

# Hepatoprotective Effect of Aerial Parts of *Desmostachya bipinnata* Against CCl<sub>4</sub> Induced Liver Damage

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## Abstract

The human liver is exposed to high concentrations of toxicants and toxic metabolites during the process of metabolic detoxification, making it susceptible to injury. Liver damage is associated with cellular necrosis, an increase in tissue lipid peroxidation, and depletion of tissue GSH levels, among other factors. Herbs play a significant role in managing various liver disorders. In the present study, *Desmostachya bipinnata* aerial parts were subjected to soxhlet and cloud point extraction. Preliminary phytochemical identification was performed using chemical tests and TLC. Subsequently, the antioxidant and hepatoprotective potential of the extracts were assessed in a CCl<sub>4</sub>-induced hepatotoxicity model. Regarding soxhlet extraction, the alcoholic extract exhibited the highest extractive yield (20.00 ± 0.68% w/w), with phenols and flavonoids present at 10.92% w/w and 20.81% w/w, respectively. Among the eight cloud point extracts (CPE), CPE 8 showed the best results (temperature: 60°C, time: 2 hours, and Triton X-100 concentration: 5%), with a maximum extraction yield of 11.2 ± 0.126% w/w, flavonoids at 13.44% w/w, and phenols at 43.63% w/w.

Phytochemical screening of the extracts revealed the presence of phenolics, flavonoids, alkaloids, and steroids in different extracts of *D. bipinnata*. In the CCl<sub>4</sub>-induced hepatotoxicity model, based on tissue and serum analysis, the order of hepatoprotective effect was found to be alcohol extract < chloroform extract < C.P.E < standard marketed formulation. The difference in activity among these extracts in reducing hepatotoxicity is likely attributed to the nature and quantity of phytoconstituents present in each extract. Further studies are planned to isolate and characterize the active constituent responsible for this activity.

**Keywords:** Hepatotoxicity, herbal, extraction, Soxhlet, liver, cloud point.

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## INTRODUCTION

Carbon tetrachloride radicals can bind to both cellular lipids and proteins. Carbon tetrachloride-induced liver damage proceeds through a sequence of steps that contribute to different levels of damage. These steps include reductive dehalogenation, covalent binding of radicals, inhibition of protein synthesis (especially apolipoprotein synthesis), assemblage, packing, and release of VLDL and HDL, accumulation of fat, formation of CCl<sub>3</sub>-OO\* radicals, lipid peroxidation, membrane damage, loss of Ca<sup>2+</sup> sequestration, apoptosis, and fibrosis.<sup>5,6</sup> Radical formation and lipid peroxidation are the predominant cellular mechanisms involved in the development of fatty liver caused by CCl<sub>4</sub> exposure, as well as excessive alcohol consumption.<sup>19,36</sup> Accumulation of fat is one consequence of CCl<sub>4</sub>-induced liver damage, which develops only in the presence of an intact cytochrome P450 oxygenase system.<sup>5</sup> The cytochrome P450 inducer metyrapone was used to enhance the bioactivation of CCl<sub>4</sub> and formation of radicals, namely CCl<sub>3</sub>\* and CHCl<sub>2</sub>\*. This leads to the accumulation of triglycerides in hepatocytes. It is important to note that the liver is not the only target organ of CCl<sub>4</sub>; it also affects several other organs in the body, including the lungs, heart, testes, kidneys, and brain.

