Unit

4

Chemical Kinetics

Chemical Kinetics helps us to understand how chemical reactions occur.

Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to

- define the average and instantaneous rate of a reaction;
- express the rate of a reaction in terms of change in concentration of either of the reactants or products with time;
- distinguish between elementary and complex reactions;
- differentiate between the molecularity and order of a reaction;
- define rate constant;
- discuss the dependence of rate of reactions on concentration, temperature and catalyst;
- derive integrated rate equations for the zero and first order reactions;
- determine the rate constants for zeroth and first order reactions;
- describe collision theory.

Chemistry, by its very nature, is concerned with change. Substances with well defined properties are converted by chemical reactions into other substances with different properties. For any chemical reaction, chemists try to find out

(a) the feasibility of a chemical reaction which can be predicted by thermodynamics (as you know that a reaction with $\Delta G < 0$, at constant temperature and pressure is feasible);

(b) extent to which a reaction will proceed can be determined from chemical equilibrium;

(c) speed of a reaction i.e. time taken by a reaction to reach equilibrium.

Along with feasibility and extent, it is equally important to know the rate and the factors controlling the rate of a chemical reaction for its complete understanding. For example, which parameters determine as to how rapidly food gets spoiled? How to design a rapidly setting material for dental filling? Or what controls the rate at which fuel burns in an auto engine? All these questions can be answered by the branch of chemistry, which deals with the study of reaction rates and their mechanisms, called **chemical kinetics**. The word kinetics is derived from the Greek word 'kinesis' meaning movement. Thermodynamics tells only about the feasibility of a reaction whereas chemical kinetics tells about the rate of a reaction. For example, thermodynamic data indicate that diamond shall convert to graphite but in reality the conversion rate is so slow that the change is not perceptible at all. Therefore, most people think

that diamond is forever. Kinetic studies not only help us to determine the speed or rate of a chemical reaction but also describe the conditions by which the reaction rates can be altered. The factors such as concentration, temperature, pressure and catalyst affect the rate of a reaction. At the macroscopic level, we are interested in amounts reacted or formed and the rates of their consumption or formation. At the molecular level, the reaction mechanisms involving orientation and energy of molecules undergoing collisions, are discussed.

In this Unit, we shall be dealing with average and instantaneous rate of reaction and the factors affecting these. Some elementary ideas about the collision theory of reaction rates are also given. However, in order to understand all these, let us first learn about the reaction rate.

4.1 Rate of a Chemical Reaction

Some reactions such as ionic reactions occur very fast, for example, precipitation of silver chloride occurs instantaneously by mixing of aqueous solutions of silver nitrate and sodium chloride. On the other hand, some reactions are very slow, for example, rusting of iron in the presence of air and moisture. Also there are reactions like inversion of cane sugar and hydrolysis of starch, which proceed with a moderate speed. Can you think of more examples from each category?

You must be knowing that speed of an automobile is expressed in terms of change in the position or distance covered by it in a certain period of time. Similarly, the speed of a reaction or the rate of a reaction can be defined as the change in concentration of a reactant or product in unit time. To be more specific, it can be expressed in terms of:

 (i) the rate of decrease in concentration of any one of the reactants, or

 (ii) the rate of increase in concentration of any one of the products.

Consider a hypothetical reaction, assuming that the volume of the system remains constant.

$$R \rightarrow P$$

One mole of the reactant R produces one mole of the product P. If $[R]_1$ and $[P]_1$ are the concentrations of R and P respectively at time t_1 and $[R]_2$ and $[P]_2$ are their concentrations at time t_2 then,

$$\Delta t = t_2 - t_1$$
$$\Delta[R] = [R]_2 - [R]_1$$
$$\Delta [P] = [P]_2 - [P]_1$$

The square brackets in the above expressions are used to express molar concentration.

Rate of disappearance of R

$$= \frac{\text{Decrease in concentration of R}}{\text{Time taken}} = -\frac{\Delta[R]}{\Delta t} \tag{4.1}$$

Rate of appearance of P

$$= \frac{\text{Increase in concentration of P}}{\text{Time taken}} = +\frac{\Delta[P]}{\Delta t} \qquad (4.2)$$

Since, $\Delta[R]$ is a negative quantity (as concentration of reactants is decreasing), it is multiplied with –1 to make the rate of the reaction a positive quantity.

