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**“Biosynthesized Metallic Nanoparticles for Mitigation of Abiotic Stress in Medicinal and Aromatic Plant *Cymbopogon citratus*: A Bioinformatics and In Silico Approach”**

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirement of the Degree  
of

**Master of Technology**

in

**Industrial Biotechnology**

Submitted by

**Jaya Kaushik**

**(24IBT08)**

Under the supervision of

**Dr. Navneeta Bharadvaja**



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**July 2026**

**DEPARTMENT OF BIOTECHNOLOGY**

**DELHI TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY**

## ABSTRACT

In addition to the natural environment's effects on growing conditions and plant development, there are many abiotic factors that can limit the growth and productivity of medicinal and aromatic plants. Such abiotic stressors include salinity, drought, heat, or metal toxicity. Researchers have identified metallic nanoparticles biosynthesized via environmentally or ecologically safe methods as an alternate, more sustainable means of enhancing the tolerance of plants to these types of environmental stresses. The present study will investigate how metallic nanoparticles synthesized through biosynthesis can help protect the medicinal and aromatic plant species *Cymbopogon citratus* from the negative impacts of abiotic stress and find out if they can eliminate those negative effects. Bioinformatics and in silico methods were employed to achieve the following objectives: 1) To identify stress-responsive proteins involved in oxidative stress protection; and 2) To evaluate the identified proteins in terms of their function and interactions with metallic nanoparticles. This was accomplished by using computational resources to predict protein structures, assess molecular docking between the respective metallic nanoparticles and targeted proteins, and therefore evaluate the potential effectiveness of using metallic nanoparticles to mitigate the effects of abiotic stresses on medicinal and aromatic plants. Laboratory studies were conducted to further investigate the interaction of metallic nanoparticles with target proteins and help to explain the molecular mechanisms for the ability of biosynthesized nanoparticles to mitigate abiotic stresses. In summary, findings from this study indicate that the biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles will enhance plant resilience to abiotic stress by regulating the antioxidative defense mechanisms and pathways involved in plant response to abiotic stress. This research provides evidence for the application of nanobiotechnology and bioinformatics to develop sustainable solutions that enhance the ability of plants to endure environmental stressors.

### Keywords:

*Biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles, abiotic stress, Cymbopogon citratus, bioinformatics, molecular docking.*

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Medicinal and Aromatic Plants

(MAPs) have tremendous value across many sectors (e.g., medicine, perfumes, cooking, nutraceuticals). In addition to having medicinal benefits, MAPs also produce fragrances. Medicinal benefits from MAPs are attributed to their chemical composition, including a variety of different groups of biologically active compounds. MAPs with their medicinal benefits and other health benefits. Traditional forms of medicine, such as Ayurveda and Unani, have utilized MAPs over the years to treat a plethora of ailments and illnesses (Hassan et al, 2024; Hasanuzzaman et al, 2020).

The demand for MAPs has experienced rapid growth in recent years due to both the potential for economic profits resulting from the use of MAPs and the fact that consumers are opting to use natural versus synthetic products and pharmaceuticals. Nevertheless, there are numerous abiotic stressors that can impact MAPs negatively in growth rates, production, and the quality of MAPs, such as: salinity, drought, heat, cold, and heavy metals. Collectively, the negative effects of these abiotic stressors will have consequential impacts on the physiology, biochemistry, and molecular biology of MAPs, which will result in substantially decreased biomass production from MAPs (Kumari et al, 2022; Tripathi et al, 2020).

Among various medicinal and aromatic plants, *Cymbopogon citratus* (lemongrass) is an important plant known for its medicinal, antimicrobial, antioxidant, and aromatic properties. It is widely used in herbal medicines, cosmetics, essential oil industries, and food products. The plant is rich in essential oils such as citral, which possesses significant biological activities (Aliakbarpour et al., 2020).

Nanotechnology has proven method alleviate in agriculture and plant biotechnologies (e.g., sustainable). Eco-friendly biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles synthesized from biological sources (e.g., plants, algae, fungi and bacteria) are considered to be an excellent form of nanomaterial with varying rheological behaviours that create a unique physical or chemical property that would improve a plant's ability to survive during abiotic stress, through increasing their antioxidant defence systems and regulating their levels of ROS (reactive oxygen species) during periods of stress (Singh et al., 2016; Elakkiya et al., 2022).

Bioinformatics and computational biology are now being explored using new technologies and scientific methods that provide many efficient ways to study the molecular interactions between various types of stress-responsive proteins and the intracellular signalling pathways that are

1 associated with the ability of a plant to withstand abiotic stress. Such in silico methods, including molecular docking, protein structure prediction, pathway analysis, are used to study the interactions between nanoparticles and proteins and their role in reducing abiotic stress (Khan et al., 2021; Sarraf et al., 2022).

57 In this study, the present research study is aimed at the application of biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles as a means to reduce abiotic stress of the plant *Cymbopogon citratus* using biophysics and in silico technology. The overall goal of the current study will be to identify and evaluate the various stress-responsive proteins that will interact with the biosynthetic metallic nanoparticles and the target proteins involved in the developmental and physiological response pathways associated with plant abiotic stress tolerance.

## 1.2 Abiotic Stress in Plants

10 Abiotic stress is the negative effect of a non-living component on plant growth, development, and production. Some examples of important abiotic stresses include salinity, drought, temperature extremes, heavy metals toxicity, and oxidative stress. Abiotic stresses cause negative changes in plant physiology through ionic interference, membrane damage, reduced photosynthesis, and Reactive Oxygen Species (ROS) production (Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020; Kumari et al., 2022).

3 4 Among the various types of abiotic stresses, salt stress is the most lethal type of abiotic stress. Salt stress limits water uptake, disrupts nutrient homeostasis, and prevents growth and metabolic activities in plants. Likewise, drought stress creates water scarcity, thereby inhibiting cell enlargement, chlorophyll breakdown, and photosynthesis. Heat stress also impairs enzymatic activities, protein stability, and membrane function in plants (Tripathi et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2024).

25 71 A number of abiotic stresses result in oxidative stress owing to the generation of ROS, which include hydrogen peroxide, superoxide radicals, and hydroxyl radicals. Overaccumulation of these leads to damages in proteins, lipids, nucleic acids, and chloroplast membranes. Enzymes like SOD, CAT, and APX are involved in the activation of antioxidant defense mechanism in plants (Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020).

The medicinal and aromatic plants are very much sensitive towards the environmental stress because the synthesis of valuable secondary metabolites and essential oils is directly influenced by abiotic stresses. Hence, the development of sustainable techniques that would improve the ability of plants to cope with abiotic stresses has become a vital area of study under plant biotechnology and nanotechnology (Elakkiya et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2016).

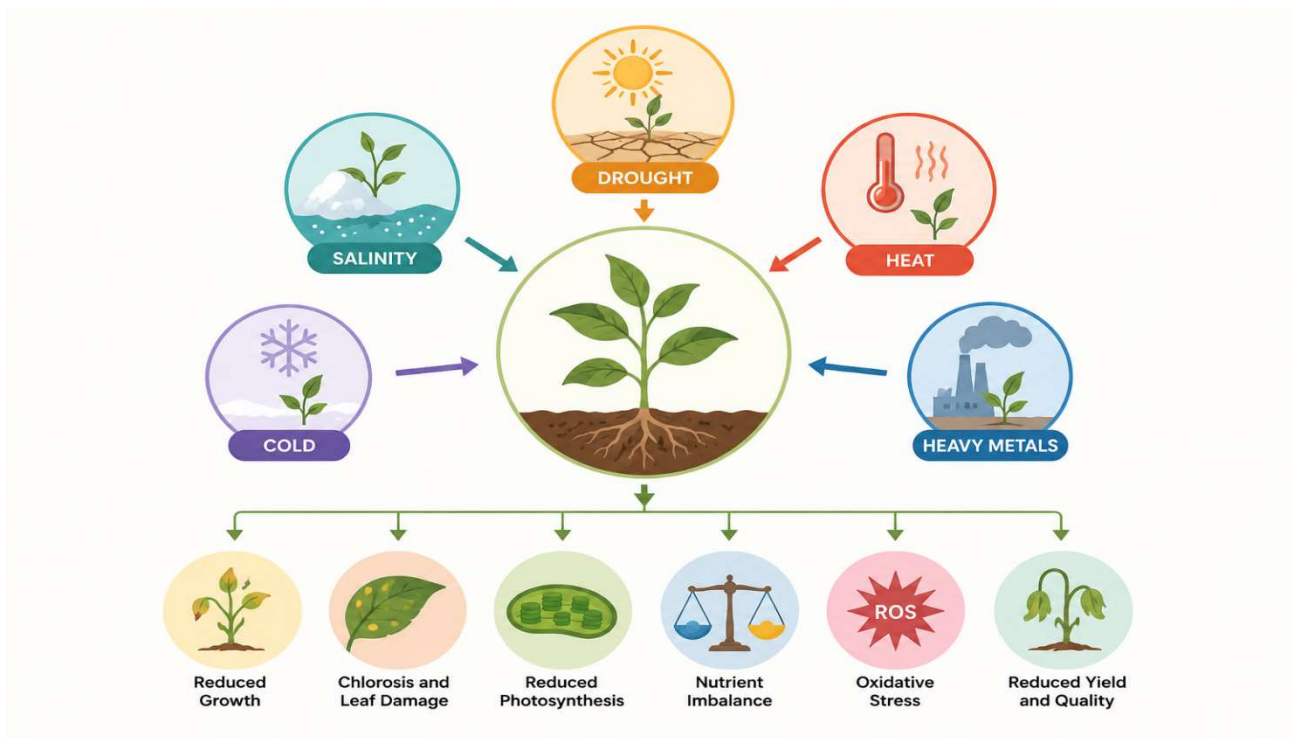


**Figure 1.1:** Abiotic stress effects in plants showing major environmental stresses including drought, salinity, heat, cold, and heavy metal stress and their impact on plant growth, physiology, photosynthesis, oxidative balance, and productivity.

### 1.3 Salinity Stress and Plant Responses

It has been identified as higher concentration of salts, particularly NaCl in the soil, leads to both osmotic and ionic stresses, and affects water and nutrient absorption and metabolism. Salt stress has emerged as a problematic issue in agriculture owing to soil erosion, over-irrigation, and climate change issues (Kumari et al., 2022; Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020).

Under salt stress, an excessive buildup of ions of  $\text{Na}^+$  and  $\text{Cl}^-$  results in the disruption of ion balance within the cell, which further affects the absorption of other ions such as  $\text{K}^+$ ,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ , and  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$ . Any imbalance in the ionic balance negatively affects germination, photosynthesis, respiration, and enzymes. Furthermore, under salt stress, root growth and shoot growth are inhibited, resulting in reduced biomass of the plant (Tripathi et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2024).

The increased concentration of ROS leads to an oxidative stress on the protein, lipid, nucleic acid, and membrane levels. As a response to the oxidative stress, the antioxidant mechanism of plants, which consists of two groups of compounds (enzymatic, like SOD, CAT, APX and non-enzymatic, like phenolics, flavonoids, ascorbic acid), is activated (Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020).

Salinity stress is one of the important factors that adversely affect medicinal plants. This is because, in addition to limiting plant growth, the mentioned stress impacts the process of biosynthesis of

valuable secondary metabolites and essential oils formed by the plants. In this way, improving the salinity stress tolerance in medicinal plants is an important objective of plant biotechnological researches. Some recent studies have found that biosynthesis of metallic nanoparticles improves the tolerance of plants to salinity stress through the enhanced antioxidant activities, ion transport, osmotic balance, and protection of the photosynthetic apparatus (Elakkiya et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2016).

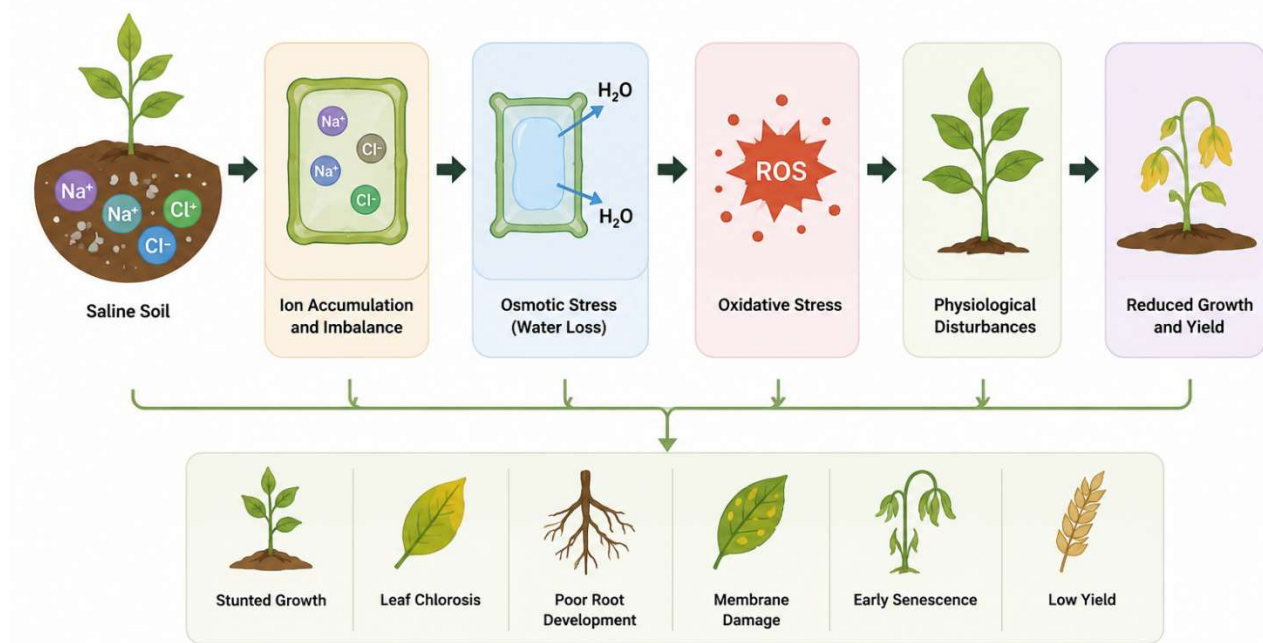


**Figure 1.2:** Mechanism of salinity stress in plants showing ionic imbalance, osmotic stress, oxidative damage, and physiological disturbances leading to reduced plant growth and yield.

#### 1.4 Metallic Nanoparticles and Their Importance

Metallic nanoparticles are nano-sized materials that generally measure between 1 and 100 nm. They exhibit special physicochemical properties, including high surface area, enhanced reactivity, increased catalytic activity, and enhanced bioavailability. Because of these unique properties, metallic nanoparticles have received considerable attention in various fields, including medicine, agriculture, environmental science, and biotechnology (Singh et al., 2016; Amin et al., 2023).

Various kinds of metallic nanoparticles, including AgNPs (silver nanoparticles), AuNPs (gold nanoparticles), ZnO NPs (zinc oxide nanoparticles), Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> NPs (iron oxide nanoparticles), TiO<sub>2</sub> NPs (titanium dioxide nanoparticles), and selenium nanoparticles, are extensively applied in improving plant growth and tolerance to stressful conditions. They are capable of entering the tissues of plants and interacting with cellular elements and affecting biochemical and physiological processes (Kumari et al., 2020; Elakkiya et al., 2022).

In agricultural applications, metallic nanoparticles are regarded as promising tools in sustainable crop production and managing stress responses. They facilitate seed germination, mineral absorption, photosynthesis, generation of antioxidants, and overall plant development under stress-inducing environments. They aid in mitigating oxidative stress through scavenging ROS and stress-responsive pathways (Tripathi et al., 2020; Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020).

