Identification of Virulent *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* Strains from some Dicotyledonous Plants in Bangladesh

Abdul Qayum SARKER 1
Palash C. MONDOL 1
Soriful ISLAM 2
Mohammad Firoz ALAM 1(✉)

1 University of Rajshahi, Department of Botany, Biotechnology and Microbiology Laboratory, Rajshahi-6205, Bangladesh
☎ e-mail: falambiiotech@gmail.com or the_sarker@yahoo.com
2 Polytechnic University of Marche, Department of Molecular Pathology and Innovative Therapies-Anatomy and Cell Biology, Italy

Summary

Wild type virulent *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* strains viz. AtTp0120, AtTe0121, AtMo0122 and AtMi0123 (accession number was given according to their respective host plants) were identified from four dicot plants viz. *Tagetes patula*, *Tagetes erecta*, *Moringa oleifera* and *Mangifera indica*, respectively, of Rajshahi University campus, Rajshahi, Bangladesh. Isolated strains were confirmed as *A. tumefaciens* on the basis of their morphological, physiological and biochemical features, antibiotic sensitivity, phytopathogenicity tests, and agarose gel analysis of plasmid DNA in comparing with type strain of *A. tumefaciens* (ATCC23308T). Supported by statistical analysis of the number of induced tumors in potato disc strain AtTp0120 from *Tagetes patula* was identified as more virulent than the other isolates.

Key words

*Agrobacterium tumefaciens*, wild type, virulence, phytopathogenicity, antibiotic sensitivity and plasmid DNA

Received: December 19, 2010 | Accepted: May 10, 2011
Introduction

*Agrobacterium tumefaciens* is a soil borne bacterium; *A. tumefaciens* is a member of family-Rhizobiaceae. These are Gram-negative, rod-shaped and motile bacteria that grow aerobically without forming endospores (Collins, 2001). Its virulent strains cause crown gall disease throughout the world and infect dicotyledonous plant of about 90 different families and a few monocotyledonous plants (Cleene and Levy, 1976). *A. tumefaciens* is containing an extra-chromosomal DNA designated as Ti (tumor inducing) plasmid (Zaenen et al., 1999). Ti-plasmid carries two components: vir and T-DNA regions needed for genetic transformation (Tzfira et al., 2004). The molecular machinery needed for T-DNA generation and transport into the host cell comprises proteins that are encoded by the bacterial chromosomal virulence (chv) genes and encoded by the Ti-plasmid virulence (vir) genes (Kelvin, 2003; Tzfira and Citovsky, 2002; Zupan et al., 2000).

*Agrobacterium* can transform virtually any living cell, from other prokaryotes (Kelly and Kado, 2002) to yeast (Piers et al. 1996) and fungi (Groot et al., 1998; Gouka et al., 1999) to human cells (Kunik et al., 2001). Updated information of mechanisms for T-DNA transfer to plant cells by *A. tumefaciens* is provided, focused on the role played by the different components of the virulence system (Riva et al., 1998). *A. tumefaciens*-mediated transformation has been widely been used for research in plant molecular biology and for genetic improvement of crops since 1983 (Park, 2006). Transformation is currently used for genetic manipulation of more than 120 species of at least 35 families, including the major economic crops, vegetables, ornamental, medicinal plants, fruit, trees and pasture plants, using *Agrobacterium*-mediated or direct transformation methods (Birch, 1997). This is part of our research looking for virulent strains of *A. tumefaciens* (Islam et al., 2010).

Materials and methods

Plant samples

Crown gall tissues were collected from four different dicot plants: *Tagetes patula*, *Tagetes erecta*, *Moringa oleifera* and *Mangifera indica* available in Rajshahi University Campus, Rajshahi, Bangladesh. Samples were immediately transferred to the laboratory. Special care was taken to avoid contamination. The experimental period was from February to December, 2009.

Gall extraction

Samples were rinsed with tap water to remove soil and hazardous materials. Galls were sterilized with ten percent (10%) commercial bleach (Savlon, ACI limited, Bangladesh) for 1.5-3.0 min according to the nature of galls. After washing three more times with sterilized distilled water (SDW), galls were finely chopped and immersed in SDW and incubated overnight at room temperature (27-30°C).

Isolation of bacteria

Overnight incubated crown gall extracts were streaked on to two different media i.e., MacConkey agar (Bopp et al., 1999) and Clark’s selective medium designated as NASA (Serfontein and Staphorst, 1994). Plates were incubated at 28-30°C for 18 to 24 h and examined for growth and color development. Bacterial colonies were selected based on colonies form, elevation, surface, color etc. Four individual colonies were transferred onto the same medium (NASA) and purified on MGY agar media (Putnam, 2006) for further purification. Purified isolates were cultured on Luria-Bertani (LB) medium described by Miller (1987) and preserved in glycerol (25%) stock for further experimentation.

