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## CONTENTS

<b>Effect of tillage, fertilizer placement and nitrogen levels on green foliage, brix, sucrose, juice and ethanol production of sweet sorghum (<i>Sorghum bicolor</i> L.) in Mollisols of Uttarakhand</b> MANOJ KUMAR, MAHENDRA SINGH PAL and KEWALANAND	<b>1</b>
<b>Status and distribution of soil available micronutrients along a hill slope in Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria</b> AGBOGUN, LUCKY, EDOSOMWAN, N.L. and AGABI, E.J.	<b>7</b>
<b>Foliar nutrition for higher soybean productivity in north western plain zone of India</b> AJAY KUMAR, D. K. SHUKLA, AMIT BHATNAGAR and R. K. SHARMA	<b>15</b>
<b>Soil suitability assessment of a humid tropical soil for pineapple (<i>Ananas comosus</i>) and plantain (<i>musa spp</i>) cultivation in Port Harcourt, Nigeria</b> PETER, K.D., ORJI, O.A. and ORIAKPONO, I.O.	<b>19</b>
<b>Land suitability evaluation for avocado pear (<i>Persea americana</i> Mill.) and pineapple (<i>Ananas comosus</i> L. Merr) in rain forest zone of Edo State, Nigeria</b> OKUNSEBOR F. E., UMWENI A. S., ONAIFO W. and OSAGIE D.	<b>30</b>
<b>Population studies on various coccinellid beetles from different crop ecosystems of Pantnagar, Uttarakhand</b> M. SREEDHAR, R. P. MAURYA, PARUL DOBHAL and RIYA	<b>39</b>
<b>Occurrence of leaf feeder <i>Podontia quatuordecimpunctata</i> (Linnaeus, 1767) in <i>Spondias pinnata</i> (L.f.) Kurz at Kamrup district of Assam, India</b> S. PATHAK and B. DEKA	<b>44</b>
<b>Morphological characterization of F<sub>1</sub> guava hybrids and varieties</b> SHIKHA JAIN, RAJESH KUMAR, NARENDRA KUMAR SINGH, VIJAY PRATAP SINGH and SATISH CHAND	<b>47</b>
<b>Report on severe infestation of root-knot nematode, <i>Meloidogyne incognita</i> on tuberous <i>Vigna vexillata</i> (L.)</b> ZAKAULLAH KHAN, KULDEEP TRIPATHI, BHARAT H. GAWADE and V. CELIA CHALAM	<b>53</b>
<b>Selection of exotic germplasm of bread wheat against <i>Puccinia triticina</i> resistance with analysis of Area Under Disease Progress Curve</b> WAGHAMARE MINAL BHUJANGRAO and DEEPSHIKHA	<b>58</b>
<b>Land suitability assessment for okra (<i>Abelmoscus esculentus</i> L.) and fluted pumpkin (<i>Telferia occidentalis</i>, L.) cultivation in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State, Southern Nigeria</b> PETER, K.D., UMWENI, A.S. and ORJI, A.O.	<b>62</b>
<b>A comprehensive study of changed training in SAMETI Uttarakhand mode during Covid-19 pandemic</b> JYOTI KANWAL, B. D. SINGH, ANURADHA DUTTA and ANIL KUMAR SHARMA	<b>71</b>

<b>Initiation of Farmers University and Farmers Bank in India</b> AVINASH SHARMA, CHOWLANI MANPOONG, SANGEETA SHARMA and MEGHA RAGHAVAN	<b>76</b>
<b>Reformation of ration shop for below poverty line people in India</b> AVINASH SHARMA, CHOWLANI MANPOONG, SANGEETA SHARMA and MEGHA RAGHAVAN	<b>83</b>
<b>An empirical analysis of factors influencing agricultural employment intensity of migrant farm households at Almora district of Uttarakhand</b> BHUMIKA GIRI GOSWAMI and ANIL KUMAR	<b>90</b>
<b>Consumer attitude and behavior towards purchasing agri food: A case study of tomato crop</b> TAMANNA JOSHI and ASHUTOSH SINGH	<b>95</b>
<b>Checklist and conservation status of freshwater finfishes of KuleWetlands a Ramsar Site in Kerala, India</b> KITTY FRANCIS C. and M. K. SAJEEVAN	<b>103</b>
<b>Freshwater fish fauna of Peechi-Vazhani Wildlife Sanctuary, Western Ghats of Kerala, India</b> ELDHO. P. S. and M. K. SAJEEVAN	<b>110</b>
<b>Study of subclinical mastitis in milch breeds of cattle in Western India</b> BEENU JAIN, ANUJ TEWARI, BHARAT BHANDERI and MAYURDHWAJ JHALA	<b>117</b>
<b>Prevalent mutations in the Delta variants of SARS CoV2 circulating in India</b> BEENU JAIN, ANUJ TEWARI, ALOK KUMAR and PREMA S GODI	<b>122</b>
<b>An analysis of selective pressure on Delta variants of SARS CoV2 circulating in India</b> BEENU JAIN, ANUJ TEWARI, ALOK KUMAR, PREMA S GODI and SHRADDHA DWIVEDI	<b>126</b>
<b>AMR status in Uttarakhand</b> NAWAL KISHOR SINGH, A. K. UPADHYAY, T. K. AMBWANI, MAANSI, HIMANI SHARMA, SOURABH SWAMI and AJAY KUMAR	<b>131</b>
<b>Awareness of the aspects of sun protection among college going girls</b> BEENU SINGH and MANISHA GAHLOT	<b>142</b>
<b>Development and evaluation of power weeder for narrow row crops</b> T. SENTHILKUMAR, N.S.CHANDEL, P.S.TIWARI, SYED IMRAN S. and G. MANIKANDAN	<b>148</b>
<b>Data prediction for calibration of seed drill using multiple linear regression</b> SIMRAN TIWARI, PRAMOD MOHNOT and K.B. JHALA	<b>156</b>
<b>Mapping of ground water potential zone in complex hydrological system of Suyal basin in the Mid-Himalayan Region using Analytic Hierarchical Process</b> RITESH JOSHI, H.J SHIVA PRASAD, JYOTHI PRASAD, P. S. MAHAR, DEEPAK KUMAR and PANKAJ KUMAR	<b>166</b>
<b>Water quality assessment of Bageshwar Block Springs using Weighted Arithmetic Water Quality Index (WAWQI) method, Bageshwar District, Uttarakhand, India</b> MOHD AZAM, JYOTHI PRASAD and H. J. SHIVA PRASAD	<b>173</b>