*Silybum marianum*, *Coccinia grandis*, *Flacourtia indica*, *Wedelia calendulacea*, *Prosthechea michuacana*, *Swertia chirata*, *Phyllanthus emblica*, *Desmostachya bipinnata*, *Picrorhiza kurroa*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Aegle marmelos*, etc., have been used in many poly-herbal formulations meant for the treatment of liver diseases.<sup>15</sup> Several plant products are available in the market to protect the liver from damage. *Cuscuta chinensis* and *Cuscuta reflexa* contain alkaloids (cuscutamine, lupanine, agroclavine), glycosides (cuscutin, cuscutoside A&B, arbutin, odoroside H), sterols (gitoxigenin, campesterol,

stigmasterol, sitosterol), flavonoids (kaempferol, quercetin, hyperoside), etc., which have proven effective in CCl<sub>4</sub> and N-acetyl-para-aminophenol-induced hepatotoxicity.<sup>2</sup>

Silymarin, a bioflavonoid from milk thistle, is effective in preventing CCl<sub>4</sub>-induced liver injury.<sup>18</sup> Iridoid glycosides like picroside I and picroside II, isolated from extracts of *Picrorhiza kurroa* (Scrophulariaceae), have proven effects against liver intoxication in mice induced by CCl<sub>4</sub>. Acubin and iridoid glycoside, isolated from both leaves and seeds of *Platocodon asiatica*, have shown potent liver-protecting activity.<sup>13</sup> The saponins of the gypsogenic series have been isolated from *Dianthus superbus* (Caryophyllaceae) and *Panax ginseng* (Araliaceae) for their potential role in elevated SGOT and SGPT levels in CCl<sub>4</sub>-intoxicated rabbits.

Antihepatotoxic effects of flavonolignans and related constituents from *Silybum marianum* have been observed through CCl<sub>4</sub> and D-gal N-induced cytotoxicity studies in primary cultured rat hepatocytes (Hikino et al. 1984). The flavonoids in plants such as *Colinium goggyria*, *Anemone hepatica* (Ranunculaceae), *Convallaria majalis* (Liliaceae), and *Omanus arvenis* (Leguminosae) are proven hepatoprotectives.<sup>13</sup> The ethanolic extract of *Zinnia elegans* has shown hepatoprotective activity against CCl<sub>4</sub>-induced liver damage due to the presence of polyphenolic components in the plant, such as kaempferol 3-O- $\beta$ -glucoside, kaempferol 3-O- $\beta$ -xyloside-7-O- $\beta$ -glucoside, quercetin 3-O- $\beta$ -glucoside, apigenin 7-O- $\beta$ -glucoside, apigenin 4'-O- $\beta$ -glucoside, luteolin 7-O- $\beta$ -glucosides.<sup>9</sup> Extracts of various samples of the crude drugs prepared from the rhizomes of *Atractylodes macrophala* and *Atractylodes lancea* (Compositae) exhibited anti-hepatotoxic activity. The major sesquiterpenoid active components atractylon,  $\beta$ -eudesmol, and hinesol exhibited a significant liver-protecting effect.<sup>7</sup>

*D. bipinnata* is commonly known as sacrificial grass, kusha<sup>14</sup>, drabh<sup>27</sup>, dab.<sup>26</sup> It contains many flavonoids such as kaempferol, quercetin, quercetin-3-glucoside, trycin, trycin-7-glucoside, as well as coumarins such as scopoletin and umbelliferone, sugars, amino acids, and carbohydrates.<sup>2</sup> *D. bipinnata* oil contains camphene,  $\beta$ -eudesmol, eseroline, and calarene in significant amounts, while others like diphenyliodonium bromide, limenone, 2-cyclohexene-1-one, and 8-nitro-12-tridecanolide are present in smaller quantities.<sup>15</sup> The leaf paste is used to cure cuts and wounds<sup>13</sup>, while the root is used in asthma, rheumatism<sup>2</sup>, carbuncles, piles, cholera, dysuria<sup>27</sup>, and as a diuretic, galactagogue, astringent, remedy for dysentery, leucorrhoea, and wounds.<sup>14</sup>

Through literature survey, we found only one study that estimates the hepatoprotective effect of the aqueous extract of roots of *D. bipinnata* using a paracetamol-induced hepatotoxicity model in rats.<sup>24</sup> The present study was carried out to examine the hepatoprotective activity of extracts prepared from the aerial parts of *D. bipinnata*. Hepatotoxicity in rats was induced with CCl<sub>4</sub>, and the effect of the extracts in reversing it was assessed.

## MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

### Plant Material Collection and Authentication

The whole plants of *D. bipinnata* (L.) Stapf were collected in September 2013 from Chirawa, district Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, India. The collected plant was authenticated by Dr. R. P. Pandey from the Botanical Survey of India, Jodhpur, India. A voucher specimen, JNU/PH/2010/Db D2, was deposited in the herbarium of Jodhpur National University, Jodhpur, India.

### Extraction and Photochemical Screening

The plant material, i.e., aerial parts of *D. bipinnata*, was ground in an electric mixer-grinder and screened using a BSS standard sieve. The powder that passed through sieve no. 22, with an average aperture size of 710  $\mu$ m, and was retained on sieve no. 44, with an average aperture size of 355  $\mu$ m, was selected and used for extraction.

### Soxhlet Extraction

The powdered drug was packed in a paper cylinder made from filter paper and placed in the body of a Soxhlet extractor. The solvent (alcohol and chloroform) was poured into the Soxhlet extractor and allowed to run for 3-4 cycles. After that, the apparatus fitted appropriately, and the drug was extracted. The obtained extracts were filtered through Whatman filter paper and concentrated and dried by evaporating the solvent on a water bath. The residual moisture in the extract was removed by drying in an oven, followed by keeping the extract in a desiccator.<sup>23</sup>

### Cloud Point Extraction

Ultrasonic cloud point extraction was performed as per the illustration shown in Fig.1.<sup>25</sup> Three factors, viz. temperature, time and surfactant concentration, at two levels (Table No. 1) were investigated to optimize the extraction process.

Table No. 1. Factors used in cloud point extraction

Name	Factor	Lowest level	Highest Level
A	Temp	40°C	60 °C
B	Time	1 h	2 h
C	Surfactant	2% w/v	5%

