

Artemesiaannua L. Silver Nanoparticles Exhibit Anticancer Activity by ROS mediated apoptosis in MDA-MB-231 Cells

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Abstract

Aim of this study was to investigate the growth inhibitory effect of *Artemesiaannua* L. silver nanoparticles (A.annuaAgNPS) on human triple negative breast cancer tumor cell line MDA-MB-231. Cells were cultured and treated with A.annua water extract and A.annuaAgNPS to determine the half inhibitory concentration (IC₅₀). Oxidative stress was determined using lipid peroxidation (LPO), ROS generation and by determining the levels of antioxidants, superoxide dismutase (SOD) and reduced glutathione (GSH). Further, the mechanism of apoptotic induction was assessed by DNA fragmentation analyses. We observed that A.annuaAgNPS significantly caused growth inhibition by increasing levels of LPO and ROS, in a dose dependent manner with reduced level of endogenous antioxidant enzymes. Increased shear in genomic DNA from MDA MB231 cells treated with A.annuaAgNPS shows apoptosis to be the cause of cell cell death. We conclude that A.annuaAgNPS can be used as a therapeutic agent against breast cancer.

Keywords: *Artemesiaannua*· Silver nanoparticle· Breast cancer· Apoptosis

Introduction

Breast cancer is the leading cause of death among women globally with 1 million new cases every year with an estimated prediction of 14 million new cases by 2035. Breast cancer mortality rate is gradually increasing due to conditions like poor prognosis, lack of effective treatment options and increasing drug resistance [1, 2]. Recently, breast cancer reports are increasing rapidly at an alarming rate, preceding the cervical cancer in India [3]. Breast cancer is classified into 3 major subtypes based on the molecular markers for estrogen or progesterone receptors and human epidermal growth factor 2 (HER2): hormone receptor positive (HER2) negative (70%), HER2 positive (15%-20%), and triple-negative (tumors lacking all 3 standard molecular markers; 15%). Notably, triple-negative breast cancer recur more frequently than the other 2 subtypes, and it denotes that it warrants greater

attention towards identifying therapeutic regimens that can inhibit and as well prevent its recurrence.

In recent years, role of metal nanoparticles in delivering and targeting agents that are beneficial at pharmaceutical, therapeutic and diagnostic levels are gaining much importance [4]. Particularly, in disease like cancer where lack of target specificity for anticancer agents remains a greater challenge. Use of silver nanoparticle mediated drug delivery exhibit significant clinical benefits [5]. Biogenic (green chemistry) synthesis of silver nanoparticles (NPs) using plant extract were reported to exhibit useful clinical benefits than other forms of synthetic AGNPs [6]

Artemisia annua L. (commonly known as sweet wormwood, qinghao) is native to China for about 2000 years. It was popular for its unique potential as a natural antimalarial agent, as an anti-oxidant, with anti-inflammatory and anti-microbial effects [7]. The present study focused on investigating the *in vitro* cytotoxicity of biogenic AgNPs using A.annua using MDA-MB-231 cell line. Our results demonstrated that A.annuaAgNPs exhibit significant cytotoxicity, which can be attributed

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to its ability to induce oxidative stress, mitochondrial dysfunction and apoptotic induction. We believe that investigation of nanoparticle research for treatment of cancer therapy will bring more significant clinical outcomes in near future.

Materials and Methods

Chemicals and their sources:

Trypsin, Bovine serum albumin (BSA), Dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO) 3-[4, 5-Dimethyl-2-thiazolyl]-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide (MTT) were purchased from Sigma (St. Louis, MO, USA). RPMI 1640 medium, fetal bovine serum (FBS) and antibiotics were purchased from Gibco (Carlsbad, CA, USA). FBS was stored at -20°C and then freshly prepared aliquots were used for cell culture complete medium. All the other chemicals used were of cell culture grade unless otherwise stated.

