

Biosynthesis and characterization of silver nanoparticles using leaf extract of *Wedelia urticifolia*(Blume)DC and evaluation of antibacterial efficacy

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Abstract: In the present study, an easy and green method for the phytosynthesis of silver nanoparticles is reported. The leaf extract of *Wedelia urticifolia* Blume DC was used for the synthesis. Overall, three ratios of leaf extract to metal salt concentration viz 9:1, 1:1 and 1:9 were used to achieve the best ratio to be treated for getting a better yield. The silver nanoparticles (AgNPs) synthesis was confirmed by the colour change. The produced nanoparticles were examined by UV-Visible spectroscopy, Dynamic Light Scattering (DLS/Zeta-Sizer), XRD (X-Ray Diffraction Spectroscopy) and SEM (Scanning Electron Microscopy). All the three ratios showed a peak in UV-visible spectrum graph at 450nm, but maximum absorbance was observed in 1:1 ratio followed by 9:1 and 1:9. The average size of the AgNPs obtained from DLS was found to be 179.3 nm, 90.38 nm and 80.28 nm for 9:1, 1:1 and 1:9 ratios respectively. SEM images indicated that the synthesized AgNPs were agglomerated, but poly-dispersed and crystalline in nature. The XRD pattern obtained for the synthesized particles matched with the ICDD standard. The results obtained from the antibacterial assay revealed that the AgNPs are more potent in inhibiting the growth of gram-negative bacterial species (*Escherichia coli*, 100 µg) rather than gram-positive bacterial species (*Staphylococcus aureus*, 400 µg).

Keywords: Antibacterial activity, Biosynthesis, Silver nanoparticle, *Wedelia urticifolia*

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I. Introduction

Metal nanoparticles, with a size between 0-100nm, have numerous applications in biology, chemistry, medical science, pharmaceuticals and energy science [1] as they exhibit remarkable properties due to their specific characteristics like size, surface area. Nanoparticles are synthesized by a wide range of chemical processes. Some of them are expensive or hazardous to the environment as these processes involve a variety of chemicals. The green synthesis of nanoparticles is favoured over physical and chemical methods because it is cost effective, eco-friendly and does not need massive external energy or toxic chemicals [2]. Green synthesis, where a wide range of plants and microbes have been involved, is gaining a lot of attention globally because of its easy reproducibility, rapid, economic and environmental friendly techniques. Among metal nanoparticles, silver nanoparticles (AgNPs) have gained a very special focus because of their wide variety of uses down through human civilization. AgNPs possess a lot of unique assets like good conductivity, chemical stability, catalytic properties, and most importantly antibacterial, anti-viral, antifungal and anti-inflammatory properties [3,4]. AgNPs have been produced using many plant species [5]. Kasthuri et al. [6] synthesized quasi-spherical AgNPs by using purified apigenin compound, which was extracted from the henna leaf at ambient conditions. Green tea, *Camellia sinensis* extract was used as an agent for reducing and stabilizing gold and silver nanoparticles [7]. Plant extracts from broths of lemongrass, live alfalfa and others have aided in AgNP synthesis [8]. The reaction of aqueous leaf extract of a common ornamental geranium plant *Pelargonium graveolens* with silver nitrate (AgNO_3) produced AgNPs within 24 h [9]. A vegetable, *Capsicum annum* was also utilized to synthesize AgNPs [10]. Plant extracts from *Solanum trilobatum*, *Syzygium cumini*, *Syzygium aromaticum*, *Centella asiatica*, *Ocimum tenuiflorum* and *Citrus sinensis* were used for the synthesis of AgNPs from silver nitrate solution [11,12]. Besides synthesis of AgNPs using a variety of plant parts as reductants, they are also tested for their antibacterial efficacy against potential as well as common pathogenic bacterial species viz. *Bacillus subtilis*, *Escherichia coli*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Streptococcus pyogenes* using the extracts of *Boerhaavia diffusa* [13], *Tribulus terrestris* [14], *Coccoloba nucifera* [15], *Solanum torvum* [16], *Trianthemadecandra* [17], *Argemone mexicana* [18], *Abutilon indicum* [19], *Aloe vera* [20] and *Pistacia atlantica* [21]. Presently, one of the

invasive plant species *Wedelia urticifolia* Blume DC has been selected and the silver nanoparticles synthesized from aqueous extract of the leaves is tested for its antibacterial potency against two pathogenic bacterial species viz. *Staphylococcus aureus* (gram positive) and *Escherichia coli* (gram negative).

