



RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Anti cancer activity of silver nano particles bio-synthesized using stingless bee propolis (*Tetragonula iridipennis*) of Tamilnadu

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Abstract

Global efforts to reduce hazardous wastes and alarming environmental issues urge the need to develop more and more eco-friendly processes and bio-compatible products. In this study, silver nano particles were synthesized using stingless bee propolis (*Tetragonula iridipennis*) reared from Tamilnadu. The bio-reduction process was further intensified by ultrasonics irradiation. The synthesized silver nano particles were well characterized by UV-visible spectrophotometer, Energy dispersive X-ray analysis, Scanning electron Microscope, Dynamic light scattering measurement. The active functional groups were identified by Fourier Transform Infra-red spectroscopy. The crystalline nature was established by XRD technique. The anticancer potential of the synthesized silver nano particles was evaluated by MTT assay and it was found to show significant activity against A549 human lung cancer cells. IC 50 value is 38 µg/ml.

Keywords: Stingless bee propolis, silver nano particles, process intensification, ultrasonication, A549 cancer cells, anticancer activity.



1. Stingless bee



2, 3 & 4 Colony under study



5. Stingless bee propolis

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INTRODUCTION

Nano biotechnology is a promising field of nano science, which extends the horizon of nano sized systems for various newer applications both in the field of biotechnology as well as in the field of Nano medicine. Nano particles exhibit distinct physical and chemical properties compared to their bulk counterparts due to their small size and large surface area. Metal nano particles are found to be potential therapeutic alternatives for the treatment of various diseases including cancer ⁽¹⁾. Cancer - a life threatening disease has nowadays become a common disease due to the vast changes in the life style of people and its accounts for second major cause of mortality rate in the world⁽²⁾. Existing anti-cancer treatments including chemotherapeutic drugs, radiations, surgery are serving their purpose to some extent, but their side effects are much more than it, targeted treatment of disease⁽³⁾. Nano particles enabled targeted drug delivery⁽⁴⁾ is found to be efficient for cancer treatment as nano particulate can cross some of the biological barriers and achieve therapeutic concentration in tumours even with less dosage of drug administration and spares the surrounding normal tissues from toxic effect. So, a separate branch of Nanoscience, Nano Oncology has emerged, which deals with the ways and means of developing potential alternatives to manage the dreadful disease.

Among all the metal nano particles, silver nano particles have always attracted researchers due to its widespread applications in various fields⁽⁵⁾ such as catalysis, sensors, food industries, agriculture, textile industries and more particularly in the field of biomedical applications⁽⁶⁾ as antimicrobial⁽⁷⁾, antifungal⁽⁸⁾, antiviral⁽⁹⁾ and anti-angiogenic agent⁽¹⁰⁾ and now emerging as a potential therapeutic agent for cancer treatment⁽¹¹⁻¹⁷⁾.

Though various conventional Physical and chemical methods⁽¹⁸⁻²²⁾ are used for the synthesis of silver nano particles, they are always associated with one or more limitations^(23,24) such as defective surface formation, low production rate, high cost of manufacturing, large energy requirement, formation of hazardous byproducts etc,. Limitation of these methods has made the recent research to focus on the development of clean, eco-friendly and cost effective synthesis protocols. Apart from the above said advantages, use of Biogenic method leads to the production of silver nano particles coated with a lipid layer that gives physiological solubility and stability which is critical for any biomedical applications ⁽²⁵⁾ Various natural resources such as plants ⁽²⁶⁻²⁸⁾ insect origin ⁽²⁹⁾, bacteria ⁽³⁰⁾, algae ⁽³¹⁾ fungi ⁽³²⁾ were reported for the synthesis of silver nano particles.

