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ABSTRACT

In the present manufacturing scenario, miniaturization is the basic strategy all over the world. Mechanical and electronic products are in great demand having small size and lighter weight. The development of high-strength alloys in biomedical and aerospace industries necessitates the use of precision machining with advanced technology. Micromachining techniques are used to create micro features or miniature parts in micro devices such as micropumps, microvalves, microactuators, etc. Machining in the microdomain is difficult and requires precise and sophisticated technique. Among various advanced machining techniques, micro-electric discharge machining (μ EDM) finds its importance because of its unique advantages of low cost and clean environment.

Micro electric discharge milling (μ ED-milling) is the advancement in the μ EDM which is specifically used to create complex features with high aspect ratio. It utilizes a simple cylindrical rotating tool to cut the microchannel (μ channel) while moving along the predefined path. The phenomenon happening at the inter-electrode gap (IEG) of the tool and workpiece is complex. The IEG size formed between the two electrodes mainly depends on the input energy supplied and the value happens to be less than 50 μ m. At this small gap, multiple numbers of plasma channels are formed with very high temperature and pressure which contributes to the removal of material due to melting. This plasma channel on collapsing ejects the molten metal from the crater which cools due to surrounding dielectric to form debris particles. This debris has to be removed instantly from the IEG to avoid secondary sparking. Among the different approaches of flushing, rotation of tool is a simple and effective method. The rotation will also provide sufficient stiffness for the tool during the process. But the rotation of the tool in the process will further add to the complexity. The literature survey shows that μ ED-milling has a history of nearly 40 years. Most of the research in this area is focused on the material removal rate (MRR), tool wear rate (TWR), and tool wear compensation. Many aspects of the μ ED-milling process such as the shape of plasma channel, crater geometry, temperature distribution model, etc. are studied. However, only a limited research work is reported on the flow behavior of dielectric flow and its interaction with the molten metal or debris at the IEG at different conditions of the μ ED-milling process. This phenomenon is important in achieving desired performance on MRR, TWR and surface finish and the process is

attractive for micro features. Hence it has been decided in the present research to focus on the flow behavior at the IEG in the microdomain.

The complex phenomenon happening at the IEG is a multiphysics problem involving different phases such as dielectric, debris and bubbles occurring in microseconds. Such a multiphysics problem is very complex to simulate or capture through instruments experimentally. So, it has been decided to simulate this problem in different stages using various tools of computational fluid dynamics (CFD). For the first stage of simulation, only the dielectric fluid is considered and the flow behavior is analyzed. In the subsequent stages, the interaction of the dielectric fluid with debris particle at room temperature is solved and followed by the interaction behavior at a high temperature. Molten metal is injected and its interaction with the dielectric fluid is investigated. All the simulations are performed on the standard Fluent software.

To simulate the dielectric flow, the realizable k -epsilon (k - ϵ) model is selected. This model responds more accurately to the flow features involving turbulence. The geometrical model of the study is a 2D representation of the cutting process by μ ED-milling. This is shown as partially cut straight channel with rotating tool positioned in the direction of machining. The tool is represented as a solid circular domain and the μ channel excluding the tool represents the fluid domain which is finely meshed. Moving reference frame is used to provide the rotation to the tool. The entire fluid domain surrounding the tool is filled with kerosene which is selected as a dielectric fluid because of low viscosity. The inlet and outlet for the flow of dielectric are provided in the boundary of the geometry that represents the edge of the work. Through the detailed review, various parameters which are critical for dielectric flow such as tool rotation speed, IEG size, inlet nozzle velocity, and tool diameter are selected with initial reference of simulation. The critical range for each parameter has been decided by the initial simulation study and a total of 51 simulations are performed considering 4 variables to cover all the conditions.

Among all the variables discussed, tool rotation is the most influencing parameter which affects the dielectric velocity in the gap. It is observed that with the increase in the tool speed the dielectric velocity in the gap increases. Rotating tool exerts a centrifugal force on the dielectric near the tool which drags the fluid in the gap. The velocity pattern observed in the IEG is uniform along the gap and the vortex formation is observed at the back of the tool. The pressure distribution also varies in the gap due to tool rotation. This effect of velocity pattern, vortex, and pressure distribution are largely affected by the other input parameters such as IEG size and inlet nozzle

velocity. With the decrease in the size of IEG, the velocity is found to increase but the vortex is not significantly affected. On the other hand, with the increase in the inlet nozzle velocity the velocity in the IEG increases and also the vortex size is affected.