II. Materials And Methods

Fresh leaves of *Wedelia urticifolia* were collected from the horticulture wing of the Pondicherry University and it has been identified with the keys in consultation with plant taxonomists in the Department of Ecology and Environmental Science. *Wedelia urticifolia* (Chinese name-Dixuegen) is an erect, weak and perennial herb having elliptic leaves, bright yellow coloured flowers, terminal heads, and a light camphor-like odour (Fig 1).



Fig. 1: Habit of *Wedelia urticifolia* DC plant

CLASSIFICATION: Clade: Asterid II — Order: Asterales Family: Asteraceae
Genus: *Wedelia* Species: *urticifolia* (Blume) DC. —→

2.1 Preparation of plant extract

The aqueous plant extract from fresh leaves of *W. urticifolia* was prepared based on the methods adopted by Sigamoney et al. [22] with slight modification. The fresh and healthy plant leaves were collected, washed thoroughly first with tap water and then with distilled water to remove adhering debris and associated biota before use. The plant leaves were cut into fine pieces and 10 grams were ground with mortar and pestle to make a paste. To this paste, 100 ml of distilled water was added in a 250 ml beaker and the solution was boiled at 60°C for 30 minutes. The boiled solution was filtered using muslin cloth followed by centrifugation at 5000 rpm for 15 minutes and finally filtered through Whatman No. 1 filter paper. The filtrate was stored at 4°C for further experimental work.

2.2 Preparation of silver nitrate solution

Silver nitrate (AgNO_3) was chosen as the source of metal for the synthesis of AgNPs. AgNO_3 was purchased from HiMedia Pvt. Ltd. Mumbai, India. AgNO_3 used was of analytical reagent grade. A volume of 500 ml of 1 mM AgNO_3 salt solution was prepared using double distilled water and was stored in the dark for further use.

2.3 Biosynthesis of silver nanoparticles

The synthesis protocol involved two phases. Phase I was to find out the suitable ratio for the synthesis of a higher amount of particles and Phase II was to prepare more of reactants based on the suitable metal salt to extract ratio found out from Phase I to produce more nanoparticles required for further use. Phase I: Overall, three ratios were designed viz: 9:1 (9 ml plant extract and 1 ml metal salt solution), 1:1 (5 ml plant extract and 5 ml metal salt

solution), and 1:9 (1ml plant extract and 9ml metal salt solution). The reacted samples after the change in colour of the mixture were then subjected to UV spectrum analysis. The ratio which showed higher values of absorbance was considered as the suitable ratio for phase II.

Phase II: From the readings of UV spectrum, the best ratio out of the three ratios of metal salt to plant extract was selected and the synthesis was done in a 500ml conical flask to get more nanoparticles for further studies. The colour change and UV spectrum were obtained similar to what it was in the Phase I. For Phase II, the sample of plant extract and the metal solution was kept in an auto shaker at 250 rpm at room temperature till the reaction completion to ensure thorough mixing. The AgNPs solution thus obtained was purified by repeated centrifugation at 10,000 rpm for 10 minutes, dried and stored until further use.

2.4 Characterization

The different techniques used to characterize the AgNPs were UV-Vis spectroscopy, DLS, XRD and SEM. UV-Visible spectroscopy is a commonly used technique to measure the quantity of nanoparticles present in the sample in terms of the light absorbed by the sample and is used for characterizing various metal nanoparticles. DLS is used to measure the average size of particles and their size distribution. XRD was used to determine whether the particles formed were silver metal in comparison with international standards. For XRD analysis (Rigaku Ultima IV), the liquid phase nanoparticle solution was dried in an oven at 60°C and then in a muffle furnace at 750°C to form a powder. The dried powder was collected for characterization by an X'pert Pro x-ray diffractometer operating at 40 kV and a current of 30mA with Cu Ka radiation in θ -2 θ configuration. SEM is used for knowing the morphological characteristics viz. size and topology of particles. Dried powder of silver nanoparticles produced was placed onto carbon tape attached to aluminum stubs. The samples were viewed using scanning electron microscope, Joel India Pvt. Ltd., Model JSM-6610LV.

