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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### EVALUATION OF PHYSICAL AND MECHANICAL PROPERTIES OF BN REINFORCED AL7079 METAL MATRIX COMPOSITES

**Mahesh Kumar V.**

Department of Mechanical Engineering, Malnad College of Engineering, Hassan-573202 and Affiliated to Visvesvaraya Technological University, Belagavi, Karnataka, India.

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#### Abstract

Metal matrix composites (MMCs) are regarded as viable alternatives to conventional materials such as metals, plastics, and ceramics in structural applications due to their properties, including lightweight, high specific stiffness, elevated elastic modulus, enhanced specific strength, and excellent wear resistance. Among the many metal composites, aluminum metal matrix composites (MMCs) have emerged as sophisticated engineering materials for several prospective applications in engineering industries due to their superior qualities compared to typical aluminum alloys. Ceramic particles are the most extensively utilized reinforcements in MMCs due to their superior wear resistance, thermal stability, and exceptional bonding with the matrix. This research work has been conducted to develop ceramic particle-reinforced aluminum matrix composites and to evaluate their physical and mechanical properties. Al7079 alloy and Boron Nitride (BN) are selected as the matrix and reinforcement for the study respectively. The stir casting technique was utilized to fabricate the composites. Al7079-BN composites are prepared by varying the percentage of BN reinforcement particles from 0 to 8% by volume, with an increment of 2%. Test specimens were machined from the produced composites for the evaluation of microstructural, physical, mechanical properties according to ASTM standards. The microstructural analysis of the produced samples was conducted using scanning electron microscopy (SEM). The density of the composite was assessed empirically using Archimedes' principle and theoretically through the rule of mixture. Microstructural analysis reveals a homogeneous distribution of BN particles throughout the matrix without any agglomeration, and it also demonstrates excellent bonding. The density of the composites decreased by approximately 4.6% with the incorporation of BN reinforcement up to 8%, attributed to the lower density of BN particles. The mechanical properties such as hardness, tensile strength, Young's modulus, and compressive strength of the composite increases significantly.

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**Corresponding Author:- Mahesh Kumar V.**

Address:- Department of Mechanical Engineering, Malnad College of Engineering, Hassan-573202 and Affiliated to Visvesvaraya Technological University, Belagavi, Karnataka, India.

**Introduction:-**

The 7xxx aluminum alloy possesses high strength, low density and excellent processing capabilities, making it a crucial structural material in the aerospace sector, automobile and marine industry. As these sectors advances, high-strength aluminum alloys must possess exceptional overall qualities. In recent decades, some engineering materials including magnesium alloy, titanium alloy and composite materials, have exhibited significant advancement, presenting challenges to 7xxx aluminum alloy. Consequently, to maintain competitiveness in its primary sector and secure additional prospects in emerging industries, the 7xxx aluminum alloy necessitates continued enhancement of its performance. Micron and nano-scale ceramic particles such as alumina ( $Al_2O_3$ ), silicon carbide (SiC), titanium oxide ( $TiO_2$ ), titanium carbide (TiC), aluminium nitride (AlN) and boron carbide ( $B_4C$ ) are extensively utilized as reinforcements in aluminum matrix composites (AMCs) for many industrial applications. BN particles are among the most commonly utilized reinforcement materials for Al matrix composites, owing to their availability and exceptional qualities, including high mechanical strength and excellent chemical stability at elevated temperatures. The process of liquid casting facilitates the production of composites featuring complex designs. It is preferable to produce lightweight bulk components composed of metal matrix composites that exhibit uniform reinforcing distribution and preserve structural integrity. The use of micro-sized ceramic particles poses difficulties owing to their elevated viscosity, poor wettability in metal matrices, and substantial surface area-to-volume ratio. Attaining a homogeneous distribution of these particles in liquid metals is challenging. To resolve this issue, pretreatment of the particles is essential to improve their bonding capacity with the metal matrix.

