

**DEVELOPMENT OF A SUITABLE BIOREACTOR SYSTEM FOR  
AZADIRACTIN PRODUCTION BY HAIRY ROOTS OF  
*AZADIRACTA INDICA***

by

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Thesis submitted

in the fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

to the



**Indian Institute Of Technology, Delhi**

**July, 2008**

*Dedicated*  
*To*  
*My FAMILY...*

## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Development of a suitable bioreactor system for azadirachtin production by hairy roots of *Azadirachta indica***”, being submitted by **Ms. Smita Srivastava** to the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, for the award of the degree of “Doctor of Philosophy” is a record of the bonafide research carried out by her, which has been prepared under my supervision and guidance in conformity with rules and regulations of the “Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi”. The results described in it have not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any Degree / Diploma.



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## *ACKNOWLEDGEMENT*

*Before thanking all those who have contributed in some or the other way in the fulfillment of this journey, it would not be an exaggeration to express that this is the most difficult part to pen down. It seems as if ages have gone by, while traveling through the lanes of the memories associated.*

*So many encounters with worldly things, which seemed 'good' or 'bad' initially, now comprise a beautiful journey of my research work for the earning of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in one of the esteemed institutes of the country "The Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, India"*

*My heart is indebted with the blessings of the unknown force which we call as "The Almighty" who has always been behind all that I have achieved in my life till today. It is only because of his making that I am in a situation to thank all my loved ones. He devised means to reach me whenever I needed him.*

*There were many faces of god.....and it's my pleasure to thank all those faces individually.*

*I express a deep sense of gratitude and indebtedness towards my supervisor, Prof. Ashok K. Srivastava without whom this would not have been possible. It was his valuable and continuous guidance all through my research period which helped me to overcome all the challenges which came in the way of my success. I have always been a great admirer of his perfectionist attitude toward any kind of work. I hope I have inherited some part of it in these years. His critical assessment, valuable suggestions, and motivation to improve more and more have helped me in all spheres of life including the successful completion of my Ph.D research work. I am sincerely thankful to him for his belief in me during the entire research tenure. Thank you Sir for all that which I must have missed in these lines.*

*I would also like to thank the members of my Ph. D. research committee, Prof. Saroj Mishra, Prof. V. S. Bisaria and Prof. K.D.P. Nigam who were like guiding lights and milestones in the journey of my research work. They always had an eye on my work and ensured that I moved ahead in the right direction.*

*A special thanks to Principal Scientists Dr. Subramanyam and Dr. Wafia of the Indian Institute of Agricultural Research, Delhi. They helped me to carry out certain important tasks of my research in their labs even though I did not belong to their institute. They were always there for discussions and any kind of help required at any time.*

*The acknowledgment would not be complete if I forget to mention those who were involved in the successful completion of the different experiments carried out during the research period. The staff members associated with different instruments and official work, Mr. Mukesh Anand, Mr. Sapan Patra, Mr. D.V.Sharma, Ranaji, Santaram ji, Bhagawan Singh ji, Mr. Ranbir, Mr. Prashant, Mrs. Neera, Mrs. Renu, Mrs Meena Mathur and Mrs Suneeta Dang. I would like to specially thank Mr. Joseph Mathew who helped in the timely fabrication of some bioreactor vessels and never the less, the lab attendants of the plant tissue culture lab, where I carried out*

major part of my research work, Mr. Sanjay and Mr. Harilal for their sincere efforts in the maintenance of the lab.

My seniors, juniors and colleagues played the role of friends and critics whenever required for my betterment and benefit in the long run. They were the ones who have helped me grown all these years of my research into a more confident personality. I would like to specially acknowledge some of my true friends who occupy a special place in my heart for their inevitable contribution in my life since I met them, Shilpi, Ramesh, Ananya, Gunjan, Shalini and Amlendu. A sincere thanks to my labmates Ashish, Seema, Parul, Gaurav, and Ms. Sunita who have helped me a lot in carrying out my tasks in a smooth manner. They were always there for help and healthy discussions on my work whenever needed. The lab atmosphere was no less than a family, where we used to at times even argue and contradict each other but with healthy intentions of supporting each other.

Now is the turn to acknowledge my dearest ones who are responsible for my existence in this world. My parents are no less than God to me. I see them every time and I feel secure about that 'Golden Hand' on me. I know whatever might happen they will never turn their backs on me. Even if I am not in front of them they come to know about every tiny emotion (happy or sad) emerging in my heart. Such is their charisma that I always strive hard to become worthy of them but still feel short of that level.

After marriage I thought its time to leave home now, but then I saw another face of God in my parents –in -law. I always feel blessed when I think of them. I am lucky to get into a family where I still feel the same level of care and security as before marriage. It would not be a lie to write that it was only after my marriage that I realized that I could also touch the skies, through my caliber. All thanks to my parents-in -law who have helped me to fulfill my dreams in the field of academics. They are the ones who have always pushed me to dream big and work towards its fulfillment.