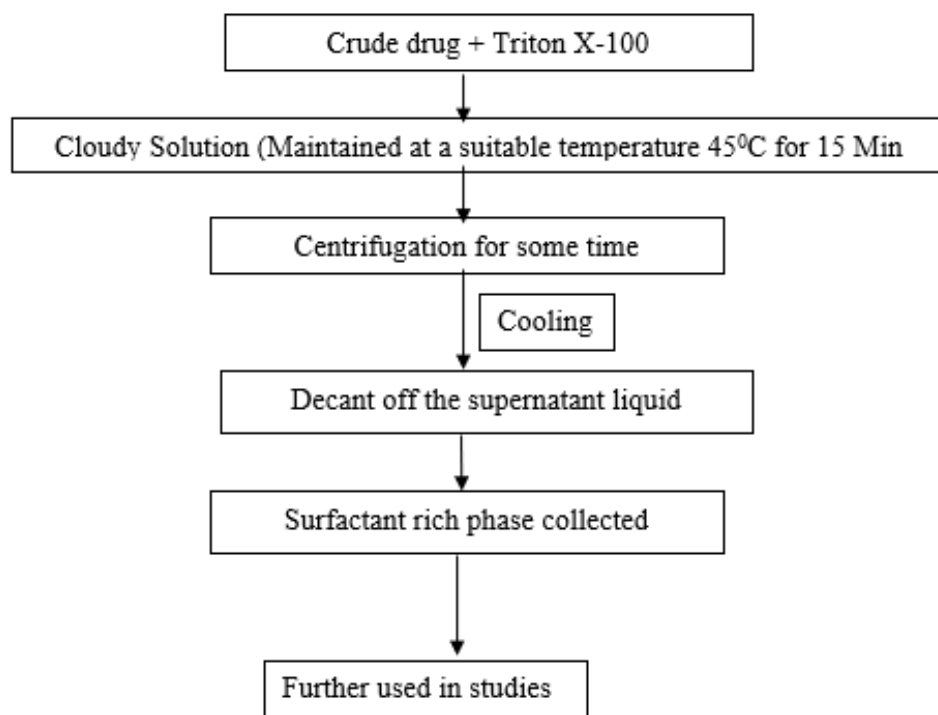


Fig. 1. Steps followed in cloud point extraction

The extracts of aerial parts of *D. bipinnata* were subjected to various qualitative chemical tests to determine the presence of various phytoconstituents like alkaloids, glycosides, carbohydrates, phenolics and tannins, fixed oils and fats, proteins, amino acids, flavonoids, saponins, etc. using reported methods.<sup>23</sup>

#### Carbon tetrachloride induced hepatotoxicity

Hepatotoxicity activity of chloroform and alcoholic extracts of aerial parts of *D. bipinnata* were evaluated using carbon tetrachloride induced hepatotoxicity in albino rats (n=5).<sup>28</sup>

#### Animals

Wistar albino rats of either sex weighing between 150-250 g were used for the study. Prior approval by institutional animal ethical committee, registration number 2650/SBS/2018, was obtained for conduct of experiments. Animals were kept in the departmental animal house at 25 ± 2°C and relative humidity 45-51.5% on a 12 h light/dark cycle.

#### Grouping and Treatment Protocol

**Group I:** Control group was treated with normal saline, i.e. 0.9% w/v of NaCl

**Group II:** Standard group received treatment of Himalaya Liv-52 at dose of 1 mg/kg

**Group III:** Positive control Carbon tetrachloride (1 mL/kg)

**Group IV:** Test group I was treated with alcoholic extract (500 mg/kg)

**Group IV:** Test group II received treatment of chloroform extract (500 mg/kg)

**Group VI:** Test group III received treatment of cloud point extract 8 extract (500 mg/kg)

#### Biochemical Estimation

Animals were fasted overnight, followed by treatments as mentioned above. Biochemical estimation was carried out 24 hours after the last dosing on the 8th and 15th day at the end of the treatment protocol. Serum parameters

including SGOT (serum glutamate oxaloacetate transaminases), SGPT (serum glutamate pyruvate transaminases), BIL (bilirubin), TP (total protein), and tissue parameters such as SOD (superoxide dismutase), GSH (reduced glutathione), LPO (lipid peroxidase), and CAT (catalase) were recorded. For serum parameters, blood was collected from the retro-orbital plexus under mild chloroform anesthesia, and serum was separated by centrifugation (C-24BL, Remi motor LTD. Mumbai) at 3000 rpm for 10 minutes. The resultant supernatant was used for biochemical estimation, and the analysis was performed using biochemical kits (ERBA).

All animals were fasted overnight. The estimation of oxidative stress markers was carried out 24 hours after the last dose on the 8th and 15th day at the end of the experimental protocol. The liver was quickly removed and washed with an ice-cool saline solution. The tissue was weighed and homogenized in tris buffer (pH 7.4). The homogenate was then centrifuged at 3000 rpm for 10 minutes, and the resultant cloudy supernatant liquid was used for estimation.

Reduced glutathione (GSH) was measured according to the method described by Glutathione peroxidase enzyme belongs to the peroxidase family, having a protective mechanism against oxidative damage. Glutathione contains a sulfhydryl group, i.e., 5,5 dithio bis 2-nitrobenzoic acid (DTNB).<sup>22</sup> A disulfide compound easily reacts with these sulfhydryl groups, resulting in the formation of a yellow-colored anion, which can be measured using a spectrophotometer at 412 nm.

Superoxide dismutase (SOD) was assayed by the method of Superoxide dismutase catalyzes the dismutation of superoxide into oxygen and hydrogen peroxide.<sup>21</sup> As superoxide has the ability to inhibit auto-oxidation of epinephrine to adrenochrome at pH 10.2, this inhibition can be measured with a spectrophotometer at 480 nm.