The principal disadvantage of aluminium alloys is their reduced resilience to high temperatures and wear properties. Researchers initiated the enhancement of aluminium alloys to resolve this issue. Utilizing ceramic nanoparticles like boron carbide, silicon carbide, and aluminum oxide. Developing enhanced mechanical strength aluminum matrix composites is crucial for the aerospace and automotive industries to guarantee extended fatigue lifetimes in structural components [1]. Stir casting of an Al6061 matrix using 15-micron  $B_4C$  particles at 6 to 12 weight percent. The researchers analyzed the mechanical and microstructural properties of aluminum composites. The macrostructural and XRD analyses demonstrated the existence of uniformly dispersed boron carbide particles within the composite. The tensile strength of aluminium matrix composites peaked at 176.37 MPa at 8 wt%, while the Vickers microhardness likewise attained its maximum at 8 wt%, recording 121.31 VHN. The hardness and ultimate tensile strength augmented with the increasing weight percentage of reinforcement [2]. The density of the fabricated AMCs decreased by as much as 9 wt% with the introduction of additional reinforcement, while porosity increased from 3.7% to 11% in the Al/10%SiC/15%RHA composite in comparison to the pure Al alloy. The microstructural examination of the composite revealed a uniform distribution of SiC and RHA particles, with the exception of the 15% RHA composite, which exhibited clustering of RHA particles [3]. This work investigates the synergistic improvement of wear and tribological properties provided by  $B_4C$  and TiC, demonstrating that a higher concentration of TiC, namely at 5 wt% TiC and 3 wt%  $B_4C$ , boosts performance. TiC and  $B_4C$  both improve friction performance. At 4500 rpm, TiC demonstrates a superior ability to improve friction performance relative to  $B_4C$ . Furthermore,  $B_4C$  markedly affects tribological performance at 6000 rpm, leading to the formation of the  $B_2O_3$  tribofilm [4]. Investigated the impact of  $B_4C$  on the mechanical and wear properties of Al2618 composites using stir casting. The researchers produced Al2618- $B_4C$  metal matrix composites with  $B_4C$  concentrations ranging from 2 to 8 weight percent in 2 percent increments. The resulting composites were assessed for hardness, compressive strength, and tensile characteristics. The addition of  $B_4C$  particles enhanced the mechanical characteristics and wear resistance of the Al2618 alloy, while it caused a slight reduction in elongation [5]. Investigated the impact of stir casting with SiC and  $B_4C$  additions on the mechanical properties of Al6061. The researchers utilized SEM to analyze the composite's microstructure. The results demonstrated that the incorporation of SiC and  $B_4C$  reinforcement particles significantly improved the mechanical properties of the Al6061 aluminum alloy [6]. Examined the performance of the aluminum alloy subsequent to reinforcement with titanium and aluminum oxides. The proposed reinforcements were amalgamated in equal proportions (2.5, 5.0, 7.5, and 10 wt%) and produced using the traditional stir casting method. A hybrid composite comprising 5 wt% aluminum oxide and 5 wt% titanium oxide demonstrated enhanced engineering and tensile strength. An increase in the weight fraction of reinforcement leads to a softer surface of the MMC, hence enhancing the material's impact strength and its resistance to maximum force before fracture [7]. Improved Al7075 matrix alloy integrated with  $ZrB_2$  particles via the stir casting technique. A linear correlation between the content of  $ZrB_2$  and its electrical resistivity was noted. The hardness of the composite with 10 wt%  $ZrB_2$  increases by 25.1%, but the hardness of the MMCs with a 15 weight fraction enhances by 29.3% relative to the base material. The ultimate tensile strength increased at 10 wt%; above this threshold, the material demonstrated enhanced stiffness within the elastic range [8]. Examined the tribological and mechanical characteristics of hybrid Al7075-SiC metal matrix composites containing graphite, molybdenum disulfide, and

hexagonal boron nitride. The liquid metallurgical stir casting technique was utilized to fabricate hybrid metal matrix composites (MMCs). The composite incorporating Gr exhibited superior hardness, tensile strength, and compressive strength, whereas those with alternative reinforcements were lowered due to porosity in the material. The hBN reinforcement demonstrated enhanced wear properties relative to other reinforcements, due to the establishment of a homogeneous transfer coating by SiC particles, which serve as load-bearing components [9]. Examined the impact of coconut shell ash (CSA) and  $ZrO_2$  on the mechanical properties of AA6082-based composites. Both reinforcements had synergistic benefits; the integration of CSA led to a decrease in the composite's weight without considerably impairing mechanical capabilities, whilst the addition of  $ZrO_2$  markedly enhanced the mechanical qualities [10]. Investigated the influence of including SiC particles and CSA on the properties of the resultant MMCs. In accordance with previous studies, the density decreased due to the incorporation of lightweight, lower-density CSA particles. The hardness and tensile strength of the hybrid composites (Al-10 wt.% SiC-x wt.% CSA) improved with the addition of CSA up to 8 wt.%. The increase in strength was attributed to the obstruction caused by SiC and CSA particles on the movement of dislocations in the hybrid cast composites. In recent decades, researchers worldwide have actively explored the use of nanoparticles as reinforcement due to the exceptional properties of these materials [11]. Analyzed the impacts of reinforcements, manufacturing methods, and property assessments of Al 7075 matrix composites. This review research analyzes the sorts of reinforcing materials utilized, the advantages of reinforcement hybridization, composite manufacturing techniques, essential property assessments, experimental findings, and prospective future uses of Al 7075 composites. Similar to copper, magnesium enhances corrosion resistance, ductility, and weldability [12].

The objective of the project is to develop a lightweight material with a superior strength-to-weight ratio, exhibiting excellent physical and mechanical qualities for sustainable aerospace, automotive, and marine applications. The use of BN enhances the mechanical and compressive strength of the composites. This study seeks to examine the impact of incorporating Boron Nitride (BN) into the Aluminium 7079 alloy (AA7079) matrix as a reinforcement via the stir casting method. The density, Brinell hardness, tensile, and compressive tests are employed to obtain results and facilitate further examination of the manufactured composites.