Stingless bees are reared mainly for medicinal honey ⁽³³⁾. Propolis of stingless bees is a natural resin which the bees create by mixing its own body secretions with the substances that it collects from various herbal plant sources of medicinal value. Stingless bee propolis also has high medicinal value like antibacterial, antioxidant and anticancer properties. The chemical composition and hence its biomedical applications vary from place to place depending on the generic type of bees, on the botanical sources with which the bees forage, the geographical location and its climate⁽³⁴⁻³⁶⁾. Owing to the pharmacological importance, extensive studies on propolis were made worldwide ⁽³⁷⁻⁴⁰⁾. In India, a few studies were reported on the regions of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh ⁽⁴¹⁻⁴³⁾. In Tamilnadu, studies on propolis is very rare, that too its application in nano medicine field is very scarce ^(44,45).

Ultrasonication involves irradiating the reactants using ultrasonic waves of frequency 20 kHz-10 MHz ⁽⁴⁶⁾. Sonochemical effect in liquids is due to acoustic cavitations. When the reactants are irradiated with ultrasound waves, microscopic bubbles called cavities were created during the decompression phase of the ultrasonic waves and were imploded during the compression phase. This alternating expansive and compressive acoustic wave makes the bubbles to oscillate. The oscillating bubbles accumulate the ultrasonic energy effectively and grow. When it grows to an optimum size, it collapses releasing the concentrated energy within very short-time. This cavitation implosion is very localized and produces an ambient temperature that intensifies the production of silver nano particles of smaller size with reasonably faster rate⁽⁴⁷⁻⁴⁸⁾

The present study focuses on the bio-sono chemical synthesis of silver nano particles using an ethanolic extract of stingless bee propolis, reared from the Pudukottai region of Tamilnadu⁽⁴⁹⁾ and evaluation of its anti-cancer potential against human lung cancer cell line A549.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Stingless bee propolis collection:



A bulk sample of stingless bee propolis was collected from the region of Patti Punkai, Anavayal, Pudukottai District, Tamilnadu, India.

Coordinates: 10.38° N 78.82° E.

Stingless bee propolis sample is highly adhesive in nature so it was stored in the freezer.

Ultrasonic extraction of propolis:

Instrument: Wensor Ultrasonicator (40kHz).

20g of propolis was cut into small pieces and grounded well. To this 200 ml of a solvent mixture containing 140ml of ethanol and 60ml of distilled water in the ratio (7:3) was added and subjected to ultrasonication for about an hour. This is then filtered through Whatman 41 filter paper.

Materials:

Silver Nitrate, Sodium hydroxide, Minimum essential medium (MEM), Fetal bovine serum (FBS), Trypsin, 3-(4,5-dimethyl-2-thiazolyl)-2,5-diphenyl--tetrazolium bromide (MTT), and Dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO) were purchased from Hi media & Sigma Aldrich.

Characterization of Silver nano particles:

UV-Visible Spectral Analysis:

The initial characterization of the synthesized silver nano particles was carried out using Shimadzu Dual Beam (UV-1650PC) spectrophotometer of resolution 1nm. To avoid errors due to high optical density, the solution (0.5 ml) was diluted ten times with double distilled water.

Fourier Transform Infrared Spectral Analysis (FT-IR):

The bio reduced solution was centrifuged at 10,000 rpm for 20 minutes, twice. The sample was grinded with KBr, dried in infra-red light and the spectra were recorded in the spectrum range of 4000- 400 cm^{-1} using Shimadzu FT-IR Spectrophotometer.

Energy Dispersive X-Ray Analysis (EDAX):

The elemental composition of the synthesized silver nano solution was determined by using Philips XL-30 Energy Dispersive Analysis X-ray spectrometer.

SEM Analysis:

The sample was drop coated on a tiny piece of glass substrate, dried at 40°C and then subjected to SEM analysis using Teftan Vega 3-SBU instrument.

X-ray diffraction:

The synthesized silver nano particles were drop coated on a 1 cm^2 glass piece, dried and its crystalline nature was examined on Rigaku Mini Flex diffractometer with Cu K α radiation.