2.5 Antibacterial activity assay

The silver nanoparticles (AgNPs) synthesized were tested for their antibacterial property using broth dilution method. Two clinical cultures of pathogenic organisms, *Staphylococcus aureus* (gram positive) and *Escherichia coli* (gram-negative) were obtained from a Private Clinical Diagnostic Centre- M/s Deveraj Diagnostics, Pondicherry. The antibacterial susceptibility test/assay was done according to European Committee for antibacterial susceptibility test (EUCAST, Germany) document E. Dis. 5.1, 2003. Presently, 24 hours old cultures of test organisms transferred to sterilized broth were used. The broth meets the requirements of National Committee for Clinical Laboratory Standards (NCCLS). The Minimum Inhibitory Concentration (MIC) is the lowest concentration of antimicrobial agents that inhibit 99% growth of microorganisms. The bacterial suspension is adjusted to a turbidity equivalent to that of 0.5 McFarland Standard. Each tube is inoculated with approximately 5×10^5 cfu/ml (colony forming units per milliliter). Once in four hours, the turbidity in terms of OD is measured photometrically in 600nm (OD₆₀₀). The OD values for 24 hours with the interval of 4 hours have been plotted in the graph.

III. Results

3.1 Colour change

The bioreduction of silver ions was visually evident from a change in colour of solution from smoky white to dark brown compared to control. Fig. 2 depicts the change in colour within 6 hours of reaction at room temperature.



Fig. 2: Reaction tubes at the end of 6 Hours showing colour change

3.2 UV Spectrophotometer

The reduction of silver nitrate into silver ions and silver nanoparticles was monitored by analyzing the samples using the UV-Visible spectrophotometer after 6 hours of reaction time. The scanning range employed was from 200 to 800 nm. Strong surface plasmon resonance (SPR) bands were observed at 450 nm. This confirmed the formation of AgNPs. The spectra presented in Fig 3 shows the maximum absorption value of 1.9 in 1E:1M ratio at 450 nm followed by 9E:1M and 1E:9M with maximum absorption values of 1.5 and 0.5 at 450 nm and 451.5 nm respectively. The UV-Vis spectrum results concluded that among the three ratios of the extract of *W. urticifolia* evaluated, the ratio of 1:1 of leaf extract to 1 mM AgNO₃ solution is found advantageous for AgNPs synthesis. Hence, the same ratio was taken for Phase-II to produce more number of nanoparticles.

