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Evaluation of Acute Toxicity and Hepatoprotective Activity of the Methanolic Extract of *Hibiscus Radiatus* Cav. Leaves on Liver Damage Caused By Carbon Tetrachloride in Rats

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ABSTRACT

The present study observed the potential hepatoprotective action of methanolic extract of *Hibiscus radiatus* leaf (MEHR) on carbon tetrachloride-induced liver damaged in rats. Thirty rats divided into five groups i.e.; group 1 – control; group 2 – CCl₄ induced; group 3 – CCl₄ + Silymarin 100 mg/kg; group 4 – CCl₄ + MEHR 200 mg/kg; group 5 – CCl₄ + MEHR 400 mg/kg of six rats in each were used. Administration of CCl₄ induced hepatic damage in rats, as evidenced by a significant (p<0.05) increase in the levels of AST, ALT, cholesterol and bilirubin levels. However, administration of methanolic extract of *Hibiscus radiatus* (200 and 400mg/kg) after CCl₄ administration (group 4 and 5) brought a significant (p<0.05) reduction in values of these parameters compared to the CCl₄ treated group (group 2). The potential hepatoprotective activity of the extract was also demonstrated by its regenerative action on some damaged liver tissues, as evidenced by the histopathological studies of the representative liver sample of group 5 rats' liver section, which showed hepatic regeneration, with no visible pathology. This study therefore showed the potential of the *Hibiscus radiatus* leaf extract to decrease the levels of serum markers enzymes, indicating the protection of hepatic cells, and to confer some stage of protection against CCl₄ induced hepatocellular injury.

Key words: CCl₄, Methanol, Extract, Hepatoprotective, Silymarin.

Introduction

The liver plays a vital role in metabolism and has some physiological functions [1]. Liver detoxification occurs in two phases, namely phase I (involving oxidation, reduction, and hydrolysis) and phase II (involving synthetic conjugations with sulfates, glucuronic acid, glutathione, acetate, and glycine), and these phases convert toxic materials into harmless metabolites and then excrete them from the body [2]. Liver diseases are considered serious problems which can be caused by toxic chemicals, drugs, and virus infiltration through ingestion or infection [3]. These toxins induce the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS), which can attack hepatic tissue and cause serious injury [4,5].

Medicinal plants with hepatoprotective activity contain a large number of bioactive molecules. The identification of these molecules contained in a biomass

complex requires careful selection and execution of appropriate bioassays during the various stages of the research process [6]. One hepatoprotective agent used widely in the treatment of various liver disorders, such as hepatitis or fatty infiltration caused by alcohol or toxins, is the standardized extract of *Silybum marianum*, known as milk thistle or silymarin (SLM) [7-10]. It is a complex mixture of the flavonolignans silybinin (SLB), silychristin, silydianin, and isosilybin. SLB, a polyphenolic molecule, is the major component of SLM and is responsible for its pharmacological activity [11,12]. SLM is poorly absorbed, although the bioavailability of SLB is higher than that of phosphatidylcholine (SLP) [13,14]. The major inducers of hepatic damage used when evaluating hepatoprotective activity are carbon tetrachloride (CCl₄) and paracetamol (acetaminophen, APAP). However, there are few reports on their use and in vitro characteristics [15-17].

The mechanisms responsible for the in vivo liver toxicity of both compounds are complex and involve several

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cell types [18,19]. CCl_4 undergoes metabolic activation in a cytochrome P-450-dependent step to produce free radicals, which can initiate lipid peroxidation. The toxicity induced by CCl_4 in vivo and in cultured hepatocytes involves stimulation of lipid peroxidation, which is detected as an increase in malondialdehyde (MDA) formation [20]. APAP is metabolized mainly in the liver to excretable glucuronide and sulfate conjugates. However, the hepatotoxicity of APAP has been attributed to the formation of toxic metabolites, which occurs when APAP is activated by hepatic cytochrome P-450 [21] to a highly reactive metabolite N-acetyl-P-benzoquinoneimine (NAPQI) [22]. NAPQI is initially detoxified by conjugation with reduced glutathione (GSH) to form mercapturic acid. However, when its rate of formation exceeds the rate of detoxification by GSH, NAPQI oxidizes tissue macromolecules such as lipids and —SH group proteins, and calcium homeostasis is altered by depletion of GSH [23].

