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Original Article

Study of Mentha piperita against gamma radiation in mice

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INTRODUCTION

The liver is a vital organ which performs wide range of functions, including detoxification, production of bile, metabolism of ingested nutrients, elimination of many waste products and plasma protein synthesis. In humans the radiation doses ranging between 2-8 Gray (Gy) are often used for treating cervical and bone cancers [1, 2]. Whole body or localized irradiation in humans often results in development of radiation-induced liver disease; thus, it seems reasonable to study liver for radiation injury as well as protection [3]. Radiotherapy has been widely used for treatment of abdominal neoplasms which often results in symptoms of radiation-induced liver disease (RILD) [4, 5]. Subacute RILD patients show development of veno-occlusive disease (VOD) characterized by marked centilobular congestion, yellow necrosis, collapse of the parenchyma, hyperemia, mild congestion of portal vein and increased size of Kupffer cells [6-8].

Whole body irradiation also results in biochemical changes in liver like decrease in glutathione (GSH) levels while malondialdehyde (MDA) levels increased in tissues [9]. This can be induced because of free radicals which impair the antioxidant defense mechanism leading to damage of the membrane structure and inactivation of membrane bound enzymes [10].

Numerous drugs of synthetic or natural origin have been screened for their radioprotective efficacy. The molecular drug amifostine, the only drug which is approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States, is the most thoroughly investigated drug but its radioprotective effects are short term and produce severe side effects at clinically effective doses [11, 12]. In fact, it can be said that there exist no single radioprotective agent which meets all the prerequisites of an ideal radioprotector [13, 14]. The role of the protective substances evidently accounts to a prevention of the secondary reactions which are the result of the primary radiocchemical process induced by exposure. The primary mode of radiation induced injury is the production of reactive

http://www.oamsjournal.com 285
oxygen species (ROS). Thus plant extracts which contain antioxidant properties seem promising in protection against ROS-mediated damage induced by radiation. Antioxidants delay the oxidation of biomolecules by inhibiting the initiation and propagation of oxidizing chain reactions and thus interfere with the process of apoptosis [15]. A number of plant extracts have exhibited considerable radioprotection due to their radical scavenging activity, which is examined as their effect on radiation-induced lipid peroxidation (LPO) and GSH levels [16, 17], but meager reports are available regarding the protection of histopathological lesions in liver. As large scale studies of various aspects of radiation exposure in human are limited and many times prohibited, animal models can provide useful information about radiation-induced injury and its protection using suitable drugs [18].

*Mentha* is one of the genera that are used in traditional Chinese, Thai and ayurvedic medicine for the treatment of fever, pain and dysentery [19, 20]. *Mentha piperita* (Linn) (peppermint), the ‘medicinal plant of the year 2004’ [21], is a perennial, glabrous and strongly scented medicinal herb belonging to the Labiatae family (also known as Lamiaceae) which has been shown to possess antioxidant, antimicrobial, antifungal, anticarcinogenic and antiallergic activity [22-33]. The aqueous extract of *Mentha piperita* has been studied for protection against radiation injury [34, 35] but its alcoholic extract has yet not been studied for hepatoprotection. Thus the present study deals with analysis of the hepatoprotective efficacy of the alcoholic extract of *M. piperita* (ALM) against radiation-induced liver injury in Swiss albino mice after whole body irradiation in terms of histopathological lesions and levels of LPO and GSH in liver.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Animals**

Six-eight week old female Swiss albino mice (*Mus musculus*) weighing 25 ± 2 g (procured from Hamdard University, Delhi, India) housed under controlled conditions of 25 ± 2°C temperature and 14:10 h light:dark cycle were used for the present study. The animals were given pelleted standard mice feed (obtained from Hindustan Lever Ltd, Delhi) and water *ad libitum*.

**Irradiation**

The Cobalt Teletherapy Unit (ATC-C9) in the Cancer Treatment Center, Radiotherapy Department S.M.S. Medical College and Hospital, Jaipur was used for irradiation exposure. Unanesthetized animals were restrained in well-ventilated Perspex boxes and their whole body was exposed to different doses (6, 8 and 10 Gy) of gamma radiation at a source-to-skin distance (SSD) of 77.5 cm to deliver the dose rate of 1.64 Gy/min.

