

Table of Contents	Page No.
List of figures	xii
List of tables	xx
List of abbreviations	xxi
Preface	xxiv
Chapter 1	
Introduction.....	01
1.1 Cornea.....	02
1.1.1 Anatomy, Function and Composition of Cornea	02
1.1.2 Microstructure of Cornea	03
1.1.3 Functions of corneal layers	03
1.1.3.1 Corneal Epithelium.....	03
1.1.3.2 Bowman’s Layer	04
1.1.3.3 Stroma Layer.....	04
1.1.3.4 Descemet’s Membrane.....	05
1.1.3.5 Endothelium Layer	05
1.2 Problem and Needs	05
1.2.1 Corneal diseases and dystrophies.....	05
1.2.2 Burden of corneal diseases	06
1.3 Solutions for Health Issues Associated With the Cornea	07
1.4 Tissue Engineering.....	08
1.4.1 Definition of Tissue Engineering	08
1.4.2 Cell sources in Tissue Engineering.....	09
1.4.3 Biomaterials in Tissue Engineering.....	10
1.4.4 Tissue Engineering Scaffolds	11
1.4.4.1 Hydrogel based scaffolds.....	13
1.4.4.2 Electrospinning nanofibrous scaffolds.....	13
1.4.4.3 Gas foaming.....	16
1.4.4.4 Solvent casting/Particulate leaching.....	17
1.4.4.5 Three-dimensional (3D) Bioprinting/Freeform fabrication technology ..	18
1.4.4.6 Decellularization technology	20
1.5 Literature review	23

1.6 Research objectives	25
1.7 Thesis outline	26
1.8 References	28
Chapter 2	
Fabrication, Characterization and Modification Strategy of Electrospun Nanofibrous Scaffolds from Acid and Alkaline Hydrolyzed Gelatin for Corneal Tissue Engineering	43
2.1 Introduction	44
2.2 Materials and method	50
2.2.1 Materials	50
2.2.2 Methods	50
2.2.2.1 Fabrication of electrospun gelatin nanofibrous mats	50
2.2.2.2 Preparation of Silk Fibroin Solution	52
2.2.2.3 Silk permeation inside gelatin scaffold	53
2.2.3 Characterization of the scaffolds	54
2.2.3.1 Morphological characterization of electrospun nanofibers	54
2.2.3.2 Porosity determination	55
2.2.3.3 ATR-FTIR spectroscopic analysis	55
2.2.3.4 Water retention capacity	56
2.2.3.5 In vitro stability and degradation	56
2.2.3.6 Transparency determination	57
2.2.3.7 Cellular viability and compatibility	57
2.2.3.7.1 Culturing fibroblast cells on the prepared nanofibrous scaffolds	57
2.2.3.7.2 MTT assay	58
2.2.3.8 Statistical analysis	59
2.3 Results	59
2.3.1 Morphological characterization	59
2.3.2 Posrosity determination	61
2.3.3 ATR-FTIR spectroscopic analysis	62
2.3.4 Liquid retaining capacity	66
2.3.5 Stability and degradation	68
2.3.6 Transparency	69
2.3.7 Cellular viability and compatibility	71

2.3.7.1 Cell culture within the scaffolds	71
2.3.7.2 MTT assay	73
2.4 Discussion.....	74
2.5 Conclusion	79
2.6 References	81
Chapter 3	
Fabrication and Characterization of Silk Fibroin Based Nanofibrous Scaffolds Supplemented with Gelatin for Corneal Tissue Engineering	
96	
3.1 Introduction.....	97
3.2. Materials and method.....	101
3.2.1 Materials	101
3.2.2 Methods.....	102
3.2.2.1 Preparation of Silk Fibroin Solution.....	102
3.2.2.2 Fabrication of electrospun nanofibrous mats.....	102
3.2.2.3 Permeation of gelatin solution inside electrospun silk scaffold ..	104
3.2.3 Characterization of the scaffolds.....	104
3.2.3.1 Morphological characterization of electrospun nanofibers	104
3.2.3.2 Porosity determination	105
3.2.3.3 ATR-FTIR analysis.....	105
3.2.3.4 Liquid retention capacity	106
3.2.3.5 In vitro stability and degradation.....	106
3.2.3.6 Transparency determination	106
3.2.3.7 Water contact angle measurement	107
3.2.3.8 Mechanical testing of the Scaffold.....	107
3.2.4 Cellular viability and compatibility	108
3.2.4.1 Culturing of cells within scaffolds	108
3.2.4.2 Nuclear staining	109
3.2.4.3 MTT assay	109
3.2.5 Statistical Analysis	110
3.3 Results	111
3.3.1 Characterization of the scaffolds.....	111
3.3.1.1 Morphological characterization of electrospun nanofibers	111
3.3.1.2 Porosity determination	113