## Material Selection:-

### Matrix

The aluminum alloy 7079 has been selected as the matrix material. The Al7079 alloy in its ingot form is depicted in Fig. 1. Zinc is the primary alloying element, added in quantities of 3.8 to 4.8%, and is combined with a lesser percentage of magnesium, 2.9 to 3.7%, resulting in a heat-treatable alloy. The chemical composition of the Al7079 alloy is presented in Table 1. These alloys are advantageous for medium to high-strength applications when copper and chromium are incorporated in minimal proportions. High-strength Al7079 alloy has reduced susceptibility to stress corrosion cracking and is frequently utilized in a slightly lower temper to provide an improved mix of strength, fracture toughness, and corrosion resistance.



Fig. 1:- Al7079 in ingot form.

**Table 1:-** Composition of Al 7079.

Element	Zn	Mg	Cu	Fe	Si	Mn	Cr	Ti	Al
Contenti(%)	3.8- 4.8	2.9 – 3.7	0.40- 0.8	0.40 max	0.30 max	0.10 – 0.30	0.10 – 0.25	0.10 max	Remainder

## Reinforcement

### Boron Nitride

Boron nitride (BN) particles of size less than 10  $\mu\text{m}$  shown in fig. 2 (a) are used as reinforcement material. Its SEM image is shown in fig. 2 (b). BN is stable at high temperatures in inert atmospheres and melts at 1300  $^{\circ}\text{C}$ , density of BN is 2.1 g/cc. BN is a ceramic compound that consists of boron and nitrogen atoms. It possesses unique characteristics that make it suitable for reinforcement in various composite systems. With addition of BN it improves the mechanical properties, thermal conductivity and electrical resistivity.

**Fig.2:-** (a) BN powder sample

(b) SEM image of BN particles

### Fabrication process

The fabrication of specimens with varying percentages of aluminium nitride was conducted via the stir casting technique at ambient temperature, utilizing optimal process conditions. The schematic diagram of stir casting and the actual setup utilized for the current study are illustrated in Fig. 3(a) and (b). This method entails the incorporation of particles into molten aluminium via stirring, followed by the solidification of the material in the mould under standard environmental conditions. The requisite quantity of Al7079 alloy in ingot form was initially melted at 700 – 750  $^{\circ}\text{C}$  utilizing an electric resistance furnace. The aluminum nitride particles and permanent mold were warmed to 400  $^{\circ}\text{C}$  to mitigate the chilling impact during solidification. Degassing of the molten metal was accomplished by using commercially available tablets of Hexachloroethane ( $\text{C}_2\text{Cl}_6$ ). The primary limitation of the particle reinforced metal matrix composite is wettability, which can be enhanced by using a tiny proportion (<2%) of magnesium chips. Coverall (1%), a drossing flux with a melting temperature of 607  $^{\circ}\text{C}$ , is incorporated to diminish the surface tension between metals and to create a continuous layer over the molten metal, so safeguarding it against oxidation and the absorption of air hydrogen. The stainless steel stirrer, coated with zirconia and featuring a blade angle of 30 $^{\circ}$ , is employed to create a vortex in the melt. The stirrer height is adjusted to ensure that two-thirds of its length is submerged in the melt. The preheated reinforcement was gradually introduced into the melt, with stirring maintained at 400 rpm for an additional 15 minutes following the complete incorporation of the reinforcement. The temperature was consistently maintained with an accuracy of  $\pm 5$   $^{\circ}\text{C}$  via a digital temperature controller.

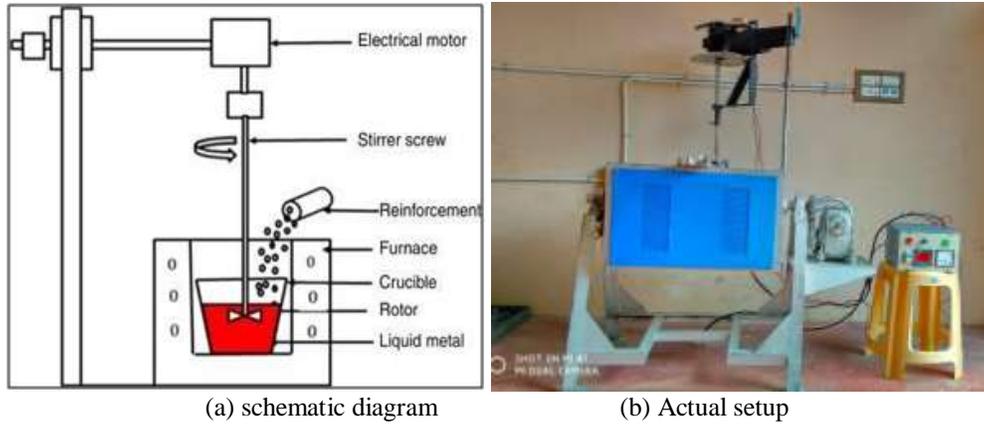


Fig. 3:- Stir casting process.