Dynamic Light Scattering Analysis:

The average particle size distribution (PSD) of the synthesized silver nanoparticles, poly dispersity index (PI) were determined using Dynamic Light Scattering Instrument- Malvern Vetasizer Nano-S-Series.

In vitro anticancer studies of synthesized Silver nano particles:

Cell Culture:

A549 cell lines were obtained from National Centre for cell sciences (NCCS) Pune, India.

The cells were maintained in Minimal Essential Media supplemented with 10% FBS, penicillin (100 U/ml) and streptomycin (100 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$) in a humidified atmosphere of 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ CO_2 at 37 °C.

Cell Viability:

The anticancer activity of the synthesized silver nano particles on A549 human cancer cells was determined by the MTT assay ⁽⁵⁰⁾. Cultured A549 human lung cancer cells (1×10^5 cells)) were plated in 0.2 ml of the medium in 96 flat bottomed well plates. Incubated at 5 % CO_2 atmosphere for 72 hours. Then, various concentrations of the synthesized silver nano particles in 0.1% DMSO were added to the cells and maintained at 5% CO_2 incubator for 24hrs. After incubation and washing with phosphate-buffered saline (pH 7.4), 20 μl of 0.5% 3-(4, 5-dimethyl-2-thiazolyl)-2, 5-diphenyl--tetrazolium bromide (MTT) in phosphate- buffered saline solution was added to the incubated cells and further incubated for four more hours at 37°C and at 5% CO_2 atmosphere. After 4hrs of incubation, 1ml of DMSO was added. Viable cells at various concentrations (dilution method) were determined by measuring the absorbance at 540nm. The concentration required for 50% inhibition (IC_{50}) was determined graphically. The effect of the synthesized silver nano particles on the proliferation of A549 cells was expressed as the % cell viability.

$$\% \text{ cell viability} = \text{A549 of treated cells} / \text{A549 of control cells} \times 100\%$$

Measurement of cytomorphological changes in A549 cells:

A549 cells were pre-treated with different concentrations of synthesized silver nano particles and incubated for 24h at 37°C in 5% CO_2 atmosphere. After incubation of cells, the gross morphology changes in the cells were observed under an inverted microscope (Lobomed) at the magnification of 40X.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Synthesis of silver nano particles:

10ml of ethanolic extract of propolis was added to 10ml of distilled water. The solution is made alkaline by adding aqueous NaOH solution. This is added to 100ml of 0.001M silver nitrate solution with continuous stirring at room temperature. There was a gradual color change from light yellow to reddish brown in 15 minutes. The appearance of reddish brown colour indicated the formation of silver nano particles. This is due to the Surface Plasmon Resonance exhibited by synthesized silver nano particles.



Figure1: (a) AgNO_3 solution (b) stingless bee propolis extract (c) silver nano particles

When the same amount of the precursor and the stingless bee propolis extract were irradiated with ultrasonic waves, it has taken only five minutes of time for the appearance of reddish brown color. This may be due to the fact that in addition to the active reducing groups present in the extract, some of the free radicals like $\text{H}\cdot$ and $\text{OH}\cdot$ generated during sonolysis of the solution, also involved in the bio-reduction of Ag^+ ions to Ag^0 (48) resulting in the quick formation of silver nano particles. Thus Ultrasonication- a process intensification technique plays a major role in the formation of silver nano particles. The possible mechanism is

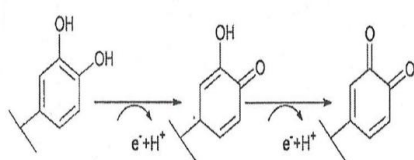
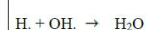
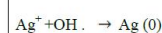
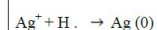
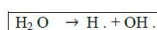


Table 1: Sono Chemical Reduction **Figure 2 :** Polyphenols giving e^- to Ag^+

Characterization of Biosynthesized silver nano particles by spectral methods: UV-VIS spectral analysis:

