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# Antioxidant Effect of Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) Extract on Paraquat-Induced Oxidative Stress in Sheep Red Blood Cells Using *In-vitro* Phytochemical Analysis

**Donga Durga Veera Hanuman [a++], K V Venkata Rao [b#*], Gandham Nagarjuna [a†], Kamishetty Mounika [c‡], Bhaskar Debbarma [a++], Vemula Sravathi [a++], Vankudothu Venkatesh [a++], Pechetty Sravani [a†], Mullu Atchuta Rao [a†] and Amgoth Vamsi Kiran [a†]**

*[a] College of Veterinary Science, Rajendra Nagar, India.*
*[b] College of Veterinary Science, Garividi, India.*
*[c] College of Veterinary Science, Korutla, India.*

***Authors' contributions***

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author DDVH did data curation, performed methodology, wrote, reviewed and edited the manuscript. Author KVVR did data curation, designed and conceptualized the study and performed methodology. Authors GN, KM, BD managed the analysis of the study. Authors VS, VV, PS managed the literature searches and did the minor grammatical changes. Authors MAR and AVK did data curation and formal analysis. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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*[++] PhD scholar;*
*[#] Assistant Professor & Head;*
*[†] MVSc scholar;*
*[‡] CTF;*
**Corresponding author: E-mail: handy.hanu@gmail.com;*

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## ABSTRACT

**Aims:** Oxidative stress, which causes harm to cells, is a significant factor in many diseases. Red blood cells are easily damaged by free radicals. Lemongrass has powerful abilities to fight these free radicals' because it contains a lot of phytochemicals. The study examined how effective lemongrass is in protecting red blood cells from damage caused by Paraquat. Additionally, phytochemicals present in lemongrass are also analysed.

**Methodology:** The preparation of lemongrass leaf extract involved drying and grinding the leaves, followed by extraction with acetone using the Soxhlet method. Phytochemical analysis was done to reveal the presence of alkaloids, saponins, flavonoids, tannins, phenols, and acids. A 10% RBC suspension was prepared from sheep blood. Oxidative stress was induced in RBCs using Paraquat, Ascorbic acid, and the extract. Antioxidant analysis included protein concentration via the Lowry method, Thiobarbituric acid reactive substance (TBARS) estimation for lipid peroxidation, Glutathione (GSH) estimation, and Superoxide dismutase (SOD) activity assay. Statistical analysis was performed using GraphPad Prism, with significance set at $p<0.05$.

**Results:** The phytochemical analysis revealed the presence of flavonoids, terpenoids, saponin, and tannin in lemongrass, while no acids or alkaloids were detected in the plant. In Group II exposed to Paraquat toxicity, total protein decreased significantly compared to the control group (10.24±0.53 mg/dl to 6.3±0.49 mg/dl). TBARS activity notably increased in Paraquat-treated group (629.7±2.85) compared to control (398.8±3.51), while Lemongrass and ascorbic acid treatments showed significant decreases (513.05±4.54 and 504.01±1.97, respectively). SOD and GSH levels decreased significantly in Paraquat-treated group (6.08±0.4 and 80.86±4.9 µg/mg of protein) compared to control (11.13±1.1 and 109.81±8.6, respectively), but Lemongrass treatment increased levels (14.12±2.0 and 114.8±4.5 µg GSH/mg of protein). Lemongrass demonstrated pronounced protective effects against oxidative stress, normalizing SOD levels and increasing GSH levels, comparable to ascorbic acid treatment.

**Conclusion:** The study successfully induced oxidative stress in RBCs with Paraquat, presenting avenues for further exploration in understanding cellular responses. Additionally, the research highlights Lemongrass's significant preventive impact (100µg), possibly attributed to its bioactive phytochemicals, including flavonoids, phenols, saponins, and tannins. This underscores Lemongrass's potential in countering oxidative damage induced by Paraquat in RBCs.