In the second stage of the simulation, debris is introduced in the IEG to study its interaction with the dielectric flow. The model which is used for dielectric flow simulation is retained for debris analysis. Besides, discrete phase modeling (DPM) is used where the dielectric is a primary phase and the debris are the secondary phase. During the simulation, generation of debris is represented by injecting micro-sized particles from the workpiece surface. The geometrical model selected is also the same where the inlet and outlet are assigned with escape boundary condition for the particles to move out of the domain. The tool and workpiece surface are assigned with reflect boundary condition. The injection points on the workpiece surface are assigned wall jet boundary condition to provide injection velocity to the particles. Particles injected with a different velocity reaches various positions in the IEG and is dragged from this position due to dielectric flow. These particles follow the dielectric flow and travel as a single particle or a group of particles. The grouping of particles shows chain-like structure, clustering, and accretion on the workpiece surface. These trajectory patterns observed are reasonably in accordance with the results reported in the literature. During motion, particles make multiple rotations around the tool before accreting. The distance traveled by the particle before accretion is calculated by tracing the path followed. The particles accrete on the workpiece surface inside the IEG and outside the IEG. Accretion outside the IEG can affect the geometry of the μ channel whereas the accretion inside the IEG will not affect as it will be removed by the subsequent sparks. The study is further extended by introducing particles with a high temperature and finding the distance traveled by the particle before cooling. The simulation results are compared with the analytical method and it is observed that the results are reasonably similar. Like the particles, molten metal is injected at a high temperature during the simulation. It is observed that the molten metal gets cooled rapidly and solidify in a few milliseconds. Hence, the multiphase study of the molten metal flow is carried by injecting solid particles at high temperature.

The next objective is to study the effect of the slotted tool on flow behavior. The slotted tool consists of a peripheral slot along the surface of the tool. These slots provided on the tool helps in collecting the particles and reducing their concentration in the IEG. The stages of simulation explained before is now applied for the slotted tool. All the models selected for the

simulation study is similar except the geometry of the slotted tool. Different shapes of the tool with various slot size and the number of slots are studied. The width and height of the slot are varied to study its effect on the particle removal rate. It is observed that the dielectric velocity in the gap is less for all the slotted tools as compared to the cylindrical tool due to a disturbance in the flow around the slots. Also, a large variation of pressure is seen in the slots. Among various slotted tool shapes considered, the tool which has a deep slot is efficient in the removal of particles. The vortex observed in the slot is responsible to collect the particles in the slot and reduce its concentration in the IEG. While the accretion is majorly observed on the corners of the slot which does not affect the workpiece surface.

Different tools are fabricated with the slotted shapes considered for simulation to conduct experiments. The experimental study is the investigation of the machining performance of the slotted tool over the conventional cylindrical tool. Here the machining performance such as MRR and TWR is calculated using 9 different tools consisting of different slot size while cutting a channel. Out of 9 tools, 3 tools are similar to simulation study and the other 6 tools are used to find the effect of slot width, height and the number of slots on the MRR. It is observed that the MRR is higher using a slotted tool as compared to the cylindrical tool. The surface topography of the machined surface and the tool surface is captured to observe the accumulation of debris particles on various slotted tools. The simulation results are correlated with the experimental findings.

An attempt is made to capture the actual process images at the IEG of the μ ED-milling using a high-speed video camera. As the field of view (FOV) is few microns and the process is submerged under the dielectric it is difficult to capture the micro size debris particles ejecting from the crater. However, the images of spark and dielectric flow are captured at a high resolution with a high frame rate of 2277 fps. The images show sparking is continuous along the periphery of the tool and its size changes with the input energy. The vortex flow is also observed at the back of the tool. The obtained images of the spark and the bubble motion are used to calculate the IEG size and the velocity of the dielectric. The scanning electron microscope (SEM) images show spherical debris particles deposited on the machined surface which is the direct validation to the assumption of spherical particles for simulation. The experimental results are reasonably in accordance with the simulation results.