Hibiscus radiatus Cav. also known as monarch rosemallow, is an ideal crop for developing countries as it is relatively easy to grow, can be grown as part of multi-cropping systems and can be used as food and fibre. The genus *Hibiscus* (Malvaceae) includes more than 300 species of annual or perennial herbs, shrubs or trees [24]. The plant is about 3m tall and has a deep penetrating taproot. It has a smooth or nearly smooth, cylindrical, typically dark green to red stems. Leaves are alternate, 7 to 11cm long, green with reddish veins and long and short petioles. Leaves of young seedlings and upper leaves of older plants are simple; lower leaves are deeply 3 to 5 or even 7 – lobed and the margins are toothed [25]. This study investigated the hepatoprotective effect of the methanol extract of *Hibiscus radiatus* leaves on CCl_4 -induced liver damage in rats. Serum alanine aminotransferase (ALT) and aspartate aminotransferase (AST) levels were estimated to evaluate liver function.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Collection of plant material

The plant *Hibiscus radiatus* Cav. belonging to the family *Malvaceae* were collected from local area of Basna, district - Mahasamund, Chhattisgarh, India and was identified and authenticated by M. Ahmedullah scientist 'E' Botanical Survey of India (BSI), Deccan Regional Centre, Hyderabad 500048, Telangana (Establishment under the Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India). The plant voucher No. is BSI/DRC/2015-16/Tech./664/07 dated 30-10-2015.

Drugs and Chemicals

All the chemicals were analytical grade. CCl_4 was obtained from pharmacognosy and phytochemistry lab, Anwarul Uloom College of Pharmacy, New Mallepally, Hyderabad, India. Silymarin was obtained from Allied Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals (P) Ltd. New Delhi. It is a poly herbal formulation which produces hepatoprotective activity against CCl_4 .

Preparation of the Extracts

The leaves of *Hibiscus radiatus* were shade dried and reduced to coarse powder in a mechanical grinder. The powdered material obtained was then subjected to successive extraction by hot percolation method using petroleum ether, chloroform, methanol, and distilled water in a soxhlet extractor [26]. The different extracts obtained were evaporated using a rotary evaporator to obtain semisolid mass. The extracts thus obtained were subjected to phytochemical screening and the methanolic extract of *Hibiscus radiatus* (MEHR) and aqueous extract of *Hibiscus radiatus* (AEHR) was used for further studies.

Ethical Committee Approval

The experimental protocol was approved by Institutional Animal Ethical Committee (IAEC) No.-IAEC/AUCOP/2016/01, Anwarul Uloom College of Pharmacy, New Mallepally, Hyderabad, Telangana, India. The experimental animals were treated as per the guideline of Committee for the Purpose of Control and Supervision on Experiments on Animals (CPCSEA).

Phytochemical Analysis

The qualitative chemical tests carried out for the identification of the different phytoconstituents present in the powdered crude drugs by standard procedures. They are usually tested for the presence of alkaloids, flavonoids, phenols and phenolic compounds, tannins, glycosides, triterpenes, steroids, saponins etc. [27,28].

Acute Oral Toxicity

Acute oral toxicity study was performed as per OECD-423 guidelines category IV (acute toxic class method). Albino rats (n = 3) of either sex selected by random sampling technique were employed in this study. The animals were kept fasting for 4 h with free access to water only. MEHR was administered orally with maximum dose of 2000 mg/kg body weight by gastric intubation. The mortality was observed for three days. If mortality was observed in 2 out of 3 animals or 3 out of 3 animals then the dose administered was assigned as toxic dose. If mortality was observed in 1 animal, then the same dose was repeated again to confirm the toxic dose. If mortality was not observed then the procedure was repeated for further higher dose such as 3000 mg/kg of body weight [29].