The method is based on the principle to estimate malondialdehyde (MDA), a product of lipid peroxidation.<sup>35</sup> One molecule of MDA reacts with two molecules of thiobarbituric acid (TBA) under mildly acidic conditions to form a pink-colored chromogen whose intensity can be measured with a spectrophotometer at 535 nm.

Catalase (CAT) was estimated according to the method of Catalase is a common enzyme that protects cells from oxidative damage.<sup>1</sup> It is found in all living organisms and catalyzes the decomposition of hydrogen peroxide into oxygen and water. In the UV-Visible spectrophotometer (200 - 400 nm), hydrogen peroxide shows an increase in absorption with decreasing wavelength. The decomposition of hydrogen peroxide can be followed with the decrease in absorbance at 240 nm. The difference in absorbance per unit time is a measure of catalase activity.

#### **Histopathology of Liver**

Harvested liver tissues were fixed in formalin (4% v/v) and sectioned perpendicularly. Tissue sections were stained with hematoxylin-eosin using standard histopathology protocol.<sup>23</sup>

#### **Statistical analysis**

All the data were represented as mean  $\pm$  S.E.M.,  $n=5$ , and analyzed by one-way ANOVA followed by Dunnett's t-test for the possible significant interrelation between the various groups.

## **RESULTS**

Cloud point extraction and soxhlation were used to prepare various extracts from the aerial parts of *D. bipinnata*. In the soxhlation method, n-hexane, chloroform, and alcohol were used as solvents, while cloud point extraction employed triton X-100 as a surfactant. The maximum extractive yield of  $20.00 \pm 0.68\%$  w/w was obtained in alcohol, followed by  $4.44 \pm 0.18\%$  w/w in chloroform, and the least,  $1.90 \pm 0.57\%$  in n-hexane.

The amount of phenolics and flavonoids present in the alcoholic extract was 10.92% w/w and 20.81% w/w, respectively. In the chloroform extract, phenolics and flavonoids were found to be 7.76% and 8.59% w/w, respectively. Among all eight extracts of cloud point extraction, CPE 8 (Temperature 60°C, time 2 h, and triton X-100 5% w/v) demonstrated the best results, with a maximum extraction yield of  $11.2 \pm 0.126\%$  w/w, flavonoids at 13.44% w/w, and phenolics at 43.63% w/w.

During the phytochemical screening of extracts, phenolics, flavonoids, alkaloids, and steroids were found to be present in different extracts of *D. bipinnata*.

#### **Hepatoprotective Activity**

The serum parameters, such as SGOT, SGPT, BIL, and TP, were significantly higher in positive control rats compared to the standard drug and extracts of *D. bipinnata*. In the control group of rats, the estimated values of serum transaminases (SGOT and SGPT) were  $16.40 \pm 1.65$  and  $15.88 \pm 1.62$ , respectively. However, after the

administration of a toxic dose of CCl<sub>4</sub> (3 ml/kg), these values significantly increased to  $46.80 \pm 2.65$  and  $49.86 \pm 3.52$ , respectively. However, pretreatment of animals with different extracts (alcoholic, chloroform, and C.P.E. 8) of *D. bipinnata* led to a reduction in serum SGOT and SGPT values. C.P.E. 8 showed a significant decrease in serum SGOT and SGPT values to  $23.40 \pm 0.67$  and  $27.50 \pm 1.53$ , respectively, which were very close to the standard treatment.