**Preparation of alcoholic extract of Mentha**

*Mentha piperita* collected locally was identified and specimen was placed at Herbarium, Department of Botany, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur. The voucher number is RUBL-19443. Fresh leaves of *M. piperita* (Linn) were washed, air dried, powdered and extracted with 1500 ml of 50% ethanolic solution in double distilled water (DDW) and by refluxing for 36 h (3 x 12) at 60°C. The obtained extract was vacuum-evaporated and powdered. The optimum dose of ALM against gamma radiation-induced mortality was determined in the earlier study in our laboratory [36]. The extract was suspended in DDW and 0.1 ml of ALM suspension was given to each mouse by oral gavage dissolved at a dose of 100 mg/kg b.wt/day for 3 consecutive days before irradiation.

**Experimental design**

The animals selected for this study were divided into four groups:

-**Group I (normal);** animals of this group were sham-irradiated

-**Group II (drug alone);** animals of this group were given orally 100 mg/kg b.wt/day of ALM for 3 consecutive days

-**Group III (control; radiation alone);** animals were given DDW for 3 consecutive days equal to the volume of ALM and then exposed to different doses of radiation:
  - *Subgroup IIIa;* DDW + 6 Gy
  - *Subgroup IIIb;* DDW + 8 Gy
  - *Subgroup IIIc;* DDW + 10 Gy

-**Group IV (experiment; ALM + radiation treatment);** animals of this group were given orally 100 mg/kg b.wt/day of ALM for 3 consecutive days and then exposed to different doses of gamma radiation as follows.
  - *Subgroup IVa;* ALM + 6 Gy
  - *Subgroup IVb;* ALM + 8 Gy
  - *Subgroup IVc;* ALM + 10 Gy

**Autopsy intervals**

A minimum of five animals from all the above groups were autopsied by cervical dislocation at 1, 3, 7, 14 and 30 days post-treatment/irradiation and their liver tissues were removed and excised immediately after the autopsies, and fixed in Bouin's fixative. Following 16-24 h of fixation, tissues were washed, dehydrated, cleared and embedded in paraffin wax (58-60°C) followed by their microtome sectioning at 5 μ. The staining techniques employed for histological studies involved hematoxylin-eosin (HE).
Qualitative studies
The stained slides were observed at 100x and 400x magnifications for qualitative changes as hyperemia, degranulation in hepatoplasm, edema, lymphocytic infiltration, hydropic degeneration, giant cells and swollen Kupffer cells.

Quantitative studies
The stained slides were employed for the Histometric measurements on several 16 x 40 microscopic fields. At least 500 counts were taken in each case and then average values representing the percentage of normal, abnormal (pycnotic nuclei, necrotic cells) and binucleated cells were obtained.

Biochemical study
-Reduced glutathione assay: The level of GSH was determined by the method of Moron et al [37]. GSH content in liver was measured spectrophotometrically by using 5,5'-dithiobis-(2-nitrobenzoic acid) (DTNB or Ellman’s reagent) as a cooling reagent. The absorbance was read at 412 nm with a UV-VIS spectrophotometer (Systronics).

-Lipid peroxidation assay: The LPO level in liver and serum was measured in terms of thiobarbituric acid reactive substances (TBARS) by the method of Ohkawa et al [38]. The absorbance was read at 532 nm.

Statistical analysis
The results obtained from the present study were expressed as mean ± SEM. Student’s t-test [39] was used to make a statistical comparison between the groups. Statistical comparisons were completed with the irradiation alone group vs normal, normal vs drug alone and irradiation alone vs radiation and ALM-treated combined group. The significance level was set at P < 0.05.

RESULTS
Qualitative study of liver
In the present study, no toxic effects on liver were observed in mice treated with ALM alone (Fig.1) and the histology of liver was found to be similar to normal group (Fig.2).