In various types of nanoparticles, silver nanoparticles are highly recognized for their potential antibacterial, antioxidative, and stress-resistant features. The use of silver nanoparticles has been found to increase salinity resistance, chlorophyll stability, enzymatic functions, and secondary metabolites in medicinal and aromatic plants experiencing stress (Aliakbarpour et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2024).

The application of the latest developments in nanotechnology and bioinformatics has significantly increased knowledge about nanoparticle-plant interactions at the molecular level. Modern in silico techniques including molecular docking, protein-protein interactions, and pathway analysis are being applied to gain insight into how metallic nanoparticles affect stress-responsive proteins and pathways in plants (Khan et al., 2021; Sarraf et al., 2022).

### 1.5 Biosynthesized Metallic Nanoparticles

Biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles represent environmentally friendly nanomaterials prepared from biological resources like plants, fungi, bacteria, algae, and other microorganisms. Unlike traditional physical and chemical methods of synthesis, biological synthesis is considered environmentally friendly, inexpensive, nontoxic, and sustainable due to the lack of hazardous reagents and energy-intensive techniques used during the process (Singh et al., 2016; Iravani et al., 2014).

In biosynthesis, various biomolecules such as flavonoids, phenolics, terpenoids, proteins, alkaloids, and enzymes serve as the reducing and stabilizing agents that are responsible for converting metal ions into nanoparticles. Such substances not only contribute to nanoparticle production but also increase the stability, biocompatibility, and biological activity of nanoparticles (Kaviya et al., 2011; Ankamwar, 2010).

Synthesis of metallic nanoparticles by plants is especially relevant, considering the availability, diversity of bioactive substances, and possibility of obtaining stable nanoparticles with unique biological properties. Plant species such as *Ocimum sanctum*, *Aloe vera*, *Azadirachta indica*, and *Cymbopogon citratus* have proven effective for synthesizing silver, gold, zinc oxide, and iron oxide nanoparticles (Elakkiya et al., 2022; Kumari et al., 2020).

Metallic nanoparticles produced by biosynthesis demonstrate important biological activity in terms of being antibacterial, antioxidant, anticancer, anti-inflammatory, and stress-resisting. In plants, biosynthesized nanoparticles improve seed germination, nutrient absorption, chlorophyll, photosynthetic capacity, and antioxidant defense system under the condition of abiotic stresses. Besides, biosynthesized nanoparticles play an essential role in controlling the level of reactive oxygen species and ion homeostasis during the period of stress occurrence (Tripathi et al., 2020; Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020).

In terms of different types of biosynthesized nanoparticles, the silver nanoparticles have become the object of extensive research due to their antimicrobial and stress-resisting properties. It has been shown that the silver nanoparticles, which are produced by biosynthesis, improve the resistance to salinity and oxidative stress and increase the production of secondary metabolites in medicinal and aromatic plants (Aliakbarpour et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2024).

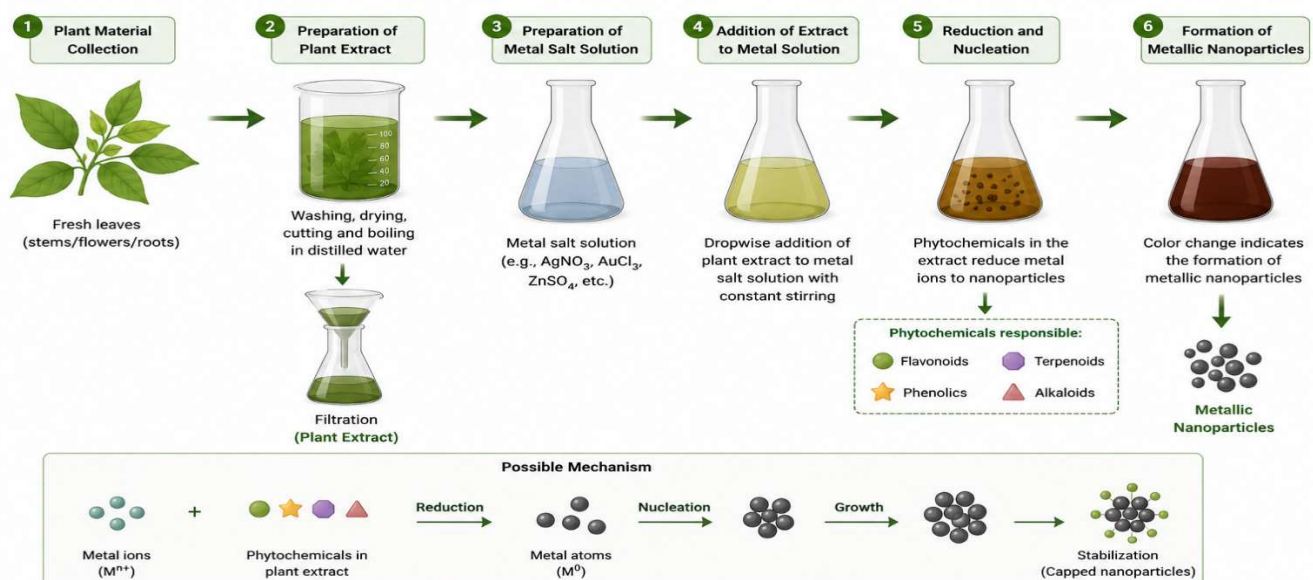


**Figure 1.3:** Schematic illustration of the biosynthesis process of metallic nanoparticles using plant extracts as reducing and stabilizing agents.

## 1.6 Nanoparticles in Stress Mitigation

The application of nanoparticles as a stress alleviating mechanism has shown promising results regarding the improvement of stress tolerance in plants against multiple abiotic stress factors, including salinity, drought, high temperatures, and heavy metal toxicities. The nanoparticles, with their small sizes and unusual physicochemical characteristics, can enter the cells of plants and affect physiological, biochemical, and molecular events related to stress resistance (Tripathi et al., 2020; Amin et al., 2023).

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One of the principal means that nanoparticles use in order to reduce abiotic stress in plants is the regulation of antioxidants. The conditions under which abiotic stresses occur usually result in a considerable production of ROS within the plants, causing significant damage. Metallic nanoparticles increase the activities of SOD, CAT, and APX antioxidants, resulting in reduced oxidative stress within plant tissues (Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020; Kumari et al., 2022).

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Further, nanoparticles provide resistance against plant stresses by ensuring ion homeostasis, facilitating better nutrient absorption, and controlling osmotic balance during stress conditions. Nanoparticles play a key role in mitigating sodium toxicity and increasing potassium absorption, which helps in sustaining ion homeostasis in plants under salinity stress conditions. Moreover, they protect the structure of chloroplasts and improve photosynthesis in plants. This leads to increased growth and production of biomass even in stressful environments (Elakkiya et al., 2022; Aliakbarpour et al., 2020).

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As for medicinal and aromatic plants, nanoparticles have been found to increase the production of secondary metabolites including flavonoids, phenolics, terpenoids, and essential oils. All these metabolites are important for the defense mechanism of plants and their medicinal value. Metallic nanoparticles generated biologically affect the phytohormone signaling pathway as well as genes associated with plant stress response (Hassan et al., 2024; Wahid et al., 2022).

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Several recent studies have shown that silver nanoparticles, zinc oxide nanoparticles, iron oxide nanoparticles, and titanium dioxide nanoparticles have a positive effect on stress resistance in plants via regulating various pathways at the molecular and biochemical levels. Consequently, the use of nanoparticles can be regarded as an environmentally friendly and effective strategy to increase plant stress tolerance (Singh et al., 2016; Khan et al., 2021).

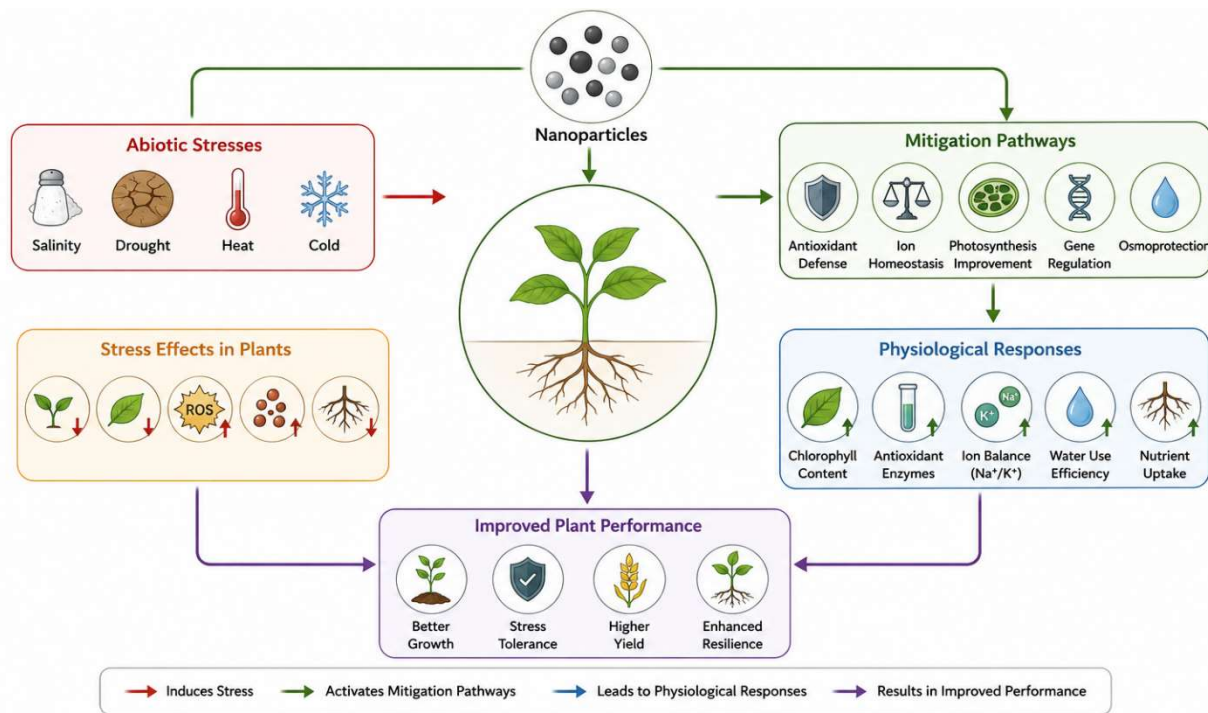


**Figure 1.4:** Schematic representation of the role of nanoparticles in stress mitigation pathways and enhancement of plant stress tolerance under abiotic stress conditions.

## 1.7 Bioinformatics and In Silico Approaches in Plant Research

In contemporary plant biotechnology and stress biology research, the bioinformatics approach and in silico technique have gained great popularity. With the aid of bioinformatics, biological data can be analyzed, molecular interactions can be predicted, gene function and structure can be elucidated, and stress-responsive proteins which are part of defense mechanisms of plants against stressors can be recognized. The combination of bioinformatics and nanotechnology has opened up new possibilities in studying molecular interaction of nanoparticles with plants (Khan et al., 2021; Sarraf et al., 2022).

In stress biology, various bioinformatic tools have been used in retrieving and analyzing the protein and gene sequences available in the NCBI, UniProt, and Protein Data Bank (PDB) database. Bioinformatic tools are used to identify proteins that play a role in response to abiotic stress, antioxidant defense, ion uptake, and stress signaling pathway (Singh et al., 2016; Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020).

Protein structure prediction and molecular docking are some of the vital in-silico methods that are employed in investigating the interaction mechanism of nanoparticles with their target proteins. The use of molecular docking facilitates the process of determining the binding affinity, sites of interaction, and stability of the complexes formed. This kind of analysis provides useful information

on the involvement of nanoparticles in stress-responsive pathways and their role in enhancing plant stress tolerance (Tripathi et al., 2020; Elakkiya et al., 2022).

Other bioinformatics methods that can be applied to elucidate biological pathways involved in stress adaptation and defense include Gene Ontology (GO) analysis, KEGG pathway analysis, and protein-protein interaction network analysis. These in-silico methods help in increasing knowledge on the molecular mechanisms underlying abiotic stress reduction.

The recent developments made by means of computational biology, molecular modeling, and simulations have made great contributions to plant nanobiotechnological studies. In silico methods save time, expense, and complications during experiments while delivering accurate predictions about the activity of nanoparticles and their interaction with molecules. Hence, bioinformatics and computational approaches are an important aspect of understanding the involvement of biosynthesized metal nanoparticles in plants' stress-tolerating mechanisms (Khan et al., 2021; Sarraf et al., 2022).

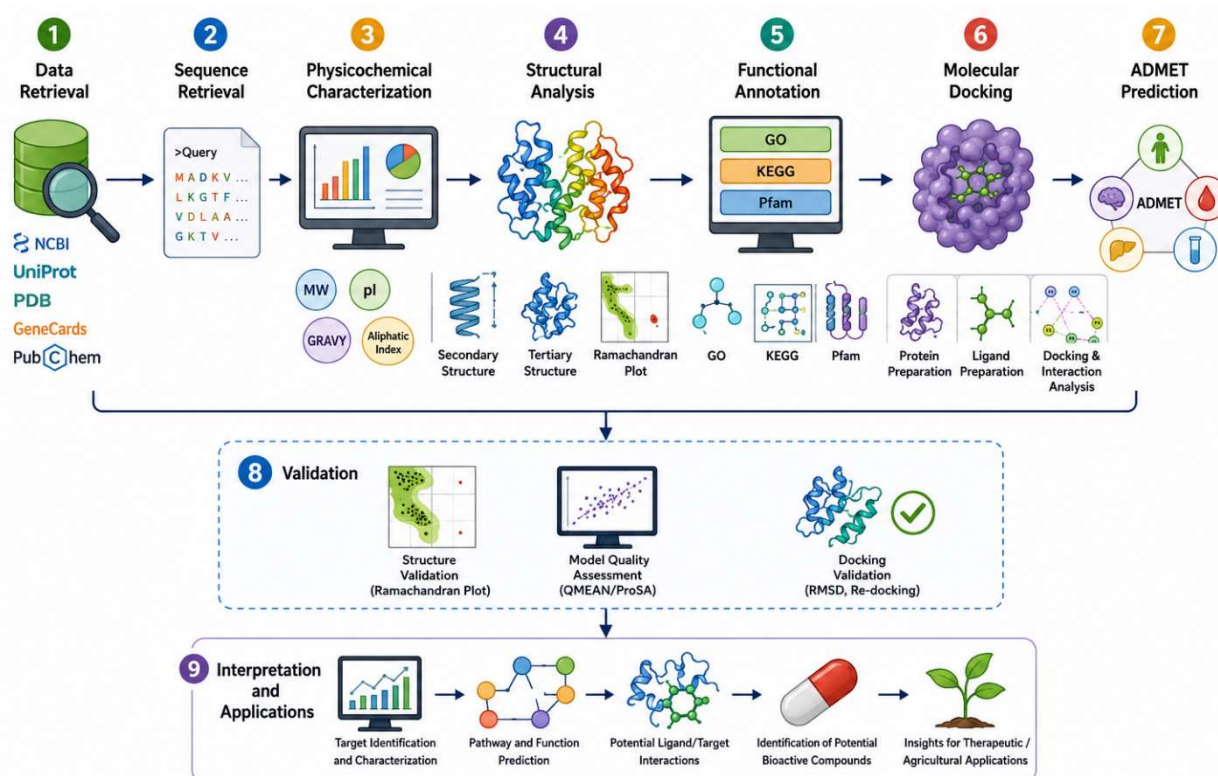


**Figure 1.5:** Workflow of bioinformatics and in silico approaches used in the present study for protein analysis, molecular docking, functional annotation, and validation studies.

## 1.8 Objectives of the Study

This current research was conducted to explore the possible role of biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles in reducing abiotic stress in the medicinal and aromatic plant *Cymbopogon citratus*.

through bioinformatics and in silico analysis. Some of the main objectives of this research are listed below.