**Table No. 2:** Serum analysis parameters after 14 days of treatment

Groups	Serum biochemical parameters			
	SGOT (U/L)	SGPT (U/L)	BIL (mg/dl)	TP (g/dl)
Control	$16.40 \pm 1.65$	$15.88 \pm 1.62$	$0.38 \pm 0.02$	$7.51 \pm 0.19$
Standard	$25.87 \pm 3.95^{***}$	$22.34 \pm 1.87^{***}$	$0.62 \pm 0.02^{***}$	$8.70 \pm 0.15^{***}$
Positive control	$46.80 \pm 2.65^*$	$49.86 \pm 3.52^*$	$1.80 \pm 0.15^*$	$12.69 \pm 0.35^*$
Test 1 (Alcohol)	$45.98 \pm 1.81^*$	$49.66 \pm 3.14^*$	$0.94 \pm 0.01^{***}$	$11.27 \pm 0.15^*$
Test 2 (chloroform)	$35.97 \pm 2.54^{**}$	$35.16 \pm 1.22^{**}$	$1.06 \pm 0.03^{**}$	$10.54 \pm 0.38^{**}$
Test 3 (C.P.E 8)	$23.40 \pm 0.67^{***}$	$27.50 \pm 1.53^{***}$	$1.03 \pm 0.25^{**}$	$9.87 \pm 0.12^{**}$

**Note:** The statistical significance of difference between means was calculated by Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), followed by Dunnett's test for multiple comparison and t-test followed by unpaired test. Values are expressed as Mean  $\pm$  SEM. \*P<0.05, \*\*P<0.01, \*\*\*P<0.001, n=5 in each group.

Similarly, bilirubin and total protein levels were higher in the positive control group, i.e.,  $1.80 \pm 0.15$  and  $12.69 \pm 0.35$ , respectively. An increase in bilirubin concentration in the serum or tissue indicates obstruction in the excretion of bile, and thus, the elevated level of bilirubin observed in rats administered with CCl<sub>4</sub> alone (positive control) could be attributed to liver damage. However, the decrease in bilirubin levels in pretreated rats is indicative of the reversal of liver damage, which was observed in the pretreatment groups of different extracts (alcoholic, chloroform, and C.P.E. 8) of *D. bipinnata*. C.P.E. 8 significantly lowered the values of serum bilirubin and total protein to  $1.03 \pm 0.25$  and  $9.87 \pm 0.12$ , respectively, which were close to the standard values.

In the tissue parameters, the levels of antioxidant enzymes SOD, GSH, and CAT were decreased, but the level of LPO significantly increased in positive control rats. However, in different pretreatment groups with standard, alcoholic, chloroform, and CPE8 extracts, the levels of antioxidant enzymes SOD, GSH, and CAT were increased compared to the control and positive control groups.

**Table No. 3.** Tissue analysis parameters after 14 days of treatment

	Tissue parameters (IU/l)			
	SOD	GSH	LPO	CAT
Control	$94.25 \pm 1.57$	$18.48 \pm 1.59$	$60.73 \pm 2.73$	$47.35 \pm 1.52$
Positive control	$61.43 \pm 3.55$	$11.63 \pm 1.45$	$161.30 \pm 9.37$	$38.88 \pm 2.71$
Standard	$78.28 \pm 3.20^{**}$	$15.50 \pm 1.45^{**}$	$94.12 \pm 4.46^{***}$	$46.38 \pm 1.45^{***}$
Test 1 (Alcohol)	$58.58 \pm 1.46$	$17.73 \pm 1.18^{***}$	$109.60 \pm 2.31^{**}$	$37.81 \pm 2.24^*$
Test 2 (chloroform)	$62.08 \pm 1.57^*$	$18.16 \pm 1.69^{***}$	$111.20 \pm 1.29^{**}$	$36.75 \pm 2.27^*$
Test 3 (C.P.E 8)	$69.69 \pm 1.40^{**}$	$16.00 \pm 1.21^{**}$	$114.40 \pm 4.25^{**}$	$41.86 \pm 1.36^{**}$
<b>Note:</b> LPO (Lipid peroxide), SOD (Superoxide dismutase), CAT(Catalase), and GSH (Glutathione)				