The liver of control (irradiation alone) mice showed radiolesions in the form of dilated sinusoidal spaces, cellular edema, hydropic degeneration, hyperemia, lymphocytic infiltration, degranulated and vacuolated cytoplasm, swollen Kupffer cells, giant cells, multinucleated cells, enucleated cells and necrotic cells along with many pycnotic nuclei in post-irradiation autopsy intervals. At 6 and 8 Gy irradiation dose maximum damage was seen on day 3 post-irradiation with a trend towards normalization from day 7, relapse of damage was observed on day 14 (Figs.3&4).
However, by day 30 almost normal liver structure was attained, but the severity of damage was dose dependent.

Figure 4. 8 Gy irradiation alone group; day 1 liver histology showing hyperemia, pyknotic nuclei, enucleated cells and degranulated cytoplasm (400x, HE).

Figure 5. 6 Gy irradiation + ALM group; day 3 liver histology showing few enucleated cells and lymphocytic infiltration (400x).

Figure 6. 8 Gy irradiation + ALM group; day 1 liver histology showing hyperemia lymphocytic infiltration, binucleated and multinucleated cells (400x, HE).

ALM pretreatment afforded significant protection against radiation-induced hepatic lesions at all the autopsy intervals and 6 and 8 Gy doses of radiation (Figs.5&6). The protection by ALM at irradiation dose of 10 Gy was exhibited in form of minor suppression in severity of radialesions as compared to control (Figs.7&8).

Quantitative study

- Normal hepatocytes: drug alone group did not showed any significant variation in number of normal hepatocytes as compared to normal. In the control group a dose dependent decline in normal cell population was observed as compared to normal with highest decline at 10 Gy followed by 8 Gy and 6 Gy. The decline was observed up to day 3 followed by a slight increase on day 7, further decline on day 14, but by day 30 post-irradiation considerable recovery in normal hepatocyte number was observed in the survivors of 6 and 8 Gy treated groups. The population of normal hepatocytes also decreased after irradiation in the ALM and radiation combined group. This decline was always significantly lower than the respective control groups (Table 1).

Figure 7. 10 Gy irradiation alone group; day 3 liver histology showing enucleated, necrotic cells and hydropic degeneration (400x).

Figure 8. 10 Gy irradiation + ALM group; day 3 liver histology showing enucleated, necrotic cells and hydropic degeneration (400x).
**DISCUSSION**

The efficacy of any hepatoprotective drug is essentially dependent on its capacity of either reducing the harmful effects or maintaining the normal physiologic function which has been distributed by hepatotoxic agents [40]. Radiation exposure results in severe damage to liver. This causes necrosis of liver cells at varying level, depending on the radiation dose. Extensive necrosis of parenchymatous cells of liver after irradiation has long been known [41].