Last but not the least is the one who has dreamt along with me in every sphere of life since he came in my life. He is my dearest Husband- 'Mayur' without whom my Ph.D would have only remained a beautiful dream of mine. Since he came in my life my dreams became his too. We dreamed together of a future where 'quality of life' would be the foremost priority. He always encouraged me to work toward fulfilling my goals in life. He gave me freedom to think and work independently. It is only because of him that I was able to break that shell of mine. I must mention that the 'contentment' in him has sometimes been a cause of worry for me but now I realize that it is that wonderful and special trait in him which has made our relationship during these years the most precious asset I ever had.

In the end I would like to thank all my family members, my dearest brother 'Saurabh' and his wife 'Pallavi', my brother-in-law whom I call 'Rajit dada' and his wife 'Jona bhabhi', my cousins and all those whom I have missed unknowingly. My heartiest thanks and gratitude for their valuable presence in my life.

Every success in my life is dedicated to these special people without whom 'I' would never be 'I'.....

  
Smita Srivastava

## ABSTRACT

Plants are the important source of food, fiber, color, fragrance and medicine. However yield and productivity from the natural plants are significantly low, making the plant production route uneconomical. Alternate *in vitro* production technologies like specialized plant cell/hairy root cultivation processes are being developed to mass produce the plant secondary metabolites. *In vitro* cultivations of hairy roots have a distinct advantage of rapid growth in hormone free medium. They have better genetic and biochemical stability in comparison to cell/tissue cultivations. Scientific communities have focused their attention toward its exploitation as a source of rare and valuable secondary metabolites.

Hairy root culture was developed in the present study to establish and demonstrate an alternative commercially viable production technology for Azadirachtin against extraction from the seeds of *Azadirachta indica*.

The hairy roots of *Azadirachta indica* were initiated in the present study by transformation of the plant cells by *Agrobacterium rhizogenes*. 175 hairy root lines were induced from the different explants of *in vitro* germinated seedlings from the elite high Azadirachtin yielding varieties of seeds collected from different agroclimatic regions of the country. Further, screening and selection of a single hairy root line (Az-35) was done in liquid culture on the basis of its highest Growth Index (1.75) and Azadirachtin accumulation (content) (3.8 mg/g). The integration of the T-DNA region of the Ri-plasmid of *A. rhizogenes* in the selected *A. indica* hairy root line was confirmed using the Polymerase Chain Reaction technique. The selected hairy root line was maintained on

a favorable solid medium of the following composition: MS medium major and minor salts, B5 medium vitamins and 30 g/l sucrose. The initial pH of the medium was adjusted to 5.8 and temperature was maintained at 25 °C.

Different hairy root culture medium recipe (s), growth factors and environmental conditions were studied and their optimum concentrations yielding high Azadirachtin and biomass production were derived in the shake flask. Substrate utilization, growth and production kinetics was established in the liquid culture of hairy roots under optimized medium and environmental conditions (rpm: 80, temperature: 26 °C, pH: 5.7, medium composition: (major nutrients: Sucrose – 40 g/l; Potassium dihydrogen phosphate – 0.19 g/l; Potassium nitrate – 3.1 g/l; Ammonium nitrate- 1.65 g/l; Magnesium sulphate – 0.41 g/l along with MS medium minor salts and B5 medium vitamins), Inoculum size: 3 g/l dry weight (DW) and age: 30 days, growth regulator: 1.0 mg/l Indole-3-acetic acid (IAA) and 0.025 mg/l Gibberellic acid (GA<sub>3</sub>), permeabilizing agent: 0.5 % v/v Di-n-butyl phthalate (DNBP)). A maximum biomass of 21.3 g/l and Azadirachtin production of 78.81 mg/l in 25 days of the cultivation period (equivalent to an overall volumetric productivity of 3.15 mg/l d) was obtained with a residual sucrose concentration of 10.7 g/l. The disappearance of the nutrients was also reflected by a decrease in the medium conductivity from its initial value of 10.2 mS to 3.3 mS in 25 days of the hairy root cultivation period.

Directly and/or indirectly related biosynthetic precursors of Azadirachtin were added in the medium to enhance the Azadirachtin production in the hairy roots of *A. indica*. Maximum improvement in the Azadirachtin production (up to 70.42 mg/l) and its equivalent volumetric productivity (up to 2.81 mg/l d) could be achieved from that

obtained in control with no precursor in the medium (44 mg/l of Azadirachtin production in 25 days and its equivalent volumetric productivity of 1.76 mg/l d) when the growth medium was supplemented with 50 mg/l of Cholesterol. The Azadirachtin yield (content) in the hairy roots was found to increase from 3.3 mg/g in control to 5.82 mg/g on Cholesterol (50 mg/l) addition.