### Specimen preparation

Specimens of Al7079-BN composites were prepared for microstructural observation, density measurement, hardness testing, tensile testing, and compression testing in accordance with ASTM standards. The dimensions for the tensile test specimen are illustrated in Figure 4.

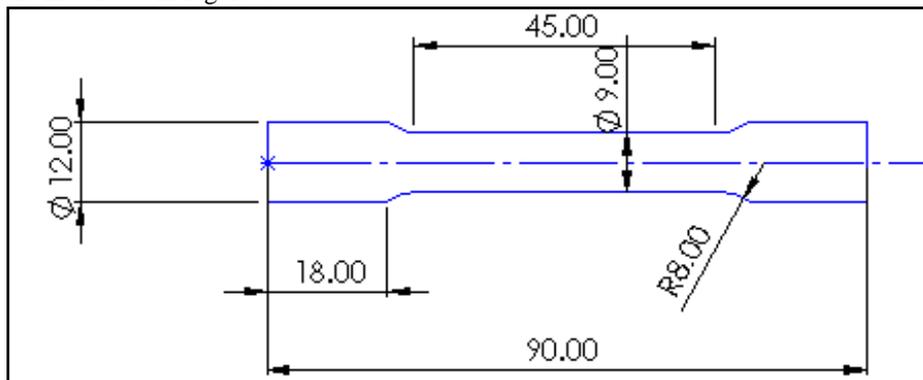


Fig. 4:- Tensile test specimen geometry.

### Experimental work

#### Microstructural study

A metallographic analysis was conducted on the cast aluminum matrix composites utilizing Scanning Electron Microscopy to verify the uniformity of distribution and interfacial adhesion between the matrix and particles.

#### Density measurement

The effect of BN reinforcement on the density of the developed composites are studied both experimentally by using Archimedes principle and theoretically by using the mass by volume ratio.

The experimental density is determined by using mathematical equation is given below.

$$\rho_{ex} = \frac{m}{m - m_1} \times \rho_w$$

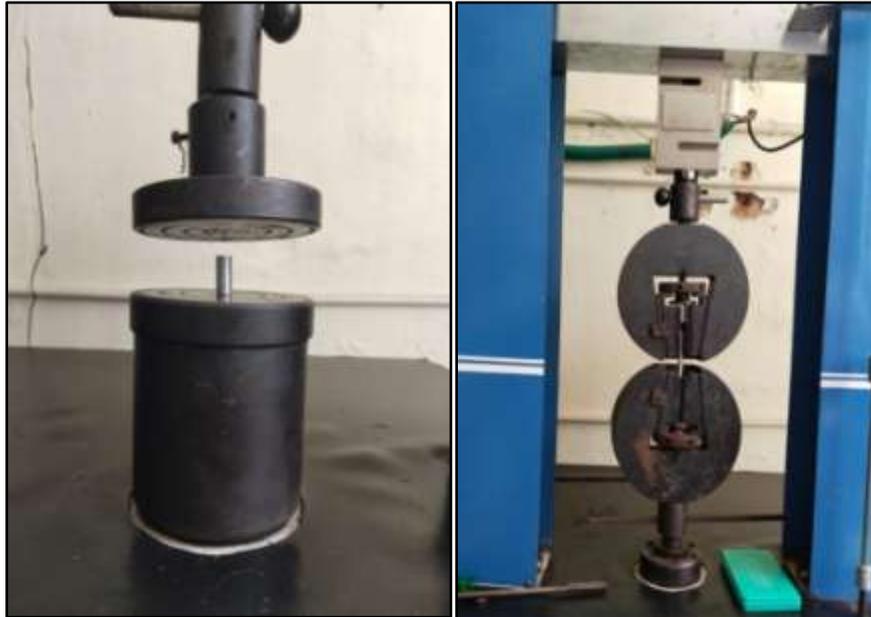
Where

- $m$  is the mass of the composite sample in air,
- $m_1$  is the mass off the same composite sample in distilled water.
- $\rho_w$  is the density of the distilled water.

#### Mechanical properties

The mechanical parameters, including ultimate tensile strength, modulus of elasticity, ductility, and ultimate compressive strength of the produced samples, were assessed at room temperature using a servo-controlled

computerized universal testing machine. Hardness values were determined utilizing a Brinell hardness tester. The configuration for the compression and tensile tests is illustrated in figures 5 (a) and (b).