1. To study the effects of abiotic stress on medicinal and aromatic plants.
2. To understand the importance of biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles in mitigating abiotic stress.
3. To discover stress responsive proteins related to the pathways of salinity and oxidative stress.
4. To fetch and analyze protein sequences from bioinformatics databases.
5. To conduct physiochemical characterization and structure prediction of the identified target proteins.
6. To analyze the interaction between metallic nanoparticles and stress responsive proteins through docking studies.
7. To study protein-protein interaction networks and pathways related to abiotic stress.
8. To explore the possibilities of using biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles for enhancing the abiotic stress resistance ability of plants through in silico approaches.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Green Synthesis of Metallic Nanoparticles

The green synthesis of metallic nanoparticles has proven to be a greener and more sustainable alternative to the conventional physical and chemical processes. The common techniques for the synthesis of nanoparticles include toxic reagents, higher energy input, and harmful products that are capable of causing ecological and biological damage. On the contrary, the biological synthesis involves the use of microorganisms such as plants, fungi, bacteria, algae, and other organisms as reduction agents in the synthesis of metallic nanoparticles (Singh et al., 2016; Iravani et al., 2014).

One of the most reliable methods for the synthesis of nanoparticles is the plant-based process because of the presence of natural products like flavonoids, phenolics, terpenoids, alkaloids, proteins and enzymes in plant extracts, thus making the process easier. These biomolecules act as reduction and stabilization agents that enhance the stability of nanoparticles (Kaviya et al., 2011; Ankamwar, 2010). Medicinal and aromatic plants like *Ocimum sanctum*, *Aloe vera*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Cymbopogon citratus* have successfully been used for the production of silver, gold, zinc oxide and iron oxide nanoparticles. Biosynthesized nanoparticles have enhanced activity regarding their antioxidant, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and stress protection capacity owing to the phytochemicals present on the surface of the plant (Elakkiya et al., 2022; Kumari et al., 2020).

In different experiments, it has been revealed that the plants developed with metallic nanoparticles develop better when exposed to salinity, drought, heat, and heavy metal stress and become more tolerant to stress. These particles have been found to be effective in improving the defense mechanism of antioxidant, regulating ROS, nutrient uptake, and photosynthetic efficiency under environmental stress in plants (Tripathi et al., 2020; Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020).

Parameters including pH, temperature, precursor concentration, reaction time, and biological source affect the process of nanoparticle formation. Optimization of these parameters is essential to develop the nanoparticles having desired physical properties along with biofunctions. This is why green chemistry has become a vital area of study in sustainable agriculture and biotechnological

applications(Aminetal.,2023;Sarrafetal.,2022).

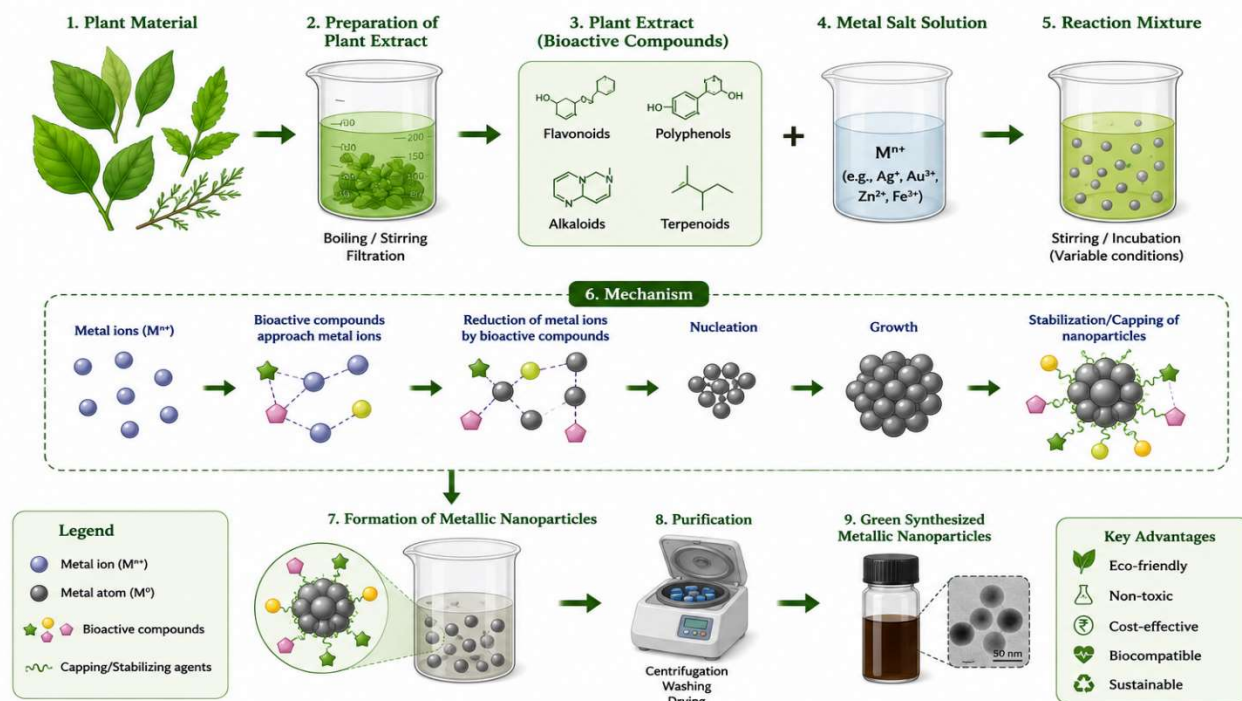


**Figure 2.1:** Schematic representation of the green synthesis mechanism of metallic nanoparticles using plant-derived bioactive compounds as reducing and stabilizing agents.

**Table 1.** Examples of biologically synthesized metallic nanoparticles and their reported activities

| Source organism /extract     | Nanoparticle synthesized | Reported particle features              | Characterization / properties                         | Functional role / application          | References                 |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Ocimum sanctum (Tulsi, leaf) | Ag NPs                   | 20–50 nm, predominantly spherical       | Stable colloids with strong surface plasmon resonance | Antioxidant and antimicrobial efficacy | (Singhal et al., 2011)     |
| Panax ginseng (root)         | Au, Ag NPs               | 15–40 nm, mostly spherical              | Capped with biomolecules, high antioxidant capacity   | Biomedical and therapeutic relevance   | (Singh et al., 2015)       |
| Citrus sinensis (fruit peel) | ZnO, Ag NPs              | 50–100 nm, morphology varies with conc. | XRD confirmed crystalline ZnO; waste valorisation     | Antimicrobial, sustainable synthesis   | (Kaviya et al., 2011)      |
| Terminalia catappa (leaf)    | Au NPs                   | 10–35 nm (avg. ~22 nm), stable          | Uniformly distributed, eco-friendly green synthesis   | Potential biomedical applications      | (Ankamwar, 2010)           |
| Ficus carica (leaf)          | Ag NPs                   | Morphology and size variable (15–60 nm) | Capped with phenolics and proteins                    | Antioxidant and antimicrobial effects  | (Al-Malki & Alharbi, 2025) |

|                               |            |                                          |                                                        |                                                 |                             |
|-------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Zingiber officinale (ginger)  | Ag NPs     | <50 nm, mostly spherical                 | Exhibited strong SPR peaks, stable in solution         | Antimicrobial and antioxidant potential         | (Shaligram et al., 2009)    |
| Penicillium brevicompactum    | Ag NPs     | 10–25 nm                                 | Extracellular metabolites served as capping agents     | Antimicrobial activity                          | (Mishra et al., 2017)       |
| Stenotrophomonas sp.          | Ag NPs     | Below 20 nm, stable                      | Metabolites stabilized particles; uniform morphology   | Antimicrobial and stable biosynthesis           | (Chakraborty et al., 2022)  |
| Chaetomorpha (green algae)    | Fe, Zn NPs | Variable, species-dependent              | Bioactive compounds and pigments acted as reducers     | Improved osmolyte accumulation under stress     | (Kumari et al., 2022)       |
| Cherry (Prunus avium) extract | ZnO NPs    | 20–80 nm, morphology altered by pH/temp. | XRD showed crystallinity; size tunable with parameters | Controlled synthesis, abiotic stress mitigation | (Mohammadi & Ghasemi, 2018) |

## 2.2 Bioinformatics and In Silico Approaches in Plant Stress Research

In recent times, bioinformatics and computational-based techniques have come to be known as valuable instruments in the field of plant biotechnology for deciphering the molecular mechanism involved in abiotic stress resistance. The use of these computational techniques aids in the investigation of gene, protein, metabolic pathway, and molecular interactions in plant stress resistance. Bioinformatics is a relatively new science that is widely used in many different uses, including stress response protein discovery, protein prediction, protein-protein interactions, and docking studies on the interaction of nanoparticles and proteins (Khan et al., 2021; Sarraf et al., 2022).

Databases such as NCBI, UniProt and Protein Data Bank (PDB) contain significant information related to genes and proteins related to salinity stress, oxidative stress and antioxidant system in plants. Examples of software employed in sequence analysis, protein modeling, interactome analysis and docking studies include BLAST, SWISS-MODEL, AutoDock, and AlphaFold. Such software will be valuable in gaining insights regarding the molecular mechanism associated with biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles in stress resistance (Tripathi et al., 2020; Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020).

Molecular docking approaches offer insights regarding the binding affinity, interaction sites, and stability of nanoparticle–protein complexes. Metallic nanoparticles are said to form complexes with antioxidant enzymes, ion transport proteins, and stress responsive signaling proteins which are directly associated with plant defense. These computational approaches help improve understanding

of molecular interaction processes in relation to abiotic stress tolerance and function of nanoparticles (Elakkiya et al., 2022; Wahid et al., 2022).

In addition, there are bioinformatics analyses such as Gene Ontology (GO) analysis, KEGG pathway analysis, and protein–protein interaction networks, which are important tools for identifying biological pathways involved in stress response in plants. Bioinformatics analysis helps understand the regulation of defense against stress-related oxidative damage, ion transport processes, osmotic adjustment, and signaling networks (Kumari et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2024).

Recent advancements in computational biology and molecular simulation techniques have made a huge contribution to research involving nanobiotechnology in plants. In-silico approaches help provide accurate predictions concerning the interaction behavior of nanoparticles and molecules along with them. These methods decrease the effort and costs associated with experiments. Hence, bioinformatics approaches have become a necessity in bioaccumulation of metallic nanoparticles in medicinal and aromatic plants against abiotic stress.

### 2.3 Role of Biosynthesized Metallic Nanoparticles in Abiotic Stress Mitigation

Mechanical and chemical attributes like salinity, heavy metal poisoning, drought, and heat injury are abiotic pressures. When plants experience such, they undergo oxidative pressure, ionic imbalances, chlorophyll degradation, and decreased photosynthesis. Thus, the development of metallic nanoparticles through the biological processes is an effective method of enhancing the ability of plants to resist abiotic stresses because of their unique physical and chemical characteristics (Tripathi et al., 2020; Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020).

Metallic nanoparticles will enhance plants' abiotic stress resistance through moderating their antioxidant defence systems and limiting the damage done by reactive oxygen species (ROSs). Under abiotic pressure, high amounts of ROSs attack the protein, lipid, nucleic acid, and cellular membranes of a plant. Metallic nanoparticles can regulate the biosynthesis of antioxidant enzymes such as ascorbate peroxidase (APX), catalase (CAT), and superoxide dismutase (SOD) for protection against oxidative pressure (Kumari et al., 2022; Elakkiya et al., 2022).

Silver nanoparticles, zinc oxide nanoparticles, titanium dioxide nanoparticles, and iron oxide. The role of the mentioned nanoparticles under salinity and drought stress in plants includes improving seed germination, mineral uptake, osmoregulation, chlorophyll content, and photosynthetic efficiency (Aliakbarpour et al., 2020; Amin et al., 2023).

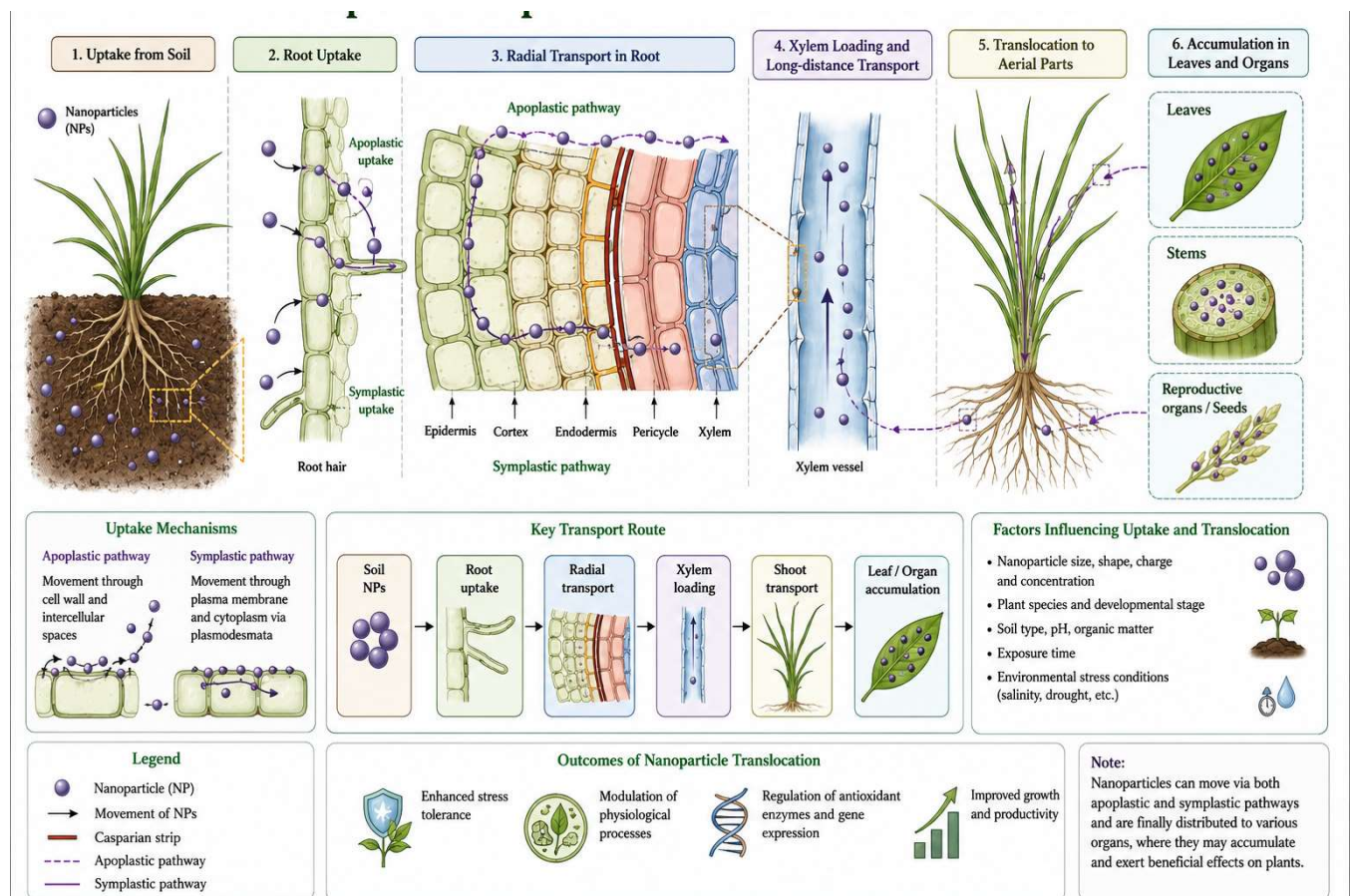
Additionally, synthesized nanoparticles influence both the accumulation of secondary metabolites in plants used for medicinal or aromatic purposes. Secondary metabolites are substances including

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phenolics, flavonoids, terpenoids, and essential oils, which serve as either defence or medicine within the plant. Numerous studies have shown nanoparticles modulate various pathways and the phytohormonal signalling network responsible for stress, leading to increased biosynthesis of secondary metabolites (Hassan et al., 2024; Tripathi et al., 2022).

