COMPARATIVE PHARMACOGNOSTICAL, PHYTOCHEMICAL AND HPTLC STUDY OF SOME COMMON MEDICINAL PIPER SPECIES

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Received on: 02/09/16 Revised on: 14/10/16 Accepted on: 02/11/16

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DOI: 10.7897/2277-4343.076233

ABSTRACT

Piper species are reported to have great medicinal values in Indian system medicines. The present study was therefore carried out to provide the requisite pharmacognostic, phytochemical and HPTLC study of the four piper species namely Piper longum, Piper nigrum, Piper cubeba and Piper retrofractum. The marker compound present in all these four species is Piperine, an alkaloid found naturally in plants belonging to the pyridine group of Piperaceae family. This study will be the ready reference for the correct identification of the four crude drugs.

Keywords: Piper longum, Piper nigrum, Piper cubeba and Piper retrofractum, piperine, HPTLC.

INTRODUCTION

Plants have been the source of medicines for thousands of years. Species of the genus piper are among the important medicinal plants used in Traditional systems of medicine. Piper Species are widely distributed in the tropical and subtropical regions of the world and have high commercial and economic potential. A country like India has got a variety of geo-climatic conditions and seasons favourable for the growth of many plant species. The family Piperaceae comprises of 24 genera and about 1400 species mainly found in the tropical region. The genus Piper contains more than 700 species, grown in the southern part of India are economically important and used in various systems of medicine. Several species of Piper are used in the Indigenous system of medicine in India. Piperine (C_{17}H_{24}NO) is the main alkaloid present in the fruits and roots of these species. Piperine has been reported from 19 Piper species and more than 600 secondary metabolites are isolated from the genus Piper. Piperine has diverse biological activities and responsible factor for the pungency of the useful parts. Piperine has a broad spectrum of activities. It increases the bioavailability of other drugs by enhancing their absorption from the gut. It also displays analgesic-antipyretic, anti-inflammatory, growth stimulatory, anti-thyroid, chemopreventive, insecticidal, immune-modulator, antitumor, anti-depressant and anti-apoptotic activities.

The present study reveals relevant pharmacognostic, phytochemical and HPTLC study of four piper species namely Piper longum, Piper nigrum, Piper cubeba and Piper retrofractum commonly used in Traditional systems of medicine.

Piper longum Linn or Pippali consists of dried fruits, a slender, aromatic, perennial herb, native of the hotter parts of the country and found wild as well as cultivated extensively in Assam, lower hills of Bengal, evergreen forests of western ghats, along the west coast and southern states of India. Fruits are harvested in January. The fruits are useful in cough, asthma, bronchitis and other respiratory disorders. Black pepper contains fully mature dried fruits of Piper nigrum L., a climber, cultivated from Konkan southwards, especially in North Konkan, Kerala and also in Assam of India. Fruits ripen from December-March depending upon climate conditions, Fruits harvested from December to April. Pepper is useful for digestive and respiratory disorders. Piper cubeba (cubeb) or tailed pepper, a plant in genus Piper, cultivated for its fruit and essential oil. It is mostly grown in Java and Sumatra, hence sometimes called Java pepper. It is a perennial plant, with a climbing stem, round branches, about as thick as a goose-quill, ash-colored and rooting at the joints. Fruits are useful for halitosis, dental and gum disorders.

Chavya is named as Piper Chaba or Piper retrofractum belongs to the family Piperaceae. Its root is considered as Chavya or Gaja Pippali. It is useful for digestive disorders and hemorrhoids. In all these four species, the major chemical constituent is alkaloid piperine.

