ABSTRACT
The present study was conducted to evaluate the hepatoprotective activity of methanolic extract of aerial parts of *Plumbago zeylanica* in CCl₄-induced hepatotoxicity in wistar rats. Silymarin (100mg/kg, p.o.) was given as reference drug. The extract of aerial parts of *Plumbago zeylanica* have shown very significant hepatoprotection against CCl₄-induced hepatotoxicity in wistar rats by reducing serum total bilirubin, SGPT, SGOT and ALP levels. Histopathological studies also confirmed the hepatoprotective nature of the extract.

**Keywords:** Flavonoids, Triterpenes, Histopathological Studies, Biochemical Parameter

INTRODUCTION
Herbal drugs are prescribed widely even when their biologically active components are unknown because of their effectiveness, fewer side effects and relatively low cost¹. *Plumbago zeylanica* Linn (Plumbaginaceae) is a perennial herb commonly distributed in forest of the Uttarakhand, India, and cultivated in the gardens throughout India. The plant is commonly known as Ceylon leadwort (English), Chita, Chitra (Hindi) and Chitramoolam (Tamil). The root is used as laxative, expectorant, astringent, abortifacient, and in dysentery²-⁴. Tincture of root bark is used as antiperiodic. The leaves are used as aphrodisiac and in scabies⁵.

Earlier chemical examination of this plant revealed that the root contains plumbagin, 3-chloroplumbagin, 2,3-biplumbagin, 6,6-biplumbagin, zeylinone, isozeylinone, chitranone, droserone, plumbagic acid, plumbazeylanone, glucose, fructose, enzymes as protease and invertase. The leaves and stem contains little or no plumbagin. The aerial parts contain naphthoquinones, sitosterol, lupeol, lupenylacetate, hentriacontane, and amino acids⁶. Literature review indicated that the hepatoprotective activity of aerial parts of *P. zeylanica* have not been clinically evaluated so far. An active and safe drug is needed for the treatment of hepatitis. In view of this, the present study was aimed at evaluating the hepatoprotective activity of the aerial parts of *P. zeylanica* against carbon tetrachloride (CCl₄) induced hepatotoxicity in Wistar rats.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Plant materials
The aerial parts of *P. zeylanica* were collected in December 2006, from the kaladhungi forest, Nainital, Uttarakhand (India). The plant was authenticated by Dr. V.K. Lal, Professor, College of Pharmacy, IFTM, Moradabad and a voucher specimen has been deposited in the departmental laboratory for further references.

Preparation of extract
The air dried plant materials were extracted successively with hexane, petroleum ether, chloroform and methanol using soxhlet apparatus. The extracts were concentrated...
using rotary vacuum evaporator. The dried extracts were stored in airtight container and placed in refrigerator.

**Animals**

Wistar rats (150-200 g) were used in this study. They were maintained at standard housing conditions and fed with commercial diet and provided with water *ad libitum* during the experiment. The experiment was approved by institutional animal ethical committee (Reg. No. 837/ac/04/ CPCSEA/2007).

**Chemicals**

Carbon tetrachloride was procured from S.D. Fine Chemicals Ltd. (India), silymarin was obtained as gift sample from Ranbaxy (Devas, India), standard kit of SGPT, SGOT, ALP and bilirubin was obtained from Jain Scientific Industries, Moradabad, India. All other reagents used were of analytical grade.

**Preliminary phytochemical screening**

Hexane, petroleum ether, chloroform and methanolic extracts of aerial parts of *P. zeylanica* were screened for different phytochemical constituents viz. alkaloids, triterpenes, steroids, carbohydrates, tannins and flavonoids.

**Acute toxicity study**

The acute toxicity studies were carried out as per stair case method. Sixty male rats were divided into six groups of 10 each and were administered with aliquot doses of the methanolic extract orally (100, 150, 200, 250, 300 and 400 mg/kg). Mortality was not noticed up to 300 mg/kg, whereas, 100% mortality was noticed in the dose of 400 mg/kg. The LD$_{50}$ of the extracts was found to be 350 mg/kg body weight. One-fifth and one-tenth of this dose were selected as the therapeutic dose for the evaluation.

**Assessment of hepatoprotective activity**

Five groups of animals containing six each were used for the study. Group I served as control and received the vehicle (5% gum acacia; 1 ml/kg/day; p.o. for 14 days). Group II received 0.1 ml/kg/day, i.p. of CCl$_4$ for 10 days. The standard drug, silymarin was administered to Group III animals in the dose of 100 mg/kg/day, p.o. for 14 days. While, group IV and V were treated with methanolic extract at the doses of 35 & 70 mg/kg/day, p.o. (as per acute toxicity studies) for 14 days respectively. The CCl$_4$, silymarin and the extracts were administered concomitantly to the respective group of animals. On 14$^{th}$ day the blood was collected by carotid artery under mild ether anesthesia, serum was collected by allowing the blood samples to coagulate for 30 min at 37 °C followed by centrifugation (3000 rpm for 15 min) and subjected for determination of biochemical parameters like total bilirubin, SGPT, SGOT and ALP.