*Keywords: Lemon grass; paraquat; oxidative stress; flavanoids; RBC; Ascorbic acid.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Oxidative stress arises as a physiological condition when there is an imbalance between the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and the body's ability to neutralize and eliminate these harmful molecules [1]. Reactive oxygen species consist of highly reactive oxygen-based molecules, including free radicals (molecules with unpaired electrons) and specific peroxides. They naturally occur as byproducts of various cellular processes, such as metabolism, immune responses, and energy production [2]. Though, ROS surpasses the antioxidant mechanisms, it can result in the commencement of oxidative stress. This condition holds the potential to cause damage to cellular components like proteins, lipids, and Deoxyribose nucleic acid (DNA), thus contributing to the development of various diseases [3].

Paraquat, an herbicide introduced in the 1960s, is effective at killing weeds in different plants. But it's mostly known for being harmful to animals and the environment because it can be toxic and cause oxidative stress [4]. Upon contact with cells or organisms, paraquat triggers the production of ROS, disrupting the balance between oxidative stress and protective antioxidant mechanisms. This harmful process, called redox cycling, becomes more severe as ROS disrupt cell functions, causing damage and

weakening protective systems [5]. Inside cells, paraquat undergoes chemical reactions called redox reactions, using enzymes like Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate (NADPH) and cytochrome P (CYPs) reductase. This creates superoxide radicals ($O_2^-$) through transferring electrons. These radicals can turn into hydrogen peroxide ($H_2O_2$), which makes escalating oxidative stress and damages cell structures [6]. ROS overproduction harms cellular components like lipids, proteins, and DNA, disrupting cell function and stability. Paraquat-induced oxidative stress affects mitochondria, essential for cellular energy production. This disturbance triggers further ROS generation, continuing oxidative stress. Oxidative stress activates cellular signalling pathways related to stress responses, inflammation and cell survival, influencing the cellular response to paraquat-induced stress [7].

Paraquat's highest toxicity is observed in the respiratory system, particularly targeting the lungs.Regardless of the exposure route, the lungs selectively accumulate paraquat, disrupting lung cellular structure and causing pulmonary fibrosis. This results in respiratory failure and symptoms like chest tightness and shortness of breath. Lung inflammation, swelling and pleural fluid accumulation contribute to fatal outcomes [8]. Paraquat quickly distributes throughout the body, primarily accumulating in the kidneys. This accumulation increases the risk of severe nephrotoxicity, leading to acute kidney injury, especially in the proximal tubules. Within 24 hours, paraquat induces degeneration and necrosis in mouse renal tubules [9]. In summary, paraquat disrupts the redox cycle, inhibits antioxidants and generates potent oxidants causing cellular damage. Its effect varies across target organs, notably affecting the lungs, brain, liver and kidneys, escalating oxidative stress and amplifying cellular harm [6].

Cymbopogon citratus, commonly referred to as lemon grass, is a tropical perennial herb belonging to the Poaceae family, which comprises true grasses. This aromatic tall grass has rhizomes and densely tufted fibrous roots [10]. It has been traditionally used in folk medicine to address issues like nervous and gastrointestinal disturbances, fever and hypertension. Lemon grass finds culinary use as a flavor enhancer in various dishes. Furthermore, its infusion as lemon grass tea offers a revitalizing beverage option. The plant is valued for its essential oil, primarily due to its constituents, citronellal and citral [11]. These compounds serve essential roles in detoxification and exhibit anticancer properties by stimulating glutathione-S-transferase (GST) activity [12]. The components α-citral (geranial) and β-citral (neral) demonstrate antibacterial effects, effectively inhibiting the growth of both Gram-positive and Gram-negative bacteria[13].Lemon grass has also been found to contain various phytochemicals, including flavonoids, alkaloids, volatile and non-volatile terpenoids, carotenoids and tannins [14].

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Leaf Extract Preparation

Lemongrass leaves were collected and dried in shade not exposing to direct sunlight. Afterward, the leaves were finely ground into powder and stored securely in an airtight container. For extraction, 10 grams of this powder was mixed with 100 ml of acetone, initiating a 48-hour extraction within a Soxhlet apparatus. The solution was then filtered using Whatman Filter Paper No. 1 and subjected for evaporation. The resultant extract, obtained after this procedure, was dissolved in Dimethyl Sulfoxide (DMSO) at a concentration of 100 mg/ml. (Fig. 1).