HEPATOPROTECTIVE ACTIVITY

Animal Model

Healthy Wistar Albino Rats weighing about (150-250gm) of either sex was used for the studies. The animals were housed in large polypropylene cages in a temperature controlled room ($25^\circ\text{C} \pm 3^\circ\text{C}$), relative humidity ($50 \pm 20\%$) and provided with standardized pellet feed and clean drinking water *ad libitum*.

CCl₄ induced-hepatotoxic activity

The animals were randomly divided into 5 groups of 6 animals per group[30]. Group 1 received 1 ml of 30 % PEG orally as a control group, Group 2 received 1 mL/kg body weight of CCl₄ subcutaneously for 7 days as a toxic group, Group 3 received Silymarin (100mg/kg, p.o.) and CCl₄ (1mL/kg, s.c.) of body weight for 7 days, Group 4 received MEHR(200mg/kg, p.o.) and CCl₄ (1mL/kg, s.c.) for 7 days, Group 5 received MEHR (400mg/kg, p.o.) and CCl₄ (1mL/kg, s.c.) for 7 days. All rats were sacrificed by cervical dislocation 24 h after the last treatment. Just before sacrifice, blood was collected from the retro-orbital sinus plexus under mild ether anesthesia. Collected blood was allowed to clot and serum was separated at 3500 rpm for 15 min for carrying out further biochemical investigations. One part of liver was dissected out and used for biochemical and histopathological studies[31-34].

Measurement of serum biochemical parameters

The activities of serum aspartate transaminase (AST), alanine transaminase (ALT), alkaline phosphatase (ALP) and total bilirubin were determined using the Hitachi 912 clinical chemistry automatic analyzer (Roche Diagnostic GmbH, Mannheim).

Histopathology

Animals from control and treated groups were used for this purpose. The animals were sacrificed and the abdomen was cut open to remove the liver. The liver tissue was dissected out and fixed in 10% formalin solution and then dehydrated in ethanol (50-100%), cleared in xylene and embedded in paraffin wax. Afterwards thick sections (5–6 mm) were made and then stained with hematoxylin and eosin dye for photomicroscopic observation.

Statistical analysis

The statistical significance were determined by using one way ANOVA followed by Dunnett's multiple comparison test by using Graph p Instat software. The

values were represented as Mean ± SEM, (n=6). Less than 0.05 value of P was considered to be statistically significant. *P<0.5 **P<0.01 and ***P<0.001, when compared with control and toxicant group as applicable.

RESULTS

Preliminary Phytochemical studies indicate the presence of flavonoids and phenolics compound were noticed in methanolic extract of *Hibiscus radiatus* leaves. Therefore, there is possibility that methanolic extract of *Hibiscus radiatus* leaves may possess hepatoprotective activity. The results were shown in Table No.1. The extract did not produce any toxic symptoms of mortality up to the dose level of 2000 mg/kg body weight in the treated animals and hence 1/10th (200mg/kg.) dose were selected for screening hepatoprotective activity.

Hepatoprotective activity

Histopathological observation of rat liver tissue from the control group (Group 1) showed hepatic cells (normal) with central vein and sinusoidal dilation (Figure 1). In the CCl₄ group (Group 2), severe hepatotoxicity was showed in the form of severe necrosis and disappearance of nuclei (Figure 2). Histopathological analysis showed that the pathological lesions caused by CCl₄ were very minimal in groups pretreated with methanolic extract of *Hibiscus radiatus* (Group 4 and 5). Normal hepatocytes with regenerating hepatocytes and mild inflammation in the portal area were observed in groups 4 and 5, treated with methanolic extract of *Hibiscus radiatus*, 200 and 400 mg/kg body weight, respectively (Figures 4 and 5). Liver tissue from CCl₄ + silymarin group (Group 3) had normal hepatic cells with portal vein and portal artery (Figure 3).