(a) Compression

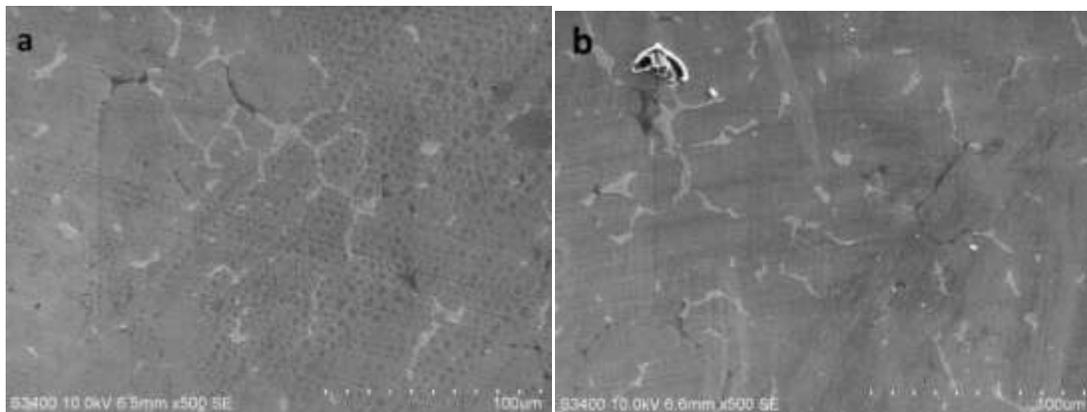
(b) Tensile

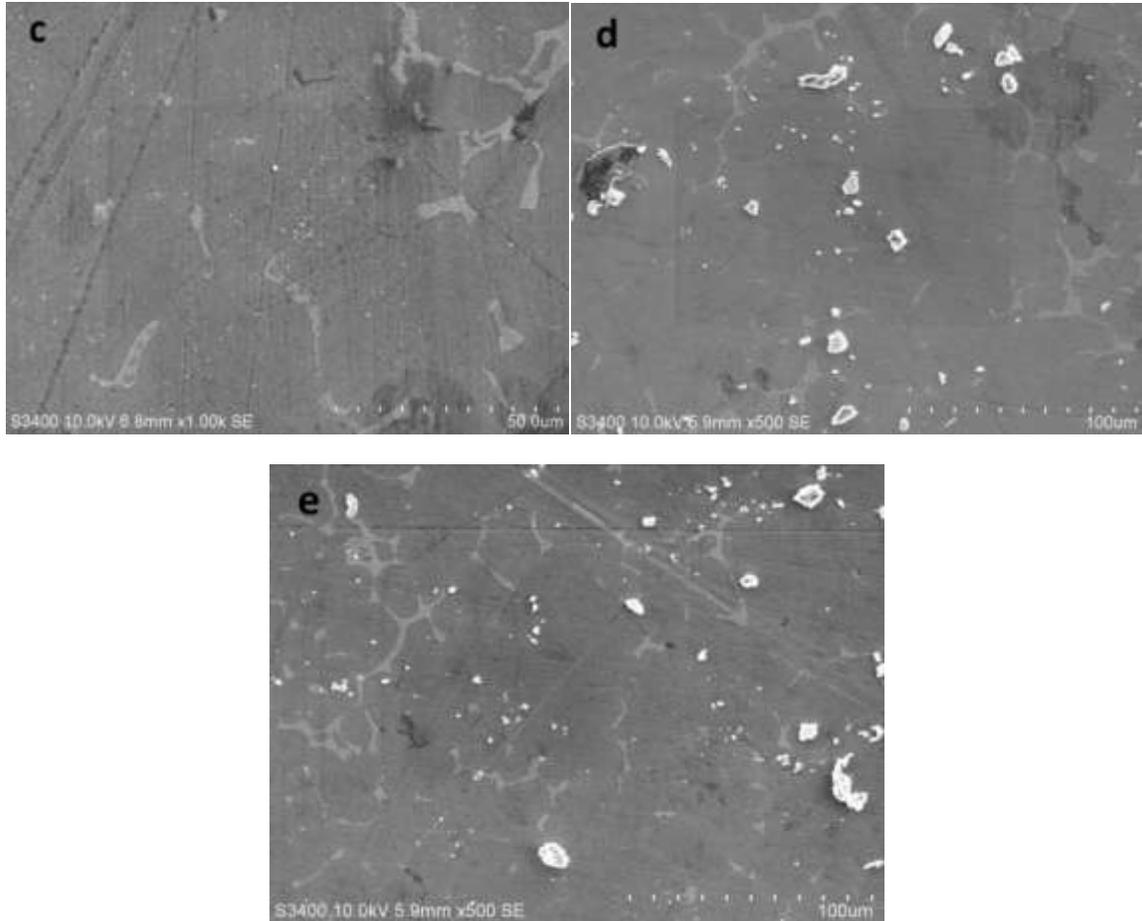
**Fig. 5:-** Mechanical Test setup.