### 2.2 Phytochemicals Analysis

The quantitative phytochemical analysis of the lemon grass extract was conducted using the methods outlined by Claustra [15] and Harborne [16].

#### 2.2.1 Test for alkaloids

To conduct the Alkaloid Test, 2ml of HCl added to 2ml of the extract. Following this, a few drops of Mayer's reagent were carefully incorporated. The presence of alkaloids is indicated by the emergence of a greenish coloration.

**Table-1 Experimental Design**

| Group | Treatment |
|---|---|
| I | RBC control (no treatment) |
| II | RBC + Paraquat (50μM) |
| III | RBC + Paraquat (50μM) +Ascorbic acid (100μg) |
| IV | RBC + Paraquat (50μM) + Lemongrass (100μg) |

#### 2.2.2 Saponin test

To test for saponins, 2 ml of distilled water was mixed with 2 ml of the oil extract. The mixture was vigorously shaken for a duration of 15 minutes. The presence of saponins is indicated by the formation of foam.

#### 2.2.3 Flavonoid test

For the detection of flavonoids, 5 ml of diluted $NH_3$ solution was combined with 1 ml of the oil extract. Subsequently, concentrated sulphuric acid was added to the mixture. The presence of flavonoids is signalled by the appearance of a yellow coloration.

#### 2.2.4 Tannin test

A test for tannins involved adding 2 ml of 5% ferric chloride to 1 ml of the oil extract. The presence of tannins is indicated by the development of a greenish-black coloration.

#### 2.2.5 Phenol test

To determine the presence of phenols, 2 ml of distilled water along with a few drops of 10% ferric chloride were mixed with 1 ml of the oil extract. The presence of phenols is indicated by the appearance of a green coloration.

#### 2.2.6 Acid test

To examine for acids, 1 ml of oil extract was treated with a solution of sodium bicarbonate. The occurrence of effervescence indicates the presence of acids.

### 2.3 Preparation of 10% RBC Suspension

A volume of two millilitres of blood is obtained from the jugular vein of the deccani sheep and transferred into an EDTA vial. Following this, the collected blood is subjected to centrifugation at 1100 rpm for a duration of 12 minutes, at a temperature of 5°C. The resulting plasma is then carefully washed with Phospho buffered saline (PBS) and this washing process being repeated three to four times until a clear supernatant is achieved. To make a 10% RBC solution, mix 200 µl of RBC pellet with 1800 µl of cold PBS. Then store the mixture at -20°C to keep it usable for later. (Fig. 1).

### 2.4 Induction of Oxidative Stress

Distinct sets were created from the 10% RBC suspension and subjected to different concentrations of Paraquat (50µM), Ascorbic acid (100µg)and Lemon grass extract (100µg). The resulting mixtures were then incubated on an orbital shaker for 24 hours according to the experimental design.

### 2.5 Antioxidant Analysis

#### 2.5.1 Estimation of protein concentration

Protein concentration was determined employing the Lowry method. In this approach, proteins react with copper ions in an alkaline solution, generating a color complex. The color intensity is directly proportional to protein concentration. The absorbance of the complex was measured at around 750 nm using a spectrophotometer. The Lowry method is esteemed for its reliability and sensitivity in protein estimation [17].

#### 2.5.2 Estimation of Thiobarbituric Acid Reactive Substance (TBARS)

The assessment of lipid peroxidation in groups followed a previously documented method [18]. In summary, approximately 200 µl of RBC suspension was homogenized using 500 µl of PBS. Subsequently, the entire homogenate was combined with 100 µl of 8.1% SDS, 750 µl of 20% acetic acid, 750 µl of 0.8% TBA and 300 µl of ultrapure water. This mixture was then subjected to heating in a water bath at 95°C for 60 minutes, followed by cooling and subsequent centrifugation at 10,000 rpm for 10 minutes. The resulting supernatant was measured at 532 nm for quantification purposes.