3.3.1.3 ATR-FTIR spectroscopic analysis.....	114
3.3.1.4 Liquid retention capacity	116
3.3.1.5 Stability and degradation of electrospun nanofibers.....	117
3.3.1.6 Transparency measurement	120
3.3.1.7 Contact angle measurement	122
3.3.1.8 Mechanical testing of the scaffolds.....	123
3.3.1.9 Cell compatibility	124
3.3.1.10 MTT Assay	126
3.4 Discussion.....	127
3.5 Conclusion	137
3.6 References.....	138
Chapter 4	
Conclusion and future scope of work.....	150
Permission from Central Animal Ethical Committee	157
List of publications	162

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure No.	Figure description	Page No.
Figure 1.1	Diagram and anatomy of human eye.	02
Figure 1.2	Diagram showing microstructure of cornea and its function	03
Figure 1.3	(A) Global map of age-standardized prevalence of blindness, 1990-2020. Source: Vision Atlas (B) represents the requirement and availability of healthy donor cornea.	06
Figure 1.4	General Scheme of Tissue Engineering Process.	08
Figure 1.5	A diagrammatic representation of the difference between a two-dimensional and three-dimensional cell culture environment.	12
Figure 1.6	Approaches for developing a wide range of 3D scaffolds.	12
Figure 1.7	Diagrammatic representation of electrospinning unit setup and Taylor cone formation.	14
Figure 1.8	Depicts various applications of electrospun nanofibers.	15
Figure 1.9	Schematic diagram for fabrication of hierarchical scaffolds with a tailored macro porous (3D printing) /micro-porous (gas foaming) architectures.	17
Figure 1.10	Schematic diagram for fabrication of scaffolds using solvent casting/ salt leaching method	18
Figure 1.11	Overview of 3D Bioprinting for Tissue Engineering. Computer aided design models use patient derived images to mimic the specific geometry of tissues of interest. The printing bioink may contain a combination of biomaterials, bioactive molecules, or cells to create functionalized and personalized scaffolds. Scaffolds are then printed using the computer aided design and desired bioink (s).	19
Figure 1.12	Schematic of organ decellularization and tissue decellularization approaches.	22

Figure 1.13	Schematic diagram displaying applications of decellularized materials.	23
Figure 2.1	Basic chemical structure of gelatin.	44
Figure 2.2	Basic amino acid composition of gelatin.	45
Figure 2.3	Preparation of two distinct gelatins from collagen hydrolysis by acidic and basic treatments	46
Figure 2.4	Depicts schematic for electrospinning setup and optimized parameters for gelatin electrospinning	51
Figure 2.5	Schematic flow diagram for silk fibroin extraction procedure.	52
Figure 2.6	Schematic procedure for (A) silk permeation inside the electrospun gelatin A nanofibrous structure and (B) schematic representing ethanol vapor crosslinking of the silk permeated gelatin A nanofibrous (SFG) scaffold. Ethanol vapor treatment alters silk confirmation from least stable, high water soluble scaffold to highly stable, less water-soluble silk. Therefore, the gelatin nanofibers of silk permeated gelatin A (SFG) remains protected from fast degradation enhancing its stability under physiological conditions.	54
Figure 2.7	Schematic for porosity analysis using Image J software.	55
Figure 2.8	Depicts the mechanism of MTT assay to determine the cellular proliferation.	59
Figure 2.9	Digital images and SEM micrograph of the electrospun gelatin nanofibers. (A) Digital images and (B) SEM images of nanofibrous scaffold shows no difference except gelatin B nanofibers appears smooth and thin compared to gelatin type A nanofibers.	60
Figure 2.10	Depicts digital images of electrospun gelatin A (GA) silk	61

permeated nanofibrous gelatin A (SFG), and their respective SEM images.

