**Optimization of Isolation, Screening, and Production of Keratinase Enzyme from Bacillus sp. Isolated from Chicken Feathers**

**Abstract**

Microbial keratinases have become increasingly important in biotechnology due to their ability to target the hydrolysis of highly rigid, strongly cross-linked structural polypeptide "Keratin". They are produced in a medium containing keratinous substrates such as feathers and hair, and belong to the group of serine proteases. This study focused on optimizing the isolation, screening, and production of keratinase enzymes from Bacillus sp. strains that were isolated from chicken feathers. Nine colonies were screened, and the K3 isolate showed the highest level of keratinase activity. The K3 isolate was identified as a Bacillus sp. bacterium based on its culture, morphology, and biochemical characteristics. To optimize the production of the keratinase enzyme, four different types of media were used, with feather meal broth producing the best results. The study also investigated the effect of physical factors such as pH and temperature on enzyme production, with the maximum production achieved at pH 7 and 50°C. The commercial importance of keratinase lies in their ability to produce cost-effective feather by-products for feeds and fertilizers, enzymatic dehairing for the leather and cosmetic industry, detergent uses, development of biopolymers from keratin fibers, enhancing drug delivery in some tissues, and hydrolysis of prion proteins. The findings of this study have significant implications for the industrial application of keratinase, including waste management and bioremediation.

**Keywords:** Keratinase, Chicken feather, Bacteria and Bacillus

**Introduction-** Keratin is a structural protein that forms a major component of various tissues such as feathers, nails, and hair in animals. The high content of disulfide bonds in keratin makes it resistant to degradation by conventional proteases. Therefore, the breakdown of keratin requires specialized enzymes called keratinases. Bacillus sp. is a group of bacteria that have been shown to produce keratinase enzymes capable of degrading keratin (Gupta *et al.,* 2015). The production of keratinase enzyme from Bacillus sp. has potential applications in several industries such as food, agriculture, and cosmetics. In the food industry, the enzyme can be used to hydrolyze the keratin in poultry and fish by-products, converting them into valuable proteins and peptides that can be used as food additives. In the agricultural industry, the enzyme can be used to improve the digestibility of animal feed by breaking down the keratin in feed ingredients. In the cosmetic industry, the enzyme can be used in hair care and skin care products as a natural exfoliant to remove dead skin cells and promote cell regeneration. Chicken feathers, which are rich in keratin, are a common waste product generated in the poultry industry. The disposal of chicken feathers poses environmental problems and represents a missed opportunity for resource utilization. The production of keratinase enzyme from Bacillus sp. strains isolated from chicken feathers presents a promising solution for both the waste management and biotechnological industries (Lasekan *et al.,* 2019).

The optimization of the isolation, screening, and production of keratinase enzyme from Bacillus sp. isolated from chicken feathers has been the subject of several research studies (Lasekan *et al.,* 2019; Gupta *et al.,* 2015). Understanding the factors that influence the production of keratinase enzyme from Bacillus sp. is crucial for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the process. In this paper, we present the results of our investigation into the optimization of isolation, screening, and production of keratinase enzyme from Bacillus sp. isolated from chicken feathers (Singh *et al.,* 2021). Optimizing the culture conditions for keratinase enzyme production is another important step in the process. Culture conditions such as pH, temperature, carbon and nitrogen sources, and agitation rate can have a significant impact on enzyme production. Therefore, identifying the optimal culture conditions for maximum enzyme production is critical for the efficiency of the process.

The objectives of this study were to isolate Bacillus sp. strains from chicken feathers with high keratinase activity, optimize culture conditions for maximum enzyme production, and characterize the enzyme activity. (Kumar *et al.,* 2022). This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the isolation, screening, and production of keratinase enzyme from Bacillus sp. isolated from chicken feathers. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the optimization of isolation, screening, and production of keratinase enzyme from Bacillus sp. isolated from chicken feathers. These result will also help in have important implications for the biotechnological industry and waste management practices.

**Materials and methods**

**Collection and isolation of sample-** Samples were collected from dump yards of poultry wastes at Kasana village near GIMS medical college near Greater noida U.P. India. and sample was washed with distilled water to remove any surface debris. The feathers were then cut into small pieces and added to a 250 mL Erlenmeyer flask containing 50 mL of sterile basal medium (pH 7.5) containing (g/L): KH2PO4 (1.0), K2HPO4 (2.0), MgSO4.7H2O (0.1), NaCl (0.5), and FeSO4.7H2O (0.01) (Rastogi *et al.,* 2010). The flask was incubated at 37°C with shaking at 150 rpm for 24 hours. After 24 hours, the culture was serially diluted up to 10-5 and 0.1 mL of each dilution was plated on basal agar medium containing 2% (w/v) chicken feathers as the sole source of carbon and nitrogen. The plates were incubated at 37°C for 24 hours. The colonies that showed clear zones of keratin hydrolysis were selected and streaked on fresh basal agar medium for purification.

