

Virtual antivenom prediction of tamarind compounds as inhibitor against King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) phospholipase A₂

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Abstract

Ophiophagus hannah has significant medical important among snakebite cases. The enzyme Phospholipase A₂ (PLA₂) is crucial for venom impacts in life-threatening symptoms. However, specific antivenom against this species remains underexplored. This study aimed to analyze the potential of secondary metabolites from tamarind as PLA₂ protein inhibitor specifically from *Ophiophagus hannah* venom using in-silico approaches. The sequences and three-dimensional structure of the PLA₂ protein from *O. hannah* were physicochemically predicted using ProtParam. Virtual screening, drug-likeness, pharmacokinetic, and toxicity profiles of metabolite compound from Tamarind was performed using SwissADME. All ligands were downloaded from PubChem database. Molecular docking was carried out using PyRx and visualized using Discovery Studio 2016 software. All tamarind's compounds are safe for long term administration because they displayed minimum risk for hepatotoxicity and AMES. The best interaction of secondary metabolites with PLA₂ is owned by quercetin. Future in-vitro and in-vivo studies are needed to evaluate the use of secondary metabolite compounds as specific alternatives of antivenoms.

Keywords: king cobra, molecular docking, PLA₂, secondary metabolite, tamarind

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Introduction

Snakebite is a neglected tropical disease according to the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2009. Snakebite cases are increasing rapidly in Indonesia. This is in accordance with the tropical climate in Indonesia (Gutierrez et al., 2013). Reported snakebite cases increased by 54% from 2017-2019. However, this number does not represent authentic data as many snakebite cases go unreported from community health centers and other small regional hospitals (Adiwinata & Nelwan, 2015). Despite the increasing number of snakebite cases, there is still a lack of attention from the pharmaceutical industry, government, and concern for public health. Snakebite cases are still not included in global health priority programs (William et al., 2019).

Out of all the snakes, the most venomous species is the King Cobra (*Ophiophagus hannah*) of the Elapidae family. The distribution of *O. hannah* in Indonesia covers three islands namely Java, Sumatra and Kalimantan. This species is classified in the first category of medical importance. This indicates that this venomous snake is widespread and causes high morbidity, disability or mortality (Tan et al., 2019; IUCN, 2012). Based on the snake venom category, *O. hannah* venom proteins are enriched in enzymes including phospholipase A₂ (PLA₂). This enzyme is the most abundant enzyme found in the venom of *Ophiophagus hannah* from Indonesia and Malaysia (Danpaiboon et al., 2014). PLA₂ acts on presynaptic and postsynaptic neurons causing neurotoxicity and muscle weakness. The

protease effect of PLA₂ can damage local tissues, accompanied by hemorrhage, necrosis, and risk of edema. The PLA₂ enzyme in snake venom can induce local myonecrosis and systemic myotoxicity. Severe neurotoxic paralysis and cases of death have been reported in *Ophiophagus hannah* snake venom bites (Gutierrez & Rucavado, 2000). Previous reports showed that inhibition of *Crotalus durissus terrificus* PLA₂ by quercetin reduced myotoxic effects and platelet aggregation by about 40% and 55% (Cotrim et al., 2011). PLA₂ inhibitor drugs such as varespladib are used as first-line treatment of choice to increase the survival time of snakebite victims as shown in an in vivo study, *Vipera berus* pecked mice treated with varespladib could survive for 24 hours after injection of a lethal dose of *V. Berus* (Sales et al., 2017).

Antivenom is proposed as an effective treatment for snake bites. The development of antivenom is unique compared to other drugs as it is restricted based on the species and geographical distribution of the snake, which venom is used as an immunogen in the production of antivenom (Tan et al., 2016). Currently, there is only one type of polyvalent antivenom for the Java Cobra (*Naja sputatrix*), Welang Snake (*Bungarus fasciatus*), and Malayan Pit Viper (*Calloselasma rhodostoma*) commercially produced in Indonesia. This raises the limitation of the current polyvalent antivenom which may not be effective against other species (Gomez-Betancur et al., 2019). Multiple side effects of anti-snake venom serum, such as increased blood pressure, rash, and body pain should be considered (Liagat et al., 2022).