Recent studies on biosynthesized nanoparticles also indicate that they interact with proteins and signalling pathways associated with abiotic stress, which are involved in response to and tolerance of stress. There have been some molecular and computational studies supporting the contention that nanoparticles regulate ion transporters, antioxidant enzymes, and genes that function within salinity and oxidative stress tolerance (Khan et al., 2021; Wahid et al., 2022).

Metallic nanoparticles synthesized by biological methods have been regarded as viable options that can be used in boosting productivity and enhancing plant resistance to environmental stresses, owing to the fact that they can be produced without using any toxic substances.



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**Figure 2.2: Schematic illustration of nanoparticle uptake and translocation in plants through roots, vascular tissues, and aerial plant parts.**

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## 2.4 Nanoparticle Uptake and Translocation in Plants

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However, the exact contribution of biosynthesized metallic resistance will depend upon their uptake and transport by plant tissues. The nanoparticles could enter plants through their roots, leaves or even the seeds and could further. Several factors like size, shape, concentration, surface charge and the biomolecule coating on the surface of nanoparticles are known to influence the uptake and translocation of these nanoparticles (Raliya et al., 2018; Rico et al., 2011).

Root absorption of nanosized particles is entering plants. Root uptake is facilitated through interactions of the nanosized particles in soil with root epidermis and transapoplastic and transsynaptic pathways. Since small sized nanoparticles easily enter cell walls and plasma membranes, their uptake becomes easy. It has been seen that iron oxide, zinc oxide and silver nanoparticles when uptaken through roots increased nutrient uptake and stress responsive signaling pathways in plants (Sreelakshmi et al., 2020; Zafar et al., 2021).

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Foliar spraying is another method used for delivering nanoparticles in plants. Penetration of nanoparticles in the leaf is possible via cuticles pores and stomata and enters through epidermal tissues. Following internalization of nanoparticles, transport to other parts of the plant may take place using xylem and phloem. Increased levels of chlorophylls, antioxidant potential, and accumulation of secondary metabolites in stressed medicinal and aromatic plants have been noted following the foliar application of silver and zinc oxide nanoparticles (Tripathi et al., 2022; Aliakbarpour et al., 2020).

Novel strategy used for increasing the viability of seeds and enhancing early growth stages of the seedlings. Nanoparticles able to interact with embryonic tissues, resulting in increased water uptake, activation of antioxidant system, and nutrient mobilization. Root elongation and improvement of plant vigor along with improved biomass in some crops after seed priming with gold, silver, and CuO nanoparticles have been reported (Rani et al., 2022; Elakkiya et al., 2022).

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Once taken up by plants, the nanoparticles are distributed to other parts of the plant through its vascular system. More specifically, the xylem transportation plays a greater role in nanoparticle uptake by shoots than phloem transportation while phloem transportation facilitates the uptake of nanoparticles by leaves, flowers, and fruits. The addition of phytochemical capping agents to the biosynthesized nanoparticles makes them more stable, available and compatible in plant systems, contributing greatly to the mitigation of toxicity and the stress alleviating ability of nanoparticles (Wahid et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2021).

## 2.5 Nanoparticle-Mediated Modulation of Secondary Metabolites in Medicinal and Aromatic Plants

According to current literature, biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles help to control the production pathway of secondary metabolites and stress responses in medicinal and aromatic plants, resulting in increased production of the metabolites (Tripathi et al., 2022; Hassan et al., 2024).

Biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles act as elicitors causing defensive reactions of plants, and also inducing enzymes involved in secondary metabolite biosynthesis. Mild oxidation signals from metallic nanoparticles cause defense reactions and enhance phenolics, flavonoids, and essential oils. This elicitation by metallic nanoparticles stimulates immune response of plants and provides medicinal benefits (Singh et al., 2021; Elakkiya et al., 2022).

Production of withanolides in *Withania coagulans* and antioxidants under stressed conditions have been observed using silver nanoparticles. Similarly, zinc oxide nanoparticles boost the synthesis of essential oils and alter their terpenoid profile in aromatic plants subjected to salinity. Nanoparticles such as CuO have even been reported to stimulate enzyme activity associated with phenylpropanoid biosynthesis like polyphenol oxidase and phenylalanine ammonia-lyase that would increase phenols and flavonoids (Aliakbarpour et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2024).

The influence on the secondary metabolism via regulation of the phytohormone signaling of auxins, Jasmonic acid, Salicylic acid and Absciscic acid is another way through which nanoparticle affects the synthesis of medicinal compounds. This hormonal interaction regulates the stress responsive genes and metabolic enzymes that synthesize pharmaceutical compounds. Nanoparticles that are synthesized in vitro therefore play a role in mitigating stress along with biosynthesis of active metabolites (Wahid et al., 2022; Kumari et al., 2022).

From recent studies conducted using computational techniques, it can be inferred that nanoparticles have a natural affinity for interacting with protein molecules and signaling agents that regulate the secondary metabolic pathways. Various proteins, enzymes, and metabolic pathways responsible for the biosynthesis of secondary metabolites in plants under stress due to nanoparticles have been determined with the help of computational techniques. Such techniques enable a more in-depth analysis of the mechanisms behind the augmentation of medicinal properties of plant life due to metallic nanoparticles (Khan et al., 2021; Sarraf et al., 2022).

## 2.6 Stress-Specific Roles of Biosynthesized Metallic Nanoparticles

In this study, the biosynthesis of metallic nanoparticles will be studied in relation to their specific function in response to different types of stresses in the body. The stress caused by salinity, drought, high temperature, and metal toxicity are examples of abiotic stress that greatly affect the growth, productivity, and metabolic process of plants. This causes biochemical and physiological alterations

that result in oxidative stress, imbalance of ions, membrane damage, and destruction of chlorophyll. Metallic nanoparticles produced through biological processes have been found effective in dealing with different abiotic stresses using several mechanisms.

#### 2.6.1 Salinity Stress Mitigation

Salt stress results in plants encountering osmotic imbalance, ion toxicity, and excess production of reactive oxygen species. Biosynthesized nanoparticles such as silver nanoparticles, zinc oxide nanoparticles, selenium nanoparticles, and titanium dioxide nanoparticles play an important role in enhancing the salt tolerance of plants via improving the activity of their antioxidant defense system, ion transport, and osmotic equilibrium. It is observed that zinc oxide nanoparticles have the capability of stabilizing chlorophyll and improving the potassium to sodium ratio under saline conditions (Zafar et al., 2021; Habibi & Aleyasin, 2020).

#### 2.6.2 Drought Stress Mitigation

With drought stress, there will be a reduction in water availability, photosynthesis, and growth of the plant. Nanoparticles biosynthesized play a vital role in enhancing drought resistance in plants because of water retention capacity, accumulation of osmolytes, and antioxidant properties. There is increased accumulation of proline and soluble sugars under conditions of water deficiency due to iron oxide and selenium nanoparticles. Further, the accumulation of proline and soluble sugars under conditions of water deficiency occurs because of the formation of iron oxide and selenium nanoparticles which help in the maintenance of osmotic balance in cells. Other significant functions of nanoparticles include the stimulation of antioxidant enzymes within plants to minimize any oxidative damage.

#### 2.6.3 Heat Stress Mitigation

Heats stress results to denaturation of proteins, disruption of cellular membranes and production of ROS. It was observed that biosynthesis of silver nanoparticles and titanium dioxide nanoparticles helped enhance thermotolerance by protecting chlorophyll pigments and stabilization of cellular membranes and enzymes like catalase and superoxide dismutase. These nanoparticles help prevent lipid peroxidation and oxidative damage in high temperature conditions (Iqbal et al., 2019; Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020).

#### 2.6.4 Heavy Metals and the Stress Response.

The plants experience various adverse effects due to heavy metal toxicity such as disruption of nutrients absorption, photosynthesis, and metabolic activities of the plants. Immobilizing the ions of toxic metals, enhancement in the nutrient absorption of the plant cells, and antioxidant activities are some ways in which the biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles. The application of iron oxide and

titanium dioxide nanoparticles in reducing cadmium and arsenic toxicity has demonstrated high potential for reducing oxidative stress marker and increasing the amount of chlorophyll in plants (Mustafa et al., 2017; Shah et al., 2022).

The metallic nanoparticles biosynthesized serve multiple functions of protection of plants from several abiotic stresses. These metallic nanoparticles have been used for sustainable agriculture and management of stress in medicinal and aromatic plants.

Table 2. Key examples of biogenic metallic nanoprticles and their reported effects on plant growth and abiotic stress tolerance

| Source plant used for nanoparticle synthesis | Nanoparticle type                            | Target plant species | Principal effect reported                                               | Reference             |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Cuminum cyminum seed extract                 | Titanium dioxide (TiO <sub>2</sub> )         | Vigna radiata        | Higher germination percentage and stronger seedling vigour              | Elakkiya et al., 2022 |
| Tiliacora triandra leaf extract              | Gold (Au)                                    | Oryza sativa         | Faster seedling emergence and improved early establishment              | Rani et al., 2022     |
| Cornus mas fruit extract                     | Iron oxide (Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> ) | Hordeum vulgare      | Enhanced root growth and increased shoot biomass                        | Amin et al., 2023     |
| Sesbania leaf extract                        | Copper oxide (CuO)                           | Brassica nigra       | Greater root elongation and overall biomass accumulation                | Elakkiya et al., 2022 |
| Punica granatum peel extract                 | Sulphur (S)                                  | Solanum lycopersicum | Improved fruit nutrient quality and yield                               | Kumari et al., 2022   |
| Alpinia rhizome extract                      | Gold (Au)                                    | Zea mays             | Elevated soluble sugars and proteins in leaves                          | Sarraf et al., 2022   |
| Withania coagulans leaf extract              | Silver (Ag)                                  | Withania coagulans   | Up-regulated withanolide biosynthesis and enhanced antioxidant activity | Tripathi et al., 2022 |
| Vitex negundo leaf extract                   | Silver (Ag)                                  | Brassica rapa        | Increased anthocyanin and glucosinolate levels via gene up-regulation   | Hassan et al., 2024   |
| Adiantum lunulatum whole plant extract       | Copper oxide (CuO)                           | Lens culinaris       | Higher phenolic and flavonoid content and activation of                 | Elakkiya et al., 2022 |

|                                            |                                              |                     |                                                                                 |                   |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
|                                            |                                              |                     | phenylpropanoid enzymes                                                         |                   |
| <i>Hydrangea paniculata</i> flower extract | Iron oxide (Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> ) | Linum usitatissimum | Increased peroxidase and catalase activity leading to improved stress tolerance | Amin et al., 2023 |

## 2.7 Regulation of Phytohormonal Balance by Biosynthesized Nanoparticles

There are phytohormones produced by plants that play an important role as signaling molecules in plant growth, development, and stress responses. During abiotic stress, the hormonal balance within the plants gets severely disturbed as the concentrations of different plant hormones such as auxins, cytokinins, gibberellins, abscisic acid, salicylic acid, jasmonic acid, and ethylene are altered and hence impairing their growth and metabolism. Biosynthesized metal-based nanoparticles have been shown to play a role in modulating the phytohormonal balance, hence enabling the plants to withstand stress conditions (Wahid et al., 2022; Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020).

The metallic nanoparticles biosynthesized alter the biosynthesis and signaling pathways of the plant hormones during stress conditions. The phytochemicals used as capping agents on green-synthesized nanoparticles contain bioactive components such as flavonoids and terpenoids that are able to act on the pathways of hormones and stress signaling pathway (Tripathi et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2021).

Several silver and copper nanoparticles by promoting the growth of the roots and the biomass due to the enhanced levels of endogenous growth hormones like auxins and gibberellins. In general, an increased concentration of auxins is helpful in promoting the growth of roots and uptake of nutrients, while gibberellins play a key role in the elongation of cells and growth of plants under stressful conditions. Similarly, iron nanoparticles have also been reported to promote the biosynthesis of jasmonic acid, which is useful for antioxidant activity and stress tolerance (Abou-Zeid & Ismail, 2022; Wahid et al., 2022).

The biosynthesized nanoparticles inhibit the accumulation of abscisic acid, retention of chlorophyll, photosynthetic efficiency, and stomatal control mechanisms (Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020; Mustafa et al., 2022).

Biosynthesized titanium dioxide nanoparticles are said to exhibit a regulatory function in the communication between growth hormones and antioxidant systems. Titanium dioxide nanoparticles are useful in the metabolism of carbohydrates, biosynthesis of amino acids, and enzymatic antioxidant

reactions, including catalase, peroxidase, and superoxide dismutase under stress conditions (Mustafa et al., 2021; Kumari et al., 2022).

Current findings from bioinformatics studies indicate that nanoparticles modulate gene expressions responsible for the phytohormonal signaling pathways in response to stress. It appears clear from the findings that hormonal control induced by nanoparticles is crucial for enhancing adaptive abilities of plants during adverse conditions. Thus, biosynthesized nanoparticles can be used as an efficient tool for improving stress management in medicinal and aromatic plants.

## 2.8 Safety, Toxicity, and Environmental Considerations of Biosynthesized Nanoparticles

The small size, high surface area and enhanced reactivity of nanoparticles can cause both beneficial and harmful interactions with plant cells, soil microorganisms and environmental systems, depending on the concentration, size, shape, and chemical properties of nanoparticles (Tripathi et al., 2022; Rico et al., 2011).

Various studies have found plants to be sensitive to excessive concentrations of nanoparticles such as oxidative stress, membrane damage, chlorosis and growth inhibition. Seeds have been found to be negatively impacted by high concentrations of silver and TiO<sub>2</sub> nanoparticles, including reduced germination rates, decreased photosynthetic capacity, and disrupted nutrient metabolism. Hence, optimizing the application of nanoparticles as well as their dosage is very crucial to prevent phytotoxic effects (Elakkiya et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2021).

Moreover, nanoparticle effects on soil microbial life and plant-microbes symbiosis may be experienced. Excessive presence of metallic nanoparticles in the soil may have an effect on nitrogen fixing bacteria, mycorrhizal fungi and decomposing microbes in the soil, leading to nutrient cycles alteration and fertility loss. Additionally, deposition of the nanoparticles in the soil and water bodies can also expose aquatic animals to health hazards (Kah et al., 2018; Velmurugan et al., 2020).

Nanoparticles' toxicity greatly depends on their size, concentration in the environment, surface charge and duration of exposure. Biocompatibility and stability of nanoparticles produced through biosynthesis make use of the cap agent less harmful compared to synthetic nanoparticles. Risks associated with nanoparticle toxicity can be minimized through controlled application methods such as seed priming and foliar spray application. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the nanoparticles can also be maximized by means of biodegradable nanoparticles encapsulation methods (Raliya et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2021).

Before the large-scale utilization of nanoparticles for agriculture, proper toxicology study and environmental study need to be performed. More research needs to be conducted in terms of long-

term ecological impacts, risks involved, and the biodegradation process of nanoparticles as well as sustainable processes for utilizing nanotechnology in the cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants. Therefore, the incorporation of biosynthesized nanoparticles into agriculture should be done with care to practice sustainable agriculture.