## Results and Discussions:-

### Microstructural analysis

The microstructure and distribution of BN reinforcement particles in the developed composites were analysed using SEM. Fig. 6 (a) to (e) shows the SEM images of fabricated composites. It reveals the presence of BN particles in aluminium metal matrix and it is observed that the reinforcement particles are adequately dispersed in the matrix. The composites display a substantial interface between the matrix and alloy. During the solidification of the composites, the dendrites of aluminum solidify first, whereas BN particles are excluded by the solid-liquid interface, leading to the segregation of BN particles in the inter-dendritic zone. The produced composites are noted to be devoid of casting flaws, including porosity, slag inclusions, and shrinkage, which may arise from inadequate bonding between the matrix and reinforcement during casting and solidification [12]. The average distance between the reinforcement particles diminishes as the reinforcement content increases. The uniform distribution of particles in the fabricated composites can be ascribed to the parameters chosen for their production. The microstructure of the composites demonstrates that the stirring method was sufficient to attain a uniform structure. The distribution of reinforcement particles is contingent upon the density differential between the molten alloy and the particles [13].





**Fig 6:-** SEM images of (a) Al7079 (b) Al7079+2%BN (c) Al7079+4%BN (d) Al7079+6%BN (e) Al7079+8%BN

### Density

The variation of density values with respect to increasing reinforcement percentage is illustrated in fig. 7. From the results it is observed that experimental density of Al7079 alloy was  $2.56 \times 10^{-3} \text{ g/mm}^3$  and density of Al7079 -8% BN composite is found to be  $2.68 \times 10^{-3} \text{ g/mm}^3$  and theoretical density of Al7079 alloy is  $2.61 \times 10^{-3} \text{ g/mm}^3$  and density of Al7079 -8% BN composite is found to be  $2.71 \times 10^{-3} \text{ g/mm}^3$ . Theoretical and actual densities of the samples fall by 4.6% and 3.8%, respectively, with the addition of about 8% BN particles. The reduction in density is ascribed to the diminished density of reinforcing particles [15,16]. The reduction in density is ascribed to the incorporation of marginally lower density BN particles ( $2.11 \text{ g/cm}^3$ ) into the higher density Al7079 alloy ( $2.72 \text{ g/cm}^3$ ).

### Hardness

It is observed that hardness for unreinforced Al7079 alloy is 76.9 BHN and for Al7079 -8% BN composite is 95.72 BHN. From the results it is observed hardness of the composite increased by 24.4% for the addition of BN reinforcement about 8%. The variation of Brinell hardness with percent of reinforcement is shown in Fig. 8.

The augmentation in hardness of the samples can be attributed to particle strengthening and the ability to withstand stress due to the elevated content of the relatively harder reinforcement inside the matrix [17]. The incorporation of BN particles into the continuous matrix enhances its surface area and diminishes the grain size of the aluminum matrix. The presence of BN particles provides substantial resistance to plastic deformation, resulting in an improvement in the hardness of the resultant composites [18,19].

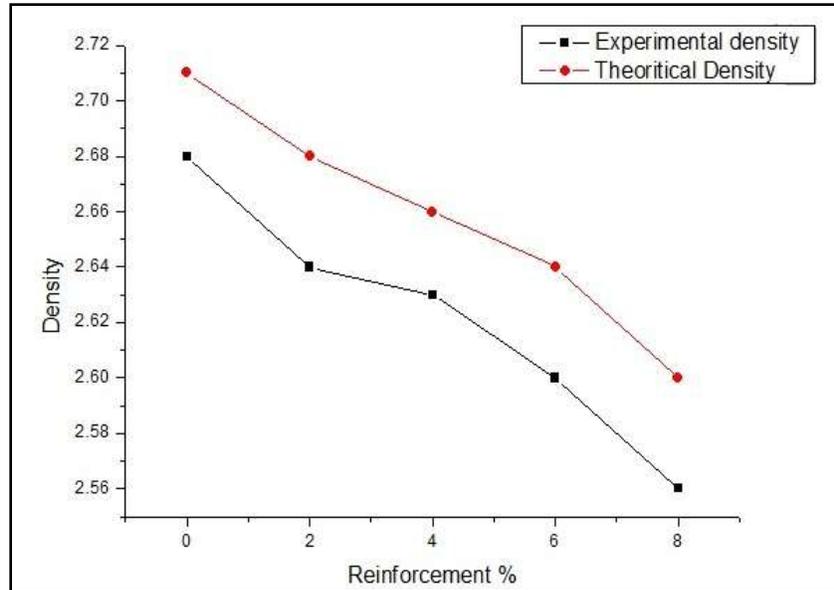


Fig. 7:- Variation of density with various % of reinforcement.