Figure 2.11 Graph represents the porosity percentage obtained using image J software from the scanning electron microscope (SEM) images of the fabricated scaffolds: gelatin A and gelatin B. 62

Figure 2.12 Attenuated total Reflection-Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (ATR-FTIR) analysis of electrospun gelatin A scaffold, gelatin B scaffold. Both the gelatin A and B polymeric scaffolds show similar characteristic peaks with no significant difference. Gelatin A and gelatin B scaffolds represents characteristic peaks at 1640, 1540, 1455 cm^{-1} and 3304 cm^{-1} for amide I, amide II, amide III and amide A, respectively. 64

Figure 2.13 Attenuated total reflection-Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (ATR-FTIR) analysis of electrospun gelatin A scaffold silk film, and ethanol treated silk permeated gelatin A nanofibrous mat [SFG (T)]. SFG (T) shows all the characteristic peaks of gelatin A and silk, with a peak shift of silk characteristic peak to a slightly lower wavenumber, i.e., at 1627 cm^{-1} , 1522 cm^{-1} , and 1232 cm^{-1} for amide I, amide II, and amide III, respectively. 65

Figure 2.14 Water retention percentage of acid hydrolyzed (gelatin A) scaffold at (A) room temperature (B) at 37°C (physiological temperature) upto 11 h, and (C) electrospun silk permeated gelatin A nanofibrous (SFG) scaffold at 37°C (physiological temperature) up to 144 h (i.e. 6 days). The gelatin A scaffold incubated at 37°C shows high water holding capacity, but starts degrading after 5 h whereas the samples stored at a room temperature (25°C) remains stable upto 11 h of incubation. Silk permeated electrospun gelatin 67

A nanofibrous scaffold (SFG) remain stable for longer compared to gelatin A alone, providing better opportunity for cellular growth.

Figure 2.15 Depicts in vitro degradation of scaffolds in lysozyme solution to simulate the in vivo environment of body fluids (A) Digital images of scaffolds showing physical appearance of gelatin A, gelatin B and SFG scaffolds after 4h, 10h, 1 day, 3 day and 6 days of incubation in lysozyme solution (B) Represents weight loss percentage of scaffolds after 4 h, 10 h, 1 day, 3 day and 6 days of incubation. Scale bar is 10 mm. 69

Figure 2.16 Depicts the transparency percentage of the native rat cornea and fabricated electrospun gelatin type A scaffold and silk permeated gelatin A (SFG) nanofibrous scaffolds. The scaffolds illustrates comparable transparency with respect to native adult rat cornea. 70

Figure 2.17 Illustrates growth of SIRC [Statens Seruminstitut Rabbit Cornea] fibroblast cells cultured on (A) a culture plate and (B) silk permeated gelatin A (SFG) nanofibrous scaffold for 1, 3, and 5 days. Scale bar is 100 μ m. 72

Figure 2.18 This figure illustrates the percentage cellular viability of SIRC [Statens Seruminstitut Rabbit Cornea] fibroblast cells for 1st, 3rd and 5th day of cell culture. Cellular proliferation and compatibility of the electrospun gelatin A permeated nanofibrous (SFG) scaffold determined by MTT assay. In this experiment, absorbance for the 5th day control culture of SIRC cell was considered as reference OD for all the samples. Values are expressed as mean \pm SD (n=3) and the level of significance as *p < 0.05 and **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001, respectively. 73-74

	Morphological analysis through SEM photomicrographs of SF (in aqueous), SF (in formic acid) and gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid). Scaffolds along with their respective digital images (a)	
Figure 3.1	before ethanol vapor treatment i.e., SF (in aqueous; NT), SF (in formic acid; NT), gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid; NT) and (b) after ethanol vapor treatment i.e., SF (in aqueous; T), SF (in formic acid; T), gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid; T).	112
Figure 3.2	Representative image shows continuous gelatin permeation throughout the internal space of the silk nanofibrous scaffold gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid) without leaving any air space along with negligible or no sign of any bubble entrapment within the nanofibrous structure. Scaffolds were cut across the longitudinal plane to observe the extent of gelatin permeation through the SEM.	113
Figure 3.3	Diameter distribution of nanofibers of electrospun SF (in formic acid; NT) scaffolds along with its nanofiber orientation graph.	114
Figure 3.4	ATR-FTIR spectra of SF (in aqueous; NT), SF (in formic acid; NT), gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid; NT), SF (in aqueous; T), SF (in formic acid; T) and gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid; T). (Where NT= non-treated, T= ethanol treated).	115
Figure 3.5	Graph shows weight gain percentage of ethanol treated samples namely, gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid; T), SF (in formic acid; T), SF (in aqueous; T) and non-treated samples namely, gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid; NT), SF (in formic acid; NT) and SF (in aqueous; NT).	117
Figure 3.6	Depicts (a) digital images representing stability of prepared	118