Medicinal plants are growing along with the trend of research based on their potential as cures for diseases. Lower costs and fewer side effects are becoming superior to existing synthetic drugs (Liagat et al., 2022). Plant extracts rich in pharmacologically active

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compounds that can interact with venom will have the potential to inhibit venom activation (Ushanandini et al., 2006). Herbal antivenoms can be prepared by making ethanolic, methanolic, or aqueous extracts of herbal plants. Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica* L.) is a versatile tree that almost every part of it has some advantages. Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and potential antivenom activities have been explored from several parts of this plant in previous studies (Caluwe et al., 2010). Tamarind has several secondary metabolites that are classified into phenolic compounds, flavonoids, benzophenones, gallates, and galotanins. The compound content in tamarind seeds includes more than 50 phytochemicals that have different benefits. Compounds that are quite widely used in research are quercetin, catechin, epicatechin, procyanidin B2, β -amyrin, and so on (Sudjaroen et al., 2005). Examples of biochemical activity of β -amyrin compounds are able to be anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antidiabetic to antivenom. Research related to antivenom from secondary metabolites has been conducted in vivo against PLA₂ from *Daboia rusellii*. The results obtained showed a bond with amino acid residues (Kumar et al., 2015).

New drug discovery strategies are now being developed through Computer Aided Drug Design (CADD) systems that utilize computational resources, algorithms, and 3D visualization to assist in the early stages of drug discovery, namely target identification and target selection. Drug discovery is the process of identifying a compound that has potential therapeutic properties in the treatment of disease (Sliwoski et al., 2013). The early stages of drug discovery involve identification of candidate compounds, synthesis of the compound, characterization of pharmacokinetic and pharmacological properties, validation of the mechanism of action, optimization of the chemical structure of the compound, and various screening and testing related to the efficacy of the candidate drug compound (Deore et al., 2019). Subsequently, candidate compounds that show potential as new drug candidates will be further explored in preclinical and clinical studies (Deore et al., 2019; Sivaramakrishnan et al., 2016).

Based on the description above, PLA₂ inhibitor candidates using secondary metabolites are important to do as an initial step in drug development with a bioinformatics approach. While the therapeutic potential of tamarind metabolites and the toxic effects of King Cobra venom PLA₂ are well-documented individually, their interaction remains relatively unexplored. Understanding the interplay between tamarind secondary metabolites and PLA₂ King Cobra protein could unveil novel therapeutic strategies or aid in mitigating venom-induced toxicity.

Methods

Receptor preparation

The 3D protein structure of PLA₂ from *Ophiophagus hannah* was downloaded in PDB format from the Protein Data Bank database (www.rcsb.org) with PDB ID: 1GP7 containing Ca²⁺ as native ligand. The preparation was performed using Discovery Studio 2016 to remove water

molecules and ligands.

Prediction of receptor physicochemical properties

PLA₂ sequences were submitted to the ProtParam tool on the ExpASy web server (<https://web.expasy.org/protparam/>) to predict several parameters, including molecular weight, isoelectric point, hydrophilicity, stability, and half-life.

Ligand preparation of tamarind secondary metabolites

Virtual screening was performed on compounds contained in tamarind (*T. indica* L.) using SwissADME (<http://www.swissadme.ch/>) to predict ADME characteristics and identify compounds with potential as snake venom inhibitors based on drug similarity properties. The aim of this analysis is to estimate the pharmacokinetic profile associated with new drug candidates (Bitencourt-Ferreira et al., 2019; Patil et al., 2010). The 3D structures of the selected secondary metabolite compounds consisted of apigenin (CID: 5280443), β -amyrin (CID: 73145), catechin (CID: 9064), epicatechin (CID: 72276), eriodictyol (CID: 440735), luteolin (CID: 5280445), naringenin (CID: 932), orientin (CID: 5281675), procyanidin B2 (CID: 122738), and quercetin (CID: 5280343) in sdf format. The compounds were obtained from the PubChem database (<https://pubchem.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>) as a control, 3bI (CID: 135457934), belongs to the δ 2-isoxazolines derivatives. This compound has been tested in vitro as a PLA₂ inhibitor in the snake genus *Daboia* (Sivaramakrishnan et al., 2016).²³ Three amino acid residues (His48, Tyr73, and Asp99) are conserved in terms of their structure among snake venom phospholipases A₂ (svPLA₂s) (Holland et al., 1990), including *Daboia* (Kholilah et al., 2021) and *O. hannah* (Kini, 2003; Zhang et al., 2002). δ 2-isoxazoline derivatives are ideal hydrophobic active site binders for enzymes with butyl substituents. From in vivo studies, only 3bI and 3bIV had strong inhibitory effects against SvPLA₂. 3bI showed the most excellent binding properties compared to other simulated derivatives as well as experimental results (Sivaramakrishnan et al., 2016; Kholilah et al., 2021). Then, all compound structures were energy minimized using PyRx 0.8 software.