Cell line and culture:

Triple negative human breast cancer cell line MDA-MB-231 was purchased from National centre for cell science (NCCS), Pune. Cells were maintained in Dulbecco's modified Eagle's medium (DMEM) supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS) and 1% antibiotic-Penicillin streptomycin solution. Cells were maintained at a controlled condition of 5% CO_2 , and 95% humidity. Experiments were performed in 6-well plates and 96 well plates unless stated otherwise. Cells were seeded at a density of 1×10^6 and 1×10^4 cells per well and incubated for 24 h prior to the experiments. The cells were washed with ice cold-phosphate buffered saline, (pH 7.4) for immediate use in experiments and for storage of cell pellets.

Cytotoxicity assay:

Effect of A.annuaAgNPs (dose dependent) on cell viability was measured using the 3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide dye reduction. Briefly, MDA-MB-231 cells (1×10^4 cells) were plated onto 96-well flat bottom culture plates and treated with various concentrations A.annuaAgNPs. For 24 h. After 24 h of incubation, 10 μL of MTT (5mg/mL in PBS) was added to each well, and then incubated for 2 h at 37°C in dark. During the course of incubation, the appearance of purple precipitate in the wells was monitored using inverted microscope and then the growth medium was removed from each well including blank. Then 100 μL of DMSO per well was added to

dissolve the formazan, including the blank and then mixed to obtain homogenous solution via gentle shaking at 37°C in a plate reader, and absorbance was measured using ELISA reader at 595 nm. Finally IC₅₀ value of A.annuaAgNPs was calculated and used for further experiments. Results were expressed as mean of three independent experiments.

Intracellular ROS analysis:

Briefly, MDA-MB-231 cells were treated with A.annuaAgNPs for 12 h. The net intracellular ROS measurement was carried out based on the intracellular peroxide-dependent oxidation of 2',7'-dichlorodihydrofluorescein diacetate (DCFH-DA; Molecular Probes, Eugene, USA) into a highly fluorescent product 2',7'-dichlorofluorescein (DCF), as reported previously. MDA-MB-231 cells were seeded into 35 mm dish at a density of 1×10^5 cells/ml and incubated overnight. Following 12 h treatment with A.annuaAgNPs the cells were incubated with DCFH-DA (10 μM) for 1 h. Along with the experimental cells, freshly prepared hydrogen peroxide (H_2O_2 , 0.1 mM in PBS) was used as a positive control. Then the excess DCFH-DA, from the dishes were removed and washed with PBS (twice) and suspended in 500 μL PBS. Finally the amount of ROS was estimated from fluorescence intensity of DCF production using a spectrofluorometer (excitation at 485 and emission at 530 nm).

Measurement of Lipid peroxidation Products:

Briefly, 2×10^4 cells/well were seeded in a 96-well plate (black walled) and incubated at 37°C in CO_2 incubator. MDA-MB-231 cells were treated with and without A.annuaAgNPs for 24 h and harvested by centrifugation. Extent of lipid peroxidation was assessed in control and A.annuaAgNPs treated cell lysate by measuring malondialdehyde (MDA) levels by colorimetric assay, according to the method described previously^[8]. Reaction of two molecules of thiobarbituric acid reactive substances (TBARS) with one molecule of MDA which yields pink color from the final soluble contains the substances. Absorption of the samples was read at 532 nm using a UV-vis spectrophotometer. Amount of MDA for each treatment was normalized by protein concentration and expressed as nmol TBARS per mg of protein lysate.

Measurement of antioxidant markers:

The levels of antioxidant markers SOD and GSH

were analyzed in MDA-MB-231 cells treated with and without A.annuaAgNPs (dose dependently) for 12 h. Superoxide dismutase (SOD) was analyzed by kinetic absorption method prescribed previously by Aebi and Misra, [9]. SOD was expressed as units/min/mg of protein. Glutathione (GSH) was measured by previously reported method [10] and the results were expressed in terms of μg of GSH/mg of protein.