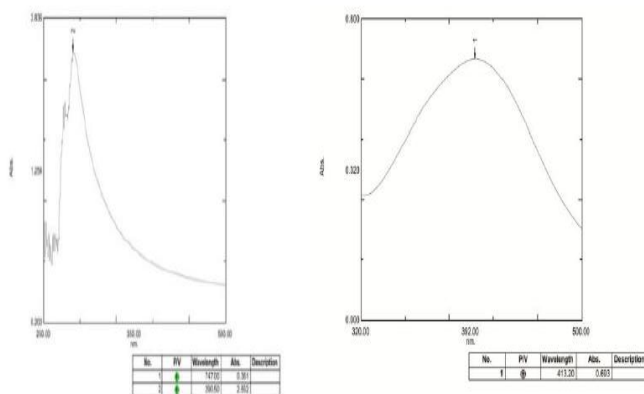


Figure 3a: UV-VIS Spectrum of stingless bee propolis **Figure.3b:** UV-VIS Spectrum of AgNPs

Figure. 3a and 3b show the UV-VIS spectra of ethanolic extract of stingless bee propolis and silver nano particles synthesized using it. An intense absorption peak at 265nm in Fig.3a indicates the presence of polyphenols and flavonoids in the raw propolis sample (49). A strong absorption peak in Figure 3b, around 413nm is characteristic of silver nano particles and is due to the Surface Plasmon Resonance (SPR) exhibited by the synthesized silver nano particles. Surface plasmon resonance is due to the collective oscillations of the free electrons of silver nano particles in resonance with the light waves. Availability of free electrons could be possible only if Ag^+ ions were reduced to elemental silver nano particles. This shows

the efficiency of Stingless bee propolis in reducing Ag^+ ions to Ag^0 .

Fourier Transform-Infra red Spectroscopic Analysis:

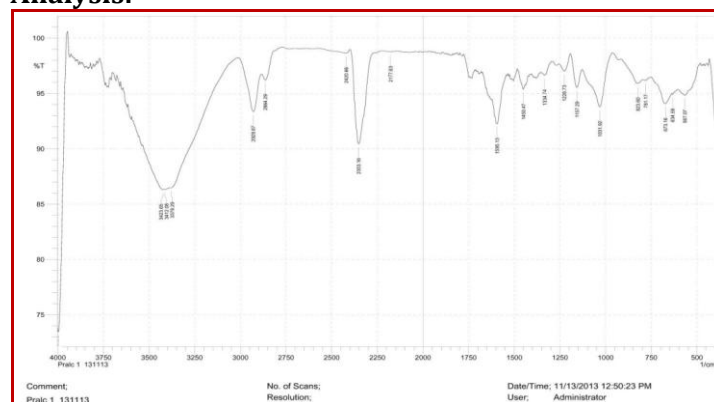


Figure 4a: FT-IR Spectrum of stingless bee propolis extract.

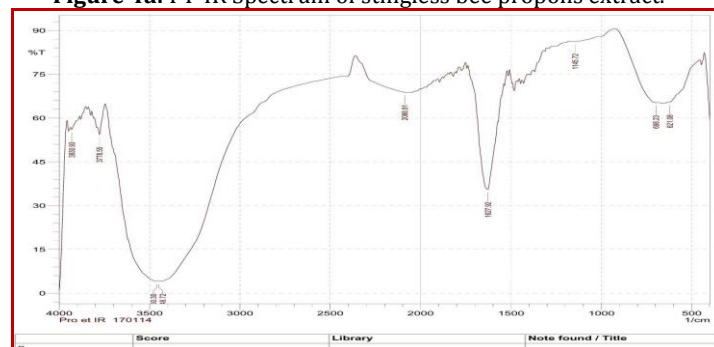


Figure4b: FT-IR Spectrum of synthesized silver nano particles
To understand the nature of biomolecules involved in the stabilization of synthesized silver nano particles, FT-IR spectra were taken. In Figure 4b, a strong broad peak around 3430cm^{-1} shows the presence of hydrogen bonded O-H group of alcohols. A prominent peak around 1627 cm^{-1} is due to C=O of conjugated amides, ketones, esters. A peak around 698 cm^{-1} is due to phenyl group. This shows that poly phenols and flavanones are stabilizing the synthesized silver nano particles. FT-IR spectrum of ethanolic extract of stingless bee propolis indicates the presence of many fundamental groups mainly alcohols and phenols. These fundamental groups are not present or present with lower intensity in the FT-IR spectrum of silver nano particles showing that these groups are involved in the reduction of silver ions.