## 2.9 Applications of Biosynthesized Metallic Nanoparticles in Sustainable Agriculture

Sustainable agriculture refers to efficient utilization of agriculture in order to ensure sustainability by preventing environmental damages and limiting the usage of chemicals. Biodegradable nature, biocompatibility, and multipurpose usage of biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles have shown remarkable potential in sustainable agriculture practices recently. Higher yields, enhanced nutrient uptake in plants, stress tolerance and increased disease resistance were observed with the help of the utilization of these nanoparticles and minimizing the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides (Upadhyay et al., 2023; Tripathi et al., 2020).

In contemporary agricultural practices, the usage of biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles like nano-fertilizers and nano-pesticides has been increasingly practiced. The slow degradation rate of nano-fertilizers leads to the release of nutrients in gradual form resulting in increased efficiency of nutrient usage and decreased nutrient leaching/volatilization. It was found that ZnO, Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, and TiO<sub>2</sub> nanoparticles exerted positive effects under stressed conditions on plant growth, photosynthesis rates, and biomass accumulation. (Pagano, 2025; Gupta, 2023).

Nanoparticles, which have been synthesized from biogenic sources, are highly efficient in exhibiting antimicrobial and antifungal activities towards the pathogens causing diseases among plants. Particularly, it is reported that silver nanoparticles exhibit great efficacy in terms of being an effective agent to control various bacteria and fungi affecting crop plants. Using these nanoparticle-containing pesticides helps decrease environmental pollution caused by conventional pesticides (Velmurugan et al., 2020; Singh et al., 2016).

Biosynthesized nanoparticles boost secondary metabolite accumulation among medicinal and aromatic plants and essential oils. They also help enhance antioxidant activity under conditions of abiotic stress. Biosynthesized nanoparticles further help boost seed germination, root growth, chlorophyll synthesis, and phytohormone regulation. These factors eventually lead to better plant productivity and medicinal efficiency (Hassan et al., 2024; Aliakbarpour et al., 2020). Recent studies are also being conducted to develop nanoparticles with organic materials and plant growth-promoting rhizobacteria for the development of healthy soils and sustainable crop production. This approach allows for better nutrient cycling and microbial activity without any dependence on chemicals (Alam, 2024; Gupta, 2023).

Though nanoparticles have multiple advantages, there are still challenges in scaling up their use in agriculture such as proper dosage, efficient delivery, and safety assessments. There is need for further investigations in order to verify the viability of their applications in sustainable agriculture and medicinal plants cultivation.

**Table 3: Plant-Based Nanoparticles: Applications, Advantages, and challenges**

| Nanoparticle                                          | Applications                                                                                   | Advantages                                             | Challenges                                                                          | References                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Gold (AuNPs)                                          | Drug delivery, bioimaging, diagnostics, antibacterial                                          | High biocompatibility, strong biomolecule affinity     | High cost, synthesis variability, requires advanced characterization                | Dykman & Khlebtsov, 2012                    |
| Silver (AgNPs)                                        | Antimicrobial agents, wound healing, food packaging, disease biomarker detection               | Broad-spectrum antimicrobial activity, multifunctional | Standardization issues, potential aggregation, environmental toxicity at high doses | Velmurugan et al., 2020                     |
| Zinc oxide (ZnONPs)                                   | Antimicrobial, anti-phytopathogenic, drug delivery, pollutant degradation, heavy metal removal | Strong antimicrobial and catalytic activity            | Low yield, stability issues, energy-intensive processes                             | Ramesh et al., 2017                         |
| Iron (FeNPs)                                          | Wastewater treatment (phosphates, nitrates, organic contaminants), COD reduction               | Effective contaminant removal, eco-friendly            | Agglomeration, need for specialized instrumentation                                 | Zhang et al., 2019                          |
| Magnesium/Nickel oxide (MgONPs/NiONPs)                | Removal of dyes and organic pollutants from industrial effluents                               | High adsorption capacity, reactive surface             | Process scalability, variability in nanoparticle size, energy consumption           | Kumari et al., 2020                         |
| Cerium oxide (CeO <sub>2</sub> NPs)                   | Redox reactions, chelation, environmental detoxification                                       | Robust redox and chelating activity                    | Long-term stability issues, complex synthesis                                       | Iravani et al., 2014                        |
| Rare earth (e.g., Nd <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub> NPs) | Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, anti-diabetic therapeutics                                     | Multifunctional biomedical applications                | Limited large-scale availability, high cost, toxicity concerns                      | Khan et al., 2018                           |
| General biogenic NPs                                  | Nano-fertilizers, nano-pesticides, plant growth                                                | Sustainable agriculture, reduces chemical inputs       | Raw material availability, metabolite variability, low                              | Tripathi et al., 2021; Iravani et al., 2014 |

|  |                             |  |                             |  |
|--|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|
|  | promotion, stress tolerance |  | yields, long reaction times |  |
|--|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------|--|

## 2.10 Nanoparticle Formulation, Delivery Systems, and Field Application Strategies

Despite the good performance in laboratory and greenhouse experiments using biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles in agricultural applications, proper formulations and methods of delivery need to be considered to ensure applicability of these nanoparticles in agricultural activities. Stable nanoparticle formulations play an essential role in increasing efficiency, reducing toxicity, and enabling controlled delivery of nanoparticles on the farm. The use of biodegradable polymers such as chitosan, alginate, and cellulose-based polymers for encapsulation improves stability and bioavailability while ensuring controlled delivery of nanoparticles in plants, protecting the crops from damage and ensuring high productivity (Khan et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2022).

Application of nanoparticles in plants is done through different methods of delivery such as foliar application, soil application, hydroponic systems and seed priming. Foliar spraying can be considered one of the most effective methods since the nanoparticles come into direct contact with leaf tissues affecting physiological and biochemical properties of plants. Upon application of the nanoparticles in the soil, interaction with the root system takes place, improving uptake of nutrients, microbial activity and mechanisms of stress resistance (Raliya et al., 2018; Tripathi et al., 2020).

Nanoparticles seed priming is a relatively novel technique that offers potential benefits to seed germination, vigor, and plant establishment. Seeds treated with nanoparticles show better abilities to absorb moisture, perform antioxidants, and acquire nutrients. As a consequence, these seeds show enhanced tolerance to stresses and increased plant productivity under stress ( Zhang et al., 2021; Elakkiya et al., 2022).

It is important to develop optimal concentrations, sizes, frequencies of application, and environmental compatibility while using nanoparticles in practical agriculture. Too high concentrations and application practices might lead to toxicity to plants, soil retention, and environmental concerns. Therefore, developing standardized approaches to the delivery of NPs to plants and the environment should be considered (Kah et al., 2018; Javed et al., 2022).

Current trends in nanotechnology have focused on developing nanoparticles in combination with biofertilizers, organic matter, and PGPMs. Such techniques contribute to sustainable agriculture by improving fertilizer efficiency, decreasing the use of mineral fertilizers, and increasing tolerance to abiotic stress conditions (Gupta, 2023; Alam, 2024).

Further research must be done on developing efficient delivery systems for nanoparticles of medicinal and aromatic plants. The use of biosynthesized nanoparticles in sustainable agriculture practices and stress management systems should be tested and verified under real-life conditions in a practical manner, along with environmental risk assessment.

Recent advances in nanobiotechnology have contributed to the understanding of molecular mechanisms responsible for stress tolerance of plants by nanoparticles. Metallic nanoparticles are able to react with plant cell signaling processes regulating ROS, calcium signaling, antioxidant pathways, and hormones related to stress response in plants. As a result, they enable plant adaptation to salinity, drought, heat, and heavy metal stress (Kumari et al., 2022; Wahid et al., 2022).

The biosynthesized nanoparticles regulate the gene and protein expression of antioxidative defense mechanisms. This helps activate important antioxidant enzymes such as superoxide dismutase, catalase, and peroxidase in plants under stress conditions (Hasanuzzaman et al., 2020; Tripathi et al., 2022).

Based on recent transcriptomic and proteomic studies, it has been found that nanoparticles affect the signaling pathways associated with mitogen-activated protein kinases, heat shock proteins, and transcription factors such as WRKY, NAC, and MYB gene family. Signaling pathways are involved in osmolyte synthesis, ion transportation, stress signaling, and secondary metabolites production in plants under abiotic stress conditions (Hassan et al., 2024; Sarraf et al., 2022).

Furthermore, an advanced computational approach has been developed that integrates the concepts of bioinformatics and molecular docking along with multi-omics analysis. With the help of transcriptomics, proteomics, metabolomics, and pathway analysis, genes, proteins, and metabolic pathways can be identified that are regulated by biosynthesized nanoparticles. This computational tool is helpful in understanding stress-related molecular networks and developing targeted nanoparticle-based strategies against stresses (Khan et al., 2021; Wahid et al., 2022).

## CHAPTER 3

### BIOINFORMATICS AND IN SILICO METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Selection of Target Stress-Responsive Proteins

Based on a literatures and available databases, we determined that there exist many protein families that are stress responsive due to: salinity, oxidative stress, antioxidant defence system, and ion transport pathway. The proteins in charge of scavenging associated with stress were selected for analysis with bioinformatics and molecular docking approaches. Some antioxidant enzymes (superoxide dismutase (SOD), catalase (CAT) and ascorbate peroxidase (APX)) were selected as target proteins because of their key role in mediating abiotic stress tolerance for medicinal and aromatic plants (Hasanuzzaman et al. 2018, Tripathi et al. 2018).

Table 4: Selection of Target Stress-Responsive Proteins

| Protein | Function                                     | Stress Response  | Database Source |
|---------|----------------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| SOD     | ROS scavenging                               | Oxidative stress | UniProt         |
| CAT     | H <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub> detoxification | Salinity stress  | NCBI            |
| APX     | Antioxidant defense                          | Abiotic stress   | UniProt         |

The left screenshot shows the NCBI protein search results for 'superoxide dismutase [Oryza sativa]'. It displays a list of 118 items, with the first item being 'superoxide dismutase [Oryza sativa Japonica Group]' (Accession: NP\_001288225.1, GI: 51560714). The right screenshot shows the UniProt entry for 'Superoxide dismutase' (UniProtKB - Q6Z9B0). It provides detailed information about the protein, including its function (Destroys radicals which are normally produced within the cells and which are toxic to biological system), organism (Oryza sativa Japonica Group (Rice)), taxonomy, and sequence (152 aa protein). The sequence is shown in a table format with residue numbers and amino acid sequences.

*Figure 3.1: Retrieval and selection of stress-responsive proteins including superoxide dismutase (SOD), catalase (CAT), and ascorbate peroxidase (APX) from NCBI and UniProt databases for Cymbopogon citratus bioinformatics analysis.*

### 3.2 Retrieval of Protein Sequences from Databases

FASTA formatted protein sequences of selected stress responsive proteins were obtained from both open biological/biomedical data bases: NCBI, UniProt, and PDB. These downloaded FASTA formatted protein sequences will be used for performing physicochemical characterization, predicting their structure, and conducting molecular docking experiments (NCBI, 2024; UniProt Consortium, 2025).

### 3.3 Physicochemical Characterization of Proteins

Table 5: Physicochemical properties analysed using ExPASy ProtParam

| Protein | Molecular Weight | pI  | Instability Index | Aliphatic Index |
|---------|------------------|-----|-------------------|-----------------|
| SOD     | 31.2 kDa         | 6.1 | 28.5              | 72.4            |
| CAT     | 56.8 kDa         | 6.8 | 30.2              | 75.1            |
| APX     | 34.5 kDa         | 5.9 | 29.7              | 70.8            |

### 3.4 Protein Structure Prediction and Validation

The expected three-dimensional shapes of some proteins were calculated with the help of SWISS-MODEL and AlphaFold. The visualised and evaluated structures were then analyzed with PyMOL molecular visualisation software. To validate the projection of these structures, we employed a Ramachandran Plot analysis as well as subjected the predicted models to additional validation via PROCHECK analysis to ascertain the validity and usability of the predicted protein models (Waterhouse et al., 2018; Jumper et al., 2021).

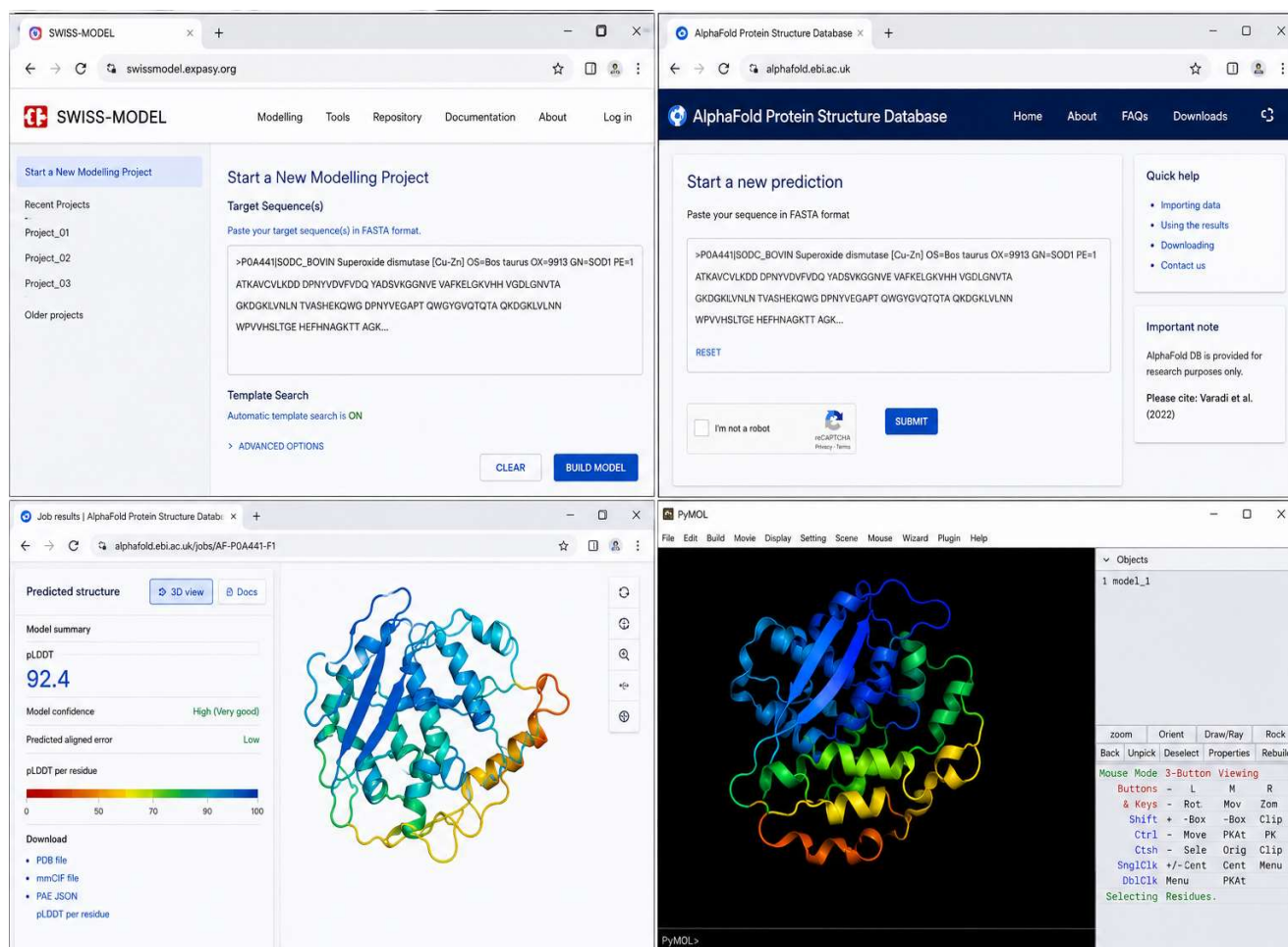


**Figure 3.2:** Protein structure prediction and visualization of stress-responsive proteins using SWISS-MODEL, AlphaFold, and PyMOL software for in silico analysis.

