Anticataract effects of *S. cumini* and *A. marmelos* on goat lenses in an experimental diabetic cataract model

A.M. Hajarnavis a,*, P.M. Bulakh b

a Department of Biochemistry, D Y Patil Dental School, Pune 412105, India  
b Bharati Vidyapeeth Deemed University, Dhanuskodi, Pune 411043, India

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1. Introduction

Cataract is the leading cause of blindness world over. Diabetes mellitus has been considered to be a major risk factor for cataractogenesis. It is known that in diabetics, the cataracts occur at comparatively an earlier age and 2–5 times more frequently. It is reported that about 20% cataract surgeries are performed for diabetics alone [1]. Lens opacification in cataract as a complication of diabetes mellitus is associated with increased oxidative and hyperosmolar stress.

Oxidative damage to the lens has been linked with development of cataract, and decrease in antioxidant enzyme activities in the cataractous lens points to the importance of antioxidant enzymes in the prevention of oxidative damage to the lens and subsequent development of cataract [2]. A wide range of drugs like aldose reductase inhibitors, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are being tried for their anticataract activity [3].

There has been a growing interest in the various activities of indigenous plants. Many indigenous plants have been explored as potential promising sources of antioxidants [4–6].

*Syzgium cumini* (*S. cumini*) (L.) Skeels (jambolan), called “Jambhul” in Marathi and “Jamun” in Hindi, has been one of the most widely used plants in the management of various diseases. Ayurvedic system of medicine is known to be using jamun seeds in the management “madhumeha” (diabetes mellitus) [7]. Leaves of *Aegle marmelos* (*A. marmelos*) (Bael) are valued in Ayurveda in the

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* Corresponding author.  
E-mail: artihajarnavis@gmail.com  
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management of diabetes mellitus, and also some ophthalmic and inflammatory conditions. The antioxidant and hypoglycemic effects of leaves of *A. marmelos* have been explored in alloxan-induced diabetic rats [8]. *S. cumini* has been studied as having antioxidant activity [9,10]. Isolation studies of seed extract of *S. cumini* demonstrated significant antioxidant activity in the form of caffeic acid [11].

The present study was done to specifically test the local antioxidant and anticataract effects of extracts of *S. cumini* seeds and *A. marmelos* leaves on dextrose-induced experimental models of diabetic cataract by lens organ culture technique in isolated goat lenses. The study also extrapolates their antioxidant and cataract preventing properties. The lens morphology, lipid peroxidation, cataractogenesis, and specific antioxidant activity were the areas of interest.

2. Material and methods

The study was approved by Institutional Ethics Committee. The study was done in 120 fresh isolated goat lenses. Goat eyeballs were obtained from the slaughter house and were transported to the laboratory in an ice box. Lenses were removed from the eyeballs by intracapsular lens extraction method. Lenses were carefully placed on sterile petri dishes with a dark colored nylon net. The lenses were incubated in “Tissue Culture Medium” (TC 199) by “Lens Organ Culture Technique” for 72 h [12]. The study was carried out in 4 groups of 30 lenses each.

Group 1 served as “Normal Control” (subjected only to TC 199). Group 2 served as “Toxic Control” consisting of lenses in which experimental diabetic cataract was produced by using 110 mM dextrose (“Toxic Control”) [13]. Group 3 consisted of goat lenses treated with aqueous extract of seeds of *S. cumini* (Jamun) along with dextrose and TC 199. Group 4 consisted of goat lenses treated with aqueous extract of *A. marmelos* (Bael) leaves, dextrose, and TC 199.

2.1. Preparation of plant water extracts

Dry powders of *S. cumini* (Jamun) seeds and *A. marmelos* (Bael) leaves were taken and 25% w/v water extracts were prepared. The extracts were analyzed for their purity and “total dissolved solids” at Indian Drugs Research Association & Laboratory, Pune. The concentration of solution of each extract used for the study was 0.25%.

2.2. Preparation of lens homogenate

At the end of 72 h of incubation, lenses from each group were removed and 10% homogenate of whole lens was prepared in 0.1 M sodium phosphate buffer (pH 7.4). The homogenate was centrifuged at 10,000 ×g for 30 min at −4 °C in a refrigerated centrifuge. The supernatant was collected and stored at −20 °C until further use.