The possibility of Azadirachtin yield (mg/g) enhancement in the hairy roots of *A. indica* was investigated by the addition of potential elicitors (biotic and abiotic) in the cultivation medium. Among all the elicitors examined the addition of 1 % (v/v) of *Curvularia lunata* fungal culture filtrate resulted in highest Azadirachtin yield enhancement (up to 7.1 mg/g with respect to control value of 3.3 mg/g with no elicitor in the medium). The addition of elicitor in the medium in the beginning of the cultivation period detrimentally affected the biomass production (g/l) as a result the overall Azadirachtin production (mg/l) and its equivalent volumetric productivity (mg/l d) got affected. Hence optimization of the time of addition of the selected elicitor in the medium was done to achieve maximum Azadirachtin production (mg/l) and its equivalent overall volumetric productivity (mg/l d). During the optimization of the time of addition, the selected elicitor was proposed to be added along with the selected precursor in the medium under optimized cultivation conditions in order to have a synergistic effect on the overall Azadirachtin production (mg/l) and its equivalent volumetric productivity (mg/l d). It was found that maximum Azadirachtin production (113.4 mg/l, (with an Azadirachtin accumulation in the hairy roots of 5.4 mg/g and biomass production of 21 g/l)) and its equivalent overall volumetric productivity (4.53 mg/l d) was achieved when the combined addition was done on 15<sup>th</sup> day of the growth cycle.

In order to scale-up the hairy root cultivation the conventional bioreactor designs were modified and some new custom made bioreactors were got fabricated as per the culture characteristics and requirements (of support for growth, nutrient and oxygen transfer, liquid hold up, etc). Experiments were conducted on these different bioreactor designs to select an appropriate bioreactor configuration (with simpler and economical reactor design) where maximum biomass production (g/l) and Azadirachtin accumulation (mg/g) in hairy roots could be achieved, thereby resulting in maximum Azadirachtin production (mg/l) and its equivalent overall volumetric productivity (mg/l d). In the experiments conducted on different bioreactors, following overall volumetric productivities of Azadirachtin (mg/l d) were obtained, respectively (Stirred Tank Reactor (0.33 mg/l d), Bubble Column Reactor (0.43 mg/l d), Modified Bubble Column Reactor (with PUF) (1.14 mg/l d), Rotating Drum Reactor (0.85 mg/l d), Nutrient Spray Bioreactor (0.49 mg/l d) and Nutrient Mist Bioreactor (1.09 mg/l d). It was invariably observed that the Azadirachtin productivities obtained in the different bioreactors studied were less than that obtained in the shake flask (1.76 mg/l d), presumably due to larger mass transfer limitations encountered during scale-up. Among all the bioreactor cultivation studies done, maximum Azadirachtin overall volumetric productivity (1.14 mg/l d) was achieved in Modified Bubble Column Reactor (with Polyurethane foam (PUF) as root support).

Finally, the selected hairy root line was cultivated under optimized cultivation conditions (obtained from the shake flask studies) in the Modified Bubble Column Reactor with a minor modification of incorporating a Setric impeller beneath the perforated PUF root support (for enhanced mixing of the cultivation medium and to

ensure adequate oxygen transfer). This resulted in a 5-fold increase in biomass (up to 15.2 g/l from an initial value of 3 g/l) and Azadirachtin production of 97.28 mg/l in 25 days of the cultivation period (with an Azadirachtin accumulation of 6.4 mg/g in the hairy roots).

The efficacy of the *A. indica* hairy roots as a potential biopesticide candidate was demonstrated through a bioassay carried out on the desert locust *Schistocerca gregaria*. The hairy root sample (its crude solvent extract) demonstrated a high level of antifeedant activity (Antifeedant Index (A.I): 83.5 at 0.5 mg/ml concentration of the hairy root extract in Ethanol). The Electron Spray Ionization- Mass Spectroscopy (ESI-MS) analysis of the hairy root sample (its crude solvent extract) revealed the presence of Azadirachtin (-A, -B, -I/H), Salannin, Nimbin, Isonimbinolide and Salannol acetate in the hairy roots of *A. indica*. A study was also undertaken to reduce the photodegradation of Azadirachtin present in the hairy root sample (its crude solvent extract) by the addition of selected chemicals (photostabilizers). Maximum improvement in the Azadirachtin degradation time (in terms of the Disappearance Time,  $DT_{50}$ ) was achieved when Terbutylhydroquinone was used as a photostabilizer in the sample (where the Disappearance Time ( $DT_{50}$ ) increased from 3.3 days in control (sample without stabilizer) to 4.5 days in the presence of the stabilizer).

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