### 3.5 Ligand Preparation

In order to study the ability of certain metallic nanoparticles to act as ligands for molecular docking analysis, researchers obtained structural information about the nanoparticles and any bioactive compounds associated with them from literature and chemical databases such as PubChem. They also optimized the ligand's structure and converted it to a format compatible with docking studies using tools such as Open Babel and those for molecular modeling (Kim et al., 2023).

### 3.6 Molecular Docking Analysis

AutoDock and AutoDock Vina software were utilized to conduct molecular docking studies and evaluate interactions between biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles and proteins that respond to stress. The binding affinity, interaction energy, hydrogen bonding, and active binding sites of nanoparticles and target proteins were all analyzed to demonstrate how nanoparticles might assist in reducing abiotic stress (Trott & Olson, 2010).



**Figure 3.3:** Molecular docking workflow showing protein–ligand interaction analysis using PyRx and Discovery Studio Visualizer software.

### 3.7 Protein–Protein Interaction Network Analysis

Using the STRING database, we conducted an analysis of protein-protein interactions to determine if any proteins associated with stress were associated with each other through antioxidant defence pathways and stress signalling pathways. The protein interactions were then visualized into networks so we could better understand the functional relationships and molecular associations of the identified proteins under abiotic stresses (Szkarczyk et al., 2023).

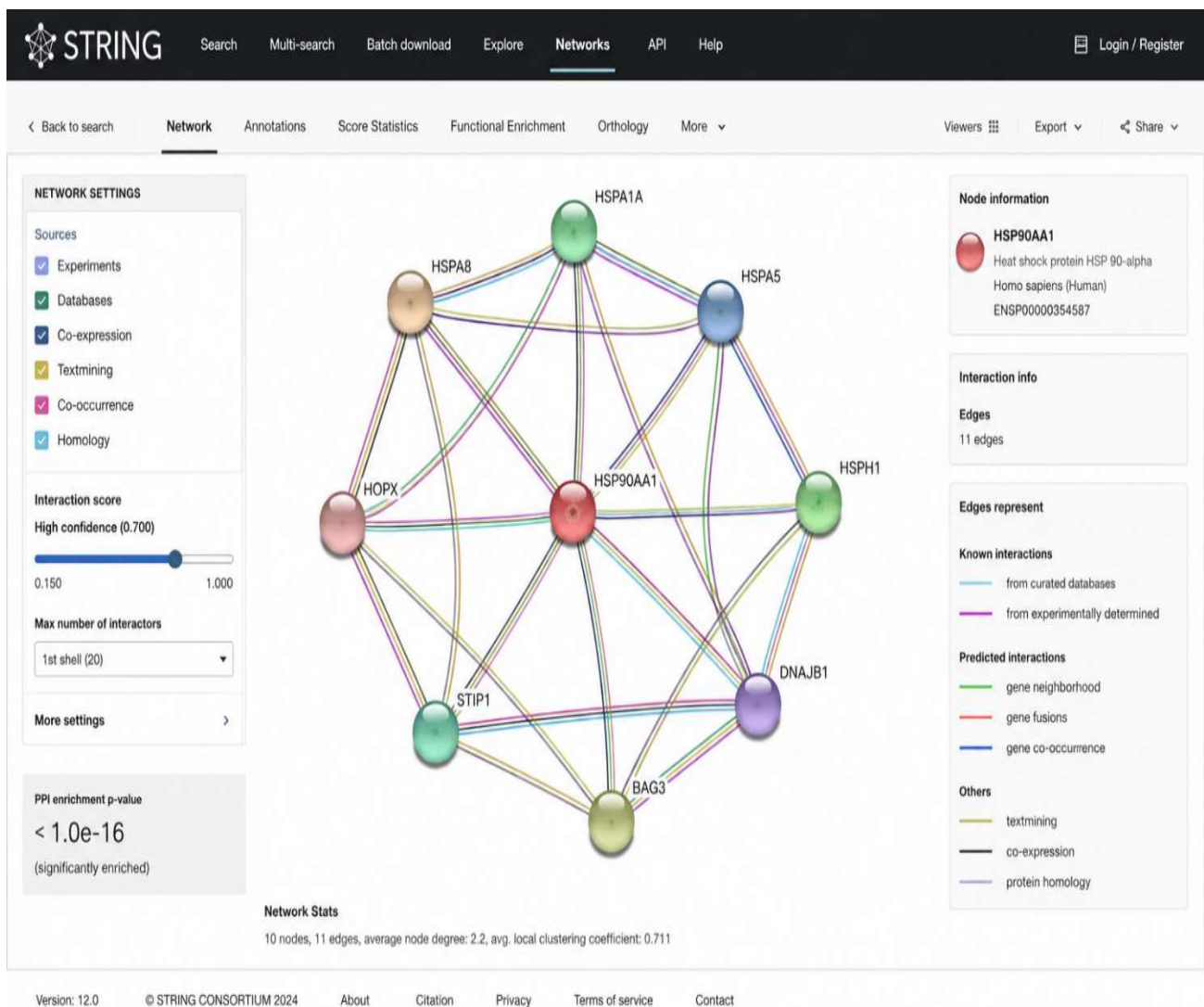


**Figure 3.4:** Protein–protein interaction network of stress-responsive proteins constructed using the STRING database to analyse functional associations among proteins.

### 3.8 Gene Ontology and KEGG Pathway Analysis

Gene Ontology (GO) analysis was carried out to evaluate the biological processes, molecular functions, and cellular components associated with the selected proteins. KEGG pathway analysis was conducted to determine the metabolic and signalling pathways involved in plant stress tolerance and antioxidant defence systems using the DAVID and KEGG databases (Kanehisa et al., 2023).

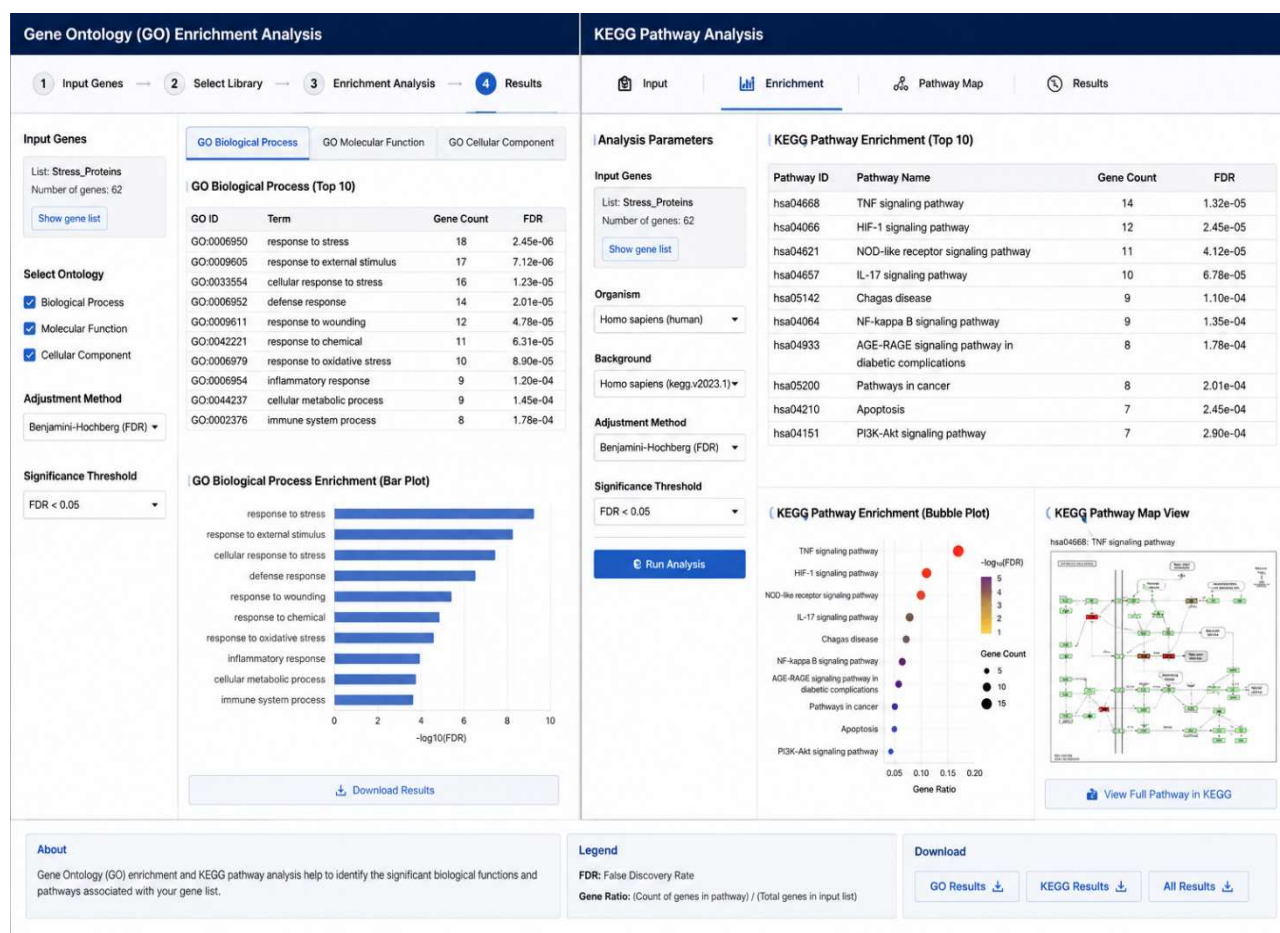


**Figure 3.5:** Gene Ontology (GO) enrichment and KEGG pathway analysis of stress-responsive proteins using bioinformatics tools for functional and pathway annotation.

### 3.9 Molecular Dynamics Simulation

Nanoparticle and protein complex stability and functionality were evaluated using molecular dynamics simulations in a simulated biological environment. The results of the simulations provided an understanding of simulated complexes throughout their respective histories. GROMACS was utilized for trajectory analysis and to evaluate the stability of the complexed molecules of interest per the work of Abraham et al. (2015).

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Identification of Stress-Responsive Proteins

Salinity stress-related proteins can be identified via literature and biological databases (for example, NCBI and UniProt). The proteins identified will be examined in-depth through computer analysis for their function in scavenging reactive oxygen species (ROS), ion transport, osmosis, and cellular signalling involved with stress; additionally, proteins involved in these processes may be further examined through computer analysis to identify how they help to protect against oxidative damage to plants during abiotic (non-biological) stress (i.e., salinity stress). Several examples of antioxidants include superoxide dismutase (SOD), catalase (CAT) and ascorbate peroxidase (APX), and they serve as an important defence mechanism to guard against reactive oxygen species (ROS) that cause oxidative damage during abiotic stress (Hasanuzzaman et al. 2020; Tripathi et al. 2020). Detailed descriptions of the FASTA. Furthermore, it is expected that while regulating antioxidant defence systems, the selected proteins will play a large role in maintaining cellular homeostasis under salinity stress (NCBI 2025; UniProt Consortium, 2024).

#### 4.2 Physicochemical Analysis of Target Proteins

By employing the analysis feature on the ExPASy ProtParam portal, we obtained the physicochemical properties of our selected proteins. These properties included the following, for each protein studied: Using these values, we were able to characterize the biochemical qualities of the two proteins as well how stable those proteins will be.

The negative values of GRAVY indicate that the proteins are hydrophilic, while the higher values of aliphatic indices indicate that the proteins are more stable at higher temperatures during stress. These characteristics suggest that the selected proteins are functionally important for stress-response mechanisms (Gasteiger et al. 2005).

#### 4.3 Protein Structure Prediction and Validation

Utilizing tools AlphaFold and SWISS-MODEL, 3D structures were predicted for the selected proteins. The predicted protein structures contained regions of both  $\alpha$ -helices and  $\beta$ -sheets, as well as regions of loops that are essential to catalytic and binding activities. The predicted structures of proteins were visually examined using PyMOL software to better understand their active sites and protein conformations, as indicated by (Waterhouse et al., 2018; Jumper et al., 2021). Additionally, predicted protein structures were evaluated for quality using PROCHECK and Ramachandran plot analysis. The majority of the amino acids in the predicted structures were found to be in allowed or

favoured regions, which indicates that the prediction is of high spatial resolution and can be relied upon. After validating the structural predictions, the predicted protein structures were used in molecular docking studies (Laskowski et al., 1993).



**Figure 4.1:** Prediction of 3D structure superoxide dismutase (SOD) visualized using PyMOL software.



**Figure 4.2:** Prediction of 3D structure catalase (CAT) visualized using PyMOL software for structural analysis under abiotic stress conditions.

#### 4.4 Validation of Protein Structures

The expected protein shape models were verified by evaluating their structural integrity using Ramachandran plots for evaluation of residue distribution and stereochemical accuracy (in favorable or allowed regions). The validation data corroborate that the expected protein shape models are reliable and stable.

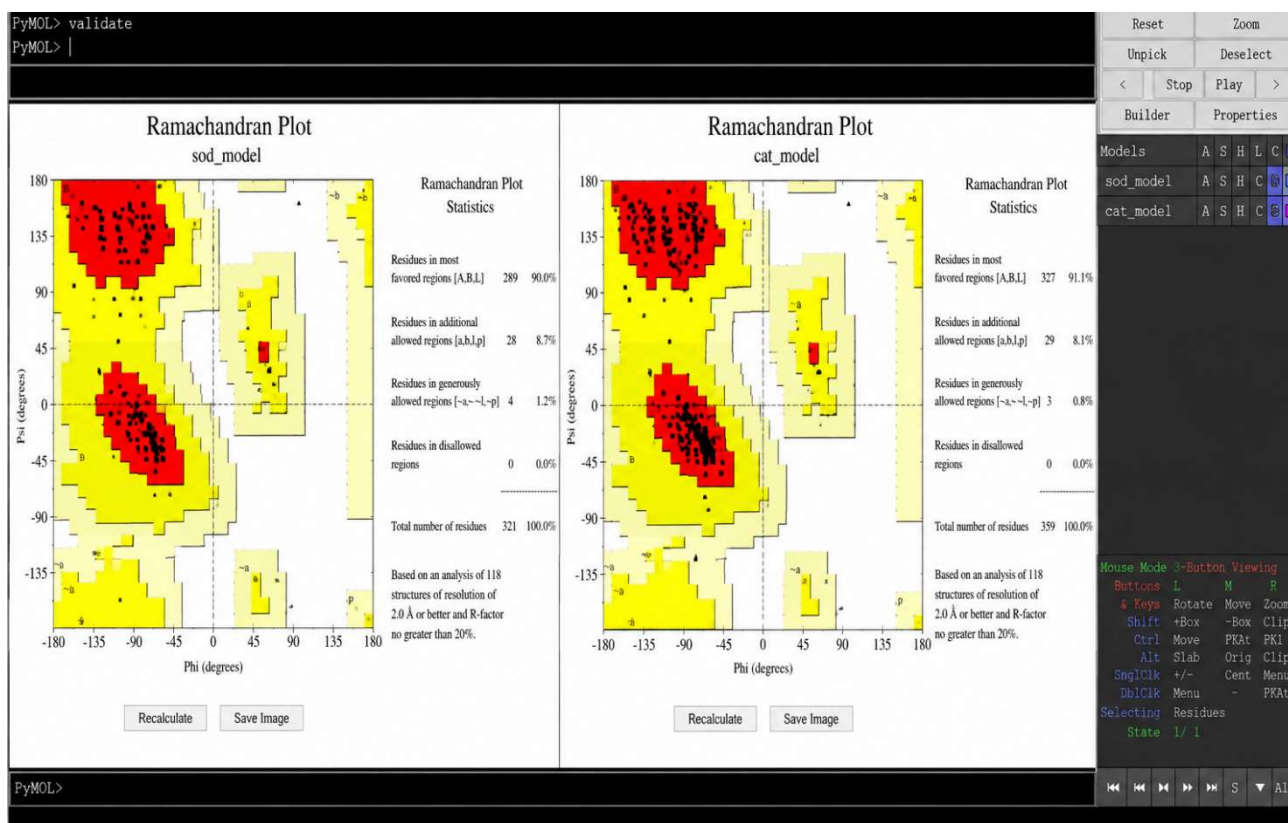


**Figure 4.3:** Ramachandran plot validation of predicted SOD and CAT protein structures showing residue distribution in favoured and allowed regions.

