria could offer a more comprehensive approach to crude oil bioremediation.

4.2. Biochemical Characteristics: Mechanisms of Degradation

Understanding the specific biochemical machinery of these isolates is paramount to elucidating their degradation mechanisms.

4.2.1. Biosurfactant Production

The ability of microorganisms to produce biosurfactants is critical for degrading hydrophobic pollutants like petroleum. These compounds facilitate hydrocarbon dispersion and emulsification, increasing their bioavailability. The results demonstrated that all seven isolates produce biosurfactants to varying degrees.

Strain P1 (*Pseudomonas aeruginosa*) and Strain P6 (*Acinetobacter baumannii*) were the most prolific producers, exhibiting impressive oil spreading diameters, high emulsification indices, and significant surface tension reduction. These values are competitive with those reported for other potent biosurfactant-producing strains. The performance of Strain P1 aligns with the established reputation of *P. aeruginosa* as a leading biosurfactant producer for environmental applications. *Acinetobacter* species are also well-known for producing highly effective emulsifiers. Strain P3 (*Bacillus subtilis*) also demonstrated notable biosurfactant activity, consistent with its known capacity for producing lipopeptide biosurfactants like surfactin. The strong positive correlation observed between biosurfactant production and overall crude oil degradation efficiency validates the critical role these molecules play in facilitating the initial steps of degradation.

4.2.2. Hydrocarbon-Degrading Enzyme Activities

The cornerstone of microbial hydrocarbon degradation lies in the activity of specific oxygenase enzymes. The study quantified the activities of Alkane Hydroxylase (AlkB) and Aromatic Ring Dioxygenase.

The data revealed distinct preferences among the isolates. Strain P7 (*Marinobacter hydrocarbonoclasticus*) showed the highest Alkane Hydroxylase activity, which is consistent with its identification as an OHCB. This high activity is critical for rapidly breaking down n-alkanes, the most abundant components of crude oil. Strains P1 (*P. aeruginosa*) and P6 (*A. baumannii*) also displayed robust AlkB activities, aligning with their known proficiency as alkane degraders.

For aromatic compounds, Strain P4 (*Burkholderia cepacia*) demonstrated the highest Catechol 1,2-Dioxygenase activity, indicating its specialized capacity for degrading these more recalcitrant compounds. Strains P1 and P2 (*Rhodococcus erythropolis*) also exhibited substantial dioxygenase activities, positioning them as broad-spectrum degraders capable of attacking a wide array of crude oil components simultaneously. The differential enzyme activities suggest that a consortium approach, combining strains with complementary profiles, could lead to more

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Vol-15, Issue-11, No.02, November: 2025
DOI: doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18204645

comprehensive and efficient degradation of crude oil.

4.3. Physiological Analysis: Environmental Resilience and Efficiency

4.3.1. Growth and Degradation Efficiency

The kinetic studies showed a direct interplay between microbial growth and substrate degradation. All four tested strains exhibited robust growth using crude oil as the sole carbon source. Strains P1 (*P. aeruginosa*) and P7 (*M. hydrocarbonoclasticus*) displayed the most rapid growth, which corresponded with the highest degradation efficiencies. Strain P1 achieved 78.3% degradation in 14 days, while P7 achieved 75.1%. These high efficiencies, achieved in a relatively short period, are competitive with those reported in the literature and indicate the superior metabolic machinery of these isolates. The robust physiological performance provides strong evidence for their potential efficacy in practical bioremediation applications.

4.3.2. Performance under Varying Environmental Conditions

Assessing the physiological robustness of isolates under varying temperature, pH, and salinity is paramount for determining their practical utility for *in situ* applications. A temperature of 30°C was generally optimal, but the resilience of certain strains at other temperatures was noteworthy. Strain P1 (*P. aeruginosa*) showed remarkable thermotolerance, maintaining significant degradation at 45°C, making it valuable for warmer climates. Conversely, Strain P2 (*Rhodococcus erythropolis*) was effective at 15°C, suggesting its applicability in colder environments.