nanofibrous scaffolds in PBS at a room temperature (b) digital images of scaffolds held through forceps after 14 days immersed in PBS at 37°C, (c) digital and SEM micrographs of electrospun samples after 14 days degradation in a lysozyme containing solution at 37°C (d) graph shows weight loss percentage of samples over 14 days of immersion in a lysozyme containing solution at 37°C. (Where NT= non-treated, T= ethanol treated).

Figure 3.7

Transparency of different scaffolds namely SF (in aqueous), SF (in formic acid), gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid) before (NT) and after ethanol vapor treatment (T) in PBS at a room temperature (25°C) (a) digital images of samples showing visual transparency (b) shows the physical appearance of ethanol treated scaffolds in PBS and (c) graph shows percentage of light transmission through the samples. Scale bar: 10 mm. (where NT= non-treated, T= ethanol treated).

121

Figure 3.8

Represents the contact angles of non-treated SF (in aqueous; NT), SF (in formic acid; NT) and gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid; NT) and their ethanol treated forms namely, SF (in aqueous; T), SF (in formic acid; T) and gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid; T) indicating the wetting behaviour of scaffolds. (where NT= non-treated, T= ethanol treated)

122

Figure 3.9

Depicts the tensile stress-strain curve of non-treated SF (in aqueous; NT), SF (in formic acid; NT) and gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid; NT) and their ethanol treated forms namely, SF (in aqueous; T), SF (in formic acid; T) and gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid; T) indicating the mechanical stability of respective scaffolds. (Where NT= non-treated, T= ethanol treated).

124

The above panel of images represents the cells cultured within the ethanol treated SF (in aqueous; T) scaffold using (a) corneal fibroblast SIRC cells (DAPI staining) and (b) L929-RFP fibroblast cells for over a period of 6 days. (c) Represents SIRC cells (DAPI staining) cultured on gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid; T) and (d) L929-RFP cells cultured on gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid; T) scaffolds for over a period of 6 days. Scale bar is 100 μ m for bright field, fluorescent and merged images. (Where NT= non-treated, T= ethanol treated).

Figure 3.10 125

The figure illustrates the percentage cellular viability of (a) SIRC cells (b) L929-RFP cells for 2, 4 and 6 days and the cytocompatibility of the scaffolds as determined by MTT assay (c) comparative cell proliferation percentage values of cells cultured on SF (in aqueous; T) and gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid; T) scaffolds. In this experiment, absorbance for the 6th day culture of positive control was considered as reference OD for all the samples. Values are expressed as mean \pm SD ($n = 3$) and the level of significance as $***p < 0.05$. (Where NT= non-treated, T= ethanol treated)

Figure 3.11 127

Represents (a) digital images of gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid) and silk-gelatin blend (SF/G blend (in formic acid)) placed in PBS showing visual transparency [scale bar = 10 mm] (b) Transparency of gelatin-permeated SF (in formic acid) composite and SF/G blend (in formic acid) scaffolds before (NT) and after ethanol vapor treatment (T) in PBS at a room temperature (25°C) and (c) Their comparative bar graph displaying low level of transparency for SF/G blend (in formic acid) compared to gelatin-

Figure 3.12 134

permeated SF (in formic acid) composite. (Where NT= non-treated, T= ethanol treated).

LIST OF TABLES

Table No.	Table description	Page No.
Table 2.1	Characteristics of gelatin type A and type B as described in the literatures.	47
Table 2.2	Transparency percentage of the fabricated scaffold quantified using UV-Visible spectrophotometer.	71
Table 3.1	List of a few-reported scaffolds promising for corneal tissue engineering and their relative properties against our fabricated product.	99-101
Table 3.2	Optimized values of electrospinning parameters for the prepared formulations.	103
Table 3.3	Weight loss percentage of scaffolds after 14 days of incubation of treated and non-treated samples.	119
Table 3.4	Transparency percentage of the fabricated scaffolds quantified using UV-Visible spectrophotometer.	121