Docking and visualization

Docking simulations were performed on the prepared PLA₂ receptors (without native ligands) with 10 tamarind (*T. indica* L.) secondary metabolites and controls using PyRx 0.8 software. Docking simulations were performed with a grid of X: 35.0012 Å, Y: 49.5501 Å, and Z: 44.4462 Å equipped with 3bI and applied to other ligands both with and without the presence of Ca²⁺ because the reaction of PLA₂ is Ca²⁺ dependent (Sivaramakrishnan et al., 2016). All ligands were paired with PLA₂ protein in turn and their binding affinity was observed (Holland et al., 1990). The docking results were visualized using Discovery Studio 2016 software to observe the type of binding and ligand-receptor

interaction. Analysis was done by observing the significance of the energy changes that occurred.

Results

Physicochemical properties PLA₂

The PLA₂ protein sequence is composed of 124 amino acids with H (His) as the N-terminal point. Based on ProtParam analysis, the predicted physicochemical characteristics of PLA₂ show a low molecular weight (13733.42 Da), an isoelectric point (pI) of 5.40, and hydrophilic properties due to low Grand Average of Hydropathicity (GRAVY) values (Table 1).

Table 1. Physicochemical properties of PLA₂ based on ProtParam analysis

Parameter	Skor
Amino acid	124
Molecular weight	13733.42
Isoelectric point	5.40
Positively charged residue	12
Negatively charged residue	9
Formula	C ₅₈₇ H ₈₈₆ N ₁₆₂ O ₁₈₈ S ₁₆
Number of atom	1839
Extinction coefficient	19785
	18910
Half life	3.5 hours (mammalian reticulocyte, in vitro)
	10 minutes (ragi, in vivo)
	> 10 hours (<i>E. coli</i> , in vivo)
Instability index	30.54
Aliphatic index	57.50
GRAVY	-0.256

Table 2. Interaction of PLA₂ with secondary metabolites of tamarind and 3bI

Receptor	Compound (ligand)	Binding affinity (PLA ₂) (kcal/mol)	Binding affinity (PLA ₂ + Ca ²⁺) (kcal/mol)	Hydrogen bond (Å)	Hydrophobic bond (Å)	
PLA ₂ (PDB ID: 1GP7)	Ca ²⁺ (Cofactor)	-7,3				
	3bI (control)	-6,6	-6,7	His48 3.148 Gly30 2.814	Trp19 3.778 Leu2 5.234 Ala23 4.012 Phe5 4.913 Leu2 3.902 Leu2 5.163 Ala23 4.649	
	Apigenin	-8,1	-8,1		Ala31 2.536 Tyr22 2.522	Lys71 5.136 Ile64 5.321 Trp19 4.231 Phe5 5.003 Leu2 5.102
	β-amyrin	-6,9	-7,9		Leu2 1.748 Tyr28 2.152 Gly30 2.473	Trp19 5.387 His48 4.722 Cys45 4.735 Leu2 4.134
	Catechin	-8	-8		Asp49 2.924 Gly30 3.029	Trp19 5.479 His48 4.674 Cys45 4.804 Leu2 4.002
	Epicatechin	-8,2	-8,2		Gly30 2.962	Tyr69 5.394 Phe5 4.877 Leu2 5.189 Ala23 4.611
	Eriodictyol	-8,3	-8,3		Leu2 2.994 Gly30 2.898	Trp19 5.500 His48 4.712 Cys45 4.849 Leu2 3.979
	Luteolin	-8,1	-8,4		Asp89 2.386 Thr12 2.469 Gly26 2.535 Cys29 1.661 Ser34 3.046 Ser62 2.827 Ala60 3.410 Thr12 3.512	Thr120 3.492 Ile64 3.696
	Naringenin	-8,1	-8,1		Asp49 2.516 Gly30 3.278	Asp24 3.916 Trp19 5.052 Ala23 4.678 Asp24 4.678
	Orientin	-8,6	-8,3		Leu2 2.332 Tyr22 2.852 Tyr28 1.995 Gly30 3.276 Ala23 3.256	Leu2 4.962 Ala23 4.507 Cys29 5.258 Cys45 4.999 Ala23 4.861 Trp19 5.447 Phe5 5.955
	Procyanidin B2	-8,4	-8,6			His48 5.529 Leu2 4.181

