

**STUDIES ON PRODUCTION AND APPLICATION OF PLANT
GROWTH PROMOTING ROOT ENDOPHYTE
*PIRIFORMOSPORA INDICA***

by

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**Thesis submitted
in fulfillment of requirement of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

to the



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, DELHI

JANUARY 2010

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Studies on Production and Application of Plant Growth Promoting Root Endophyte *Piriformospora indica***” being submitted by **Mr. Vinod Kumar** to the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi for the award of the degree of ‘**Doctor of Philosophy**’, is a record of the bonafide research work carried out by him, which has been prepared under our supervision in conformity with the rules and regulations of the “Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi”. The research reports and the results presented in this thesis have not been submitted for any degree or diploma in any other University or Institute.

Prof. V. S. Bisaria

Dr. Vikram Sahai

Acknowledgements

A journey is easier when you travel together. Interdependence is certainly more valuable than independence. In this acknowledgement I wish to thank several people who, in some way, have contributed to the work described in this thesis. This is an impossible task, given the many people that have helped to design, implement, apply, criticize and sponsor the work. I am going to try any way, and if your name is not listed, rest assured that my gratitude is not less than for those listed below.

First of all, I would like to express my deepest sense of gratitude to my supervisor **Prof. V.S. Bisaria** for his excellent guidance, persistent interests and generous availability of all his expertise throughout the course of my research work. He has always been a source of iconic inspiration for me. It has been a great pleasure to do research under his supervision. Despite his hectic schedules, he always carefully read and discussed everything I wrote, which undoubtedly has left its marks on the way I write. I thank him for his patience and encouragement that carried me on through difficult times, and for his insights and suggestions that helped to shape my research skills. His valuable feedback contributed greatly to this thesis. I have always been a great admirer of his perfectionist attitude, punctuality and organization. I hope I have inherited some part of it in these years. It is indeed my profound privilege to have him as a role model.

I am indebted to **Dr. Vikram Sahai**, supervisor, for the constant motivation and stimulating support throughout the course of my thesis. He has been supportive since the very beginning of this research right to its culmination in the present day in the form of this thesis. I have always looked up to him as a person brimming with energy with a fire in the belly to achieve the impossible; enthusing all of us with zeal to strive harder. His caring attitude, deep involvement and constructive advises have helped me to overcome all challenges which came not only during my research work but also in life. I am grateful to him for his belief in me during the entire research work.

I wish my sincere gratitude to all the members of my SRC, **Prof. A.K. Srivastava** (Chairman), **Prof. T.R. Sreekrishnan** (Internal expert), and **Dr. Satyawati Sharma** (External expert), who monitored my work and provided me valuable suggestions and encouragement.

My sincere thanks are due to the erstwhile and present Head of the Department, **Prof. Sunil Nath**, **Prof. A.K. Srivastava** and **Prof. Saroj Mishra** for providing necessary facilities to carry out my research work.

I wish to express my warm and sincere thanks to **Dr. A.K. Sharma** and **Dr. Rashmi Srivastava**, Department of Biological Science, G.B. Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pant Nagar, Uttarakhand, for providing necessary facilities to carry out glasshouse and field studies even though I did not belong to their institute. They were always there for discussions and any kind of help required at any time.

I gratefully acknowledge the timely help provided by **Mr. G.P. Yadav**, **Mr. J.A. Khan**, **Late Mr. H.S. Mavi**, **Mr. Rajeev Dahiya**, **Mr. D.V. Sharma**, **Mr. Sant Ram** and **Mr. Mukesh Anand** for successful completion of the different experiments during the research period. A special mention and thanks are due to **Mr. Harilal**, **Mr. Ranbir**, **Mr. Sanjay** and **Mr. Shadab** for their cooperation.

Special thanks to **Mr. Rahul kumar** for teaching me the techniques of microbiological work and **Dr. Sunita Farkya** for making me familiar with tissue culture techniques. My sincere thanks are also due to **Dr. Ashish Baldi** and **Gaurav Rajauria** for their help in tissue culture work.

I am thankful to **Gupta Sir**, **Lalit**, **Mohit**, **Ramesh**, **Ravi**, and **Ziauddin** for their kind help, support, and inspiration during my stay at IIT, Delhi. The time I spent with them will always bring a smile on my face. All parties, hot arguments & fruitful discussions at tea time, trips, and every single moment spent with them will be memorable. They have been constant source of my strength through many moments of darkness and

always given wise suggestions to me, giving a positive direction to my action in life. They served as superb buffer at times of my frustrations and disappointments. No need to even thank them, I know they will be there whenever I need them. I would also like to give my gratitude to **Krishna** and **Ashwini** for their best wishes.

No words can sufficiently express my gratitude to my mother (**Mrs. Asha Pathak**), who is the driving force and inspiration behind me. The love, encouragement and unflinching support I received from her, all through my study enabled me to tide over the distress periods with strength and made it possible for me to complete my work. Special regards are due to my **Nani Ma** who is another face of God for me and brought me up with her endless love. I would also like to thank my other family members, **Geeta Mausi**, **Bimla Mausi**, **Manju mausi**, **Deepa mausi**, **Tara mausi**, brother **Manoj**, sister **Vandana** and my cousins **Mukesh** and **Deepak** for their unsaid affection and care towards me. I would like to express my gratitude to **Vivek** and **Ashutosh**, whose affection and care never let me feel that I am away from my home.