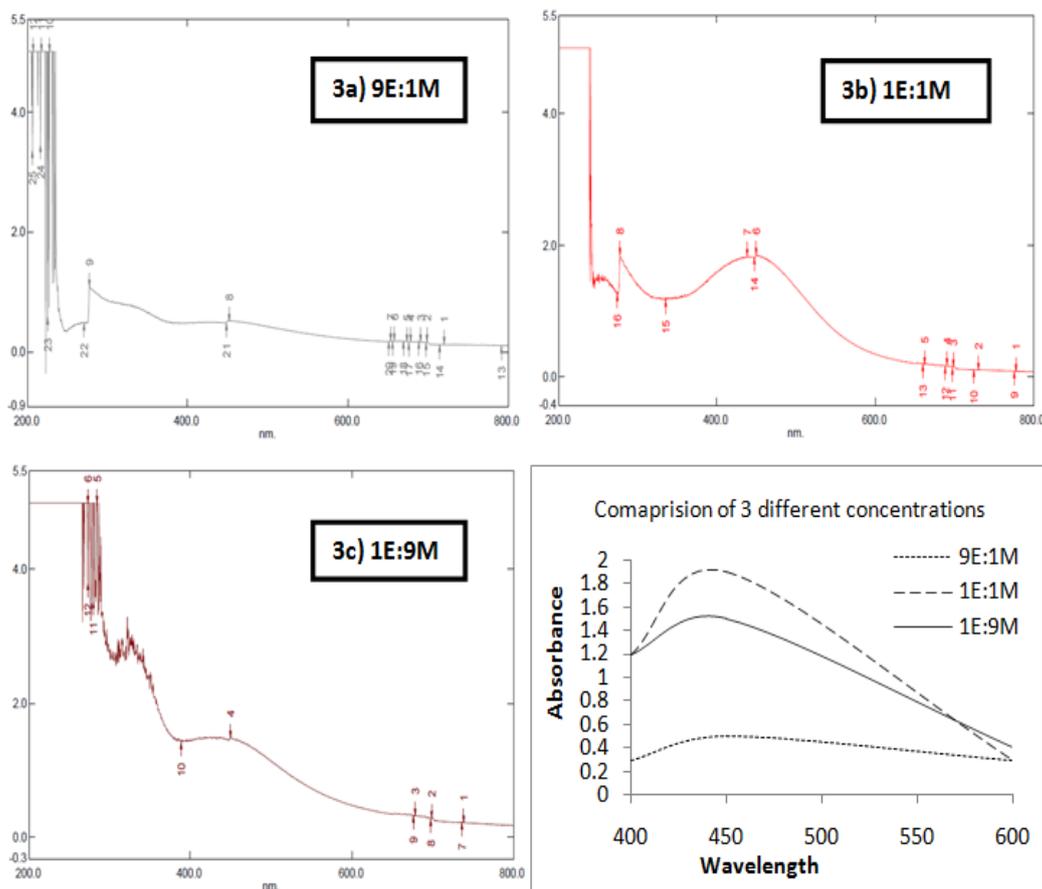
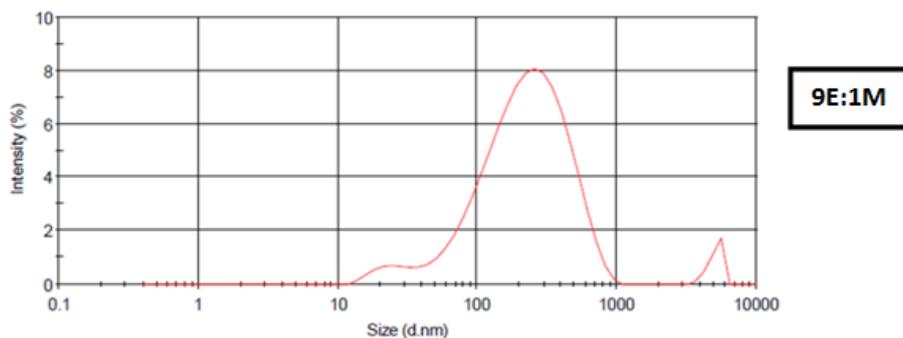


Fig 3: UV-visible spectra recorded for reaction mixture of three different ratios of plant extract (E) to metal salt (M)

3.3 The Dynamic Light Scattering

The DLS (Dynamic Light Scattering) of the AgNPs is presented in Fig 4 and was carried out by Zeta-Sizer. The average size of the AgNPs was found to be 179.3 nm, 90.38 nm and 80.28 nm for 9E:1M, 1E:1M and 1E:9M respectively.