2.3. Estimation of biochemical parameters

The supernatant was subjected to the estimation of biochemical parameters that included total soluble lens proteins, malondialdehyde (MDA), superoxide dismutase, glutathione peroxidase, and glutathione reductase.

Lowry's method was used for estimation of total soluble lens proteins and the method by Kei Satoh was used to estimate MDA, as an index of lipid peroxidation by thiobarbituric acid reacting substances (TBARS) quantification [14]. Superoxide dismutase activity was spectrophotometrically measured by monitoring pyrogallol reduction rate [14]. Randox kits were used for estimation of glutathione peroxidase and glutathione reductase. For glutathione peroxidase estimation, the substrates used were hydroperoxide and GSH [15]. Glutathione reductase was assayed by measuring decreased absorbance at 340 nm due to oxidation of NADPH to NADP during GSSG getting converted to GSH [16].

2.4. Statistical analysis

Percent difference was calculated (increase in percentage for the activity of three antioxidant enzymes and decrease in percentage for amounts of total soluble lens proteins and malondialdehyde), and the values were subjected to statistical analysis.

Biochemical parameters were subjected to student's “t” test to compare between the Group 1 and Group 2 (Normal control and Toxic control). For comparing the biochemical parameters between Group 2, Group 3, and Group 4 (Dextrose-induced cataract lenses, *S. cumini* treated lenses, and *A. marmelos* treated lenses respectively), “One-way Analysis of variance” (ANOVA) was performed.

2.5. Lens morphology

For studying the lens morphology, the lenses were placed on a grid/net and changes in lens transparency were observed by noting the number and characteristics of the squares of the grid/net seen through the lens. Generalized haziness or opacity, intumescence, swelling, disruption and other morphological changes were also noted. The grades of cataract changes were classified based on modification of the criteria used in past for grading the cataract changes [17]. They are shown in Table 1.

3. Results

3.1. Changes in experimental dextrose induced cataract lenses

Changes in Experimental dextrose induced cataract lenses were observed by estimating the changes in total soluble lens proteins, malondialdehyde (MDA), superoxide dismutase, glutathione peroxidase, and glutathione reductase etc.

3.1.1. Expression of lipid peroxidation

The values of expression of lipid peroxidation is listed in Table 2.
### Table 3
Expression of lipid peroxidation and oxidative stress in dextrose-induced lenses.

| No | Parameter                        | Group 1 (n = 30) (“Normal control”) | Group 2 (n = 30) (“Toxic control”) |
|----|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|    |                                  | (Mean ± SD)                         | (Mean ± SD)                       |
| 1  | Total soluble lens proteins (mg/dL) | 344 ± 62.56                         | 255 ± 62.46 (p < 0.0001)          |
|    | Malondialdehyde (MDA) (nmoles/ml)  | 9.56 ± 3.43                         | 13.45 ± 3.0 (p < 0.0001)          |

| No | Antioxidant Enzyme | Group 1 (n = 30) (“Normal control”) | Group 2 (n = 30) (“Toxic control”) |
|----|--------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|    |                    | (Mean ± SD)                         | (Mean ± SD)                       |
| 1  | Superoxide dismutase | 0.41 ± 0.14                         | 0.30 ± 0.15 (p < 0.01)            |
| 2  | Glutathione peroxidase | 36.16 ± 9.90                       | 29.71 ± 13.92 (p < 0.05)          |
| 3  | Glutathione reductase | 13.32 ± 3.55                        | 10.49 ± 2.11 (p < 0.001)          |

#### 3.1.1. Total soluble lens proteins
The total soluble lens protein content in Group 2 (“Toxic control”) (dextrose-induced cataract lenses) decreased by 25.8% as compared to Group 1 (normal control lenses). The decrease was statistically highly significant (p < 0.0001).

#### 3.1.2. Malondialdehyde
Lipid peroxidation measured in terms of malondialdehyde (MDA) levels showed an increase in MDA levels by 28.9% in Group 2 (“Toxic control”) (dextrose induced cataract lenses) as compared to Group 1 (normal control lenses). The increase in MDA was statistically highly significant (p < 0.0001).