Equations (4.1) and (4.2) given above represent the **average rate of a reaction**, r_{av}.

Average rate depends upon the change in concentration of reactants or products and the time taken for that change to occur (Fig. 4.1).
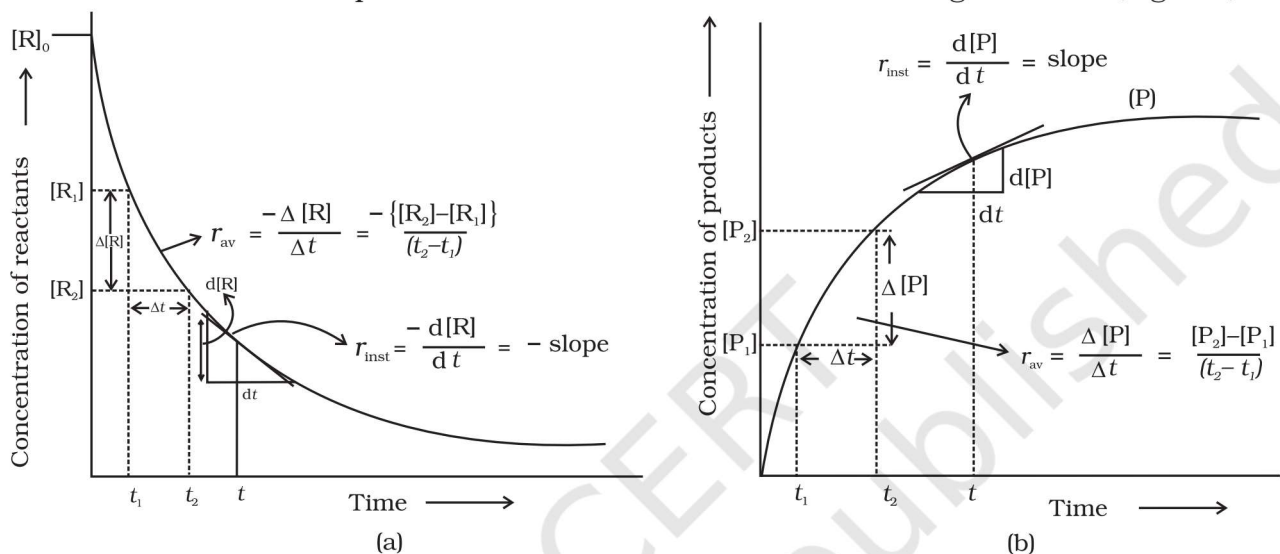
Fig. 4.1: *Instantaneous and average rate of a reaction*

Units of rate of a reaction

From equations (4.1) and (4.2), it is clear that units of rate are concentration time^{-1}. For example, if concentration is in mol L^{-1} and time is in seconds then the units will be mol L^{-1}s^{-1}. However, in gaseous reactions, when the concentration of gases is expressed in terms of their partial pressures, then the units of the rate equation will be atm s^{-1}.

Example 4.1

From the concentrations of C_4H_9Cl (butyl chloride) at different times given below, calculate the average rate of the reaction:

$$C_4H_9Cl + H_2O \rightarrow C_4H_9OH + HCl$$

during different intervals of time.

t/s	0	50	100	150	200	300	400	700	800
$[C_4H_9Cl]$/mol L^{-1}	0.100	0.0905	0.0820	0.0741	0.0671	0.0549	0.0439	0.0210	0.017

Solution

We can determine the difference in concentration over different intervals of time and thus determine the average rate by dividing $\Delta[R]$ by Δt (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Average rates of hydrolysis of butyl chloride

$[C_4H_9Cl]_{t_1}$ / mol L^{-1}	$[C_4H_9Cl]_{t_2}$ / mol L^{-1}	t_1/s	t_2/s	$r_{av} \times 10^4$/mol L^{-1}s^{-1} $= -\left\{[C_4H_9Cl]_{t_2} - [C_4H_9Cl]_{t_1} / (t_2 - t_1)\right\} \times 10^4$
0.100	0.0905	0	50	1.90
0.0905	0.0820	50	100	1.70
0.0820	0.0741	100	150	1.58
0.0741	0.0671	150	200	1.40
0.0671	0.0549	200	300	1.22
0.0549	0.0439	300	400	1.10
0.0439	0.0335	400	500	1.04
0.0210	0.017	700	800	0.4