Characterization of *A. tumefaciens*

Biochemical test

Biochemical test of isolates was done according to Bergey’s manual of Determinative Bacteriology (Holt et al., 1994; Moore et al., 1988; Sawada and Ieki, 1992). The following tests were carried out: (i) Gram stain and motility at room temperature; (ii) catalase and oxidase production; (ii) utilization of lactose and mannitol; (iv) production of 3-ketolactose; (v) salt tolerance (2%); (vi) H2S production; (vii) utilization of L-tyrosine; (viii) citrate utilization; (ix) growth on Mac Conkey, NASA and Luria-Bertani agar; (x) growth and pigmentation in ferric ammonium citrate.

Antibiotic sensitivity test

The antibiotic sensitivity of selected isolates was determined according to the method of Bauer–Kirby (Bauer et al., 1966). The following antibiotics i.e., Kanamycin (30 μg mL-1), Cefuroxime (30μg mL-1), Tetracycline (30 μg mL-1) and Rifampicin (10 μm L-1) were used. Whatman No. 1 filter paper discs (6 mm in diameter) were impregnated with 10 μL of antibiotics solution with particular concentration followed by air-drying and then placed on seeded Luria-Bertani (LB) agar plates. Twenty microliter standard bacterial cultures (106 cfu mL-1) were used for preparing seeded agar plates. The petri plates were incubated at 30°C for 24 h. Antibiotic susceptibility was determined by measuring the size of inhibition zone.

Phytopathogenicity test

Phytopathogenicity tests were done using both carrot (Chen et al., 1999; Aysan et al., 2003) and potato (Hussain et al., 2007) disc bioassays. Type strain of *A. tumefaciens* named ATCC23308T was used as control in both cases.

Carrot disc bioassay

Carrot (*Daucas carota L.*) was collected from local market in Rajshahi city, Bangladesh. Carrots were sterilized with commercial bleach (Savlon, ACI limited, Bangladesh) followed by washing with SDW for three times and sliced. Each disc was overlaid with 100 μL of bacterial suspension (106 cfu mL-1). Petri plates were sealed by parafilm and incubated in growth chamber (controlled environment, 25-30°C). Discs were checked (after 21 days) for young galls (tumors) developing from meristematic tissue around central vascular system of carrot.

Potato disc bioassay

Red skin potato (*Solanum tuberosum L.*) was also collected from local market. Potatoes were sterilized with commercial bleach (savlon) and 0.1% HgCl2. Sliced potato discs (5x8 mm) were placed on water agar plates (1.5g/100mL). Each disc was overlaid with 50 μL of bacterial suspension (106 cfu mL-1). Petri plates were sealed by parafilm and incubated at room temperature (25-30°C). After 21 days, discs were stained by Lugol’s iodine solution (10% KI and 5% I2) for 30 min and tumors were observed under stereo microscope, where the tumor cells lack starch (Hussain et al., 2007).
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**Table 1. Phenotypic characteristics of the selected strains of *A. tumefaciens***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biochemical tests</th>
<th>Selected strains</th>
<th>Type strain of <em>A. tumefaciens</em></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AtTpo120</td>
<td>AtTeo121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gram stain</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motility test</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalase</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxidase</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utilization of carbohydrates</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactose</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mannitol</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-keto lactose production</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt tolerance</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>H2S production</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L-tyrosine utilization</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>Antibiotic sensitivity test</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanamycin</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cefuroxime</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tetracycline</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifampicin</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phytotoxicity test</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Note: +: Positive, –: Negative, R: Resistant, S: Susceptible]

Agarose gel analysis of closed circular plasmid DNA

Plasmid DNA isolation has been carried out according to the alkaline lysis method of Birnboim and Doly (1979). Agarose gel preparation and electrophoresis have been performed according to Chawla (2004).

**Results**

**Isolation of *A. tumefaciens***

Four bacterial colonies were observed and screened, isolated from four crown gall samples on the basis of their color development on selective medium. After 24 h of incubation, the bacterial colonies were visible on MacConkey agar plate, and after 28 h colonies were turned into pink to brick-red color. Colonies cultured on NASA medium turned brick-red color after two days of incubation. From these initial results, isolated bacteria were tentatively identified as *A. tumefaciens* strains.

**Characterization of *A. tumefaciens***

**Biochemical test**

Biochemical features of the selected isolates are presented in Table 1 and Figure 1. Gram reaction indicates that selected isolates were Gram negative. Isolates were also negative for L-tyrosine utilization, and positive for motility, catalase, oxidase, lactose, manitol, 3-keto lactose production and H2S production. Similar reactions were also observed for type strain.