#### 2.5.3 Estimation of glutathione (GSH)

The homogenate obtained from the previous step for the MDA assay was subjected to centrifugation at 6,000 rpm for 5 minutes. Following this, 50 µl of the sample was combined with 120 µl of Ellman's reagent and 100 µl of GSH buffer, as outlined [19]. The resulting mixture was then allowed to incubate in darkness for a duration of 10 minutes, after which the absorbance was measured at 412 nm.

#### 2.5.4 Estimation of superoxide dismutase (SOD)

The reaction entails the production of superoxide through pyrogallol autooxidation, coupled with the suppression of superoxide-dependent reduction of the tetrazolium dye MTT [3-(4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyl tetrazolium bromide] to formazan. This reaction is measured at 570 nm [20].


**Fig.1: Pictorial representation of extraction and RBC suspension preparation (Biorender.com)**

## 2.6 Statistics

The experimental results were expressed as the mean ± standard error (SE) values. Statistical analysis was carried out utilizing Graph Pad Prism Software version 5.0. This encompassed a one-way analysis of variance, followed by Tukey's multiple comparison test. The significance of the observations was established at a probability level of $p \leq 0.05$.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 presents the phytochemicals identified in the lemon grass extract. The findings indicate the presence of flavonoids, terpenoids, saponin and tannin whereas no acids or alkaloids were found to be present in lemon grass.

**Table-2 Phytochemical analysis**

| Phytochemical | Status |
|---|---|
| Alkaloid | - |
| Saponin | + |
| Phenol | + |
| Flavanoids | + |
| Tannin | + |
| Acids | - |

In the second experimental group (Group II) exposed to paraquat toxicity, the total protein content decreased to 6.3±0.49 mg/dl, notably lower than the control group value of 10.24±0.53 mg/dl. Notably, the examined groups, Groups III and IV, showed significant reductions in total protein levels as well, measuring 6.78±0.59 mg/dl and 6.9±0.5mg/dl, respectively.

In Group 2 exposed to Paraquat treatment, the Thiobarbituric Acid Reactive Substances (TBARS) activity (measured in nM/mg protein) notably increased to 629.7±2.85. This surge in TBARS activity was significant ($p<0.001$) when compared to the control group (398.8±3.51), comprised of RBCs. Conversely, the treatment with Lemongrass (Group IV) and ascorbic acid (Group III) resulted in significant decreases in TBARS levels ($p<0.001$ and $p<0.01$, respectively), with values measuring 513.05±4.54 and 504.01±1.97. These results highlight the potential protective effects of Lemongrass and ascorbic acid in mitigating oxidative stress-induced damage.

The activity of Superoxide Dismutase (SOD) (measured in U/mg protein) and Glutathione (GSH) (measured in µg/mg protein) experienced a noteworthy reduction ($p<0.01$) in Group 2, treated with Paraquat, compared to the control group (Group 1 - RBCs). After treating red blood cells with 50µM Paraquat, the GSH levels were measured at 80.86±4.9 µg/mg of protein, while only RBC group had GSH levels of 109.81±8.6 µg/mg. Lemongrass treatment increased GSH levels to 114.8±4.5 µg/mg, and ascorbic acid