Chemical Constituents

The fruit of P. longum contains a large number of alkaloids in which the major is piperine. The piperine content is 3-5% (on dry weight basis) in P. longum. The other alkaloids and guanines are methylpiperine, iperonaline, piperetine, asarimine, pellitorine, piperundecalidine, piperlongumine, piperlonguminine, refractomide, pregumidine, brachystamide, brachystamide-A, brachystine, piperide, piperideridine, longamide and tetrahydropiperine, tetrahydropiperlongumine, dehydropiperonaline, piperidine and tri-methoxyaminomethyl-piperidine. Some lignans like sesamin, pulvaftol, forgesin and others have been isolated from the fruit of P. longum. The fruit of P. longum contains some esters like tridecyl-dihydro-p-coumarate, eicosanyl-(E)-(p)-coumarate, and Z-12-octadecenoic-glycerol-monoester. The essential oil of the fruit P. longum is a complex mixture, the three major components of which are (excluding the volatile piperine) caryophyllene and pentadecanec (both about 17.8%) and bisabolene (11%). Others include thujine, terpinolene,
The dried cubeb fruits mainly contain the alkaloids, lignans, and essential oil. The major alkaloid is piperine and essential oil consisting monoterpenes (sabinene 50%, α-thujene, and carene) and sesquiterpenes (caryophyllene, copaene, α- and β-cubebene, δ-cadinene, germacrene), the oxides 1,4- and 1,8-cineole and the alcohol cubebol.

The root of Chavya (Piper retrofractum) contains piperine 6.55-0.18%, pippalinot (0.13-0.20%), piperceaguminin, sterol, and glycoside.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Plant collection**

The raw materials of all these four species were procured from local market of Kolkata, West Bengal and authenticated by Botany department of the Institute as per usual norms. Dried materials of these species were used for pharmacognostic evaluation and some preliminary phytochemical tests.

**Extraction of plant material**

Extraction was carried out at room temperature under normal condition. About 15 g shade dried powder of fruits of piper species were successively extracted with petroleum ether, chloroform, and ethanol. The extracts obtained were filtered and concentrated by evaporating on a water bath.

**Phytochemical analysis**

The extract was used for preliminary screening of phytochemicals such as alkaloids, tannins, flavonoids, terpenoid/steroid. The screening was done as per the standard method.

**HPTLC Study**

A simple and convenient HPTLC method was developed for standardization of four piper species along with standard marker compound piperine. A CAMAG HPTLC system (Switzerland) comprising CAMAG Linomat5 applicator, CAMAG TLC scanner3, CAMAG wincats software, version 1.44, Hamilton Syringe (100µl), CAMAG Reprostar3, CAMAG TLC plate heater, CAMAG UV cabinet were used for the study. Silica gel F254 Aluminium plates (Merck) was used as stationary phase. Toluene: Diethyl ether: 1:4 dioxane (14:5:4v/v) was used as mobile phase. The sample solution was prepared by taking 2 g of fine dust of each piper species separately and subjected to cold extraction with methanol solvent for 3 days and extracts were filtered using filter paper (Whatman no. 40). Whole extracts were concentrated and used for HPTLC profile.

Standard solution of piperine was prepared by taking 1 mg of piperine dissolved in 10 ml of methanol in a volumetric flask. This solution was used for HPTLC study.

**RESULTS**

**Pharmacognostical study**

**Piper longum L. (Pippali)**

**Macroscopic**

Fruits of Pippali i.e. Piper longum L. (Piperaceae) are very small, ovoid, completely sunken embedded in solid fresh spike, 2.5-4.0 cm long. The color of fruit in light green to olive green when immature. After ripening colour changed to shining blackish green with aromatic odour and pungent taste producing numbness on the tongue. Broken surface shows a central axis around which 5-7 fruit-lets are arranged. [Figure 1(a)]

**Figure 1(a): Fruits of Piper longum L. (Pippali)**

**Powder Microscopy**

Deep grayish brown to dark brown with a pungent odour and bitter acrid taste, shows abundant polyhedral, elongated parenchymatous cells from perisperm, oval to slightly elongated stone cells interspersed with thin walled polygonal hypodermal cells, oil globules and round to oval starch grains, measuring 3 to 9 µm in diameter. [Figure 1(b)]