Docking analysis

Tamarind secondary metabolites formed different types of bonds with PLA₂ receptors such as hydrogen, electrostatic, hydrophobic, and unfavorable donor-donor bonds. Each bond had its own conformational complex characteristics. Table 2 showed the binding affinity of the control ligand (3bI) with PLA₂ protein was -6.6 and -6.7 kcal/mol with and without Ca²⁺. The more negative binding affinities indicated the stability of the 3bI-PLA₂ interaction either with or without Ca²⁺ as a cofactor. Similar interactions were formed for several tamarind metabolite compounds namely β-amyrin, luteolin, procyanidin B2, and quercetin. The interaction between β-amyrin as ligand showed the highest binding affinity change from -6.9 kcal/mol to -7.9 kcal/mol in the

presence of Ca²⁺. Stable binding affinities were shown by the compounds apigenin, catechin, epicatechin, eriodictyol, and naringenin, which were -8.1; -8; -8.2; -8.3; and -8.1 kcal/mol. In contrast, the presence of Ca²⁺ increased the positivity of the binding affinity which was assumed to be a reduction in conformational stability.

3bI as a control (δ²-isoxazolines derivative) formed a hydrophobic interaction at Gly53 residue responsible for the anti-coagulant response. This compound bound to the active site of PLA₂ receptor at Asp49 residue. Interaction with His48 through hydrophobic bonding was exhibited by the metabolites epicatechin, eriodictyol, naringenin, and quercetin. Meanwhile, the interaction with Asp49 through hydrogen bonding was shown by the metabolites eriodictyol and procyanidin B2 (Figure 1).