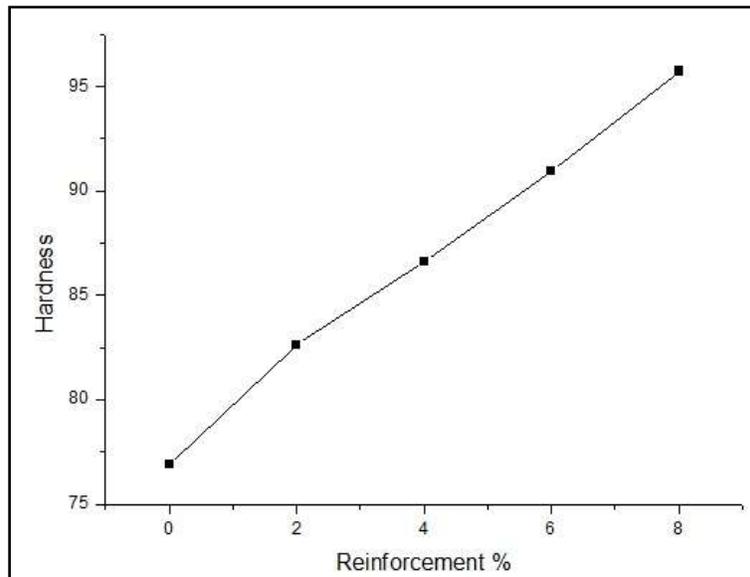


Fig. 8:- Variation of hardness value with various % of reinforcement.

### Tensile strength

The impact of reinforcing particles on the ultimate tensile strength (UTS) and Young's modulus of Al7079 composites is illustrated in Figures 9 and 10, respectively. The ultimate tensile strength (UTS) and Young's modulus of the Al7079-BN composite are measured at 139.71 MPa and 26.8 GPa, respectively, when the reinforcing content is elevated to 8%. Reinforcement particles are regarded as highly successful in enhancing the strength properties of composites, resulting in a 40.2% increase in ultimate tensile strength and a 19.1% rise in Young's modulus with the inclusion of 8% reinforcement particles. The augmentation in UTS and Young's modulus may be attributed to the distribution of BN particles within the matrix. BN particles impart their strength to the matrix alloy by a strengthening mechanism, resulting in the transfer of load from the matrix to the reinforcing particles, hence enhancing the composite's resistance to induced tensile stress [20]. As the reinforcement content increases, a greater load is transferred from the matrix to the reinforcement, hence enhancing tensile strength. Furthermore, the presence of hard ceramics such as BN restricts plastic deformation due to the dispersion of hard particles within the matrix, hence enhancing the tensile strength of the composite [21,22].

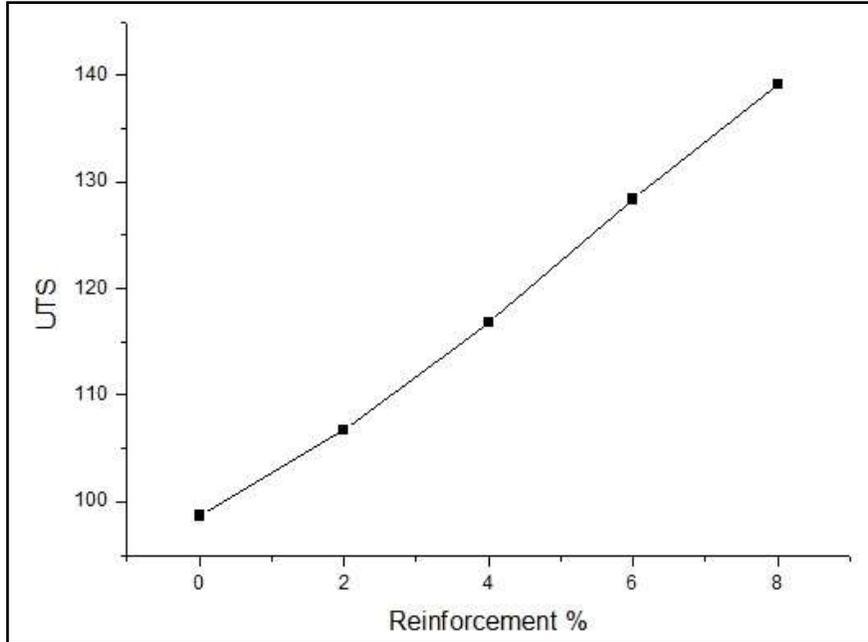


Fig. 9:- Variation of Ultimate tensile strength value with various % of reinforcement.