Energy Dispersive X-Ray Analysis:

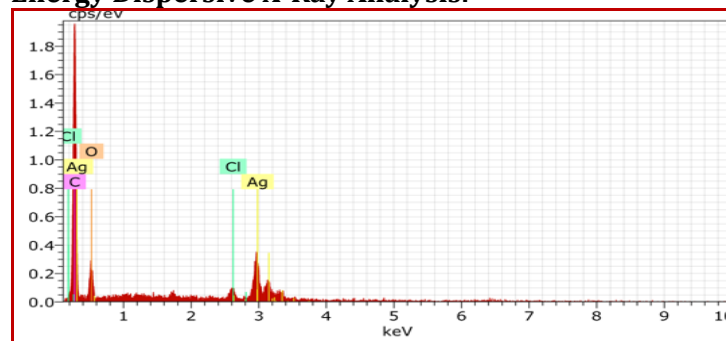


Figure 5: EDAX of Silver nano particles

The Energy Dispersive X-ray spectra of the synthesized silver nano particles showed the presence of elemental silver. The optical absorption peak at 3 KeV is characteristic of metallic silver nano particles. As there are no other signals recorded for other metallic elements in the EDAX spectra, it is evident that the synthesized silver nano particles are of high purity grade.

X-ray Diffraction:

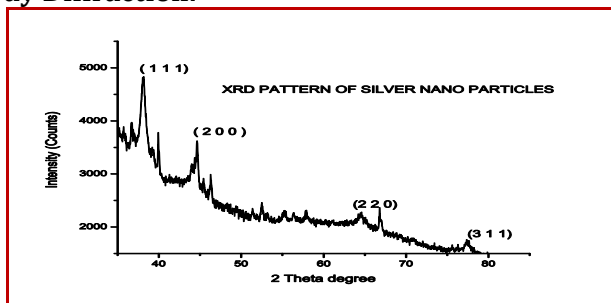


Figure 6: XRD Pattern of Stingless bee propolis mediated AgNPs. Appearance of four distinct Peaks at 38.04°, 44.23°, 64.37° and 77.80° in the X-ray diffraction pattern of the synthesized silver nano particles correspond to planes (111), (200), (220) and (311) of face centered cubic silver as per the JCPDS card N0 89-3722. The well resolved XRD pattern clearly showed the FCC crystal nature of the silver nano particles obtained by the reduction of silver ions using stingless bee propolis extract.

Scanning Electron Microscopic Analysis:

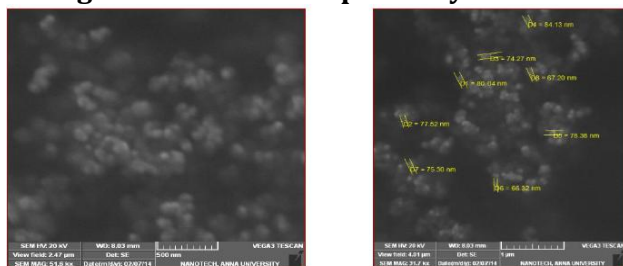


Figure 7 : SEM images of synthesized silver nano particles. Further insight into the morphology and size of the synthesized silver nano particles was obtained from Scanning electron microscopic analysis. The SEM images revealed the presence of spherical silver nano particles with particle size ranging from 66 -84nm.