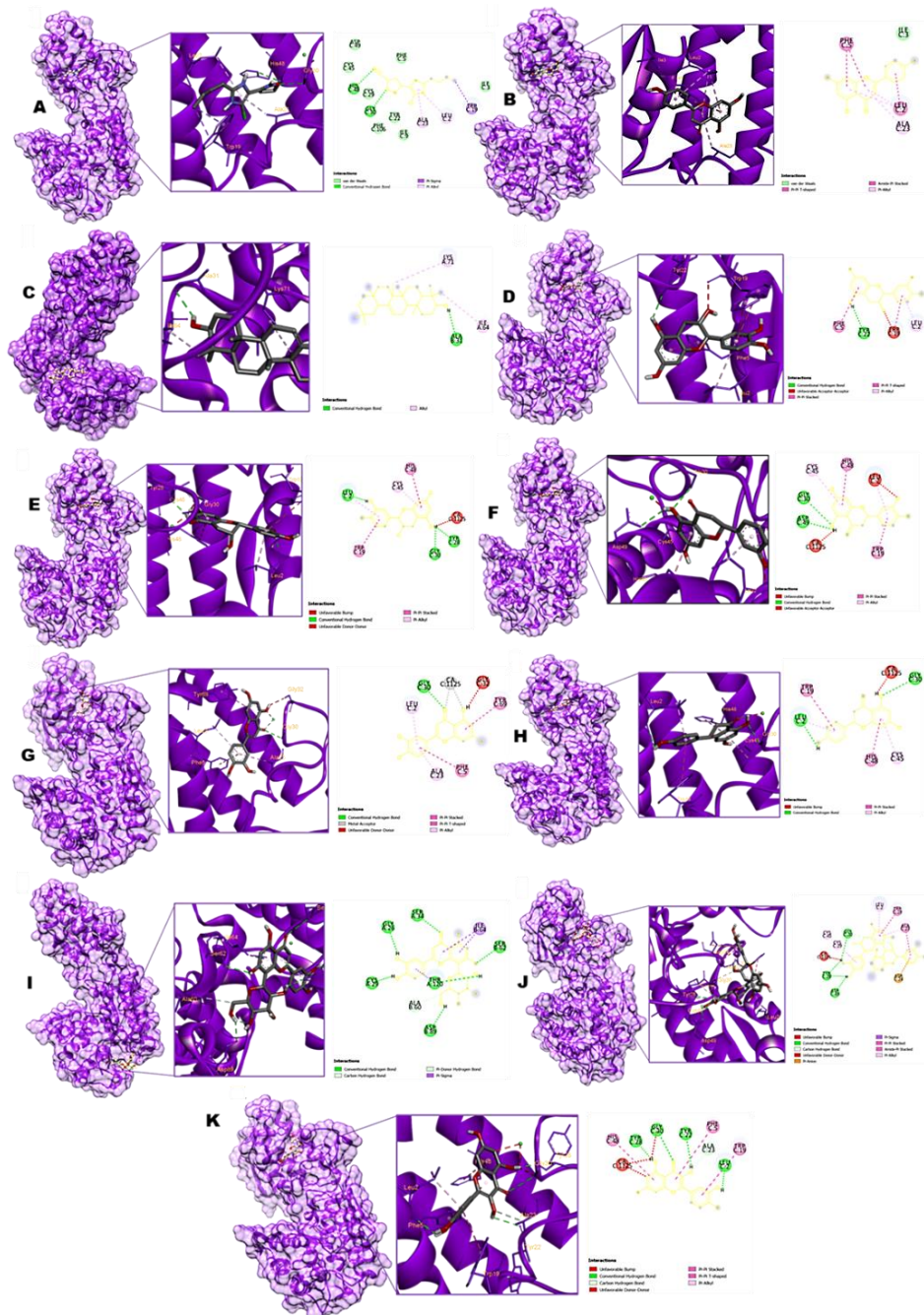


Figure 1. Docking of PLA₂ with secondary metabolites and control. Description: (A) 3bI (control); (B) Apigenin; (C) β-amyrin; (D) Catechin; (E) Epicatechin; (F) Eriodictyol; (G) Luteolin; (H) Naringenin; (I) Orientin; (J) Procyanidin B2; (K) Quercetin

Pharmacokinetic and toxicological analysis of secondary metabolites

Lipinski's rule of five rules was fulfilled by eight secondary metabolites of tamarind except procyanidin B2 and orientin. Thus, these compounds had potential as drugs compared to 3bI as a control (Table 3). All metabolites had moderate to good solubility range in water, except β -amyrin. All candidates were well

absorbed in the gastrointestinal tract, except β -amyrin, orientin, and procyanidin B2. Distribution to the blood-brain barrier of all compounds was not available except 3bI. Based on toxicity tests, all secondary metabolites used were found not to be toxic except 3bI as a control. However, according to the hepatotoxicity test, all secondary metabolites including 3bI as a control were not categorized as hepatotoxic (Table 4).

Table 3. ADME and drug similarity profiles of tamarind (*T. indica* L.) secondary metabolites and 3bI