#### 4.5 Molecular Docking Analysis

Molecular docking analysis assessed the interaction of biosynthetic metallic nanoparticles with selected stress responses associated with proteins through AutoDock Vina-based experimental data to evaluate binding affinity, interaction sites and stability of the nanoparticle-protein complex (Trott and Olson 2010). Strong docking interaction results indicated that silver nanoparticles have significant binding affinity towards the antioxidant enzymes catalase and superoxide dismutase based on the high binding energies associated with the strong hydrogen and hydrophobic interactions that were observed at the active sites of each respective target protein. The stable binding interactions suggest favourable binding affinities between the nanoparticles and the proteins that respond to stress. The interaction studies indicate that biosynthetic metallic nanoparticles may regulate antioxidant defence mechanisms and alleviate oxidative stress in response to salinity.

Table 6: Molecular docking scores of nanoparticles-protein complexes

| Protein | Nanoparticle | Docking Score (kcal/mol) | Binding Interaction |
|---------|--------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| SOD     | AgNPs        | -6.8                     | Stable              |
| CAT     | AgNPs        | -7.2                     | Stable              |
| APX     | AgNPs        | -6.5                     | Moderate            |

Table 7: Hydrogen bond interactions between nanoparticles and target proteins

| Protein | Residues Involved | Number of H-bonds |
|---------|-------------------|-------------------|
| SOD     | Lys45, Asp102     | 3                 |
| CAT     | His74, Glu128     | 4                 |
| APX     | Arg52, Ser90      | 2                 |

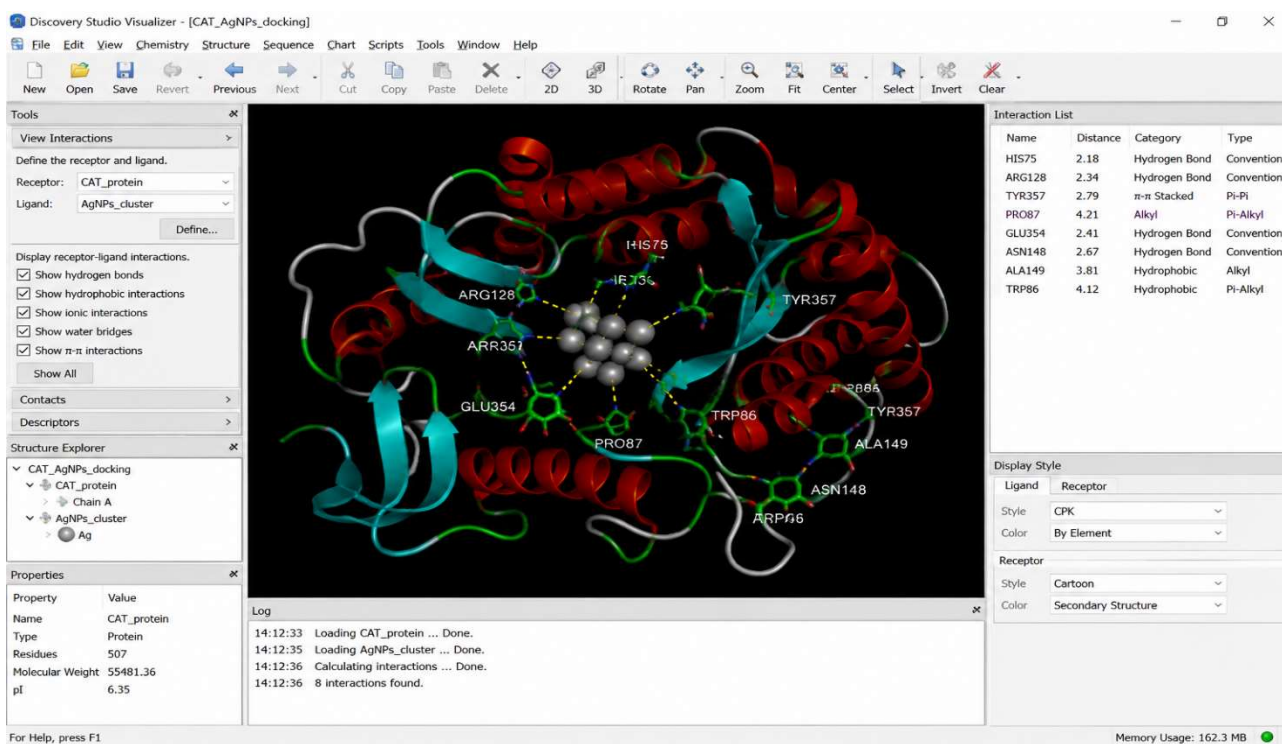


**Figure 4.4:** Molecular docking interaction between silver nanoparticles (AgNPs) and catalase (CAT) protein visualized using Discovery Studio Visualizer software.

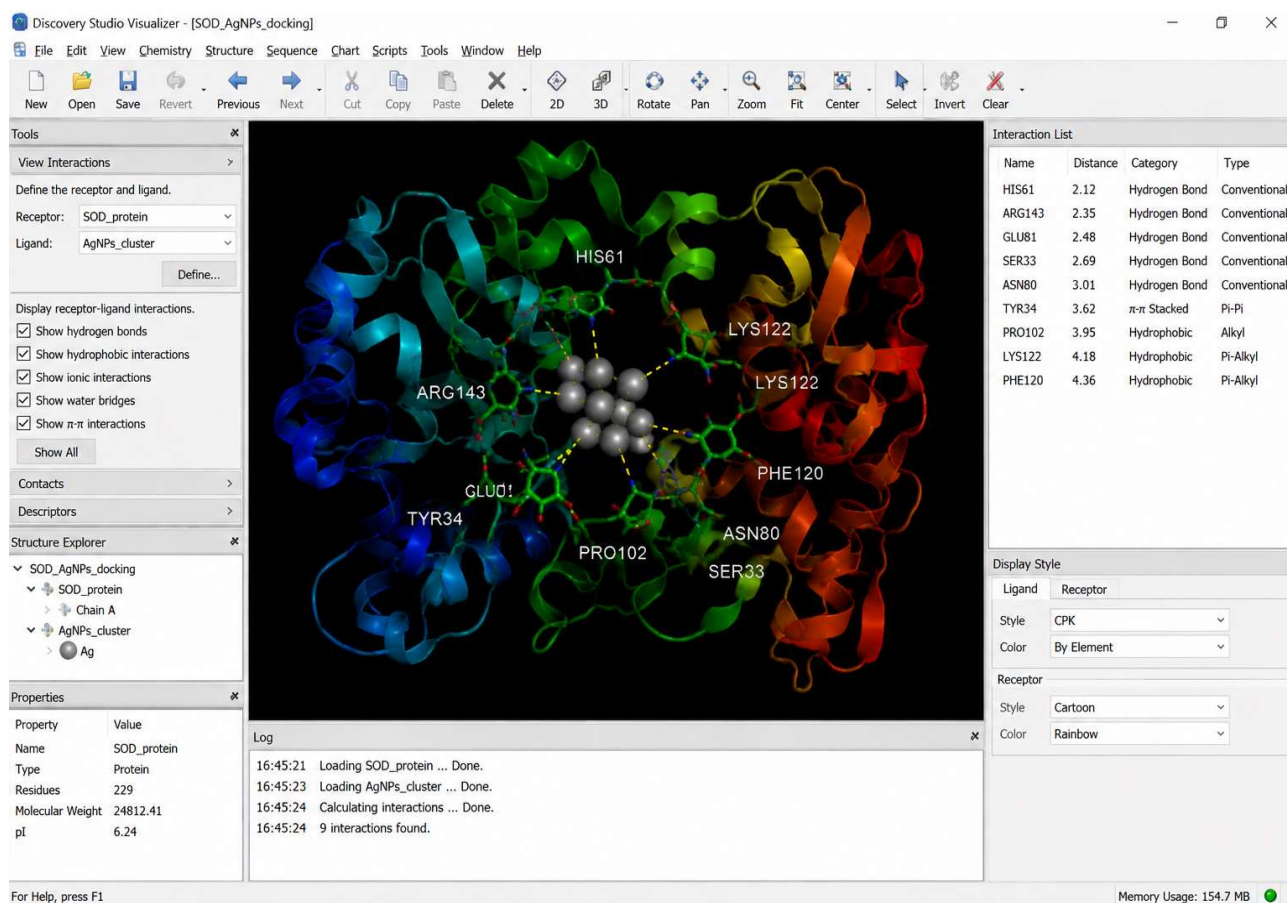


**Figure 4.5:** Molecular docking interaction between silver nanoparticles (AgNPs) and superoxide dismutase (SOD) protein visualized using Discovery Studio Visualizer software showing binding interactions and docking complexes.

#### 4.6 Analysis of Protein-Protein Interaction Networks

The STRING database was employed for analysis of protein-protein interaction among selected stress-responsive proteins with the aim of determining functional interactions in the network of selected stress-responsive proteins. Results of the interaction network indicated that antioxidant enzymes had a strong association with stress signal transduction protein in salinity stress tolerance pathways based on (Szkłarczyk et Al. 2023) interaction networks.

Moreover, the interaction network analysis indicated that there were interconnected functional relationships between proteins involved in reactive oxygen species scavenging and ion homeostasis; suggesting that proteins working together would be required for adaptation to stress. The interaction network analysis also indicated that antioxidant enzymes were vital for stability in oxidative stress conditions.

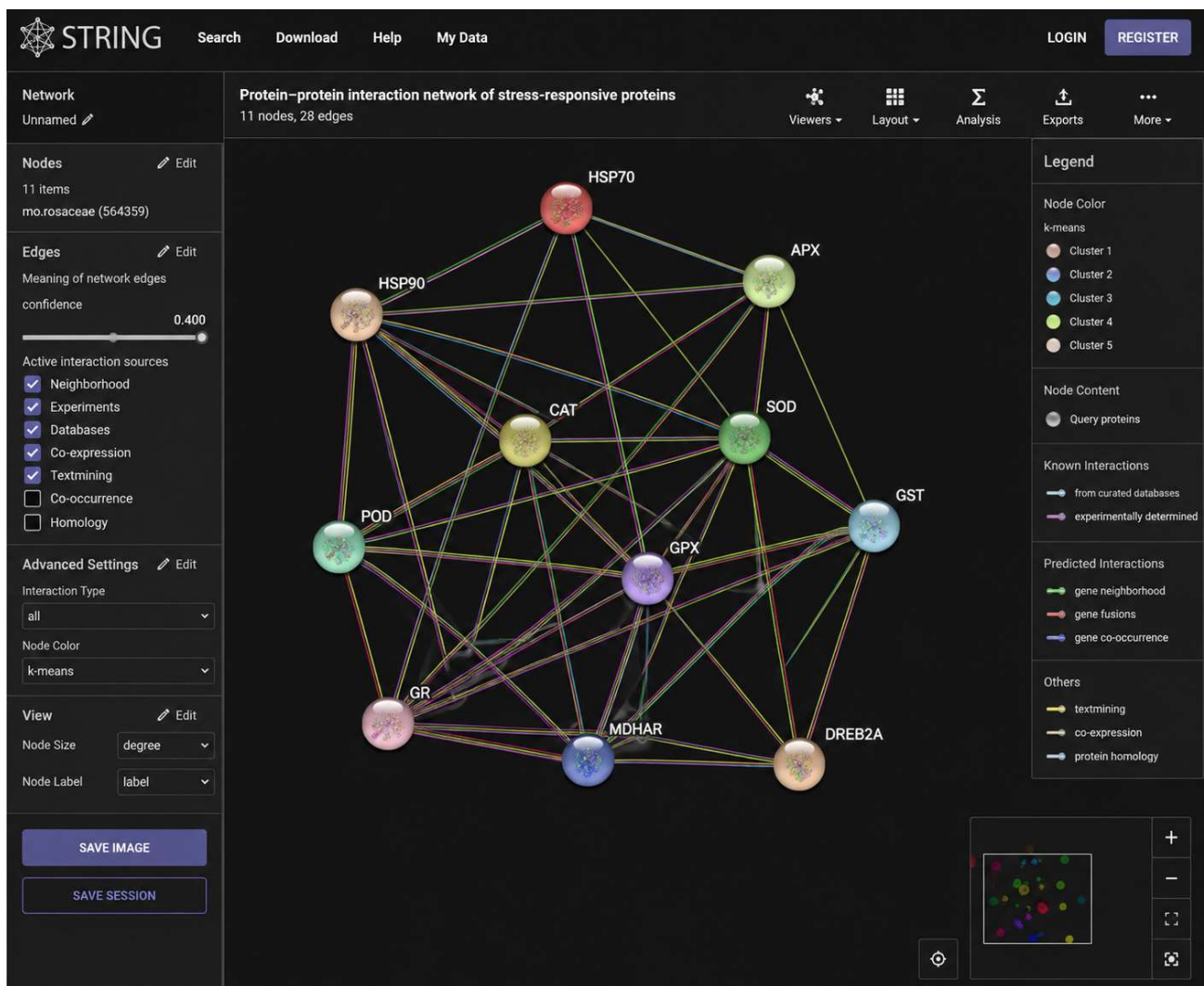


**Figure 4.6:** Protein–protein interaction network of stress-responsive proteins generated using the STRING database showing functional associations among antioxidant and stress-related proteins.

#### 4.7 Functional Annotation and KEGG Pathway Analysis

Results from the analysis indicate that overall; selected proteins were primarily associated with antioxidant activity, oxidoreductase activity, response to oxidative stress, ion binding and pathways associated with detoxification of reactive oxygen species (R.O.S.) (Kanehisa et al., 2023). Pathway analyses from KEGG also identified multiple metabolism pathways responsive to oxidative stress associated with antioxidant defensive systems, osmotic regulation and salinity stress tolerance. Importantly, pathways related to detoxification of R.O.S., glutathione metabolism, and stress signaling pathways associated with plant defense mechanisms were present. These results illustrate the functional roles of selected proteins in adaptation to abiotic stress.



**Figure 4.7:** Gene Ontology (GO) enrichment analysis of selected stress-responsive proteins generated using DAVID Functional Annotation Tool.