**Table 1.** Percentage of normal, abnormal and binucleated hepatocytes after exposure to 6, 8 and 10 Gy gamma rays with (Exp) and without (Control) pretreatment of ALM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dose</th>
<th>Hepatocyte</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>30</th>
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<tr>
<td>6 Gy</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>71.24 ± 1.52&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>70.58 ± 2.26&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>78.44 ± 2.16&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>71.55 ± 1.81&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>81.32 ± 2.38&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>81.24 ± 1.48&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exp</td>
<td>81.24 ± 2.51&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>80.24 ± 3.34&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>88.18 ± 1.32&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>84.18 ± 1.42&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>89.24 ± 1.48&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Abnormal</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>10.4 ± 0.125&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>11.46 ± 0.86&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9.22 ± 0.64&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>12.46 ± 0.26&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7.84 ± 0.34&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Exp</td>
<td>8.16 ± 1.16&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9.18 ± 0.36&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>8.46 ± 0.37&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9.52 ± 1.18&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.67 ± 0.46&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Binucleated</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>13.62 ± 1.42&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>14.22 ± 0.18&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>11.62 ± 0.32&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>12.16 ± 1.16&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10.68 ± 0.15&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Exp</td>
<td>10.18 ± 1.55&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10.08 ± 0.42&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9.24 ± 1.46&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9.08 ± 1.86&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>8.42 ± 1.182&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>8 Gy</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>70.02 ± 1.52&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>68.08 ± 52.46&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>75 ± 1.82&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>70.46 ± 1.127&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>71.42 ± 1.192&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Exp</td>
<td>80.56 ± 3.32&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>79.86 ± 1.136&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>84.36 ± 2.148&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>82.48 ± 3.131&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>83.24 ± 2.22&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Abnormal</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>11.2 ± 0.204&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>12.42 ± 0.35&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>12.98 ± 0.149&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>13.41 ± 0.148&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9.76 ± 0.21&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Exp</td>
<td>9.12 ± 0.24&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9.84 ± 0.184&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10.16 ± 0.65&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10.46 ± 1.4&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>7.16 ± 0.55&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Binucleated</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>14.15 ± 0.33&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>14.96 ± 0.35&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>13.48 ± 0.38&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>14.26 ± 0.29&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>11.42 ± 0.5&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Exp</td>
<td>11.42 ± 0.55&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>12.96 ± 0.34&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>11.24 ± 2.24&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10.25 ± 0.64&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9.25 ± 1.152&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>10 Gy</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>69.45 ± 1.31&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>68.83 ± 1.129&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>58.34 ± 3.96&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Exp</td>
<td>75.52 ± 3.118&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>74.67 ± 1.22&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>72.25 ± 2.81&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>56.44 ± 2.4&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Abnormal</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>12.04 ± 1.101&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>18.46 ± 0.4&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>24.36 ± 0.55&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Exp</td>
<td>9.03 ± 0.55&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>12.18 ± 0.18&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>13.22 ± 0.31&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>20.21 ± 1.98&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Binucleated</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>14.32 ± 1.136&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>15.22 ± 1.3&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>18.48 ± 1.22&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Exp</td>
<td>12.25 ± 0.56&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>9.64 ± 0.58&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10.52 ± 1.16&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>16.56 ± 0.16&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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Normal values: normal hepatocyte 91.27 ± 1.84%; abnormal hepatocytes 2.56 ± 0.15%; binucleated hepatocytes 8.46 ± 0.22%. Statistical comparisons were performed Control vs normal values and Exp vs Control; <sup>a</sup><i>P</i> < 0.05, <sup>b</sup><i>P</i> < 0.01, <sup>c</sup><i>P</i> < 0.001.

-Abnormal hepatocytes: drug alone group did not showed any significant variation in number of abnormal hepatocytes as compared to normal. In the irradiation alone group a dose-dependent increase in abnormal cell population was observed at all irradiation doses with maximum increase at 10 Gy followed by 8 Gy and 6 Gy. The increase in number of abnormal hepatocytes was observed up to day 3 followed by a slight decline on day 7, further increase on day 14, followed by considerable decline on day 30 post-irradiation in the control groups. The population of abnormal hepatocytes also increased after irradiation in the experimental groups but this increase was always significantly lower than the respective control groups (Table 1).

-Binucleated cells: the number of binucleated cells increased up to day 3 in 6 Gy and 8 Gy and up to day 7 in 10 Gy irradiation-treated groups. Their number showed a slight decrease on day 7 followed by increase on day 14 and considerable recovery by reaching close normal on day 30 post-irradiation in 6 Gy and 8 Gy treated groups. The experimental groups showed similar trend of increase and decrease of binucleated cells but were always significantly lower than the respective control groups (Table 1).

Biochemical estimation of lipid peroxidation and glutathione

-Lipid peroxidation: a dose dependent increase in TBARS level of liver was evident in control animals with maximum on day 14. However, no significant difference was noticed in levels of TBARS in normal and drug alone groups. ALM pretreatment exhibited considerable radioprotection by significant arrest of LPO elevation at all autopsy intervals as compared to control reaching near normal values on day 30 (Fig.9).