Biochemical studies

The effects of methanolic extract of *Hibiscus radiatus* on AST, ALT, ALP, bilirubin, and total protein levels in rats with CCl₄ induced liver damage were summarized in Table 2. Administration of CCl₄ after 18 h resulted in a significant

Table -1
Phytochemical screening of different extracts of *Hibiscus radiatus* leaves

Tested Group	Ether Extract	Chloroform Extract	Methanol Extract	Aqueous Extract
Alkaloids	---	---	+++	+++
Glycosides	---	---	+++	---
.Phenolic com	---	---	+++	+++
Steroids	+++	---	---	---
Saponins	---	---	---	+++
Flavonoids	---	---	+++	+++
Proteins	+++	---	---	---
Carbohydrates	---	---	---	---
Tannins	---	---	+++	---

Note: (+++) Present (---) Absent

elevation of hepatospecific serum markers such as AST, ALT, ALP, bilirubin, and total protein in the CCl_4 group (Group II) in comparison with the control group (Group I).

On administration of methanolic extract of *Hibiscus radiatus* (Groups 4 and 5) and CCl_4 + silymarin group (Group 3), the serum markers were restored to the normal levels.

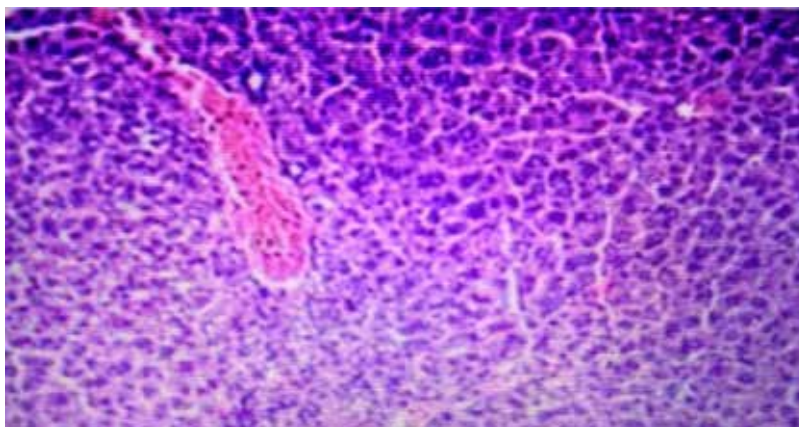


Fig. 1: Liver section of normal rats from Group 1

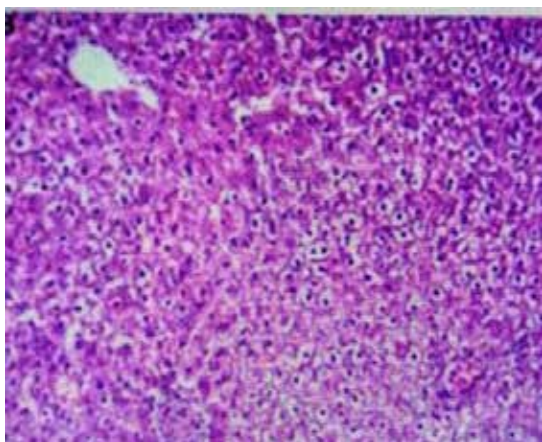


Fig. 2 : Liver section treated with CCl_4 from Group 2

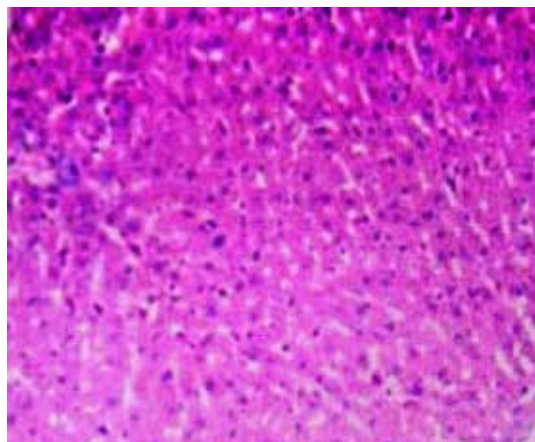


Fig. 3 : Liver sections treated with CCl_4 + Silymarin (100 mg/kg, p.o) from Group 3