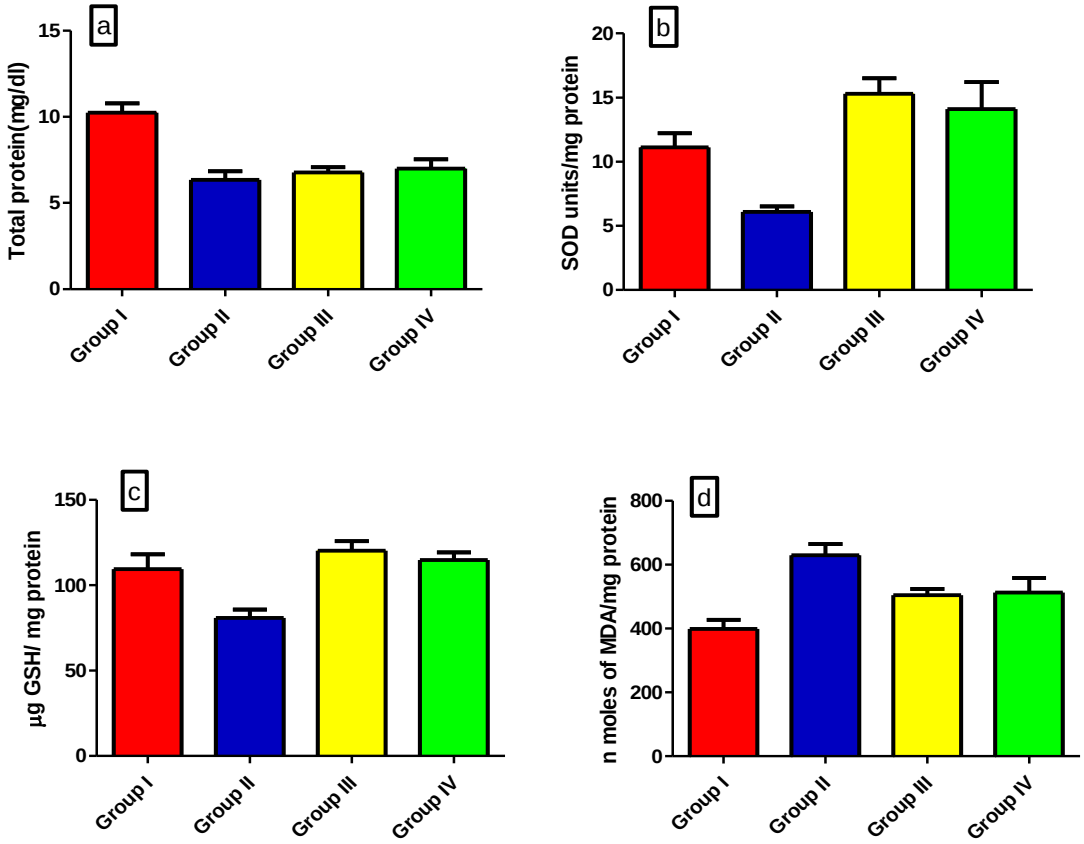


**Fig.2a-d. Graphical representation of Total protein, SOD, GSH and TBARS**

treatment (Group III) showed similar GSH levels at 120.2±5.6 µg/mg without significant differences.

The SOD levels were recorded as 11.13±1.1 SOD units/mg protein in the control group and a decrease to 6.08±0.4 SOD units/mg protein was observed in the toxic group (Group II) treated with Paraquat. In contrast, treatment with Lemongrass significantly elevated SOD levels to 14.12±2.0 SOD units/mg protein, indicating a pronounced protective effect. The plant extract exhibited substantial normalization of SOD levels, suggesting its potential protective properties. Interestingly, no substantial differences were found in values between Groups IV and III, with SOD values of 15.30±1.2 (Graphical representation are depicted).

## 4. DISCUSSION

Oxidative stress, as extensively discussed in the scientific literature, emerges when there is a significant imbalance between the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) and the defensive mechanisms designed to counteract their detrimental impacts. This imbalance disrupts the intricate equilibrium between pro-oxidant and antioxidant factors, tipping the scale in favor of pro-oxidants. As a result, the potential for cellular damage becomes a distinct possibility [21]. In this context, purposely triggering oxidative stress in red blood cells with Paraquat has provided important knowledge about how cells react to increased levels of reactive oxygen species (ROS).The study successfully replicated the widely acknowledged phenomenon of oxidative stress in RBCs, thereby shedding light on the complex cellular dynamics influenced by this specific stressor [22]. When Paraquat was used to cause oxidative stress, a series of cell processes showing oxidative damage occurred one after another. The observation of a significant rise in the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS) within red blood cells when Paraquat was applied confirms the substance's ability to trigger the generation of free radicals and also measures the magnitude of this impact [23]. Subsequent to this accumulation of ROS, the consequential

occurrence of lipid peroxidation in the cellular membrane was substantiated by the results. This underscores the disruptive potential of accumulated ROS within RBCs, as previously substantiated by established scientific literature[24]. The findings of this study further contribute to the comprehension of the intricate interplay between oxidative stress and cellular responses, emphasizing the importance of safeguarding cellular components against the destructive consequences of ROS accumulation.