The detailed investigation conducted at the IEG of the μ ED-milling process helps to understand the flow behavior at the IEG and improve the machining performance. In addition, the

study of tool geometry can be applied to improve flushing characteristics. For various microfabrication sectors, the slotted tool can provide a large opportunity for improving the process performance and suggest approaches to achieve higher performance of machining. The above discussion will justify a better understanding of the process phenomenon happening at the IEG of μ ED-milling for machining complex shapes.

CONTENTS

Sr. No.	Topic	Page No.
	Title Page	
	Certificate	
	Acknowledgement	
	Abstract	
	Contents	ix
	List of Figures	xii
	List of Tables	xv
	Nomenclature	xvi
	CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE SURVEY	1-34
1.1	Classification of Machining Processes	1
1.2	Electrical Discharge Machining (EDM)	3
1.2.1	Breakdown Phenomenon	3
1.2.2	Elements of EDM	6
1.2.3	Properties of Different Dielectric	7
1.2.4	Impurities in Dielectric	9
1.2.5	Comparison of commonly used Dielectric	9
1.3	Micro Electric Discharge Milling (μ ED-milling)	11
1.4	Literature Survey	12
1.4.1	EDM/ μ ED Milling	13
1.4.2	Debris Particle	15
1.4.3	High-Speed Imaging	18
1.4.4	Simulation	20
1.4.5	Improvised Tool	28
1.5	Research Gap	31
1.6	Scope of the Present Work	31
1.7	Objectives	33
1.8	Organization of the Thesis	33
	CHAPTER 2 CFD SIMULATION	35-53
2.1	Introduction	35
2.2	Mesh Generation	37
2.3	Governing Equations	39
2.4	Discrete Phase Modeling (DPM)	44
2.5	CFD Simulation Process	45

2.6	Problem Definition	47
2.6.1	Model Description	47
2.6.2	Boundary Conditions	49
2.6.3	Computational Solver	50
2.6.4	Meshing	51
2.7	Summary	53
	CHAPTER 3 SIMULATION OF DIELECTRIC FLUID AT IEG	55-72
3.1	Introduction	55
3.2	Simulation Parameters	56
3.3	Analysis Points	57
3.4	General Flow Pattern	57
3.5	Influence of Parameters on Dielectric Fluid Flow	61
3.5.1	Effect of Tool Rotation Speed	61
3.5.2	Effect of Interelectrode Gap	65
3.5.3	Effect of Inlet Velocity of the Dielectric	67
3.5.4	Effect of Change in Dimension of Tool	69
3.6	Summary	72
	CHAPTER 4 DEBRIS MOVEMENT AT IEG	73-95
4.1	Introduction	73
4.2	Observation Points	74
4.3	Boundary Conditions	75
4.4	Behavior of Debris Particles in IEG	76
4.4.1	Effect of Injection Velocity on Particle Position	76
4.4.2	Pattern of Particle Movement	77
4.4.3	Particle Trajectory	81
4.5	Accretion of Debris Particles	82
4.5.1	Particle Injection from Center Section	83
4.5.2	Particle Injection from Top section and Bottom section	87
4.6	Cooling Rate of Particles	89
4.6.1	Analytical Method	89
4.6.2	Simulation Method	91
4.7	Summary	95
	CHAPTER 5 SLOTTED TOOL	97-114
5.1	Introduction	97
5.2	Model Description	97
5.3	Influence of Parameters on Dielectric Fluid Flow	99
5.3.1	Effect of Tool Rotation Speed	99

5.3.2	Effect of Interelectrode Gap	101
5.3.3	Effect of Inlet Nozzle Velocity	102
5.3.4	Effect of Change in Dimension of Tool	103
5.4	Effect of Different Shapes of Tool	106
5.5	Particle Trajectory	109
5.6	Summary	113
	CHAPTER 6 EXPERIMENTATION	115-137
6.1	Introduction	115
6.2	Slotted Tool	116
6.2.1	Experimental Setup	116
6.2.2	Effect of Geometry of the Tool	118
6.2.3	Effect of Number of Slots	120
6.2.4	Effect of Slot Width and Height	121
6.2.5	Microscopic Study	122
6.3	Experimental Setup using High-Speed Camera	127
6.3.1	Experimental Setup using Phantom High-Speed Camera	129
6.3.2	Experimental Setup using Pco. Dimax High-Speed Camera	129
6.4	High-Speed Images	131
6.4.1	Sparking	131
6.4.2	Dielectric Flow	132
6.4.3	Debris Particles	135
6.5	Summary	137
	CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE	139-141
7.1	Conclusions	139
7.2	Specific Contributions	140
7.3	Future Scope of the Study	141
	REFERENCES	143
	APPENDIX	153
	LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	155
	BIOGRAPHY OF THE CANDIDATE	157
	BIOGRAPHY OF THE SUPERVISOR	158
	BIOGRAPHY OF THE CO-SUPERVISOR	159