**Figure 1.** Various type of morphological, physiological and biochemical tests: A. Gram staining, B. Young bacterial colonies on NASA medium, C. Catalase test, D. Oxidase test, E. Urease test and F. Antibiotic sensitivity test using Kanamycin (K), Cefuroxime (C), Rifampicin (R) and Tetracycline (T).
Antibiotic sensitivity test
Results showed (Table 1, Figure 1) that isolates were susceptible to Kanamycin and Cefuroxime (showing zone of inhibition) and resistant against Rifampicin and Tetracycline (showing no zone of inhibition).

Phytopathogenicity test
All four isolates and type strain were positive in phytopathogenicity test (Table 1) and produced young galls (tumor) on carrot and potato discs (Figure 2). The most virulent strain has been identified by comparison of mean number of produced gall on potato discs (replication number was three and 10 potato discs used for each replication) and results were confirmed by ANOVA. Statistical analysis proved that isolates are significantly different (p<0.001, df=4) in gall forming ability on potato disc.

Agarose gel analysis of closed circular plasmid DNA
Isolated closed circular plasmid DNA of four A. tumefaciens strains (viz. AtTp0120, AtTe0121, AtMo0122 and AtMi0123) including with type strain of A. tumefaciens (ATCC23308T) and GeneRuler™ 1kb DNA Ladder was used for agarose gel analysis. It was observed that the plasmid DNA of these strains has been fall within the size range approximately 200-250 kb in comparison with 1kb DNA Ladder (Figure 4).

Discussion
Aim of this study was isolation of wild type highly virulent A. tumefaciens strains from different natural host dicot plants and confirmation of their characteristics using different morphological, physiological, biochemical, antibiotic sensitivity, and phytopathogenicity (tumor forming ability on carrot and potato discs) tests, and molecular analysis (agarose gel analysis of plasmid DNA). A. tumefaciens can generally be found on and around root surfaces known as the rhizosphere. It can effectively be isolated for identification from gall tissue, soil or water (Collins, 2001). In this study galls were collected from different dicot plants species: Tagetes patula, Tagetes erecta, Moringa oleifera and Mangifera indica found in different places of Rajshahi University campus. On the basis of color development, desecrate four colonies were isolated from selective media (NASA). Isolates grew as pink to brick-red colonies on MacConkey agar and putative brick red colonies on NASA medium, tentatively identified as Gram negative A. tumefaciens strains. Bergey’s manual of Determinative Bacteriology (Holt et al., 1994) indicates that Gram negative bacteria generally grow as pink to brick-red colonies on MacConkey agar which was similar to our colonies. also Our results with A. tumefaciens strains were supported by work of Chen et al. (1999) because they also cultured crown gall.

Figure 2. Showing the positive phytopathogenicity of selected A. tumefaciens strains (including with type strain of A. tumefaciens) on potato (A-E) and carrot (F-J) discs.

Figure 3. Virulence comparison among four A. tumefaciens strains. Note: TP: AtTp0120, TE: AtTe0121, MO: AtMo0122, MI: AtMi0123, CC: ATCC23308T and mean number (three replicates) of gall is 11±0.58, 9±0.58, 7.67±0.88, 6.67±0.33, 9.5±0.33, respectively.

**Conclusion**

On the basis of in vitro phytopathogenicity, different biochemical and antibiotic sensitivity tests, agarose gel analysis of plasmid DNA, four isolates with the accession No. AtTp0120, AtTe0121, AtMo0122 and AtMi0123 were identified as wild type virulent A. tumefaciens strains. First two strains are newly reported regarding host plants (Tagets patula and Tagetes erecta) while the other two strains are reported for the first time in Bangladesh. Highly virulent strain could be used for construction of genetically engineered strains, in vitro anti tumor studies of plant's extract and other biological purposes.

**References**


Birnboim H. C., Doly J. (1979). A rapid alkaline extraction procedure for screening recombinant plasmid DNA. Nucl Acid Res 7:1513-1523


**Figure 4.** Agarose gel analysis of plasmid DNA of four A. tumefaciens strains (viz. AtTp0120, AtTe0121, AtMo0122 and AtMi0123) including with type strain of A. tumefaciens and compare at different base pair (bp) with Marker DNA (GeneRuler™ 1kb DNA Ladder). Note: L1: Marker DNA, L2: AtTp0120, L3: AtTe0121, L4: AtMo0122, L5: AtMi0123, L6: Only buffer (negative control), L7: ATCC23308T.


Park S. (2006). Agrobacterium tumefaciens-mediated transformation of tobacco (Nicotiana tabacum l.) leaf disks: evaluation of the co-cultivation conditions to increase β-glucuronidase gene activity; The Department of Plant Pathology and Crop Physiology.


acs76_23

Agric. con spec. sci. Vol. 76 (2011) No. 2