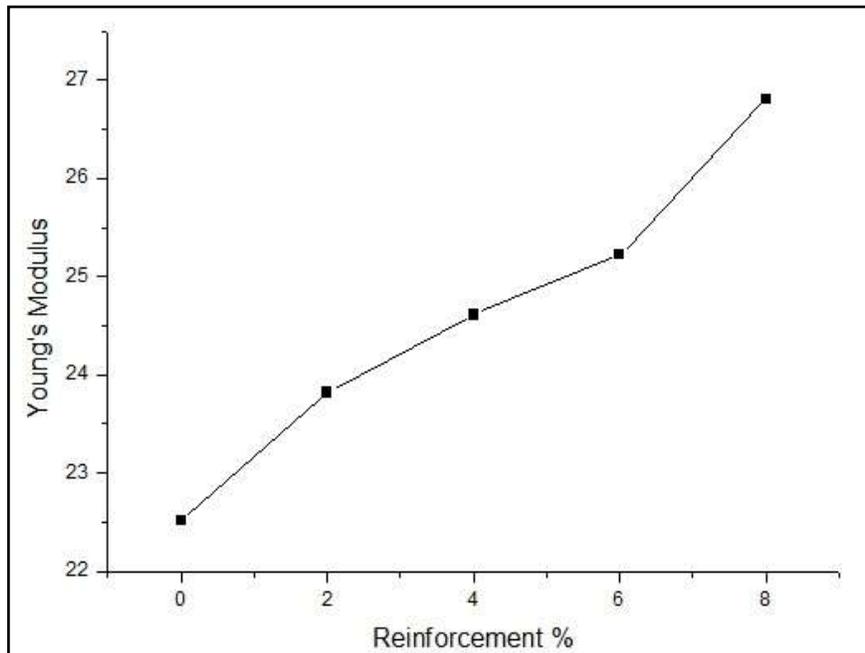


Fig. 10:- Variation of Young's Modulus value with various % of reinforcement.

### Compressive strength

The fluctuation in ultimate compressive strength for Al 7079-BN composites is illustrated in Fig. 11. The graph indicates that the final compressive strength rises with an increase in the volume fraction of reinforcement. The compressive strength of the Al7079 alloy was 353 MPa, while the compressive strength of the Al7079 -8% BN composite was determined to be 480 MPa. The compressive strength of the composites increases by 36% with the incorporation of 8% reinforcement in the matrix alloy. The enhancement in compressive strength is ascribed to the presence of reinforcement particles with superior compressive strength compared to the monolithic alloy. It can be observed that, in contrast to tensile strength, compressive strength has increased linearly due to the interface between the uniformly distributed reinforcement and the matrix alloy [23]. The incorporation of tougher BN

particles within the matrix serves as obstacles that hinder the mobility of dislocations and plastic flow in the matrix alloy. The presence of reinforcing particles in the composites minimizes crack propagation for fracture by restricting material flow [24,25].

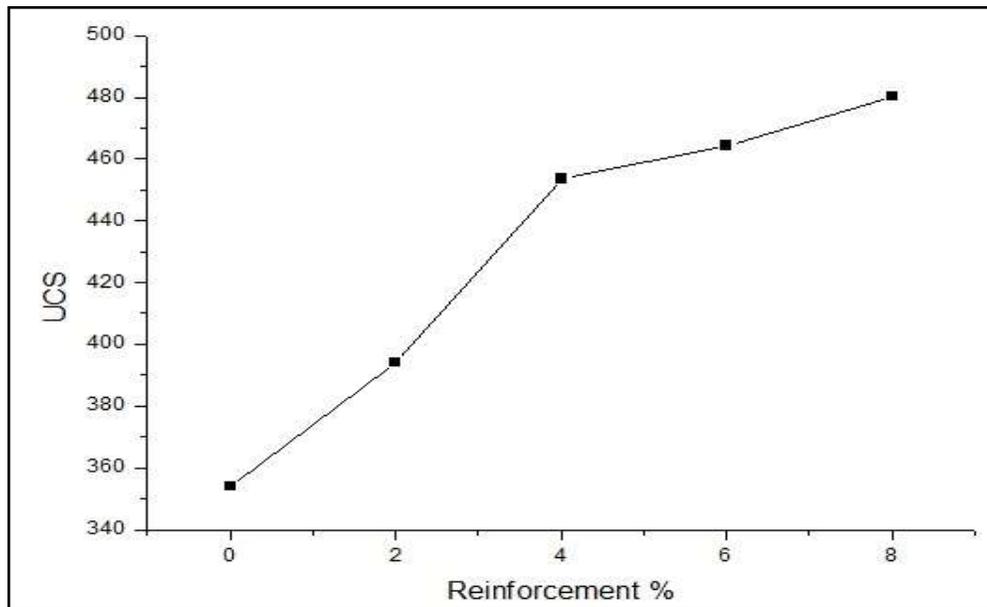


Fig. 11:- Variation of Ultimate compressive strength value with various % of reinforcement.

### Conclusion:-

Al7079-BN composites were effectively produced via the stir casting method. The microstructural analysis of composites reveals a uniform distribution of reinforcement particles within the matrix, devoid of agglomeration, and exhibits robust bonding attributed to the incorporation of  $K_2TiF_6$  and the preheating of reinforcement particles, which enhances their wettability. The density of the composites increased by approximately 4.6% with an increase in BN particle reinforcement content up to 8%. The hardness of the composite increased by 24.4% with the incorporation of 8% BN particles. The addition of reinforcement particles by 8% resulted in a 40% increase in UTS and a 19% increase in Young's modulus. The addition of 8% reinforcement in the matrix alloy results in a 36% increase in the compressive strength of the composites. The incorporation of BN particles within the matrix serves as obstacles that inhibit the movement of dislocations and the plastic flow in the matrix alloy.

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