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. No.	CAPTION	Page No.
1.1	Non-conventional machining processes	2
1.2	Breakdown mechanisms leading to a discharge. Propagation of (a) the primary electron avalanche; (b) a positive streamer; (c) a negative streamer	5
1.3	Schematic diagram of discharge gap due to multiple discharges	5
1.4	Schematic diagram showing EDM setup	7
1.5	Schematic diagram showing tool motion in (a) Die-sink EDM and (b) μ ED-milling	12
1.6	Discharge status at electrode down time of 0.24 s	16
1.7	Schematic of debris movement in the side gap resulting in secondary discharge	17
1.8	Plasma expansion in (a) air and (b) argon	19
1.9	Debris accumulation in slot corners after continuous flushing	19
1.10	CFD simulation results for (a) fluid speed, and (b) volume fraction of kerosene for lead angle of 50° and 150°	24
1.11	(a) Numerically simulated crater geometry, (b) actual crater geometry, (c) temperature profile and (d) liquid fraction at 150 V, 0.4 μ F	25
1.12	(a) Axial flow velocity distribution at the outlet, (b) turbulence kinetic energy at the outlet and (c) turbulence kinetic energy plot in cross-section of YZ plane	27
1.13	Velocity vectors of liquid colored by velocity magnitude (m/s). Range of velocity vectors shown: 8 m/s to 53.6 m/s	27
1.14	Various shapes of tools	29
1.15	Flowchart of the research work	32
2.1	Schematic diagram showing 2D and 3D mesh elements	38
2.2	Flow chart of CFD analysis process	46
2.3	Schematic diagram showing (a) position of the tool in the μ channel and (b) a planar section	47
2.4	Schematic diagram showing a 2D model of μ channel used in CFD analysis	48
2.5	Schematic diagram showing 2D and 3D mesh elements	52
2.6	(a) Mesh independency check and (b) Time independency check	52
3.1	Schematic diagram representing the analysis points for model study	58
3.2	Schematic diagram showing (a) flow over stationary cylinder, (b) Magnus effect, and (c) flow over rotating cylinder with different inflow angle	59
3.3	Schematic diagram showing flow parameters in the μ channel	61
3.4	Schematic diagram showing flow-field in the μ channel	61
3.5	Effect of tool rotation speed on the average dielectric velocity at IEG	62