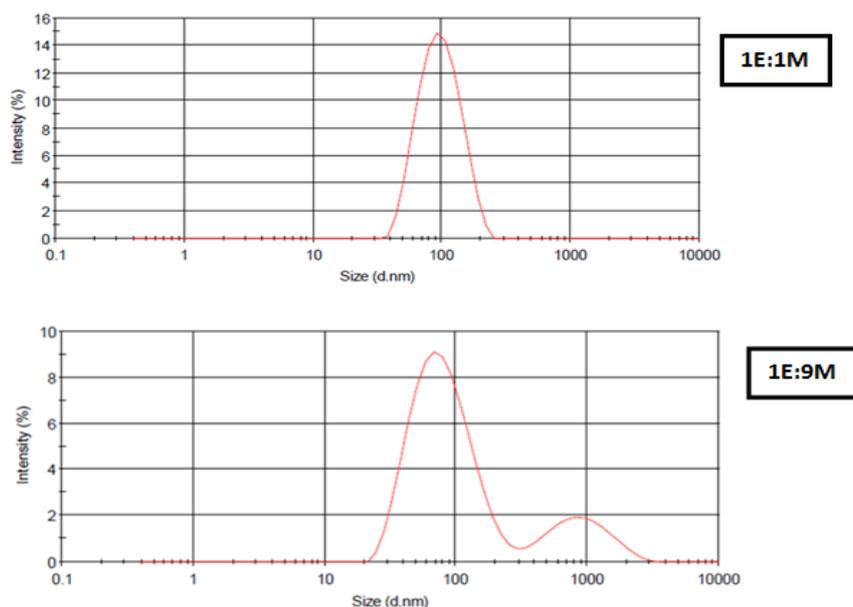


Fig 4: DLS bar graph of silver nanoparticles synthesized with different concentrations

3.4 X-Ray Diffraction (XRD)

The results of XRD are presented in spectrum i.e, Fig 5. The 2θ peak values were observed at 38.22, 44.42, 64.56 and 77.50. The results were compared with the XRD standard of AgNPs (PDF Card - 01-087-0720_Ag) which has values of 38.20, 44.40, 64.60 and 77.60 and corresponds to Bragg's diffraction at 111, 200, 220 and 311 planes of the lattice structure. Maximum peak was obtained at 38.22. These results confirmed that the synthesized nanoparticles are silver metal with the crystalline structure.

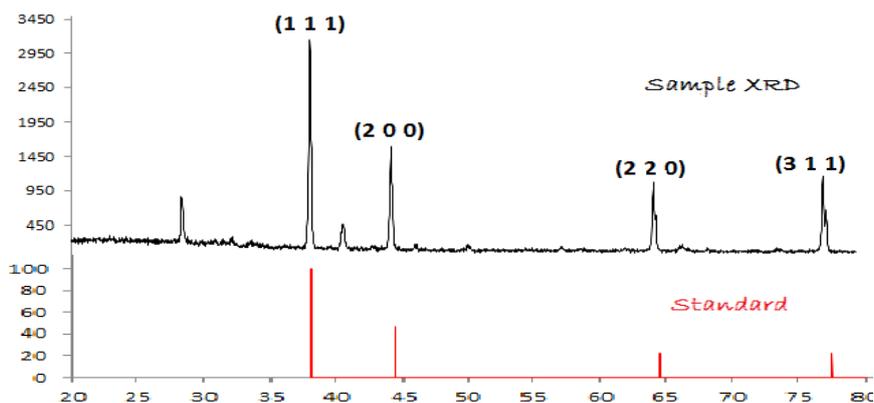


Fig 5: XRD spectrum of nanoparticles obtained with standard

3.5 SEM

The SEM image of AgNPs is presented in Fig 6. The synthesized AgNPs were found to be agglomerated, but poly-dispersed and crystalline in nature.

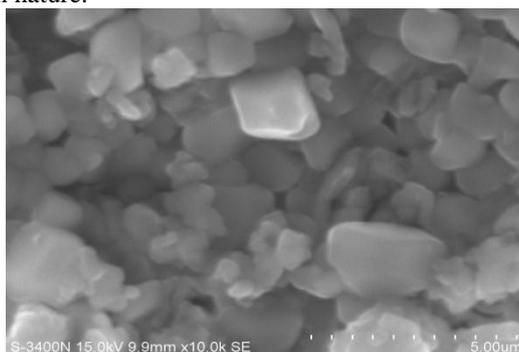


Fig 6: SEM image of silver nanoparticles

3.6 Antibacterial activity

The antibacterial activity test revealed that the overall inhibitory effect is found to be dose dependent in both the bacterial species. The MIC of AgNPs is found to be 400 µg for gram-positive bacteria (*S.aureus*) and 100 µg for gram-negative bacteria (*E.coli*). AgNPs exhibited a high level of inhibitory action against *E.coli*. The growth profile of the two species with variation in concentration of AgNPs is depicted in Fig. 7.