Dynamic Light Scattering analysis:

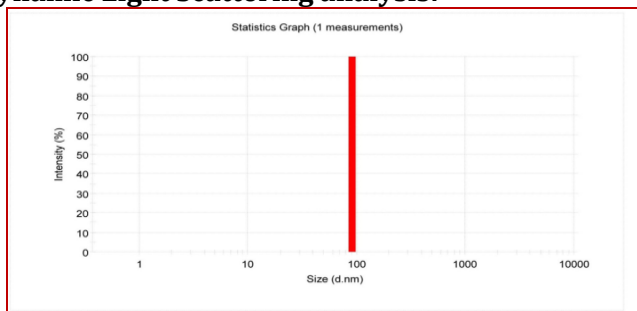


Figure 8: Percentage intensity of particle size distribution of silver nano particles

Particle size, size distribution and shape of silver nano particles are the important parameters that govern the properties and hence its applications in various fields. To know the average size of the synthesized silver nano particles, a size distribution analysis was performed using dynamic light scattering technique in aqueous solution. The DLS spectra shows that 98% of the synthesized silver nano particles are in the average size of 91nm indicating the formation of completely homogenous silver nano particles.

3.3.Biomedical application of silver nano particle:

Anti cancer activity:

The synthesized silver nano particles were found to have potential bio- medical applications. When the in vitro anti-cancer activity of the synthesized silver nano particles was evaluated on human lung carcinoma cell lines at different concentrations following a serial dilution method, it showed significant toxicity towards A549 cell lines.

Cell toxicity = 100 - Cell viability.				
S.No	Concentration µg/ml	Dilution	Absorbance 540nm	% cell Viability
1	1000	Neat	0.06	7.0
2	500	1:1	0.15	17.6
3	250	1:2	0.18	21.1
4	125	1:4	0.23	27.0
5	62.5	1:8	0.35	41.1
6	31.2	1:16	0.48	56.4
7	15.6	1:32	0.64	75.2
8	7.8	1:64	0.79	92.9
9	control	-	0.85	100

Table.2. Dose dependant anticancer activity of synthesized AgNPs

The anti-cancer activity of the sample showed an inverse dose relationship with cell viability and a direct dose relationship with cell toxicity. Cell toxicity increases and the cell viability decreases with increase in concentration of silver nano particles. A dose-dependent anti-cancer activity was noticed in silver nano particles treated A549 cells. Graphical determination revealed that 38 µg/ml of silver nano particles was enough to kill 50% of the cancer cell population (IC₅₀)

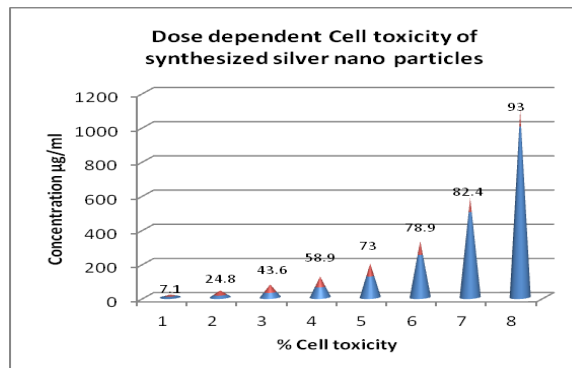


Figure 9: Cell toxicity response

Various morphological alterations were observed when A549 human lung cancer cells were treated with synthesized silver nano particles of various concentrations. The **Figure 10** shows the anticancer effect when viewed through an inverted microscope (lobomed) with a magnification of 40X. However no such effects were seen in control (non treated cells).