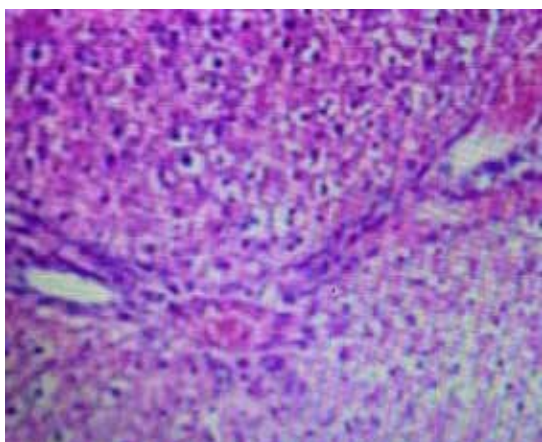


Fig. 4 : Liver sections treated with CCl_4 + MEHR (200 mg/kg, p.o) from Group 4

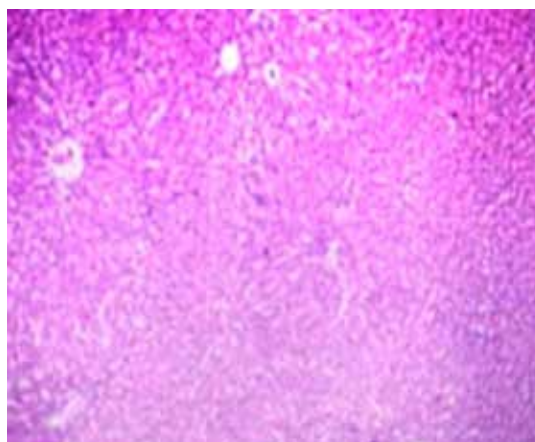
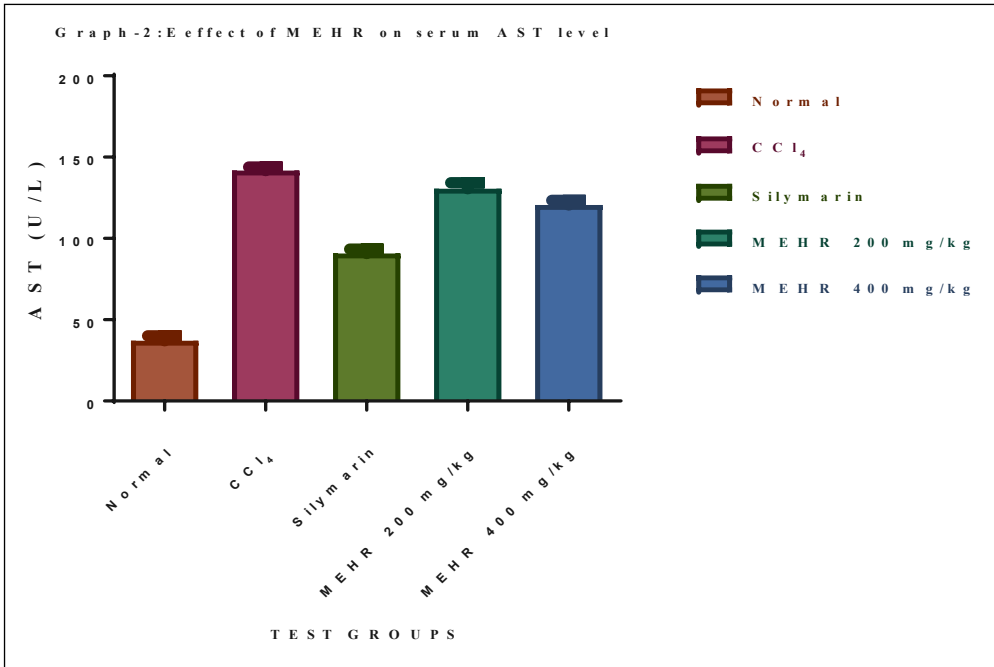
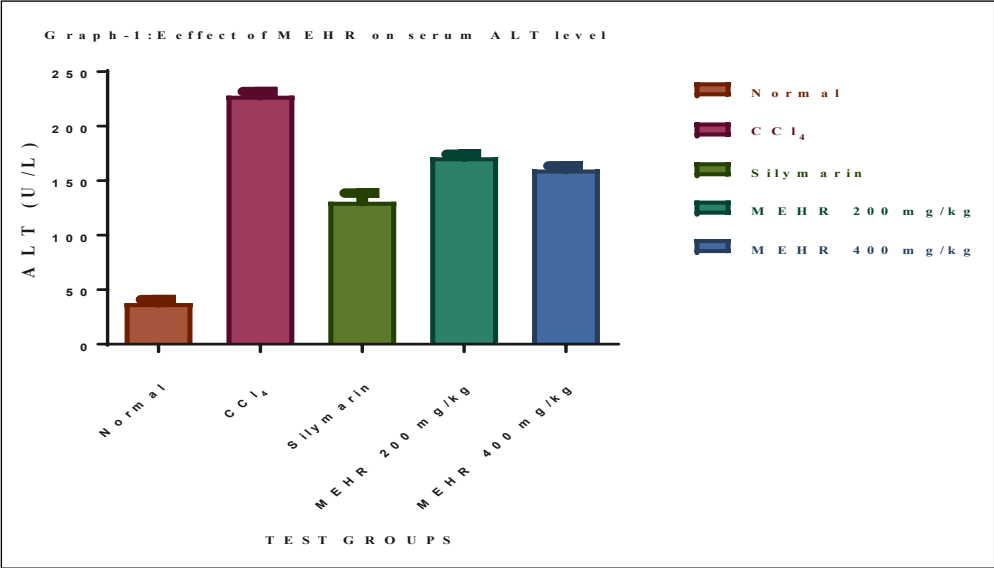