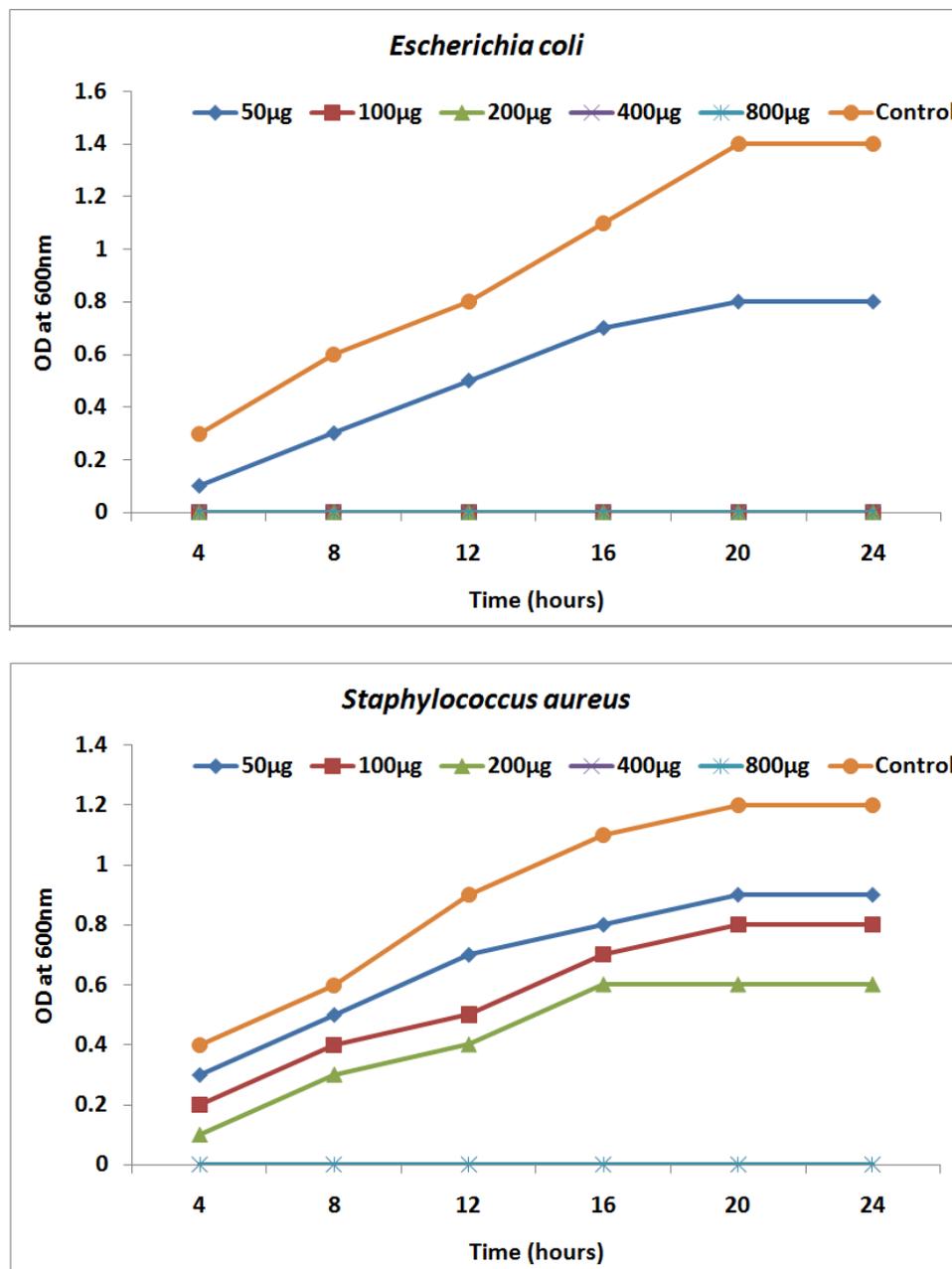


Fig. 7: Assessment of MIC using broth dilution method

IV. Discussion

In the present study, taking the leaf extract of *Wedelia urticifolia* based on its phytochemical constituents, an attempt was made to synthesise AgNPs. During the reaction, in 6 hours the brown colour formation took place indicating the formation of AgNPs. This kind of colour change in AgNPs synthesis was also reported by [1,23,24,25,26,27,28] using an aqueous extract of different plant parts. Typical peak for AgNPs observed generally ranges from 418 to 460 nm [1]. UV spectra obtained in the present study displayed absorption peak at 450 nm which is specific to AgNPs. The results were similar to the previous study done by Jain et al. [29], who observed the absorbance peak at 450 nm. Peaks between 400 and 450 nm were observed in UV-Vis spectrum of AgNPs by Sandeep et al. [27]. Nestor et al. [7] reported that the peak in absorbance around