DNA fragmentation analysis:

Cells were treated with A.annuaAgNPs for 24 h in sterile tissue culture dishes and DNA fragmentation analysis was based on the method of Kasibhatla et al. (2006)[11]. Briefly, 10^6 cells/ml after treatment with AgNPs and were harvested and transferred to sterile eppendorf tubes and lysed with 20 μl Tris, EDTA-SDS lysis buffer by constant pipetting using a pipette tip. Lysates were mixed with RNase A and RNase T1 (10 μl), incubated at 37°C for 60 min. After incubation, the lysate is treated with proteinase K (10 μl) at 50°C for 90 min. Finally, about 5 μl of 6X DNA loading buffer was added to each sample and electrophoretically separated on 1.5% agarose gel (with ETBR) in TAE buffer (100 V at RT, for 20 minutes). Then the DNA laddering pattern in treated and untreated cells were visualized by a UV light transilluminator and documented.

Statistical analysis:

Experiments were performed in triplicates (n=3). The mean \pm standard deviation (SD) was determined for each group. One way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) and Tukeys \square test were used for statistical analysis. Statistical value of $p < 0.05$ was used for considering statistical difference between groups.

Results and Discussion

Anti-cancer drugs approved by food and drug administration (FDA) has been continuously escalating ever year, however there exists lack of complete cure, coupled with adverse effects of existing anti-cancer drugs [12, 13]. Need for better therapeutics with potential anti-tumor efficacy that can reduce the unprecedented challenge in healthcare against cancer are on the rise. Natural agents like plant metabolites and its derivatives have been used traditionally for various ailments; however they were not optimized in suitable formats that might enhance their efficacy [14]. Recently plant derived therapeutic agents via green amalgamation with metal nanoparticles were reported to show promising effects

in mitigating cancer progression and its recurrence [15, 16]. However, very limited studies have been carried out in this aspect and hence we aimed to investigate the anticancer effect of AgNPs biosynthesized using A.annua plant extract.

A.annuaAgNPs induce cytotoxicity

Biogenic A.annuaAgNPs induced cytotoxicity on MDA-MB-231 cells was found to be dose dependent. Change in percentage of cell viability in MDA-MB-231 cells was observed at A.annuaAgNPs concentration range (2.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$, 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$, 12.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$, 25 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$, and 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$) after 24h of treatment. A.annuaAgNPs exerted complete mortality at 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ concentration, while 50 % reduction was observed at 12.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ (IC_{50}) compared to A.annua plant extract and untreated cells (Fig 1A). However, there was no significant difference in cell viability at similar concentrations after 24 h. Hence, 12.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$ was used for further experiments. Moreover, the tested concentration range mentioned above did not show any toxicity to normal vero cell lines (supp Fig 1). Thus the exhibited effect is highly specific to cancer cells.

A.annua induces oxidative stress in cancer cells

To investigate the effect of A.annuaAgNPs in oxidative stress, ROS levels were measured using H2DCF-DA assay. Fig 2A shows that ROS generation was significantly elevated in cells treated with A.annuaAgNPs (12.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ml}$) than the control cells or A.annua extract treated cells. However, upon pretreatment with an antioxidant N-acetyl cysteine (NAC), ROS generation in A.annuaAgNPs and H_2O_2 treated cells was markedly reduced. Fig 2B shows that formation of TBARS was significantly increased in cells treated with A.annuaAgNPs, compared to control and A.annua extract treated cells. Together, our results showed that loss of cell viability upon treatment with A.annuaAgNPs is mediated via ROS generation, thereby altering the intracellular redox status which might lead to cell death via apoptosis.

Altered homeostasis in the balance between oxidants to antioxidants favors oxidative niche which leads to increased redox state of cells. Hence, to determine the status of antioxidants during A.annuaAgNPs treatment, we analysed the levels of major endogenous antioxidants GSH and SOD. A.annuaAgNPs treatment to MDA-MB-231 cells caused significant dose dependent reduction in the levels of GSH and SOD compared to

control and *A.annua* extract treated cells (Fig 3).