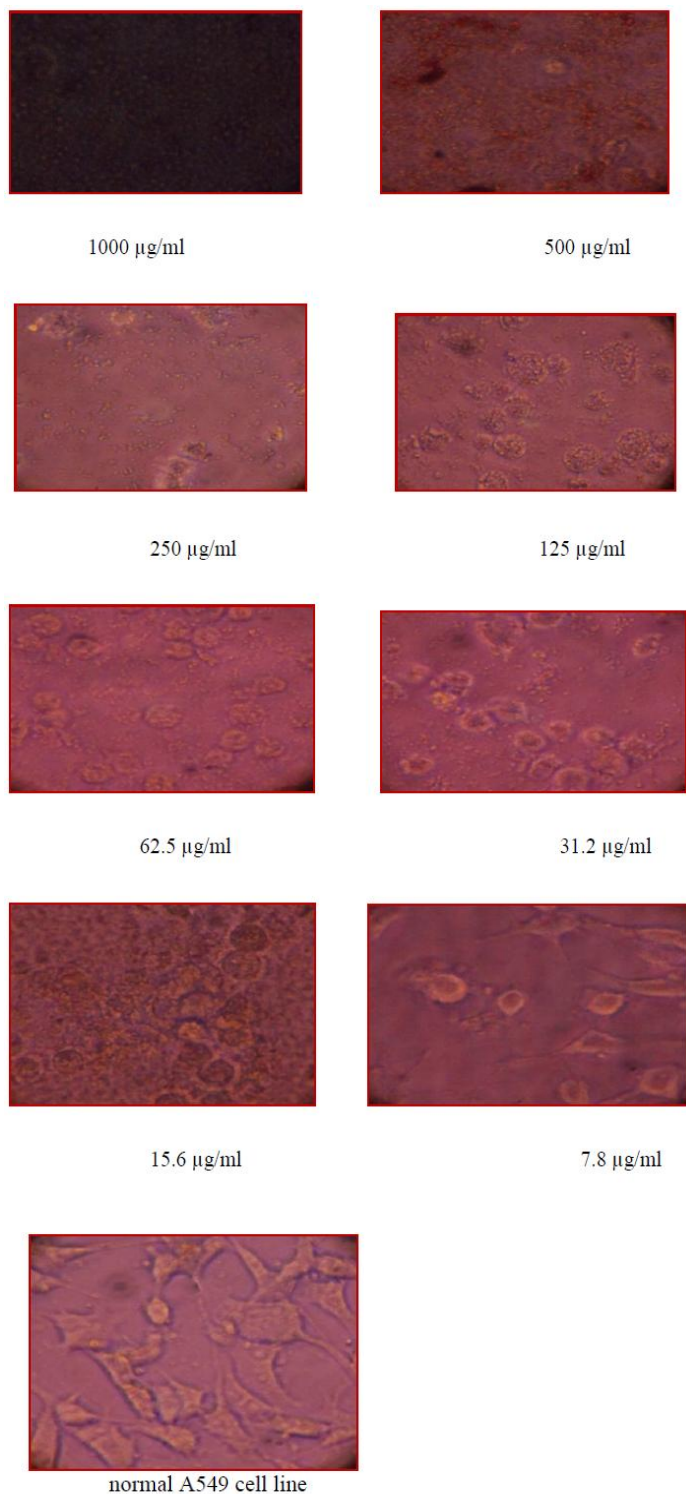


Figure: 10. Anticancer activity of AgNPs at different doses on A549 lung cancer cells

The current study exhibited that stingless bee propolis mediated silver nano particles were able to destroy 50 % of the infected cancerous cells with a minimal dosage of 38µg/ml. So it can be considered a potential nano drug for the treatment of human lung carcinoma.

CONCLUSION

This is the first study, which reports the synthesis of silver nano particles using the stingless bee propolis (*Tetragonula iridipennis*) sample reared from the pudukottai region of Tamilnadu. This bio-reduction process was intensified with ultrasonication. The silver nano particles so prepared were well characterized and was found to be effective against A549 human lung cancer cell lines. IC 50 value is 38µg/ml. This synthesis is not only eco-friendly but also has several advantages like low cost, use of sustainable resource, compatibility for biomedical applications.

The reported method has combined the advantages of Sono chemistry, Green Chemistry and Nano Chemistry, which is an interdisciplinary research approach for the benefit of mankind.

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