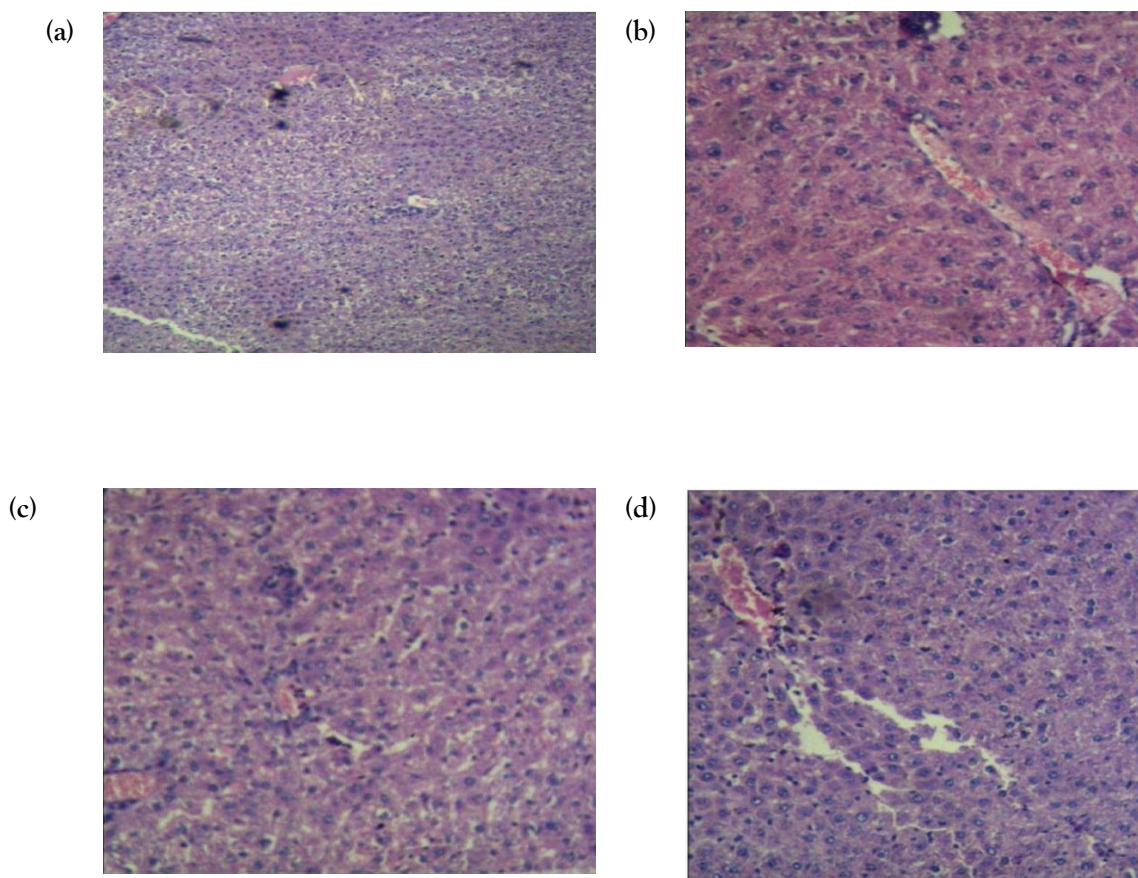
**Note:** The statistical significance of difference between means was calculated by Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), followed by Dunnett's test for multiple comparison and t-test followed by unpaired test. Values are expressed as Mean  $\pm$  SEM. \* $P < 0.05$ , \*\* $P < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $P < 0.001$ ,  $n = 5$  in each group.