Excessive ROS with augmented antioxidant defense can result in oxidation of cellular macromolecules including DNA resulting in apoptotic cell death [17]. Hence, ROS generation by AgNPs was considered crucial phenomenon in its anticancer potential. In our study elevated ROS levels in MDA-MB 231 cells treated with *A.annua*AgNPs for 12 h denotes early induction of oxidative stress, while pretreatment with NAC reduced ROS generation and this denotes that there exists a lack of antioxidant defense in MDA-MB-231 cells during AgNPs exposure favouring oxidative niche. In addition ROS mediated oxidative stress is also substantiated by increased levels of lipid peroxidation product MDA, reduced levels of endogenous antioxidants GSH and SOD as observed in our studies. Together, our results demonstrate that *A.annua*AgNPs mediated cytotoxicity is a ROS dependent manner and altered endogenous redox status leading to cell death.

*A.annua*AgNPs fragments DNA

DNA fragmentation is considered as the hall mark of apoptotic cell death, and the anti-cancer ability of

therapeutic agents were tested by its ability to induce DNA fragmentation. Hence, we analysed the status of DNA fragmentation in MDA-MB-231 cells treated with *A.annua*AgNPs. Fig 4 shows that *A.annua*AgNPs induced significant DNA fragmentation as observed from increase in shear in lane 3 and also in DOX treated cells (lane 4) compared to control (lane 1), and *A.annua* extract (lane 2) treated cells. Together our results prove that *A.annua* induces apoptotic cell death in MDA-MB 231 cells. With promising results these can be tested on other tumor models and can be considered as a therapeutic agent against breast cancers.

In conclusion, we synthesized green AgNPs using *A.annua* extract and tested its cytotoxic potential against the breast cancer cell line MDA-MB-231. We found that the anticancer effect is mediated through oxidative stress with increased ROS production and declined antioxidant activity. Additionally apoptotic induction was mediated through DNA fragmentation. However, the ability of *A.annua*AgNPs in orchestrating cellular signal cascades that is responsible for its anti-cancer effects must be validated using various cancer cell lines. Such mechanistic studies will help uncover many other potential applications of AgNPs for clinical use.

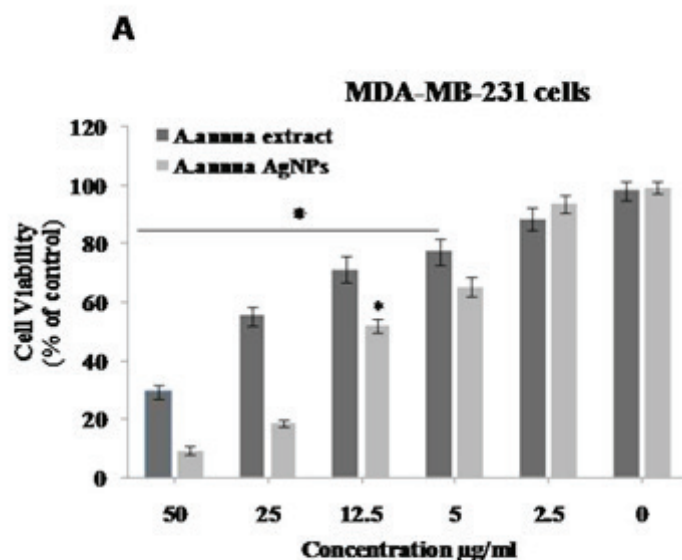


Fig 1: Shows cytotoxicity of *A.annua*AgNPS.