-Reduced glutathione: the normal group did not exhibit any significant variation in GSH levels but the drug alone group showed higher values than normal at all autopsy intervals. Animals of irradiation alone showed dose dependent decline in GSH levels at all autopsy intervals as compared to normal. ALM pretreatment before irradiation exhibited significantly elevated values of GSH level in liver as compared to control at all autopsy intervals (Fig.10).

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In the present study histopathological alterations showed a correlation with the number of abnormal cells (pycnotic nuclei, necrotic cells). Pycnotic nuclei of cells depict interphase cell deaths which were more numerous on day 1 and day 14. The peroxidation of lipid portion of the membranes which was found to be elevated on day 14 appears to be responsible for pycnosis and other structural and functional changes in liver. Other nuclear changes can be attributed to DNA damage, as DNA is the critical target and is irreversibly damaged by ionizing radiation [8].

Liver with its metabolic, detoxicating, secretory and excretory functions is extremely vulnerable to harmful substances. This is particularly true for the highly differentiated parenchyma which allows the organ to perform its specific functions. Liver function is disturbed if there is interference with the hepatocellular metabolic processes or bile secretion. Such interference may take place after radiation exposure resulting in disturbed metabolic processes and cytological abnormalities.

In the present study two types of cytological abnormalities were distinguished:

1. Cell injury, directly showing cellular edema, balloon cells (10 Gy), cytoplasmic vacuolization, hydropic degeneration, swelling, enucleation, degranulation, pyknosis and karyolysis (Fig. 7)
2. Mitosis related abnormalities, resulting in giant cells, binucleated cells and multinucleated cells.

Similar distinction in cellular abnormality has also been reported earlier [42]. The increase in cellular water content causes swelling of the cell, or cellular edema. In cellular edema, there is an increase in cell size; the cytoplasm stains less intensely and often has a somewhat foamy structure [43]. This may occur due to membrane damage or disturbances in the energy metabolism of cells, resulting in increased uptake of water. The improper functioning of Na⁺/K⁺-pump may also be responsible for cellular edema since ATP.
production is said to be reduced in certain cells following moderate doses of radiation [44]. Among the cellular organelles mitochondria are one of the key components of cells killed by radiation-induced oxidative stress [45]. Since mitochondria are the source of ATP, their damage would deplete ATP levels in cells.

If the disturbance in the water balance is not counteracted in time, the reversible phase of cellular edema changes into an irreversible phase, known as hydropic degeneration or ballooning [46]. Thus, it can be suggested that whole body exposure to radiation at 6, 8 and 10 Gy results in cellular edema because of reduced ATP production and disturbance in Na"/K"-pump; secondly animals exposed to 6 and 8 Gy show considerable recovery as they are less prone to enter in irreversible phase of cellular injury (hydropic degeneration) whereas at 10 Gy considerable hydropic degeneration is seen which is irreversible and may be one of the reason for mortality at high dose (10 Gy).

Degranulation of cytoplasm can be directly correlated with reduction in the amount of glycogen. A decrease in the glycogen content of tissues is frequently observed if there is a shortage of oxygen in the tissues (hypoxia) or if the oxygen supplied cannot be used because of mitochondrial damage [45]. By way of adaptation, the cells then change to anaerobic respiration, i.e. increased glycogen degradation via glycolysis [46].

At higher irradiation dose the cells exhibit ballooning. In these balloon cells the cavities of endoplasmic reticulum swells [47]. As we know that smooth endoplasmic reticulum (RER) plays a role in glycogenesis, the ballooning of cells may cause disturbance in the proper functioning of endoplasmic reticulum and thus causing depletion in glycogen synthesis.

Formation of giant cells has been reported by several workers in different pathological conditions like tumor [48, 49], infection [50] and administration of cytolethal toxin [51]. Giant cells in liver after internal irradiation were also reported [52]. The giant cells result in part presumably from continued DNA synthesis causing polyploidy in the cells that were unable to enter mitosis whereas the formation of bi- or multinucleate cells is considered as a result of undisturbed karyokinesis with an inhibited cytokinesis which may be partial or complete [53-56]. Mononucleate giant cells might be formed due to failure to enter mitosis after completion of interphase. Binucleate and multinucleate giant cells might also be formed as a result of the failure of cell separation after completion of mitosis, or due to fusion of cells [57]. Giant cell formation is an irreversible phenomenon and it seems to be a step before degeneration and cell death [58].