### Histopathology Studies on Rats' Liver

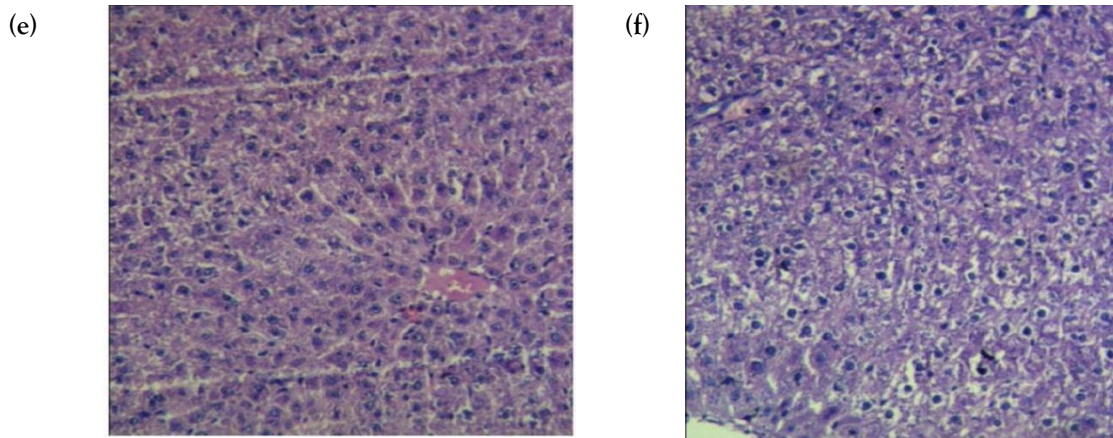
Histopathological studies provided supportive evidence for the biochemical analysis. The histology of the normal control group [Fig. 2(a)] shows reparative changes in a few hepatocytes, with no evidence of cirrhosis and toxicity. As for the treatment groups [Fig. 2(e) and 2(f)], they exhibit similar results, except for the alcoholic group [Fig. 2(d)], where the absence of glycogen degeneration was observed. Among all treatment groups, CPE 8 was found to be more effective in tissue, serum, and histopathological studies.

The difference in the activity of these extracts in reducing hepatotoxicity is likely due to variations in the active constituents present in them. Phytoconstituents such as alkaloids, monoterpenoids, diterpenoids, triterpenoids, steroids, lignans, glycosides, phenolics, flavonoids, and coumarin compounds have been reported to possess hepatoprotective activity and are found in different plant parts.<sup>30,31</sup> Agents possessing antioxidant<sup>1</sup>, free radical scavenger<sup>29</sup>, and anti-lipid per oxidant activities can effectively manage reactive species-mediated hepatotoxicity upon administration.<sup>20</sup>

Various phytoconstituents have been identified from *D. bipinnata* and reported in the literature, including coumarins (scopoletine and umbelliferone), carbohydrates, sugars, proteins, amino acids, alkaloids, tannins, phenolics, xanthenes (2,6-dihydroxy-7-methoxy-3H-xanthen-3-one)<sup>32</sup> steroids (stigmasterol,  $\beta$ -sitosterol, daucosterol, etc.)<sup>32</sup>, flavonoids (kaempferol, quercetin, quercetin-3-glucoside, trycin, and trycin-7-glucoside)<sup>4</sup>, triterpenoids, and essential oils obtained from the aerial parts of *D. bipinnata* consist of camphene, isobornyl acetate, tricyclene, caryophyllene diepoxide, eudesmol, eseroline, and calarene as the main components of the oil.<sup>8,10,11,15</sup>







**Fig. No. 2.** Histopathology of liver in CCl<sub>4</sub> induced model of hepatotoxicity. (a) Control group (b) standard group (c) positive control group (d) alcoholic extract group (e) chloroform extract group (f) CPE 8 extract group

## DISCUSSION

In the preliminary phytochemical screening of extracts, phenolics, flavonoids, alkaloids, and steroids were found in different extracts of *D. bipinnata*. In hepatoprotective activity, CPE 8 was found to be more effective among all treatment groups in tissue, serum, and histopathological studies. The results of our studies validate the traditional use of the plant as a hepatoprotective agent. Detailed studies, including phytochemical analysis, isolation of phytoconstituents, mechanisms, formulation, etc., are warranted for exploitation of this plant for developing herbal medicinal product.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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