



Lake 2016: Conference on Conservation and Sustainable Management of Ecologically Sensitive Regions in Western Ghats

[THE 10TH BIENNIAL LAKE CONFERENCE]

Date: 28-30th December 2016, <http://ces.iisc.ernet.in/energy>

Venue: V.S. Acharya Auditorium, Alva's Education Foundation, Sundari Ananda Alva Campus, Vidyagiri, Moodbidri, D.K. Dist., Karnataka, India – 574227

***Tetrahymena thermophila*: A whole cell biosensor for toxicity assessment of Mercury**

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Ciliated protozoans are ubiquitous, free living, and largely non-pathogenic microorganisms. Being single cell eukaryotic microorganisms they represent an essential component of all ecosystem where they are integral constituents of trophic chains and nutrient cycles (Foissner, 1987,1999, 2004; Darbyshire, 1994; Alpheiet *al.*, 1996; Bonkowski and Schaefer, 1997; Sherr and Sherr, 2002; Cuvelier *et al.*, 2010; Steele *et al.*, 2011). They have been used as model organisms for the discovery of key genomic processes found across the eukaryotic tree of life, e.g., self-splicing RNAs, telomeres, and the role of RNAs in shaping germline and somatic genomes. Unlike bacteria, fungi they lack cell wall and are only separated from external environment via cell membrane, this makes them highly sensitive to any change in the environment. Considering that ciliated protozoa shows high similarity in the conserved genes (more than 800 human genes have orthologs in *Tetrahymena* and out of these 58 genes are associated with human diseases; Eisen *et al.*, 2006; Fillingham *et al.*, 2002) between ciliates and several eukaryotes including humans, they represents a better biological tools to detect and diagnose community-level impairments in contaminated soil and water ecosystems. Thus, ciliate represents a perfect bioindicators that can be used for assessment of ecotoxicological assays for early warning deterioration of the environment. Furthermore, in response to heavy metal pollution, they express a special protein, i.e., metallothioneins (MT) rich in cysteine (cys) amino acid in which the thiol groups are able to bind heavy metals. Further, the induction of MTs by heavy metals is mainly regulated at transcription level.

In the present study, a recombinant cell line of *Tetrahymena thermophila* is used to assess the toxicological impact of heavy metal on this species (La Terza *et al.*, 2008). The plasmid containing the gene coding for the Green Fluorescence Protein (GFP) under the transcriptional control of an endogenous metallothionein promoter was used to transfect *T. thermophil* cells by electroporation, according to the method described in Gaertig and Gorovsky (1992).

Logarithmically growing culture of *T. thermophila* was washed three times in 10 mM Tris pH 7.5 to remove any trace of the PPY (Protease-Peptone-Yeast) culture medium which may hinder the effect of metal used in our toxicological tests (Mercury, Hg) by chelating the metal salts. Cell count was done using a Neubauer slide and adjusted to a known dilution using 10 mM Tris pH 7.5 Tris. Then the suspended cells were transferred to 96-well microplates in a final volume of 100 µl. Different concentrations of metal salts were prepared in 10 mM Tris (pH 7.5). For metal exposures, a fixed number of cells (0.42 x 10⁵ cells/ml) were mixed with different concentrations of metal salts in a final volume of 200 µl (100 µl cell culture + 100 µl metal salt solution). The exposed cells were incubated in a dark chamber at 30°C and were observed after two hours under the 20x objective on a Nikon Diaphoto TMD inverted microscope with an attached digital camera. Fluorescence was detected using a filter set



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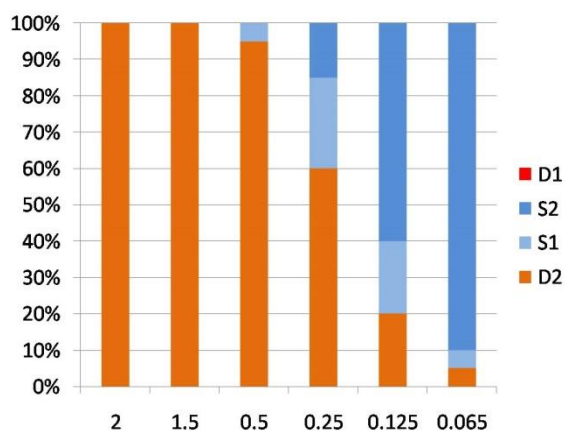
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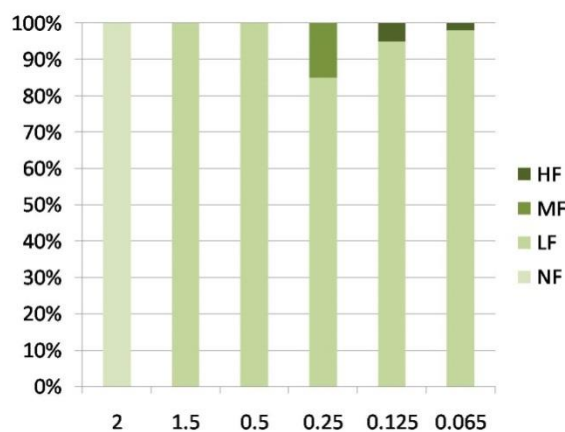
with an excitation wavelength of 470-490 nm and an emission wavelength of 520 nm. Cells showing fluorescence were counted on the Neubauer slide; at 2 min prior to observation, the cells were treated with dibucaine hydrochloride at a final concentration of 0.3 mM to reduce the motility without affecting viability. Fluorescence emission was also checked, though never detected, in the controlsamples. Based on microscopic observations, four character states (i.e., endpoints) with regard to survival weremonitored/measured, i.e., D1= death by bursting, D2= Death after formation of atypical structures,S1= Survival after formation of atypical structures, S2= Survival with normalstructure and motility. Based on the intensity of the fluorescence, four character states (endpoints) were monitored/measured – NF= no fluorescence, LF= low level of fluorescence, MF= medium level of fluorescence, HF= high level of fluorescence. In general, mercury was found to be highly toxic to the cells,; following the exposure,all cells showing atypical shapes were destined to die (Figure 1, Table 1). At metal concentrations of 2µg/ml and 1.5µg/ml, no cells survive. LC50 value (at 2 hrs) is close to 0.25µg/ml. A few cells die even at a low concentration of 0.065µg/ml. At a concentration of 2µg/ml, no cells show fluorescence. However, at 1.5µg/ml, all the cells destined to die exhibit low fluorescence. At concentrations below 0.5µg/ml some cells show medium to high fluorescence while all others show low fluorescence (Figure 2).