An increase in binucleated cells may be due to failure of cell separation after mitosis, or fusion of two mononuclear cells after irradiation [59, 60]. The recovery phase of liver also marked an elevation in binucleated cells. Two types of binucleated cells could be distinguished. The binucleated cell can be formed by incomplete cell division, which can be observed as the two nuclei are joined to each other while cells formed by fusion of mononucleate cells showed two separate nuclei [57, 59]. In the present study the former type of binucleated cells were found more frequently on day 14 and even day 30 while the latter type were more frequent on day 1 and day 3.

Hyperemia was frequently observed at all radiation doses in the initial autopsy intervals. This might be because of VOD [6-8], which is the anatomic substratum of RILD. Animals pretreated with ALM and irradiated to different doses of radiation exhibited lesser degree of damage to liver. The initial injury by radiation to liver was mild and recovery was early as compared to control (irradiation alone), however, the injury was dose dependent.

Damage incurred to a tissue can be divided into three parts [61]: a period of reversible alterations (in this period the damage can be repaired to certain extent); a point of no return (beyond which the cells will be irreversibly changed); and a period of irreversible changes (culminating in the total destruction of the cell). From the present study, the period of reversible alterations can be considered as early post-irradiation period when considerable damage occurred, followed by gradual recovery. The recovery of the tissue is not complete as many cells show pycnosis and necrosis, these can be considered to cross the point of no return and enter into period of irreversible changes as observed in the 10 Gy treated group.

The extent of injury and repair can be evaluated on the basis of quantitative study of cells which have not crossed the point of no return. As seen in the histological slides the liver tissues of ALM treated group showed mild damage and faster recovery at 6 and 8 Gy as compared to irradiation alone group. At a lethal radiation dose (10 Gy) the treatment of ALM resulted in delayed cellular damage, but was possibly not able to prevent considerable number of cells from crossing the point of no return followed by period of irreversible change and cellular death.

Radioprotection by ALM can be supported by the biochemical estimations of GSH and LPO. The levels of LPO and GSH reached close to normal levels in the ALM treated group at irradiation dose of 6 Gy and 8Gy and these levels significantly varied with those of irradiation alone group. The study suggests considerable hepatoprotection afforded by alcoholic extract of *Mentha piperita* when administered for 3
consecutive days prior to irradiation at sub-lethal dose of 6 Gy and 8 Gy in Swiss albino mice. The percentage of normal, abnormal and binucleated cells showed significant difference in the ALM treated group as compared to irradiation alone. The GSH levels dropped in both the groups as compared to normal in the initial autopsy intervals (1 and 3 days) thereafter showed gradual recovery (7, 14 and 30 days).

But at the lethal dose (10 Gy) irradiation, ALM treatment does not provide much benefit [36]. Although the levels of LPO were significantly lower than irradiation alone group they remained still 2-3 folds higher than its normal values and at 14 day autopsy interval it reached extremely high levels resulting in no survivors after 15 days. Similarly, the GSH levels in the ALM treated group were significantly higher as compared to the control group (10 Gy irradiation alone) but were many folds lower than the normal values; moreover, its levels even did not recovered by day 14.

The LPO level can be related to changes in permeability of membranes [62] which may result in hydropic degeneration as seen in present study. The lower LPO in ALM treated group may be responsible for milder changes in membrane permeability and hydropic degeneration. The decline of LPO on day 7 and elevation on day 14 paralleled with the abnormal hepatocyte population. Similar radiation response of LPO indices was also reported in an earlier study [63]. Most likely hepatocytes are not main target, but they do suffer secondary damage (atrophy, necrosis) probably due to anoxia [8]. Moreover, the lysosomal membrane stabilization by flavonoids and polyphenolic compounds present in medicinal plants like _M. piperita_ can also be implicated control in the decline of LPO levels in the ALM treated group [64]. Endogenous antioxidants constitute important defense systems in cells and elicit their action by suppressing the formation of ROS, by scavenging or by repairing the damage caused [45]. This is one of the most important systems capable of protecting cells against free radicals formed during ionizing radiation [65].