#### 3.1.3. Expression of lipid peroxidation

| No | Parameter                        | Group 3 (n = 30) (“S. cumini” seed extract treated lenses) | Group 4 (n = 30) (“A. marmelos” leaf extract lenses) |
|----|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
|    |                                  | (Mean ± SD)                                               | (Mean ± SD)                                         |
| 1  | Total soluble lens proteins (mg/dL) | 255 ± 62.46 (p < 0.0001)                                  | 294.33 ± 34.9 Increased by 13.3%                     |
| 2  | Malondialdehyde (MDA) (nmoles/ml)  | 13.45 ± 3.0 (p < 0.0001)                                  | 10.34 ± 3.2 Decreased by 13.3% Not significant       |
|    |                                  |                                                            |                                                     |
| 1  | Superoxide dismutase (units/mg lens) | 0.30 ± 0.15                                               | 0.37 ± 0.12 Increased by 16.1% Not significant       |
|    |                                  |                                                            |                                                     |
| 2  | Glutathione peroxidase (units/mg lens) | 29.71 ± 13.92                                          | 49.07 ± 22.4 Increased by 39.43% p < 0.01 Not significant |
|    |                                  |                                                            |                                                     |
| 3  | Glutathione reductase (units/mg lens) | 10.49 ± 2.11                                           | 23.06 ± 6.8 Increased by 54.46% p < 0.001           |

#### 3.2. Effect of S. cumini aqueous seed extract and A. marmelos aqueous leaf extract on dextrose-induced cataract lenses

| Parameter                        | Group 1 (n = 30) (“Normal control”) | Group 2 (n = 30) (“Toxic control”) |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Total soluble lens proteins (mg/dL) | 344 ± 62.56                         | 255 ± 62.46 (p < 0.0001)          |
| Malondialdehyde (MDA) (nmoles/ml)  | 9.56 ± 3.43                         | 13.45 ± 3.0 (p < 0.0001)          |

#### 3.2.1. Expression of lipid peroxidation

| Parameter                        | Group 1 (n = 30) (“Normal control”) | Group 2 (n = 30) (“Toxic control”) |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Superoxide dismutase (units/mg lens) | 0.30 ± 0.15                         | 0.30 ± 0.15 (p < 0.01)            |
| Glutathione peroxidase (units/mg lens) | 29.71 ± 13.92                       | 29.71 ± 13.92 (p < 0.05)          |
| Glutathione reductase (units/mg lens) | 10.49 ± 2.11                        | 10.49 ± 2.11 (p < 0.001)          |

#### 3.2.1.1. Total soluble lens proteins
The total soluble lens protein content in Group 2 (“Toxic control”) (dextrose-induced cataract lenses) decreased by 25.8% as compared to Group 1 (normal control lenses). The decrease was statistically highly significant (p < 0.0001).

#### 3.2.1.2. Malondialdehyde
Lipid peroxidation measured in terms of malondialdehyde (MDA) levels showed an increase in MDA levels by 28.9% in Group 2 (“Toxic control”) (dextrose induced cataract lenses) as compared to Group 1 (normal control lenses). The increase in MDA was statistically highly significant (p < 0.0001).

#### 3.2.1.3. Expression of lipid peroxidation

The Group 1 (“normal control”) lenses had the transparency and clarity maintained as evidenced by the clearly visible grids. As compared to the lenses in Group 1 (“normal control”), the lenses in Group 2 (“Toxic control”) showed total loss of transparency with development of mature cataract nearing rupture as evidenced by the invisibility of grids, thus showing Grade 4 changes (Fig. 1).
there was a need to assess the ayurvedic literature for their antidiabetic properties. However,

4. Discussion

S. cumini (Jamun) and A. marmelos have been mentioned in ayurvedic literature for their antidiabetic properties. However, there was a need to assess the in vitro effect of these plant extracts on the lens morphology and on the oxidative stress related biochemical changes happening in cataract. Streptozotocin-induced diabetic rats and galactosemic rats have been used as animal models of diabetic cataract, and mice have been used for in vivo studies [18]. The present study was done by developing an in vitro cataract model in goat lenses by use of a higher concentration of dextrose than that used in the previous known studies [17]. The lens organ culture technique was employed by using tissue culture medium (TC 199) and dextrose was used as a toxicant for induction of experimental cataract in the concentration as high as 110 mM dextrose, based on the hyperglycemic model for fish retina developed by Alvarez et al. [13].

The purpose of the present work was to specifically evaluate the local effects of the extracts of seeds of S. cumini and leaves of A. marmelos for the antioxidant and anticataract properties tested by biochemical and physical parameters.