Metals concentrations	<1.5	1.5	0.5	0.25	0.125	0.065
Mercury	100% D ₂ 100% NF	100% D ₂ 100% LF	95% D ₂ 5% S ₁ 100% LF	60% D ₂ 25% S ₁ 15% S ₂ 85% LF 15% MF	20% D ₂ 20% S ₁ 60% S ₂ 95% LF 5% FF	5% D ₂ 5% S ₁ 90% S ₂ 98% LF 2% FF

Table 1. The effect of different concentrations of metals on the recombinant cell line of *Tetrahymena thermophile*. Upper row (bold) shows different concentration used; lower row shows the effect of the concentration; metal concentrations in µg/ml; cell concentration of 3 x 10⁵ cells/ml.



(a)



(b)

Figure 1. Response of *Tetrahymena thermophila* to Mercury.(a) Showing cell percent viability.(b) Showing percent fluorescence. X axis – Mercury concentration (µg/ ml). Y axis in a) – viability, in b) fluorescence.

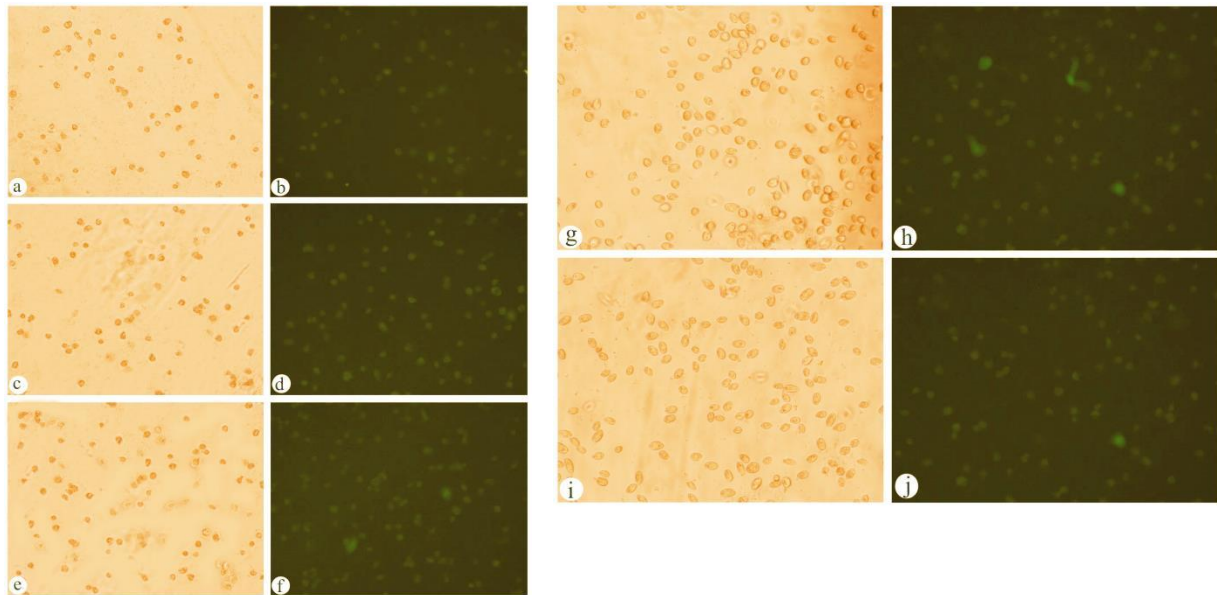


Figure 2. Photomicrographs of cells in response to different concentrations of Mercury; a, b) at concentration 1.5 µg/ml; c, d) at concentration 0.5 µg/ml; e, f) at concentration 0.25 µg/ml; g, h) at concentration 0.125 µg/ml; i, j) at concentration 0.065 µg/ml. (a, c, e, g, i) cells in bright field. (b, d, f, h, j) cells showing fluorescence.

Acknowledgements

The study was funded by the Italian Minister of University and Research (MIUR) to ALT through the assignation of “Young Indian Research Fellowship” in the frame of a project of cooperation between Italy and India. The support from Department of Science and Technology under - Research Projects- SR/SO/AS-04/2004 and EMR/2015/001505 are acknowledged. The guidance provided by Prof. G. R. Sapra (Retd.) and Prof. Rup Lal, University of Delhi, India, is greatly acknowledged.

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