3.6	Velocity vector plot showing (a) stationary tool, (b) rotating tool with a wall of unit thickness, (c) clockwise tool rotation, and (d) counter-clockwise tool rotation considering wall	64
3.7	Static pressure (Pa) contour plots in the μ channel	65
3.8	Effect of gap size on the average velocity of the dielectric at IEG for electrode speed of (a) 100 (b) 500 and (c) 800 rpm. The μ channel width is kept constant and electrode diameter is varied to change the gap	66
3.9	Effect of gap size on the average velocity of the dielectric at IEG for electrode speed of 100 rpm. Electrode diameter is kept constant and μ channel width is varied to change the gap	67
3.10	Effect of inlet nozzle velocity on the average velocity of the dielectric at IEG for electrode speed of (a) 100 (b) 500 and (c) 800 rpm	68
3.11	Velocity path lines of the dielectric at various nozzle inlet velocity	71
3.12	Effect of tool diameter on the average velocity of the fluid at IEG for electrode speed of (a) 100 (b) 500 and (c) 800 rpm	72
4.1	Schematic diagram representing the analysis points for studying motion of debris	74
4.2	Discrete phase boundary condition types	76
4.3	Effect of particle injection velocity on the position of particle across the IEG injected normal to the work surface. Particle position in the gap (i) touching the work surface (ii) touching the tool surface (iii) A (near to tool) (iv) B (mid position) (v) C (near workpiece)	77
4.4	(a) Discrete phase modeling showing behavior of particles in the gap. (b) New schematic representation of particle behavior for μ ED milling process	79
4.5	Four types of powder behavior in EDM: (1) reciprocating motion, (2) adhesion on electrode, (3) cluster in the gap and (4) chain connecting the electrodes	80
4.6	(a) Phenomenon occurring in the gap during the ignition time: formation of debris clusters, formation of debris chains, gas bubbles. (b) SEM images of chain and cluster of debris	80
4.7	Trajectory of debris particles	82
4.8	Distance travelled by particle (mm) for various electrode speed before accretion for different particle size	82
4.9	Various accretion zone in the channel	83
4.10	Effect of tool speed on total accretion values when all particles are injected from center section (CS) of the gap. Particles injected from position (i) A (near to tool) (ii) B (mid position) and (iii) C (near to work) of the gap	85
4.11	Effect of particle size on accretion values outside the sparking zone for all speeds. Particles injected from (i) center section (CS) (ii) top section (TS) and (iii) bottom section (BS) of the gap	85
4.12	(a) (b) Accretion (g/mm^2) in the sparking zone. (c) Accretion outside the sparking zone. (d) Shift in accretion outside the sparking zone	86
4.13	Time required for cooling of a particle initially at 15000 K to 300 K of various size	92
4.14	(a) Distance travelled and (b) trajectory of the particles before cooling in the IEG. (c) Simulation showing particle temperature and its motion in the IEG	93

4.15	Temperature distribution in the IEG	94
4.16	Comparison of the cooling time using analytical and simulation method	94
5.1	Schematic diagram representing the slotted tool and analysis points	98
5.2	Effect of tool rotation speed on the average dielectric velocity at the IEG	100
5.3	Effect of gap size on the average dielectric velocity at IEG	101
5.4	Effect of inlet nozzle velocity on the average dielectric velocity at the IEG	103
5.5	Contour plot showing velocity (cm/s) of the dielectric at various nozzle inlet velocity	104
5.6	The average dielectric velocity at IEG for different tool diameter and speed using cylindrical and slotted tools	105
5.7	Contour plots showing (a) static pressure and (b) velocity of dielectric in the slots of various slotted tools	107
5.8	Vector plot showing dielectric velocity in the slots of various slotted tools	108
5.9	Trajectory showing particles injected and removed from the gap	110
5.10	(a) Time taken by the particles to move out of the gap and (b) percentage of particles removed from the gap for different slotted tools	111
5.11	Accretion of particles on the edge of the slot	112
6.1	Setup using Hyper 15 machine and tools used for experimentation	117
6.2	Effect of the tool shape on MRR and TWR	120
6.3	Effect of a number of slots on MRR and TWR	121
6.4	Effect of tool speed on MRR and TWR using slotted tool	121
6.5	Effect of a slot width and height on MRR and TWR	122
6.6	Microscopic images of the tool cross-section showing the wear of the tool	123
6.7	SEM micrograph morphology of various tools: (a) cylindrical, (b) slotted, and (c) deep slot tool	125
6.8	SEM micrograph morphology of channel surface machined using different tools	126
6.9	Experimental setup on DT-110 with phantom high-speed camera	128
6.10	Experimental setup on DT-110 with pco. dimax HS4 high speed CMOS camera	130
6.11	High-speed images of spark along (a) periphery and (b) tip of the tool	132
6.12	High-speed images of spark and bubbles generated for different input energies	133
6.13	(a) SEM image showing trajectory, deposition point (b) Velocity contour	134
6.14	High-speed images showing the dielectric flow and vortex at the back of the tool	135
6.15	SEM images showing (a) debris particles at 2000 μ J, 800 rpm (b) tool and work surface at 500 μ J, 500 rpm (c) taper in the μ channel	136