430 nm in UV-Vis spectra is a characteristic of AgNPs. AgNPs synthesis using *Cinnamomum camphora* showed a sharp absorbance at around 440 nm [30]. Subramani et al. [31] reported that the AgNPs absorption spectra have absorbance maxima at 421 nm. The absorbance peak of AgNPs occurs at 451 nm which is a narrow peak with an increase in absorbance due to increase in the formation of a number of nanoparticles as a result of the silver ions reduction present in the aqueous solution. AgNPs synthesized using extracts of *Ananas comosus* displayed the characteristic UV-Vis absorption peak at 430 nm which confirmed their formation [32]. Absorption spectra of AgNPs formed in the reaction mixture have an absorption peak at 420-510 nm and the broadening of the peak indicates the polydispersed nature of particles [33]. Daniel et al. [34] stated SPR peaks were observed from 410 to 440 nm for AgNPs synthesized using plants. Balazet et al. [35] also synthesized AgNPs using the plant extract of *Origanum vulgare* and obtained peak at 445 nm. Manikandan et al. [28] also observed the peak at 445 nm in AgNPs solution obtained from an aqueous extract of *Phyllanthus acidus* fruit.

The XRD showed 2θ values ranging from 20° to 80° . A comparison of XRD spectrum obtained for the NPs synthesized in the present study with the international standard spectrum confirmed that the nanoparticles formed in the present experiment were of the silver metal particles, as demonstrated by the four peaks at 2θ values of 38.45° , 44.48° , 64.69° and 77.62° , which correspond to 111, 200, 220 and 311 planes for silver respectively and which showed similarity with the database of Joint Committee on Powder Diffraction Standards (JCPDS file No. 04-0783). The XRD peaks exhibited by the synthesized AgNPs of *Ananas comosus* have also shown peaks at 38.45° , 44.48° , 64.69° and 77.62° [32]. A similar pattern was also obtained by Kalidasan and Yogamoorthi [25], Manikandan, et al. [28], Krishnaraj et al. [36], Santhoshkumar et al. [37], and Kudle et al. [38]. The results, thus illustrate that the synthesized AgNPs are crystalline in nature. Characterization by Scanning Electron Microscopy was carried out to know the structure of the reaction product that was formed. SEM was conducted to know the size and topology of silver nanoparticles obtained. The SEM image of the AgNPs synthesized in the present study indicates the individual silver particles as well as agglomerated particles with a rough surface. Manikandan et al. [28] observed AgNPs under SEM and found that most of the nanoparticles were aggregated and just a few of them were scattered. Ali et al. [39] attributed that the agglomeration of nanoparticles is due to induced-dehydration. Similar observations were also made by Kalidasan and Yogamoorthi [25], Daniel et al. [34], Song and Kim [40] and Prashanth et al. [41]. So, further particle processing is needed before it can be used for any other purpose. Formation of nanoparticles by reducing the silver salt might be due to the type of phytochemical constituents present in the study plant, *Wedelia urticifolia*. It has been reported that members of the genus *Wedelia* contain terpenes, steroids, flavonoids, coumarins, cyclitols, and organic acids [42] and eleven monoterpene hydrocarbons (53.09%) were found in leaves, with α -pinene (15.57%), d-limonene (11.19%), α -phellandrene (9.69%) and g-terpinene (9.01%) as the main ones and also some relatively similar compounds [43]. Probably, these phytochemical constituents might have acted as a reducing agent reacting with silver nitrate to form AgNPs. The concentration of the extract might have also influenced the efficiency of nucleation of nanoparticles.