Compound	MW (g/mol)	Lipophilicity (Log P)	Water solubility	Absorption (GI Abs)	Distribution (Blood-Brain Barrier)	Metabolism	Bioavailability	Drug-likeness Lipinski's rule of 5 (violation)
Apigenin	270.24	2.58	Moderately soluble	High	No	• CYP1A2 inhibitor • CYP2D6 inhibitor • CYP3A4 inhibitor	0.55	Yes (0)
β -amyrin	426.73	8.17	Poorly soluble	Low	No	-	0.55	Yes (1)
Catechin	290.27	1.55	Soluble	High	No	-	0.55	Yes (0)
Epicatechin	290.27	1.55	Soluble	High	No	-	0.55	Yes (0)
Eriodictyol	288.25	2.22	Soluble	High	No	• CYP3A4 inhibitor	0.55	Yes (0)
Luteolin	286.24	2.28	Moderately soluble	High	No	• CYP1A2 inhibitor • CYP2D6 inhibitor • CYP3A4 inhibitor	0.55	Yes (0)
Naringenin	272.25	2.52	Soluble	High	No	• CYP1A2 inhibitor • CYP3A4 inhibitor	0.55	Yes (0)
Orientin	448.38	-0.53	Soluble	Low	No	-	0.17	No (2)
Procyanidin B2	578.53	2.35	Moderately soluble	Low	No	• CYP3A4 inhibitor • CYP1A2 inhibitor	0.17	No (3)
Quercetin	302.24	1.99	Soluble	High	No	• CYP2D6 inhibitor • CYP3A4 inhibitor • CYP1A2 inhibitor	0.55	Yes (0)
3bI	252.70	2.04	Soluble	High	Yes	• CYP1A2 inhibitor • CYP2C19 inhibitor	0.55	Yes (0)

Table 4. Toxicity profile of tamarind (*T. indica* L.) secondary metabolites and 3bI

Ligand	AMES toxicity	Maximum dosage (manusia) (log mg/kg/day)	Hepatotoxicity	Oral Rat Acute Toxicity (LD50) (mol/kg)	Oral Rat Chronic Toxicity (LOAEL) (log mg/kg_body weight/day)
Apigenin	No	0.328	No	2.45	2.298
β -amyrin	No	-0.56	No	2.478	0.873
Catechin	No	0.438	No	2.428	2.5
Epicatechin	No	0.438	No	2.428	2.5
Eriodictyol	No	0.014	No	2.03	2.475
Luteolin	No	0.499	No	2.455	2.409
Naringenin	No	-0.176	No	1.791	1.944
Orientin	No	0.567	No	2.572	4.386
Procyanidin B2	No	0.438	No	2.482	4.349
Quercetin	No	0.499	No	2.471	2.612
3bI	Yes	-0.105	No	3.021	0.843

Discussion

Physiochemical profile of phospholipase A₂

Phospholipase A₂ functions to catalyze fatty acids on membrane glycerophospholipids. The catalysis process can induce hemotoxicity, neurotoxicity, cytotoxicity, nephrotoxicity, hemorrhage, and edema. Previous studies found that neutralization of PLA₂ envenomation can be achieved by inhibiting PLA₂ activity. These days, a number of well-studied inhibitors for PLA₂ are derived from antibodies and plant compounds of both synthetic and natural origin (Sudjaroen et al., 2005; Kumar et al., 2015; Sliwoski et al., 2013).

Molecular docking

Ca²⁺ ions act as cofactors to catalyze the inflammatory reaction caused by PLA₂. The binding of PLA₂ with Ca²⁺ causes bleeding (hemorrhagic) conditions through the release of lysophospholipids and fatty acids (Mahmud et al., 2020; Sakthivel et al., 2013). Secondary metabolite interactions can also bind to the active sites His48 and Asp49, which stimulate

inflammatory reactions in *O. hannah* snake venom (Kholilah et al., 2021; Mahmud et al., 2020). The amino acids His48 and Asp49 play important roles in the enzymatic activity of sPLA₂. His48 is involved in the initial step of the enzymatic mechanism, while Asp49 is essential for binding the Ca²⁺ cofactor (Verheij et al., 1980). This indicates that some of the secondary metabolites of tamarind have the potential as enzymatic inhibitors that inhibit the enzymatic reaction resulting in chronic inflammation in snakebite victims. In addition, the development and administration of drugs targeting different venom families are mandatory to propose a comprehensive treatment to preserve the life of snakebite victims (Sales et al., 2017).

Based on the interaction on active site residues, binding affinity, and drug similarity, procyanidin B2 metabolite compounds are not recommended for the oral drug route. The best interaction of secondary metabolites with PLA₂ along with Ca²⁺ was shown by quercetin (Figure 2) in accordance with previous studies (Cotrim et al., 2011).