**Screening for keratinase activity:** The selected Bacillus sp. strains were screened for keratinase activity using a plate assay (Lasekan *et al.,* 2019). A 0.1% (w/v) keratin solution was prepared in 0.05 M Tris-HCl buffer (pH 8.0) and 20 mL of the solution was poured onto a petri dish. The dish was allowed to solidify and 10 μL of overnight culture of each Bacillus sp. strain was spotted on the surface of the keratin-containing agar. The plates were incubated at 37°C for 48 hours and observed for clear zones of keratin hydrolysis around the bacterial colonies.

**Screening of Keratinase Production by Plate Assay:** The Bacillus sp. strains isolated from chicken feathers were screened for keratinase activity using a plate assay. Feather powder agar plates containing 0.4% washed feather powder were prepared and inoculated with the bacterial isolates. The washed feathers were dried at 50°C in a forced draught oven and ground into fine fractions using test sieves of appropriate diameters. The plates were incubated at 37°C for 48 hours, and a clear zone around the bacterial growth was indicative of keratinase activity. The results of colony characteristics and keratinase activity were shows the production of keratinase by the bacterial isolates (Lasekan *et al.,* 2019).

**Identification of Bacteria:** The isolated bacteria were identified based on cellular morphology, growth condition, Gram staining, endospore staining, capsule staining, and biochemical tests. The cellular morphology was observed under a microscope, and the Gram staining was performed to identify the bacterial cell wall type. Endospore staining was used to identify endospore-forming bacteria, while capsule staining was used to identify bacteria with a capsule. Biochemical tests such as catalase, oxidase, citrate utilization, indole production, and urease tests were performed to identify the bacterial species. The results of staining techniques and various biochemical tests were recorded (Holt *et al.,* 1994).

**Optimization of Keratinase Enzyme Production from Bacillus sp. Isolated from Chicken Feathers using Different Media:** After identifying the bacterial isolate as Bacillus sp., four different types of media were used to optimize keratinase enzyme production. To do this, 250 mL Erlenmeyer flasks containing 50 mL of each medium (nutrient broth, tryptic soy broth, LB broth, and feather meal broth) were inoculated with 1% (v/v) of bacterial isolate K3 and incubated at 37°C on an orbital shaker at 150 rpm for 72 hours. The resulting culture broth was then centrifuged to obtain the cell-free supernatant, which was used to determine enzyme activity. The enzyme activity was determined using a standard method of measuring the release of amino acids from keratin substrate. Chicken feather powder was used as the keratin substrate at a concentration of 2% (w/v). The reaction mixture contained 1 mL of the cell-free supernatant and 1 mL of the substrate solution in 50 mM Tris-HCl buffer (pH 8.5). The mixture was incubated at 60°C for 30 minutes, after which the reaction was stopped by adding 1 mL of 10% (w/v) trichloroacetic acid (TCA) and centrifuged. The absorbance of the supernatant was measured at 540 nm, and the enzyme activity was expressed as µmol of tyrosine released per minute per milliliter of enzyme solution (µmol/min/mL) (Yu *et al.,* 2016). The Bacillus sp. strain with the highest keratinase activity was selected and used for the optimization of enzyme production. A 250 mL Erlenmeyer flask containing 50 mL of optimized medium was inoculated with 1% (v/v) of the overnight culture of Bacillus sp. and incubated at various temperatures (25°C, 30°C, 37°C, and 40°C) and pH values (5.0, 6.0, 7.0, 8.0, and 9.0), for 48 hours at 10000 rpm (Kumar *et al.,* 2021).

**Results and discussion**

The isolation of a keratinase-producing microorganism was carried out using a soil sample. The soil sample was incubated in an incubator shaker at 37°C for 24 hours. The sample was then serially diluted and spread on nutrient agar plates using a glass spreader. The resulting isolated colonies on the plates were studied for their morphological characteristics and streaked on nutrient agar plates using the quadrant streaking method. Nine different colonies, named K1 to K9, were screened on a feather meal plate, and out of these, K3 showed better zone formation after 24 hours. K3 was then streaked on nutrient agar plates as point inoculation and single streaking. The identification of the selected bacterial isolate K3 was carried out based on its culture, morphological, and biochemical characteristics. These examinations were performed using standard microbiological and biochemical tests as per the protocol suggested by Cappuccino and Sherman (2002). K3 isolates (Table 3 ) showed the following results for the biochemical tests. These were positive for Motility Test, Catalase Test, Lipid Hydrolysis, Starch Agar, Nutrient Gelatin, H2S production, Indole- Production, Citrate Utilization, Voges- Proskauer Test and Citrate Utilization and Nitrate reduction and few isolates were shows negative for Urease Test and Methyl Red Test- MRVP, Triple Sugar Iron Agar Plate test for K3 Isolate shows Alkaline, Dark red slant and Bud. The observation presented in the table and plate clearly shows that the bacterial isolate K3 is a gram-positive, short rod-shaped bacterium. Based on its culture, morphology, and biochemical characteristics, it is most likely a member of the genus Bacillus