Figure 2

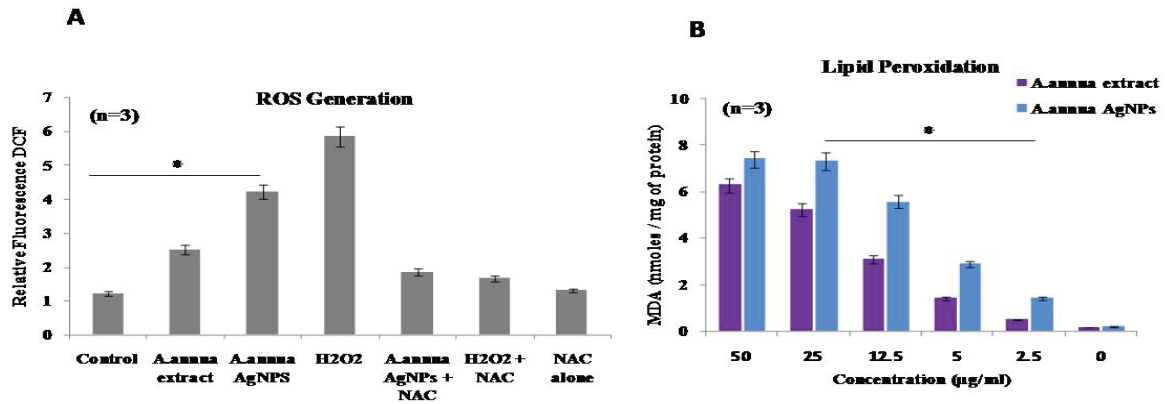


Fig 2: Shows effect of A.annuaAgNPS on oxidative stress.

Figure 3

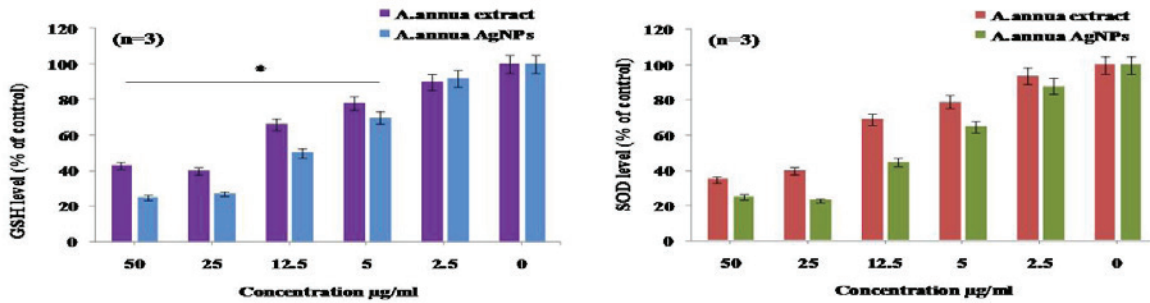


Fig 3: Shows the effect of A.annuaAgNPS on endogenous antioxidants in MDA-MB 231 cells.

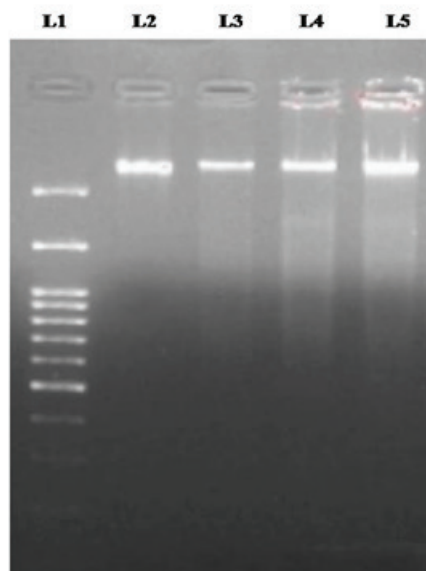
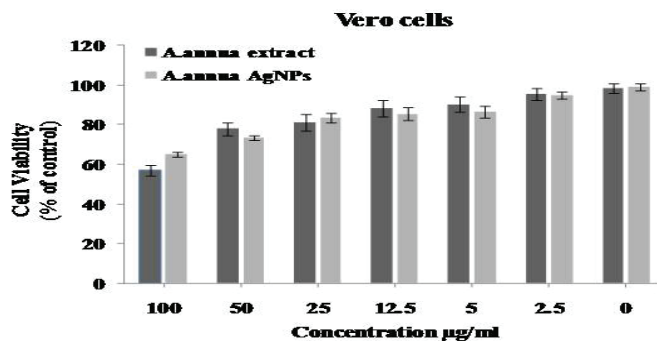


Fig 4: Shows effect of *A.annua*AgNPS on DNA fragmentation in MDA-MB 231 cells.

Supplementary Fig 1



Supplementary Fig 1: Shows cytotoxicity of *A.annua*AgNPS.

Ethical Clearance – Institutional Ethics Committee, Sree Balaji Dental College and Hospital, Committee registered with DCGI. (Registration no: ECR/761/Inst/TN/2015)

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Conflict of Interest – Nil

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