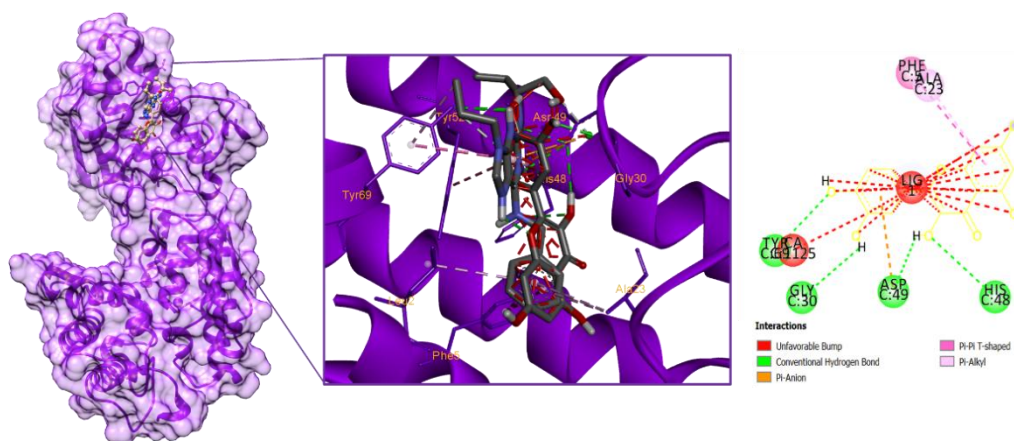


Figure 2. Docking PLA₂+Ca²⁺ with quercetin

Pharmacokinetic and toxicological analysis of secondary metabolites

According to Lipinski's rule of five, a drug compound should have a molecular mass <500 g/mol, hydrogen bond donor <5, octane-water partition coefficient (log P) <5, and hydrogen bond acceptor <10 (Lipinski et al., 2012). These characteristics indicate a chemical compound that acts as an orally active compound on the desired target (Doak et al., 2014).

Tamarind metabolite compounds were characterized in terms of lipophilicity pharmacokinetic profile, water solubility, and absorption rate in the gastrointestinal tract. The β-amyrin compound had the highest log P value and was therefore considered likely to diffuse across the lipid bilayer component, resulting in widespread distribution throughout the body. Conversely, negative log P values indicate a lower ability to diffuse across lipid bilayer membranes (Lipinski et al., 2012; Doak et al., 2014).

All metabolites have a moderate to good solubility range in water, except β-amyrin. All candidates are well absorbed in the gastrointestinal tract, except β-amyrin,

orientin, and procyanidin B2. Distribution to the blood brain barrier of all compounds was not available except 3bI. Several secondary metabolites of tamarind are suspected to act as inhibitors of cytochrome P450 enzymes, such as apigenin, eriodictyol, luteolin, naringenin, procyanidin B2, and quercetin - including 3bI as a control (Tsantili-Kakoulidou & Demopoulos, 2021). Inhibition of cytochrome P450 enzymes reduces drug metabolism in liver tissue thereby increasing the duration of metabolites in the body thereby increasing potential toxicity. Regarding the toxicity profile, all tamarind compounds are safe for long-term administration as they show minimum risk for hepatotoxicity and AMES. The AMES test indicates the potential of a compound to induce mutagenesis or be labeled as carcinogenic (Han et al., 2019). Drug-likeness assessment and pharmacokinetic evaluation will shed light on the feasibility of utilizing these compounds as potential therapeutics. Furthermore, toxicity prediction analyses will help in assessing the safety profiles of the

compounds for human consumption or therapeutic applications.

Conclusion

The secondary metabolites of tamarind used and 3b1 showed potential to be inhibitory drugs as they were less toxic and fulfilled Lipinski's rule of five, except procyanidin B2 and orientin. The best interaction of secondary metabolites with PLA₂ along with Ca²⁺ as cofactor is owned by quercetin. This study needs to be conducted further in-vivo and in-vitro to confirm the antivenom potential of tamarind secondary metabolites by inhibiting the PLA₂ enzymatic reaction.

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Disclosure of interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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