Oxidative stress is known to be participating in development of diabetes and its complications like cataract. On exposure to dextrose in a high concentration, the glucose in the lens starts getting utilized through sorbitol pathway. Accumulation of polyols (sugar alcohols) causes overhydration and oxidative stress leading to generation of cataract [13]. Hyperglycemia induces oxidative stress through various pathways [19]. Further oxidation of the lens crystallins as well as membrane proteins results in the formation of insoluble protein aggregates. Loss of soluble proteins from lens by their conversion into insoluble ones due to lens protein oxidation reflected as decrease in total lens protein content as evidenced in the present study.

Lipid peroxidation was assessed by the total soluble lens protein content and the malondialdehyde levels. The oxidative stress was assessed by measurement of the three antioxidant enzymes namely superoxide dismutase, glutathione peroxidase, and glutathione reductase [19].

Increased oxidative stress impairs the enzymatic defenses against reactive oxygen species. This is evidenced by the significant decrease of various antioxidant enzymes in experimental models of cataract in lenses. Phytochemical antioxidants such as flavonoids, tannoids, gallic acid, and phenols can scavenge free radicals. S. cumini seeds and A. marmelos leaves are rich in these phytochemicals [9]. Addition of S. cumini aqueous seed extract exhibited significant antioxidant activity evident by increase in the levels of all the three antioxidant enzymes. A. marmelos aqueous leaf extract exhibited significant antioxidant activity pertaining to the enzymes glutathione peroxidase and glutathione reductase. This is brought about by quenching free radicals. Richness of phytochemical antioxidants in the extracts of these two plants directs to their probable role in prevention of lipid peroxidation and thereby cataract formation. The free radical scavenging activity of S. cumini aqueous extract is evident in the present study by the marked increase in activities of the antioxidant lens enzymes. A. marmelos aqueous leaf extract is also known to enhance the cellular glutathione levels [20]. A significant increase in the activity of glutathione peroxidase and glutathione reductase in lenses treated with A. marmelos aqueous leaf extract in the present study can be thus explained.

The goat lens morphology was studied based on various parameters like lens shape, outline, swelling, and transparency; and the cataract changes were graded according to severity. It was found that exposure to 110 mM dextrose produced grade 4 changes in the goat lenses. There was total loss of transparency with osmotic swelling and development of mature cataract nearing rupture. This was evident by the invisibility of grids. Gradation of cataract severity was useful to compare the effects of the two plants extracts.

Both aqueous extracts demonstrated an increase in the specific activity of all the three antioxidant enzymes and a significant decrease in malondialdehyde levels as well as significant preservation of the levels of total soluble proteins. Both extracts were able to demonstrate preservation of lens morphology against the cataract changes. However, aqueous seed extract of S. cumini demonstrated a consistently better effect as compared to the aqueous leaf extract of A. marmelos with regards to all the
parameters including preservation of lens morphology. The effects found in the present study reinforce the findings in past related to *S. cumini* [9,10,21].

The experimental evidence in past has demonstrated the involvement of lipid peroxidation in the pathogenesis of cataract. Malondialdehyde (MDA) is known as a predominant breakdown product of lipid peroxides. In human cortical cataract as well as diabetic cataract, MDA has been found to be increased by 3.5 times as a predominant breakdown product of lipid peroxides. In human cortical cataract as well as diabetic cataract, MDA has been found to be increased by 3.5 times as a product of lipid peroxides. In human cortical cataract as well as diabetic cataract, MDA has been found to be increased by 3.5 times as a predominant breakdown product of lipid peroxides.

In isolated goat lenses with experimental dextrose induced diabetic cataract, *S. cumini* leaves showed significant antioxidant activity as compared to the controls. The extracts of *S. cumini* leaves significantly decreased activities of various antioxidant enzymes [22]. The experimental model developed in the present study mimicked these effects as reflected in the decrease in all the three antioxidant enzymes.

5. **Limitations of the study**

There is further need for assessing the antioxidant activity of these plant extracts in a different cataract model. Also, potency studies of both extracts need to be done to explore the possible future steps for in vivo studies.

6. **Conclusion**

In isolated goat lenses with experimental dextrose induced diabetic cataract, *S. cumini* seed extract showed significant antioxidant and anticataract properties. *A. marmelos* leaf extract also showed significant anticataract properties and antioxidant properties on all the parameters tested except for the enzyme superoxide dismutase for which the effects were comparatively less.

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None declared.

**Conflict of interest**

None.

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