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Isolate no** | **Keratinase producer** |
| KI | + |
| K2 | - |
| K3 | +++ |
| K4 | + |
| K5 | - |
| K6 | + |
| K7 | ++ |
| K8 | ++ |
| K9 | - |

**Table-1: Qualitative screening of keratinase Producing Bacteria from chicken feather Samples**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Character**  | **Morphology** | **Results** |
| **Colony characterization on nutrient agar plates** | Colony size | Medium |
| Elevation | Flat |
| Colony shape | Irregular |
| **Cell characterization** | Morphology | Results |
| Grams reaction | Positive |
| Cell shape | Short rod shaped |
| **Growth and Culture** | Growth in nutrient broth  | Uniform turbidity |
| Growth temperature range  | 37-42°C |
| Pigment production  | No pigment formation |

**Table-2: Morphological characterization of K3 Isolate**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Biochemical test** | **Results** |
| Motility Test | Positive |
| Catalase Test | Positive |
| Lipid Hydrolysis | Positive |
| Starch Agar | Positive |
| Nutrient Gelatin | Negative |
| H2S production | Negative |
| Indole- Production | Positive |
| Citrate Utilization | Positive |
| Voges- Proskauer Test | Positive |
| Nitrate reduction | Positive |
| Urease Test | Negative |
| Methyl Red Test- MRVP | Negative |
| Triple Sugar Iron Agar Plate | Alkaline, Dark red slant and Bud |

**Table-3: Biochemical characterization of K3 Isolate**

After identifying the bacterial isolate as Bacillus sp., the study aimed to optimize the production of keratinase enzyme using four different types of media: nutrient broth, tryptic soy broth, LB broth, and feather meal broth. the keratinase production in different media showed that the highest enzyme activity was obtained in feather meal broth, with a value of 22.43 µmol/min/mL. The enzyme activity in nutrient broth, tryptic soy broth, and LB broth were 14.82 µmol/min/mL, 10.44 µmol/min/mL. and 7.04 µmol/min/mL, respectively. Therefore, feather meal broth was chosen as the optimized medium for keratinase production.( Figure 2) After, the morphologically and biochemical characteristion of Bacillus sp The Bacillus sp isolates were then characterized and the proteolytic activity was detected by the presence of clear zone. It was found that the strain K3 yielded the highest Keratinase activity with a clear zone of hydrolysis. Incubation time plays a substantial role in the maximum enzyme production. It was reported that the strain K3 showed maximum Keratinase production in 16 hours. (Figure 1) It indicated that the production of Keratinase was dependent on the bacterial cell growth. The maximum enzyme production was obtained during the continuous growth of the culture at the late exponential phase and early stationary phase of the growth and thereafter number of viable organisms decreased due to the depletion of readily available nutrients. maximum O.D. was observed at 16 hours and after then decline phase starts. (Figure 2) The effect of some physical factors, such as PH and temperature, on the production of crude enzyme was investigated. The present results showed maximum Keratinase production at PH 7.(Figure 3) From the present results, it was reported that maximum Keratinase production was achieved at 50°c.( Figure 4) At PH 7 the Keratinase activity is 94.08 U/ml and at 50°c temperature Keratinase activity is 95.31 U/ml.

**Figure1: Growth Curve of Bacillus sp. for Optimization of Keratinase Enzyme Production**

**Figure 2: Enzvyme Activity in Different Production Media in 24 Hours**

**Figure 3: Keratinase enzyme Activity at Different Temperature**

**Figure 4: Keratinase enzyme Activity at Different pH**

**Conclusion-** The present study aimed to isolate and characterize a keratinase-producing microorganism from a soil sample. After incubation and serial dilution, nine different colonies were screened, and the K3 isolate was found to have the best keratinase activity. The K3 isolate was identified as a gram-positive, short rod-shaped bacterium of the genus Bacillus based on its culture, morphology, and biochemical characteristics. After identification, the study focused on optimizing keratinase enzyme production using four different types of media: nutrient broth, tryptic soy broth, LB broth, and feather meal broth. The results showed that feather meal broth was the best medium for keratinase production, with a value of 22.43 µmol/min/mL. The study also found that incubation time played a crucial role in the maximum enzyme production, with the K3 strain showing maximum keratinase production in 16 hours. The effect of some physical factors, such as pH and temperature, on the production of crude enzyme was also investigated, and the results showed that maximum keratinase production was achieved at pH 7 and 50°C. These findings may be useful in the industrial production of keratinase for various applications, including waste management and bioremediation.

**Data Availability Statement:** Not Applicable

**Ethical approval**: Not Required

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