GSH effectively scavenges free radicals and other ROS [67]. Thus it can be suggested that ALM raises the levels of GSH in liver and thus increases the radical scavenging activity of liver cells. Raised level of GSH would protect mitochondrial damage and thus increase ATP production to maintain Na+/K+ pump and protect against hydropic degeneration of liver. GSH is essential for the activation of T-lymphocytes and polymorphonuclear leukocytes [67]. The higher degree of lymphocytic infiltration and thus immunological protection in ALM treated and radiation combined group can be explained by this study. Some swollen Kupffer cells were frequently observed in ALM treated and radiation combined group. The sinusoidal wall is made up of endothelial cells and Kupffer cells. Kupffer cells are elongated, irregular cells displaying marked phagocytic activity [46]. The Kupffer cells have been shown to phagocytize denatured serum proteins [68, 69]. It is suggested that the Kupffer cells may physiologically remove any denatured or modified serum proteins from the circulation, which may help in faster recovery from radiation insult to liver. Immunomodulatory effect has been reported in peppermint oil which seems to be exerted through the components of _M. piperita_ like 1-menthol, menthol and 8-cineole [70].

The degeneration of cellular membrane may be responsible for increase in binucleated cells which may be formed due to inhibition of cytokinesis or fusion of mononucleated cells. The LPO levels showed higher values on day 3 and 14 autopsy intervals which can be correlated with the higher number of binucleated cells. Lower LPO levels can also explain the milder degranulation in cytoplasm (glycogen depletion). Lower peroxidation of lipids can reduce radiation induced oxidative stress and thus protect mitochondria [45]. Thus the ATP generation may not be hampered and all metabolic processes including glycosynthesis. The free radical-scavenging activity of _M. piperita_ extract has been earlier demonstrated [71].

The radioprotective property of _M. piperita_ can be attributed to the presence of antioxidants, namely α-tocopherol, rosmarinic acid, menthone, isomenthol, eugenol, caffeic acid, rutin, β-caroteen, genarial [15-17, 20, 21]. α-Tocopherol has also been found to attenuate oxidative stress and to exhibit liver morphological protection [72]. Limonene, another component of _M. piperita_, is shown to exhibit anti-inflammatory property [73] which may help prevent inflammatory symptoms in liver. Radical scavenging activities of three _Mentha_ species’ (_M. aquatica_, _M. longifolia_ L., and _M. piperita_ L.) essential oils on 2,2-diphenyl-1-picrylhydrazyl (DPPH) and hydroxyl (·OH) radicals have been studied by earlier workers. The highest ·OH radical scavenging activity by reducing ·OH radical generation in the Fenton reaction was exhibited by _M. piperita_ essential oil and the most powerful scavenging compounds were monoterpane ketones (menthone and isomenthone) [74].

The aqueous extract of _M. piperita_ has earlier been shown to provide significant radioprotection at a dose of 1 g/kg b.wt/day for 3 consecutive days before irradiation at 8 Gy [75]. In the present study the 50% alcoholic extract of _M. piperita_ leaves was tested which provides significant protection at 0.1 g/kg b.wt/day for 3 consecutive days before irradiation at 8 Gy which is $\frac{1}{10}$th of the aqueous extract dose. The antioxidant potential of _M. piperita_ oil has been found comparable to synthetic antioxidants such as butylated...
hydroxyanisole (BHA) and butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT) in terms of lipid peroxidation inhibition [32]. The conclusion drawn from the present study is that the alcoholic extract of Mentha piperita provides significant protection from gamma ray irradiation if given 3 days prior to exposure. The protection provided by ALM can be attributed to the antioxidant properties of biochemical constituents in the Mentha piperita leaves.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST
The authors have no conflict of interest or relationship, financial or otherwise to declare.

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