**Histopathological observation**

Liver tissue collected were used for the preparation of histopathological slides by using microtome, were suitably stained and observed under light microscope for architectural changes seen during CCl$_4$ challenge in methanolic extract of *P. zeylanica* treated and control groups.

**Statistical analysis**

The results are expressed as Mean ± SEM of six animals from each group. The data were evaluated by one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey’s multiple comparison tests. P values <0.05 was considered statistically significant.
RESULTS

Preliminary phytochemical screening

The various phytoconstituents present in different extracts were furnished in table 1.

Biochemical parameters

Rats treated with carbon tetrachloride showed a significant hepatic damage as observed from elevated serum level of hepatospecific enzymes as well as severe alteration in different liver parameters (Table 2). SGPT, SGOT, ALP, and total bilirubin in serum were increased in carbon tetrachloride intoxicated control animals (Table 2). Treatment with the methanolic extract of *P. zeylanica* caused significant protection against CCl₄–induced increase in serum enzyme level and bilirubin in a dose responsive manner (Table 2). The degree of protection observed was maximum with higher dose of the extract (70 mg/kg).

Table 1: Preliminary phytochemical screening of different extracts of *Plumbago zeylanica*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of constituents</th>
<th>Hexane Extract</th>
<th>Petroleum Ether Extract</th>
<th>Chloroform Extract</th>
<th>Methanol Extract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Triterpenes</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steroids</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbohydrates</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tannins</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flavonoids</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alkaloids</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ indicates present and – indicates absent

Table 2: Effect of methanolic extract of *Plumbago zeylanica* on biochemical parameters in CCl₄ induced hepatic toxicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Dose (mg/kg)</th>
<th>SGPT (IU/L)</th>
<th>SGOT (IU/L)</th>
<th>Total Bilirubin (mg/dl)</th>
<th>ALP (mg/dl)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal Control</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>45.16 ± 1.25</td>
<td>39.61 ± 0.59</td>
<td>0.70 ± 0.03</td>
<td>160 ± 3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCl₄ treated</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>217.30 ± 4.5</td>
<td>341 ± 3.8</td>
<td>0.87 ± 0.07</td>
<td>191.50 ± 7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silymarin + CCl₄</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>42.64 ± 0.33*</td>
<td>43.24 ± 0.30</td>
<td>0.50 ± 0.01*</td>
<td>181.60 ± 0.52*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MeOH extract + CCl₄</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>131.95 ± 0.46*</td>
<td>151.35 ± 0.40*</td>
<td>0.83 ± 0.01*</td>
<td>187.30 ± 0.31*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MeOH extract + CCl₄</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>115.30 ± 1.16*</td>
<td>127.36 ± 0.42*</td>
<td>0.51 ± 0.10*</td>
<td>185.20 ± 0.30*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values are expressed as Mean ± SEM (n = 6). *P < 0.05 vs. CCl₄ treated group.

Histopathological studies

Histopathological examination of liver sections of control group showed normal cellular architecture with distinct hepatic cells, sinusoidal spaces and central veins (Fig.1. A). Disarrangement of normal hepatic cells with centrilobular necrosis, vacuolization of cytoplasm and fatty degeneration were observed in CCl₄ intoxicated animals (Fig.1. B). The liver sections of the rats treated with methanolic extract of *P. zeylanica* and silymarin followed by CCl₄ intoxication showed a sign of protection as it was evident the absence of necrosis and vacuoles (Fig.1. C, D and E).
DISCUSSION
Liver damage induced by CCl₄ is commonly used model for the screening of hepatoprotective drugs. The CCl₄ is converted into reactive metabolite, halogenated free radical by hepatic cytochrome P450, which in turn covalently binds to cell membrane and organelles to elicit lipid peroxidation with subsequent tissue injury. The measurement of lipid peroxide is also a marker of hepatocellular damage. The methanolic extract of aerial parts of *Plumbago zeylanica* administered prophylactically exhibited significant protection against CCl₄-induced liver injury as manifested by the reduction in toxin mediated rise in serum level of SGPT, SGOT, ALP and total bilirubin in rats. The qualitative phytochemical investigation on the different extract of *P. zeylanica* showed positive test for carbohydrate, triterpenes, steroids, tannins and flavonoids. The methanolic extract has significant hepatoprotective activity. This may be probably due to the higher content of the triterpenes, tannins and flavonoids. Hence further work is necessary to elucidate the constituent responsible for hepatoprotective activity along with their mechanism of action.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
The authors are grateful to Prof. A.K. Wahi and Prof. V. K. Lal, College of Pharmacy, IFTM, Moradabad, India, for their valuable suggestions and for providing research facilities during the course of work.

REFERENCES