It can be seen (Table 4.1) that the average rate falls from 1.90×0^{-4} mol L^{-1}s^{-1} to 0.4×10^{-4} mol L^{-1}s^{-1}. However, average rate cannot be used to predict the rate of a reaction at a particular instant as it be constant for the time interval for which it is calculated. So, to express the rate at a particular moment of time we determine the **instantaneous rate**. It is obtained when we consider the average rate at the smallest time interval say dt (i.e. when Δt approaches zero). Hence, mathematically for an infinitesimally small dt instantaneous rate is given by

$$r_{av} = \frac{-\Delta[R]}{\Delta t} = \frac{\Delta[P]}{\Delta t} \tag{4.3}$$

$$\text{As} \quad \Delta t \to 0 \qquad \text{or} \qquad r_{inst} = \frac{-d[R]}{dt} = \frac{d[P]}{dt}$$
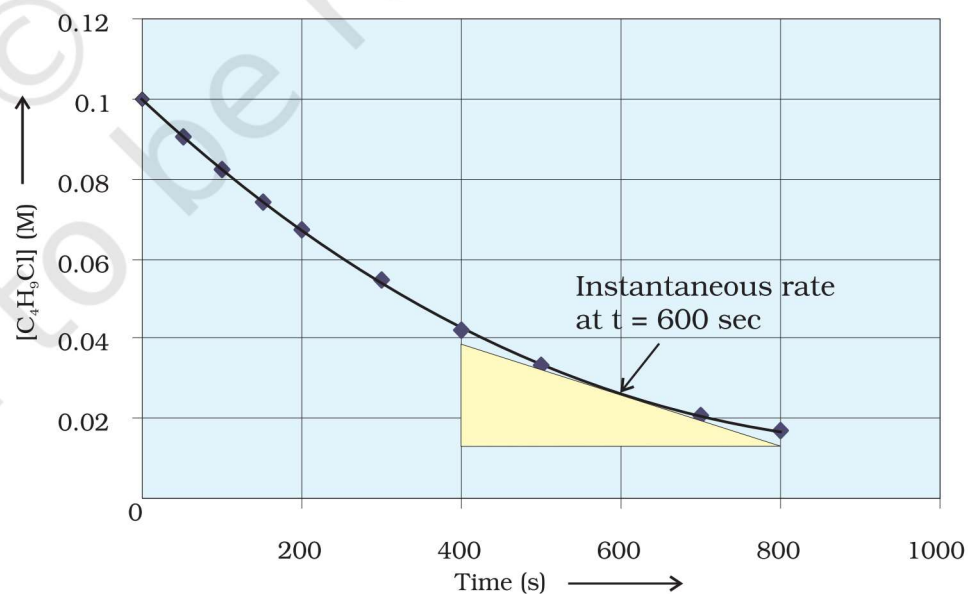
Fig 4.2
Instantaneous rate of hydrolysis of butyl chloride(C_4H_9Cl)

It can be determined graphically by drawing a tangent at time t on either of the curves for concentration of R and P vs time t and calculating its slope (Fig. 4.1). So in problem 4.1, r_{inst} at 600s for example, can be calculated by plotting concentration of butyl chloride as a function of time. A tangent is drawn that touches the curve at $t = 600$ s (Fig. 4.2).

The slope of this tangent gives the instantaneous rate.

So, r_{inst} at 600 s $= -\left(\dfrac{0.0165-0.037}{(800-400)s}\right)$ mol L^{-1} $= 5.12 \times 10^{-5}$ mol L^{-1}s^{-1}

At $t = 250$ s $\quad r_{inst} = 1.22 \times 10^{-4}$ mol L^{-1}s^{-1}

$t = 350$ s $\quad r_{inst} = 1.0 \times 10^{-4}$ mol L^{-1}s^{-1}

$t = 450$ s $\quad r_{inst} = 6.4 \times 10^{-5}$ mol L^{-1}s^{-1}