Fig. 5 : Liver sections treated with CCl_4 + MEHR (400 mg/kg, p.o) from Group 5



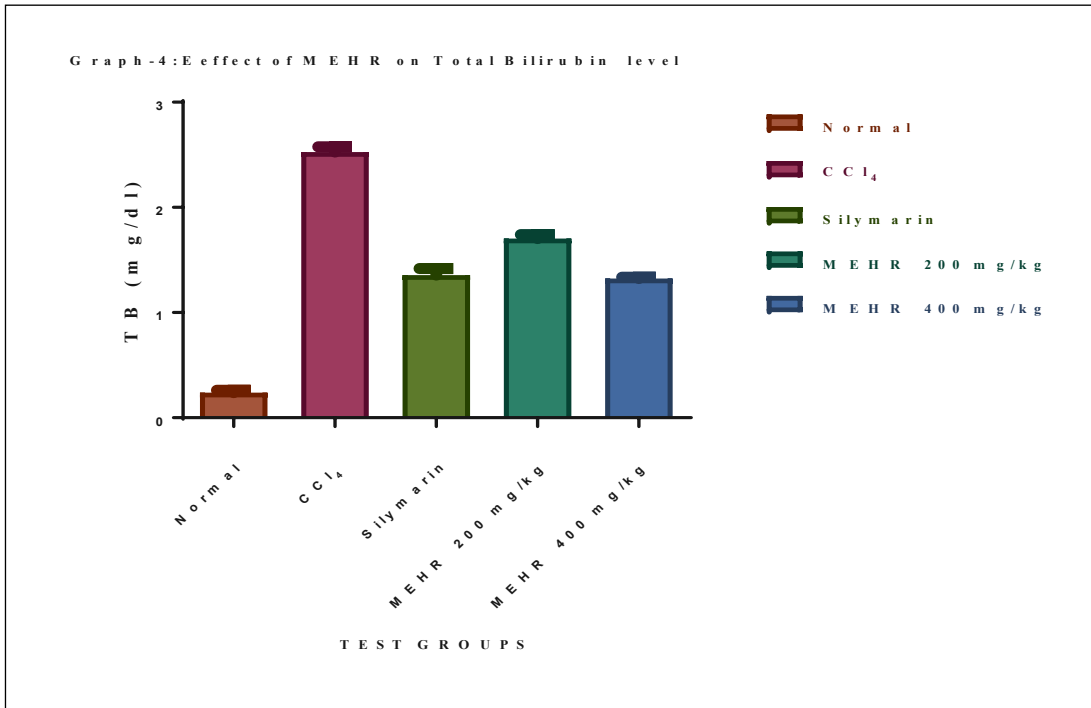
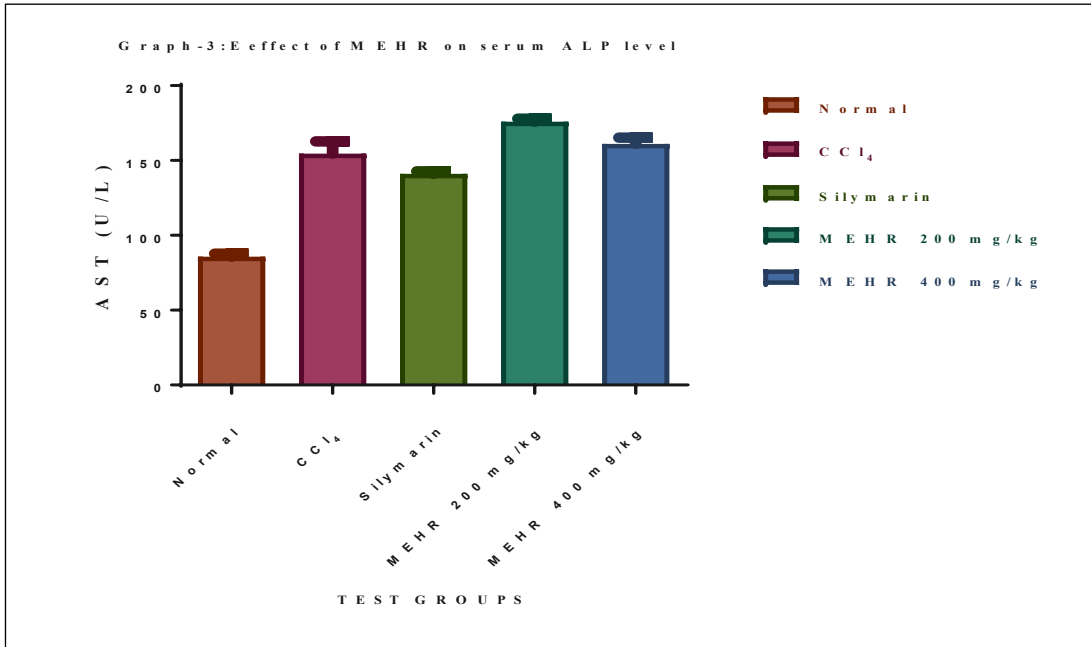


Table 2
Effect of MEHR on biochemical parameters in CCl₄ induced hepatotoxicity rats