I am grateful to Council of Scientific and Industrial research (**CSIR**), New Delhi for awarding me research fellowship for my research work.

Most of all, I owe my continuing gratitude to the **Ma Saraswati** who has been very kind on me and has given me a very happy and respectful life.

Vinod Kumar

Abstract

Piriformospora indica, a symbiont root endophytic fungus infests the roots of a broad range of monocotyledonous and dicotyledonous plants. Endophytic root colonization by this fungus confers enhanced growth to the host plant and provides protection against biotic and abiotic stresses. *P. indica* mobilizes the insoluble phosphates and translocates the phosphorus to the host in an energy-dependent process. The fungus is also able to provide systemic protection due to a yet unknown mechanism of induced resistance. The fungus which forms chlamydospores and shows tremendous potential as a biofertiliser and biocontrol agent needs to be mass-produced at a large scale for its successful application as a bio-inoculant to enhance crop productivity.

In this study, the effect of environmental parameters (inoculum size, agitation speed, working volume, initial pH and temperature) and nutritional parameters (various carbon and nitrogen sources) on the growth and sporulation of *Piriformospora indica* in batch bioreactions at shake flask level has been investigated. The composition of Kaefer medium was modified by using statistical central composite design and response surface methodologies. The culture conditions for the cultivation of *P. indica* in 14 L bioreactor have been optimized such that they result in maximum biomass formation during growth phase and in maximum spore density during subsequent sporulation phase. Using glucose deprivation as the strategy for its sporulation, the fungus was made to give rise to the maximum sporulation in a modified Kaefer medium. The value of kinetic parameters, biomass yield ($Y_{X/S}$) and specific growth rate (μ) were 0.79 and 1.15 d⁻¹ respectively. An enhancement of 100 % in overall biomass productivity (0.18 g L⁻¹ h⁻¹) and reduction of about 70 % in the time required to achieve the maximum spore density (60 h) was achieved in comparison to the original Kaefer medium.

The efficacy of the bio-inoculant formulations containing *P. indica* and fluorescent pseudomonad strains R62 & R81 and their different consortia were tested on *Vigna mungo* and tomato plants under glasshouse and field conditions. For the preparation of these formulations, talcum powder and vermiculite were used as carriers. In both the crops all the treatments resulted in significant increase in growth parameters under glasshouse and field conditions. The results specific to treatments showed consistency in their performance when the conditions were scaled up from glasshouse to field conditions. In case of *Vigna mungo* under glasshouse conditions, a maximum increase of 4.5-fold in dry root weight and 3.9-fold in dry shoot weight with respect to control was obtained when vermiculite-based consortium formulation of *P. indica* and R81 was used. In field studies with *Vigna mungo* using vermiculite as carrier, a maximum enhancement of 3.2-fold in dry root weight, 3.0-fold in dry shoot weight, 8.4-fold in number of nodules and 4.0-fold in number of pods in comparison to control was obtained with the consortium formulation of *P. indica* and R81. The same consortium formulation also caused the highest improvement of 1.9-fold in nitrogen content and 1.7-fold in phosphorus content, while the highest increase of 1.4-fold in potassium content was obtained with *P. indica* alone.

In case of tomato, talcum-based consortium treatment of *P. indica* and R81 resulted in the highest improvement of 8.8-fold in dry root weight and 16.8-fold in dry shoot weight under glasshouse conditions. In field conditions, amongst all the treatments, talcum-based consortium treatment of *P. indica* and R81 resulted in a maximum increment of 2.7-fold in dry root weight, 3.1-fold in dry shoot weight, 3.1-fold in number of branches and 3.9-fold in number of fruits. The same treatment also resulted in maximum increment of 2.8-fold in

nitrogen content, 2.0-fold in phosphorus content and 2.3-fold potassium content. The efficacy shown by the talcum-based bio-inoculant formulation containing *P. indica* and consortium of *P. indica* and R81 against fusarium wilt disease in tomato plant under glasshouse conditions were almost similar. However, R81 alone conferred maximum degree of resistance against fusarium wilt disease.

Agrobacterium rhizogenes - mediated genetically- transformed high yielding hairy root line LYR2i of *L. album* was cultured on Gamborg medium. The maximum dry cell weight (15.4 g/L), podophyllotoxin (4.02 mg/g) and 6-methoxypodophyllotoxin (1.68 mg/g) were obtained after 14 d cultivation. In the literature there are a number of studies where the fungal products such as culture filtrate, spores, mycelium, cell wall extract etc. have been used to enhance the production of secondary metabolites by the plant cell culture. This is the first study where the effects of culture filtrate, cell extract and live cells of *P. indica* have been studied on lignan production by the hairy root culture of *L. album*. The addition of 4 d (log phase) as well as 8 d (decline phase) old, autoclaved and filter-sterilized culture filtrate and cell extract of *P. indica* as well as co-culturing of *P. indica* with hairy root culture of *L. album* resulted in a significant enhancement in podophyllotoxin and 6-methoxypodophyllotoxin content. Podophyllotoxin and 6-methoxypodophyllotoxin content were maximally enhanced by 3.3 times (13.01 mg/g) and 3.8 times (7.23 mg/g) in comparison to control culture when a filter-sterilized culture filtrate at a level of 3 % (v/v) was added to the hairy root culture of *Linum album* on 12th d of growth (exposure time of 48 h) from log and decline phase respectively. The increase in the lignan content coincided with the increase in the PAL activity.

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