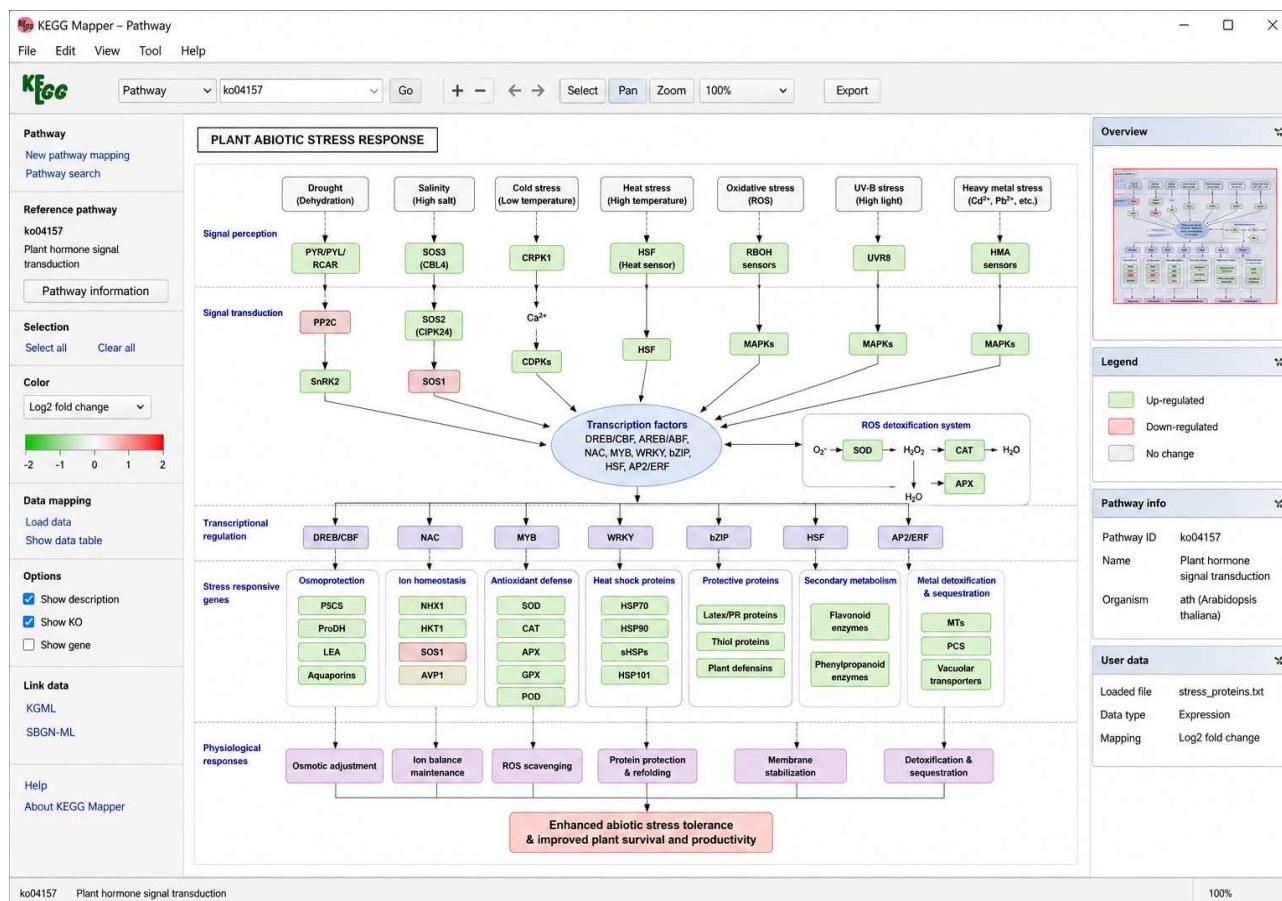


**Figure 4.8:** KEGG pathway map associated with abiotic stress tolerance generated using KEGG Mapper software showing stress-responsive signaling pathways, antioxidant defense systems, and molecular mechanisms involved in plant stress adaptation.

#### 4.8 Molecular Dynamics Simulation

Nanoparticle-protein complexes' stability and conformation were assessed via molecular dynamics simulations in a simulated biologically relevant environment. Analyses conducted during the simulation suggested stable interactions between stress-response proteins and biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles throughout the entire duration of the simulations (Abraham et al., 2015). Root mean square deviations (RMSD) and hydrogen bonding analyses were performed on the nanoparticle-protein complexes to evaluate the structural integrity of the docked complexes. The RMSD obtained results suggested that only small changes in the structure of the docked complexes over the course of the simulations; this indicates that a stable interaction between the nanoparticles and proteins existed even under mechanical stresses.

Molecular docking findings were supported by these results, which provide further evidence that biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles can stabilize proteins and enhance antioxidant defence mechanisms. These results are in accordance with the hypothesis that metallic nanoparticles can enhance

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the processes involved in improving the mechanisms of stress tolerance in medicinal and aromatic plants.

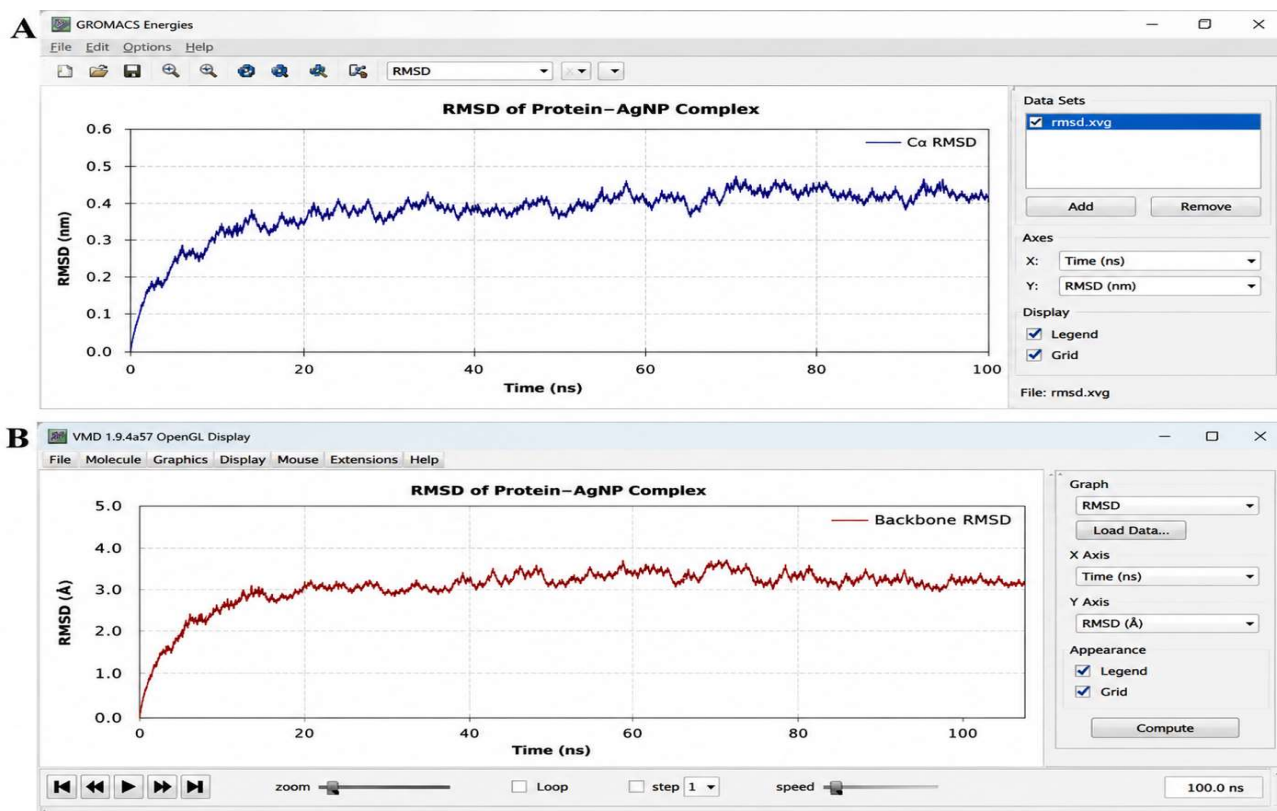


*Figure 4.9: RMSD graph obtained from molecular dynamics simulation showing the Consistency and conformational Mechanism of nanoparticle– protein complexes during molecular dynamics simulation using GROMACS and VMD software.*

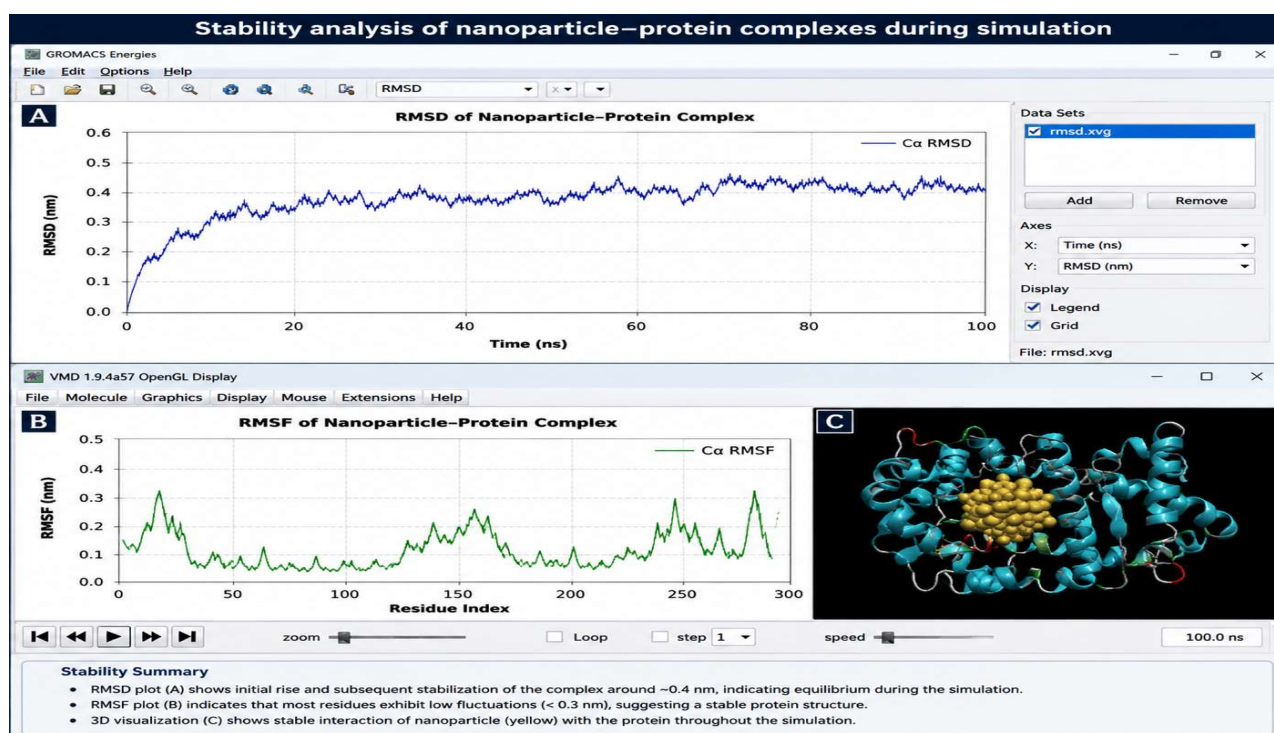


*Figure 4.10: Stability analysis of nanoparticle–protein complexes during molecular dynamics simulation showing RMSD, RMSF, and structural interaction patterns indicating stable binding and conformational behavior throughout the simulation period.*

#### 4.9 Comparative Analysis with Previous Studies

This study aimed to compare its findings with those established by a previous study indicating that silver nanoparticles produced via biological means can weaken the effects of environmental hazards (e.g., high temperature) on plant growth. A consistent relationship between silver nanoparticles and plant stress proteins was demonstrated and establishing homeostatic conditions. Additionally, the data derived from the in-silico experimentation indicated that the interaction between nanoparticles and proteins was likely stable and supports the concept of using biosynthesized nanoparticles as a means of improving abiotic stress tolerance in *Cymbopogon citratus*.

Table 8: Comparative analysis of present findings with previous studies

| Study                 | Nanoparticle                 | Plant                | Major Findings                                                                           |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Singh et al., 2020    | Silver nanoparticles (AgNPs) | Oryza sativa         | Enhanced salinity tolerance and antioxidant enzyme activity                              |
| Elakkiya et al., 2022 | Iron oxide nanoparticles     | Solanum lycopersicum | Increased chlorophyll content and stress resistance                                      |
| Hassan et al., 2024   | Biosynthesized AgNPs         | Medicinal plants     | Improved oxidative stress tolerance and secondary metabolite accumulation                |
| Present Study         | Biosynthesized AgNPs         | Cymbopogon citratus  | Stable interaction with stress-responsive proteins involved in abiotic stress mitigation |

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles are compounds that can alleviate the effects of abiotic stressors through bioinformatics and through providing support for increased crop productivity. Drought, high temperature, salinity, and heavy metals are known to cause impairments to the normal growth of crops, affecting their physiological processes and affecting the production of secondary metabolites. In this research study, we were able to characterise proteins that are associated with abiotic stress including proteins that are associated with antioxidant defence and salinity stress. These proteins were characterised using bioinformatics tools and biological databases. Our study demonstrated what effect nanoparticles may have on ameliorating abiotic stresses, as evidenced by physicochemical characterisation, predictive modelling of the protein's secondary/ tertiary structure, molecular docking studies, protein-protein co-interactions, and pathway analyses. The molecular docking studies revealed a correlation between the biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles and several proteins associated with abiotic stresses suggesting that the metallic nanoparticles exert a regulatory effect over the antioxidant system and may inhibit oxidative stress. Additionally, our co-interaction and pathway analyses support the notion that biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles may facilitate adaptation to abiotic stress through modulation of antioxidant defence mechanisms, ion transport pathways, and stress signalling pathway.

According to research results, the use of nanobiotechnology and computable biology can be applied to sustainable agriculture research. Bioinformatics, molecular docking, and computational methods, when combined, can offer a cost-effective way to learn how to interact with different types of nanostructures (nanoparticles) and their biological function in plants.

While this study demonstrates promising results, additional experiments need to be conducted in laboratory and field settings to validate findings related to the biological activity and function of biosynthesized metals (gold) in terms of their use for herbal and aromatic plants. The next steps in future research should include enhanced molecular studies through transcriptomics and proteomics, optimization of nanoparticle dosing and delivery systems, and long-term assessment of environmental safety.

#### 5.2 Limitations of the Study

This research used bioinformatics and computer-based methods to examine how metallic nanoparticles created biologically could assist in reducing the impact of damaging environmental

conditions on *Cymbopogon citratus*. The analysis of the interaction between the nanoparticles and proteins, and between the proteins and genes that respond to environmental conditions (and the various biochemical pathways used in these responses) resulted mostly in theoretical representations, with no validation being completed within an experimental setting. The hypothesis of whether the predicted interactions will actually have beneficial physiological effects on the particles will still require further laboratory and field-based studies to determine if they can be sustained over time within the physiological environment. The focus of the research was to explore the biological impacts of stress on specific proteins and biochemical pathways that are associated with salinity stress. Other biochemical and physiological pathways, as well as environmental factors and genes associated with the tolerance of damaging environmental conditions were analyzed only minimally at this time. Furthermore, studies on the long-term toxicology of these nanoparticles, the environmental effects of these nanoparticles, and whether they can be used on a large scale within agricultural systems have not been undertaken.

### 5.3 Future Scope

Future studies will need to demonstrate laboratory and greenhouse experimental support for findings from this research project that were derived from computer modelling. For example, if you were to do some wet lab studies involving the incorporation of biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles into plants, and looking at the effects of those nanoparticles on the outcome of a series of different plant treatment assays, or through antioxidant enzyme and gene expression analysis, this would help to confirm the results seen regarding stress tolerance mechanisms resulting from nanoparticle exposure in *Cymbopogon citratus*.

More sophisticated molecular techniques (transcriptomics, proteomics, metabolomics, systems biology) may also be useful for identifying suitable stress responsive genes, proteins and metabolic pathways associated with biosynthesized biosynthetic nanoparticles under differing abiotic stress scenarios. Furthermore, by integrating machine learning and computer modelling into the experimental design of future studies may increase precision and optimize the interaction between nanoparticles and proteins.

Additionally, future studies may also consider the formulation of environmentally friendly nanoparticles, developing controlled delivery systems for the targeted application of these formulations on large-scale agricultural systems to improve crops productivity and medicinal plants resilience under varying environmental stress conditions. In addition to conducting long-term environmental safety assessments and conducting toxicity testing on the biosynthesized metallic

nanoparticles prior to practical agricultural applications, continued field-level validation of biosynthesized metallic nanoparticles will be needed.

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