Secondly, the antibacterial efficacy of the presently synthesized AgNPs was tested. The antibacterial activity test revealed that the overall inhibitory effect is found to be dose-dependent in both the tested bacterial species. The MIC of AgNPs is arrived at as $400 \mu\text{g}$ for gram-positive bacteria (*S. aureus*) and $100 \mu\text{g}$ for gram-negative bacteria (*E. coli*). Silver nanoparticles exhibited a higher level of antibiotic potential on *E. coli*. Similar results were also reported by Kaviya et al. [44] who synthesized AgNPs using an extract of orange peelings (*Citrus sinensis*) and found their highest antibacterial activity against *E. coli* than *S. aureus*. Benakashani et al. [45] reported that the gram negative bacteria were more subtle than gram-positive bacteria to biologically synthesize AgNPs using *Capparis spinosa* leaf extract. In the present study, *S. aureus*, the gram-positive bacteria was less sensitive to synthesized AgNPs than gram-negative bacteria *E. coli*. The probable factor for the less susceptibility of *S. aureus* observed in the present study could be attributed to the thickness of their cell wall; the gram-positive bacteria have thicker cell wall than gram negative bacteria, as the cell wall is made up of peptidoglycan molecules. Ankanna et al. [46] explained that the peptidoglycan is negatively charged and silver ions have positive charge, due to which more silver ions may get fixed to peptidoglycan. Kim et al. [47] also attributed the less susceptibility of gram-positive bacteria to their thicker cell walls compared to that of gram-negative bacteria. With the increase in the AgNPs concentration, the greater lag phase in growth was seen and lesser OD values were found at higher concentrations indicating a dose-dependent activity. Similar kind of lag phase in growth profile was observed in previous studies [48,49]. With the increase in the AgNPs concentration, the growth of the bacteria got reduced and then stopped. The differences in the MIC could be credited to the differences in surface charge and size of AgNPs [50,51]. AgNPs with 1-10 nm size range has been reported to be most effective against bacterial species [52]. Zarei [53] reported MIC in the range of 3-25 $\mu\text{g/mL}$ of 2-25 nm colloidal AgNPs for *E. coli* at initial concentration of 105-108 cfu/mL. Moreover, Pal et al. [54] found that the nanoparticle and *E. coli* bacteria surface interaction is shape-dependent. Thus, it is understood that as the size of nanoparticles used (90.38 nm) in the current bioassay tests is more than the previous studies, the MIC values for both the species *E. coli* and *S. aureus* are found to be higher.

The exact mechanisms of antimicrobial or toxicity activities by AgNPs are still a debatable subject matter among microbiologists. However, referring to the biophysical properties of nanoparticles in general and characteristics of silver ions/NPs, in particular, the mechanism might be involving more than one cellular biochemical kinetics. Ag²⁺ ions/nanoparticles are able to form ligands with cell organelles which in turn form ligands with nucleic acids and they specifically interact with the nucleosides instead of phosphate groups of nucleic acids [48,52,55]. Besides, there is an electrostatic attraction between the positive charge of nanoparticles and negative charge of bacterial cells [56] which facilitate ligand formation. Other mechanisms involve the interaction of silver molecules with the biological macromolecules which include DNA and enzymes by an electron-release mechanism [57] or free radical production [48]. The three-dimensional structure of proteins is changed by both AgNPs and silver ions as they interfere with the disulphide bonds and chunk the functional processes of the microorganism [58,59,60]. It has been proposed that the AgNPs induce the inhibition of protein and cell wall synthesis [61]. Nanoparticles curb the phosphotyrosine profile of bacterial peptide which in turn disturbs signal transduction and inhibits the growth of micro-organisms [5].

V. Conclusion

In the present study, the aqueous leaf extract of *Wedelia urticifolia* at 1:1 ratio (metal salt:extract) is found to be more suitable for harvesting higher amount of AgNPs within 6 hours. Further, it is also reported from the present study that the leaf of *W. urticifolia* is a potential candidate for the synthesis of AgNPs as the UV-Vis absorbance is as high as 1.5. The results obtained from the antibacterial assay reveal that AgNPs are more potent in inhibiting the growth of gram-negative bacterial species rather than gram-positive bacterial species. It would be more effective if further studies are done on the isolation of individual organic reductants present in the leaf extract for the synthesis of AgNPs and it is hopefully envisaged that AgNPs would serve as magic nanorobots that could search and kill the target cell and/or pick and place the drug in the specified site precisely in the near future.

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