With its rich content of phytochemicals, lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*) offers various therapeutic qualities. It contains polyphenols like flavonoids (e.g., quercetin, rutin) and phenolic acids (e.g., caffeic acid), which contribute potent antioxidant properties for opposing oxidative stress [25]. Lemongrass extracts, rich in flavonoids, also exhibit free radical scavenging potential, reducing cellular damage caused by reactive oxygen species [26]. Additionally, lemongrass holds saponins, with their distinct structure facilitating interactions with both water-soluble and lipid-soluble molecules. This imparts various beneficial effects, including anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, immunomodulatory and anticancer activities [27], enhancing lemongrass's potential as a natural source of useful bio actives. Additionally, lemongrass contains tannins, which are known for their interactions with biomolecules and their antioxidant properties. Their role in scavenging free radicals aligns with lemongrass's potential for promoting well-being [28], with interactions influencing bioavailability and physiological effects. The many beneficial compounds found in lemongrass highlight its potential for therapy. More research is needed to understand how these compounds work together and their effects in the body, which can help promote health [29].

When lipids break down, they produce Malondialdehyde (MDA), which indicates increased lipid peroxidation [30]. This contests the decrease in glutathione levels and SOD activity observed during stress [31]. Elevated MDA levels effectively signify the presence of oxidative stress. The results showed that MDA increased a lot in the Paraquat group, but decreased in both the ascorbic acid and lemongrass groups [32,33].

RBCs have increased the their innate autooxidant defense due to the paraquat indirect oxidative stress.Enzymes like superoxide dismutase (SOD) and glutathione peroxidase heightened their activity to effectively counter reactive oxygen species (ROS). This responsive adaptation aligns with cellular strategies to combat oxidative stress damage. However, maintaining a delicate balance between ROS production and initiating antioxidant defenses remains crucial. This balance prevents overwhelming defense mechanisms and subsequent harmful cellular outcomes [34].

Lemongrass extract, rich in phyto constituents, exhibits active oxidative metabolism generating ROS [12]. The extract is also abundant in antioxidant enzymes, including GSH—an essential element in neutralizing free radicals and maintaining cellular integrity. GSH swiftly contributes hydrogen atoms to neutralize radicals, playing a pivotal role in cellular antioxidant defenses [32]. Similarly, SOD safeguards against ROS by transforming superoxide anions into molecular oxygen ($O_2$) and hydrogen peroxide ($H_2O_2$) [13]. Significantly, the Paraquat-exposed group showed reduced GSH levels, which lemongrass treatment effectively counteracted. In normal physiological conditions, enzymatic SOD and non-enzymatic GSH processes collaboratively restore redox imbalance due to oxidative stress [26].

The findings from this current study revealed the presence of flavonoids, phenols, saponins and tannins. There is a substantial increase in malondialdehyde levels, accompanied by a significant reduction in both GSH and the antioxidant enzyme SOD in the Paraquat-exposed group [6]. But there was a noticeable change in these effects in the group that got lemongrass treatment. This study's findings match the results reported by Ikegwu's research [32].

## 4. CONCLUSION

While this study successfully replicated the induction of oxidative stress in RBCs through Paraquat exposure. Studying the complex pathways activated by Paraquat-induced oxidative stress could help us understand more about how cells react and respond. This research not only provides valuable insights into the consequences of oxidative stress induction in red blood cells due to paraquat but also underscores the remarkable preventive impact demonstrated by Lemongrass (100µg). This effect could be

attributed, at least in part, to the presence of bioactive phytochemicals like flavonoids, phenols, saponins and tannins, which collectively contribute to countering the oxidative damage provoked by paraquat.

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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