**Figure 1(b): Powder microscopy of fruit of Piper longum L. (Pippali)**
**Piper nigrum L. (Maricha)**

Macroscopic

Fruits of Maricha i.e. *Piper nigrum* L. (Piperaceae) are cylindrical, matured, hard, wrinkled, grayish-black to black, 0.3-0.5 cm in diameter with specific pungent aromatic odour and pungent taste. [Figure 2(a)]

![Figure 2(a): Fruits of Piper nigrum (Maricha)](image)

**Powder Microscopy**

Colour blackish-grey with characteristic more or less isodiametric stone cells single and in groups, few groups of thick walled sclerenchymatous cells, thin-walled polygonal hypodermal cells, beaker-shaped stone cells from endocarp and abundant polygonal elongated cells from perisperm, packed tightly with masses of starch grains, aleurone grains and oil globules. Starch grains are minute oval to round single or compound having 2-3 components. [Figure 2(b)]

![Figure 2(b): Powder microscopy of fruit of Piper nigrum L. (Maricha)](image)

**Piper cubeba Linn. F (Kankola)**

Macroscopic

Fruits of Kankola i.e. *Piper cubeba* Linn. F. (family Piperaceae) are hard wrinkled, cylindrical or rounded, 5-7 mm in diameter, grayish brown to dark brown to brownish black in color, attached with 5-8 mm long stalk; pericarp light reddish brown fused with testa; albumen stony creams and oily; odour, characteristic, aromatic and pleasant with slightly bitter, pungent taste. [Figure 3(a)]

![Figure 3(a): Fruits of Piper cubeba Linn. F (Kankola)](image)

**Powder Microscopy**

Deep grayish brown to dark brown with characteristic, pleasant aromatic smell and slightly bitter pungent taste, shows small, brown and thick-walled cells, spiral xylem vessels, fibre, large, thin-walled parenchymatous cells in group, oil cells, heavily lignified sclereids with narrow lumen, few prisms of Ca-oxalate crystals, elongated hyaline cells of tegmen, group of greyish kernel cells with packed cell content, oval starch grains. [Figure 3(b)]

![Figure 3(b): Powder microscopy of the fruit of Piper cubeba Linn. F (Kankola)](image)

**Piper retrofractum Vahl. (Chavya)**

Macroscopic

Dried cut pieces of the stem of Cavya or Cavika i.e. *Piper retrofractum* Vahl. (family Piperaceae) are of variable length and 0.5-2.0 cm in width, cylindrical and somewhat twisted and pressed, with distinct nodes and internodes, greyish-brown, surface smooth with a few longitudinal wrinkles, fracture, short; odour peppery with an acrid taste. [Figure 4(a)]

![Figure 4(a): Dried cut pieces of the stem of Piper retrofractum Vahl. (Chavya)](image)
Figure 4(a): Fragmented stem of *Piper retrofractum* Vahl (Chavya)

**Powder Microscopy**

Greyish-brown shows fragments of pitted and reticulate vessels, tracheids, needle and spindle-shaped fibers and simple, oval to rectangular, thin-walled, parenchymatous cells with plenty of round to oval starch grains, measuring 3-14µ in diameter. [Figure 4(b)]

**Phytochemical Screening**

Phytochemical analysis of four pipe species revealed the presence of alkaloids, tannins, flavonoids, terpenoid are shown in Table 1-4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the test</th>
<th>Petroleum ether extract</th>
<th>Chloroform extract</th>
<th>Ethanol extract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test of Alkaloid (Dragendorff’s test)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test of Flavonoids (FeCl₃ test)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test for Tannins</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test for Terpenoid/Steroid (L.B test)</td>
<td>+ (for terpenoid)</td>
<td>+ (for steroid)</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(+): Present , (-): Absent

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**Table 1: Preliminary Phytochemical screening of *P. longum***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Petroleum ether extract</th>
<th>Chloroform extract</th>
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<td>+ (for terpenoid)</td>
<td>+ (for steroid)</td>
<td>+</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(+): Present , (-): Absent