LIST OF TABLES

Table No.	CAPTION	Page No.
1.1	Physical properties of kerosene, deionized water, and air	8
1.2	Machining characteristics of different dielectric fluid	11
2.1	Type of mesh for different geometry	38
2.2	Boundary setting of a computational model	49
2.3	CFD parameters	50
2.4	Mesh parameters	53
3.1	Input Parameters	57
3.2	Average dielectric velocity at IEG (cm/s)	68
4.1	DPM parameters	76
4.2	Accretion of particles ($\times 10^{-4}$ g/mm ²) injected from center section (CS) of the gap	84
4.3	Accretion of particles ($\times 10^{-4}$ g/mm ²) injected from top section (TS) of the gap	88
4.4	Accretion of particles ($\times 10^{-4}$ g/mm ²) injected from bottom section (BS) of the gap	88
4.5	Parameters of particles and kerosene	91
4.6	Cooling time of a particle at different position in the IEG	91
5.1	Tool geometry and channel size	99
5.2	Removal rate and accretion of particles	112
6.1	Parameters used and its specification	117
6.2	Various tool geometry	119
6.3	Observation showing MRR and TWR for various tools	119
6.4	Process parameter for μ ED-milling and its specification	128
6.5	Specifications of high-speed camera	130
6.6	Dielectric velocity at IEG	134
6.7	Vortex size and distance travelled by particles	137

NOMENCLATURE

Abbreviation	Description
ρ	Fluid density
ρ_p	Density of particle
μ	Dynamic viscosity
μ_∞	Dynamic viscosity of kerosene
μ_s	Dynamic viscosity of steel
μ_t	Turbulent viscosity
ν	Kinematic viscosity
ε	Dissipation rate
γ	Rotational rate
β	Coefficient of thermal expansion
ω	Specific dissipation rate, angular velocity
σ_k	Turbulent Prandtl number for k
σ_ε	Turbulent Prandtl number for ε
$\bar{\tau}$	Stress tensor
a_1, a_2, a_3	Constants
a	Radius of the cylinder
A_s	Surface area
A_{face}	Area of cell face at wall
$C_2, C_{1\varepsilon}, C_{3\varepsilon}$	Constants
C	Capacitance
C_D	Drag coefficient
C_p	Specific heat
<i>CFD</i>	Computational Fluid Dynamics
<i>CNC</i>	Computer Numerical Control
<i>CMOS</i>	Complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor
d_p, D	Particle diameter, cylinder diameter
<i>DPM</i>	Discrete Phase Modelling
E	Energy
\vec{F}	Additional force

F_D	Drag force
FOV	Field of View
g	Gravitational acceleration
G_b	Turbulence kinetic energy due to buoyancy
G_k	Turbulence kinetic energy due to the mean velocity
h	Average heat transfer coefficient, slot height, sensible enthalpy, normalized gap
H	Gap between cylinder and plane wall
I	Unit tensor
IEG	Inter-electrode gap
J_j	Diffusion flux of species j
k	Thermal conductivity of kerosene
k_l, k_L	Laminar kinetic energy
k, k_T	Turbulent kinetic energy
k_t	Turbulent thermal conductivity
k_{eff}	Effective conductivity
LED	Light Emitting Diode
m	Mass
\dot{m}	Mass flow rate of particles
MRR	Material removal rate
Nu	Nusselt number
p	Pressure
Pr	Prandlt number
\dot{Q}_{avg}	Average heat transfer rate
\dot{Q}_{total}	Total heat transferred
r	Radius of sphere
$R_{accretion}$	Accretion rate
Re	Reynolds number
Re_E	Relative Reynolds number
S, S_k, S_m, S_ϵ	Source terms
S_h	Heat of chemical reaction
SEM	Scanning Electron Microscope
T	Temperature

T_{avg}	Average temperature
T_{∞}	Temperature of kerosene
t	Machining time
TWR	Tool wear rate
u	Velocity along X direction
\vec{u}	Fluid phase velocity
\vec{u}_p	Particle velocity
\bar{u}_i	Mean velocity component
\dot{u}_i	Fluctuating velocity component
U	Inflow velocity
v	Velocity along Y direction
\vec{v}	Velocity vector
V	Voltage, Velocity
V_w	Volume of material removal from workpiece
V_T	Volume of material removal from tool
w	Velocity along Z direction, width of slot
Y_M	Fluctuating dilatation in compressible turbulence to the overall dissipation rate