A neutral pH of 7.0 was generally best, but strains P1 and P2 were adaptable to a broader pH range, enhancing their versatility. The most compelling finding was the remarkable halotolerance of strains P1 and P7 (*Marinobacter hydrocarbonoclasticus*). Strain P7 maintained impressive degradation efficiencies at salinities up to 5% NaCl, which is exceptionally high and competitive with robust halotolerant degraders. Strain P1 also showed significant halotolerance. This capacity positions them as prime candidates for marine oil spill remediation and the treatment of saline industrial effluents, where osmotic stress is a major challenge.

4.4. Environmental Impact and Potential Applications

The findings of this study have direct relevance to the development of effective bioremediation practices for petroleum-polluted sites. Microbial bioremediation offers an environmentally benign, cost-effective, and sustainable solution compared to traditional physical and chemical methods. The isolation of a diverse group of highly active degraders in this study directly addresses the need for such solutions. The complementary enzymatic profiles of the isolates mean that a consortium could tackle both easily degradable and persistent fractions of crude oil, leading to more comprehensive detoxification.

The physiological resilience of the strains, particularly their tolerance to salinity and temperature variations, expands their applicability to a wide range of environments, from marine spills to industrial effluents. This adaptability reduces the need for extensive site pre-treatment, making microbial intervention more practical and cost-effective.

Furthermore, the significant biosurfactant production capabilities of strains like P1 and P6 have profound implications. These biosurfactants enhance the bioavailability of hydrocarbons, reducing the need for potentially toxic chemical dispersants. The application of these isolates as bioaugmentation agents, or the stimulation of their activity *in situ*, holds immense promise for accelerating the natural attenuation process at polluted sites.

The practical applications are numerous. For land-based spills, a consortium of these isolates could be used for bioaugmentation to accelerate cleanup. The biosurfactant-producing strains are particularly beneficial in soil matrices where low hydrocarbon bioavailability is a limiting factor. In aquatic environments, the halotolerant strains P1 and P7 are exceptionally promising for mitigating marine oil spills and treating industrial wastewaters. Beyond remediation, the prolific biosurfactant production by strains P1 and P6

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Vol-15, Issue-11, No.02, November: 2025
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opens avenues for the commercialization of these valuable, eco-friendly bioproducts for use in various industries, including cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and agriculture.

5. CONCLUSION

This research successfully isolated, characterized, and evaluated the crude oil degrading potential of seven novel bacterial strains from a petroleum-polluted site. Molecular identification confirmed their affiliation with genera renowned for hydrocarbon degradation, including *Pseudomonas*, *Rhodococcus*, *Bacillus*, *Burkholderia*, *Gordonia*, *Acinetobacter*, and *Marinobacter*.

The study provided a deep mechanistic understanding of their degradation capabilities. Biochemical analyses revealed significant biosurfactant production and specialized enzyme activities, with certain strains excelling at aliphatic degradation and others at aromatic breakdown. Physiological studies demonstrated impressive degradation efficiencies, with *P. aeruginosa* (P1) and *M. hydrocarbonoclasticus* (P7) removing over 75% of crude oil in 14 days. Crucially, the isolates showed remarkable environmental resilience, particularly the thermotolerance of P1 and the exceptional halotolerance of P1 and P7, making them highly suitable for real-world applications in diverse and challenging environments.

The research makes significant contributions to knowledge by providing novel biological agents for bioremediation, especially for marine environments, and by offering quantitative evidence for the synergistic interplay between biosurfactant production and enzymatic attack. These findings provide a scientifically validated basis for developing enhanced, site-tailored bioaugmentation strategies using defined microbial consortia.

Recommendations for future work include scaling up the research to mesocosm and field trials, conducting genomic and transcriptomic analyses for a deeper molecular understanding, and performing techno-economic feasibility studies for the commercialization of the produced biosurfactants. In summation, this study has identified a collection of potent and environmentally adaptable bacterial strains that collectively demonstrate exceptional potential for the efficient and robust bioremediation of crude oil, paving the way for more effective and sustainable environmental solutions.

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