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**Table 2: Preliminary Phytochemical screening of *P. nigrum***

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Name of the test</th>
<th>Petroleum ether extract</th>
<th>Chloroform extract</th>
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<td>Test of Alkaloid (Dragendorff’s test)</td>
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<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test of Flavonoids (FeCl₃ test)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test for Tannins</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test for Terpenoid/Steroid (L.B test)</td>
<td>+ (for terpenoid)</td>
<td>+ (for steroid)</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(+): Present , (-): Absent

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**Table 3: Preliminary Phytochemical screening of *P. cubeba***

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<th>Name of the test</th>
<th>Petroleum ether extract</th>
<th>Chloroform extract</th>
<th>Ethanol extract</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test of Alkaloid (Dragendorff’s test)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test of Flavonoids (FeCl₃ test)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Test for Tannins</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
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<td>+ (for terpenoid)</td>
<td>+ (for steroid)</td>
<td>+</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(+): Present , (-): Absent

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**Table 4: Preliminary Phytochemical screening of *P. retrofractum***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the test</th>
<th>Petroleum ether extract</th>
<th>Chloroform extract</th>
<th>Ethanol extract</th>
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<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test of Flavonoids (FeCl₃ test)</td>
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<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Test for Tannins</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test for Terpenoid/Steroid (L.B test)</td>
<td>+ (for terpenoid)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(+): Present , (-): Absent
HPTLC Profile of four Piper species along with Piperine (marker compound)

Chromatography experiments

i) Stationary Phase -
   Aluminum plate precoated with silica gel $60 F_{254}$

ii) Mobile Phase -
    Toluene:Diethyl ether:1,4 Di-oxane (14:5:4)

Table 5: HPTLC analysis of Piperine and methanolic extract of four piper species

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>Standard Piperine</th>
<th>Methanolic extract of P. longum</th>
<th>Methanolic extract of P. nigrum</th>
<th>Methanolic extract of P. cubeba</th>
<th>Methanolic extract of Piper retrofractum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt; value</td>
<td>R&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt; value</td>
<td>R&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt; value</td>
<td>R&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt; value</td>
<td>R&lt;sub&gt;c&lt;/sub&gt; value</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>UV254 nm</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.57,0.62,0.65</td>
<td>0.39,0.44,0.57</td>
<td>0.57,0.62,0.71,0.85</td>
<td>0.57,0.65,0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UV366 nm</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.20,0.29,0.36,0.52,0.57,0.77</td>
<td>0.15,0.19,0.29,0.32,0.36,0.40</td>
<td>0.19,0.36,0.41,0.49,0.57,0.6</td>
<td>0.18,0.32,0.43,0.48,0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

The current study will serve to become a ready reference for identification, phytochemical analysis as well as HPTLC of four piper species on the basis of microscopy and chemical analysis. The preliminary phytochemical analysis indicated the presence of alkaloids, tannins, flavonoids, terpenoid and steroid in the crude petroleum ether, chloroform and ethanolic extracts of four piper species. The presence of alkaloids in all species of Piper indicates Piperine which is an alkaloid may be present. In future, this investigation will further help in isolation of important compounds from these four piper species. Moreover, from comparative HPTLC study, we can get a preliminary idea about the content of Piperine present in these four species. The trend of occurrence of piperine in these species are P. nigrum>P. longum, Piper retrofractum>P. cubeba.

CONCLUSION

The current study will be the ready reference for the correct identification of the four crude drugs as well as gives a preliminary idea about the phytochemicals present and qualitative level of piperine content in these common piper species used in traditional medicine, however, a comparative quantitative study is suggested further.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors are grateful to the Director General, CCRAS, New Delhi, India for providing facilities and encouragement throughout this work.

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Cite this article as:
http://dx.doi.org/10.7897/2277-4343.076233

Source of support: Nil, Conflict of interest: None Declared

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