Groups	Treatment	ALT IU/L	AST IU/L	ALP IU/L	Total bilirubin mg/dl	Total protein g/dl	Albumin g/dl
1	Normal	36.73 ± 12.21	38.00 ± 1.45	86.34 ± 4.37	0.27 ± 0.04	8.44 ± 0.16	4.12 ± 0.14
2	CCl ₄ (1mL/kg)	228.14 ± 55.31	142.5 ± 1.33	157.88 ± 6.86	2.58 ± 0.53	5.95 ± 0.05	3.47 ± 1.25
3	Silymarin (100mg/kg)	128.23 ± 21.23***	91.69 ± 1.6***	142.60 ± 1.16 ***	1.32 ± 5.03***	7.44 ± 0.12 ***	3.86 ± 0.12 ***
4	MEHR (200mg/kg)	172.23 ± 38.25***	132.42 ± 16.92	178.15 ± 11.01**	1.69 ± 4.08	6.54 ± 0.24	3.52 ± 0.16 *
5	MEHR (400mg/kg)	161.13 ± 36.22 ***	119.56 ± 17.1 **	161.79 ± 1.51***	1.33 ± 3.07*	7.12 ± 0.69 ***	4.73 ± 0.12 **

n = 6, Data expressed as Mean ± SEM, *P value < 0.05, **P value < 0.01, *** P value < 0.001 compared with toxic group.

DISCUSSION

Histopathological observation of rats administered CCl_4 showed severe necrosis and disappearance of nuclei. This could be due to the rapid formation of highly reactive metabolites, because of administration of CCl_4 . All these histopathological changes were significantly reduced in rats treated with methanolic extract of *Hibiscus radiatus* leaves. The study of serum markers such as ALT, AST, ALP, bilirubin, and total protein has been found to be of great value of assess to clinical and experimental liver damage [35]. In the present investigation, the rats suffered significant hepatic damage from treatment with CCl_4 , as indicated by elevated levels of serum markers (Table 2). A rise in AST is usually accompanied by an increase in ALT, which plays a vital role in the conversion of amino acids to keto acids [36]. Pretreatment with methanolic extract of *Hibiscus radiatus* leaves, both at 200 mg/kg body weight and 400 mg/kg body weight, significantly attenuated elevated levels of serum markers. This suggests that methanolic extract of *Hibiscus radiatus* leaves conditions the hepatocytes so as to protect the integrity of the membrane from CCl_4 -induced leakage of serum markers into circulation. These changes can be considered a functional improvement of hepatocytes and may be caused by accelerated regeneration of parenchyma cells. Bilirubin and Serum ALP are related to hepatic cell damage [37]. Increase in serum ALP is due to increased synthesis in the presence of increasing biliary pressure [38]. The decrease in the levels of ALP and bilirubin may be due to the presence of flavonoids and their antioxidant effects which may protect the hepatic cell damage induced by CCl_4 . A potential of hepatoprotective property underlying *Hibiscus radiatus* may be attributed to the antioxidative constituents. The plants most commonly used to treat liver disorders are Glycyrrhizaglabra (licorice), Curcuma longa (turmeric) and Camellia sinensis (green tea), and they are all reported to be hepatoprotective due to the powerful antioxidative properties [39-42]. The presence of flavonoids and tannins in methanolic extract of *Hibiscus radiatus* leaves was confirmed by phytochemical analysis, and these compounds are reported to have antioxidant properties [43].

Conclusion

In conclusion, this is the first study to demonstrate that hepatoprotective activity of *Hibiscus radiatus* leaves against CCl_4 -induced hepatotoxicity in rats. The results indicate that MEHR not only enhances hepatic antioxidant enzyme activities and inhibits lipid peroxidation but also suppresses inflammatory responses in CCl_4 -induced liver damage. The possible hepatoprotective mechanism correlates with the inhibition of lipid peroxidation through increasing the activities of antioxidant enzymes and the regulation of proinflammatory mediators to maintain the integrity of hepatic cells. It can be potentially developed into a functional food or even a pharmacological agent for the prevention of liver diseases.

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