## An analysis of selective pressure on Delta variants of SARS CoV2 circulating in India

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**ABSTRACT:** In this study 423 SARS-CoV-2 genome encoding for spike protein of Delta lineage circulating upto December 2022 in India were downloaded from NCBI and GISAID and aligned against the reference sequence MN908947.3. Total 192 mutations were found to be prevalent in the spike protein of Delta variants circulating in India out of which 125 were non-synonymous mutations and 67 were synonymous mutations. The non-synonymous mutations were further subjected for analysis to analyse the effect of mutation on the functionality of the protein. Out of the total 125 non-synonymous mutations, nine were found to have deleterious effect on the functionality of spike protein. Remaining 116 mutations were found to have neutral effect on functionality of spike protein. The selection pressure imparted by the host was analysed using Data monkey server. The selective pressure analysis revealed that site numbers 142, 152 and 222 of SARS-CoV-2 Delta variants were evolving under positive selection pressure.

**Key words:** Delta variants, FEL, MEME, mutations, positive selection, SARS-CoV-2, SLAC, selection pressure

Viruses mutate with due course of time but not all mutations are beneficial to virus. The mutational rate differs in viruses (Gralinski and Menachery, 2020; Tang *et al.*, 2020). RNA viruses exhibit high mutational rate (Gralinski and Menachery, 2020; Tang *et al.*, 2020) due to which they exhibit high adaptability to the environmental conditions. In RNA viruses the mutations arise due to the lack of proof reading mechanism of RNA polymerase and due to recombination between two viral lineages. Although most common mutations found are neutral, however, some mutations may affect the replication of virus and it's infectivity (Loewe and Hill, 2010; Alexander *et al.*, 2017; Gralinski and Menachery, 2020; Tang *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, new emerging variants of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) poses threat to the global health.

Mutations in the variants of interest (VOIs), Variants of concern (VOCs) are associated with increased transmissibility (Plante *et al.*, 2021) and reduced neutralization by antibody (Planas *et al.*, 2021). The genome analysis of the SARS CoV-2 strains has revealed that the mutations are distributed heterogeneously in the genome of SARS-CoV-2 (Dearlove *et al.*, 2020; van Dorp *et al.*, 2020).

The spike protein of SARS CoV-2 has accumulated several mutations which have increased affinity to human ACE2 receptor (Luan *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, the genome of SARS CoV-2 is subjected to selection pressure affecting the evolution of the virus. Therefore, the main aim of this study was to study the selection pressure analysis on the spike protein of SARS-CoV-2.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Genome sequences retrieval and alignment

A total of 423, SARS-CoV-2 complete, and high coverage viral genome sequences of Delta variants were downloaded from Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Database (GISAID) platform and National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI). Only viruses affecting human hosts were selected and low-quality sequences having sequences more than 5% NNNs and other ambiguous characters were removed using BioEdit 7.2 software. Only full-length sequences including reference sequence MN908947.3 having more than 29000 nucleotides were included in the analysis.

### ***Multiple sequence alignment and lineage prediction***

Sequences of SARS-CoV-2 Delta variants from NCBI & GISAID were downloaded and consensus sequences were aligned with the reference sequence of the SARS-CoV-2 Wuhan-Hu-1 isolate (GenBank accession number MN908947.3) using Multiple Alignment using Fast Fourier Transform (MAFFT) (Kato *et al.*, 2002).

### ***Mapping nucleotide substitutions in the genome and expressed proteins of SARS Co-V2***

The mutations across the genome of aligned sequences were mapped with the reference sequence of the SARS-CoV-2 Wuhan-Hu-1 isolate (GenBank accession number MN908947.3) using an online software described previously (Mercatelli *et al.*, 2021).

### ***Selection pressure amongst the lineages of SARS-CoV2***

The mutations across the genomes and the expressed proteins were analyzed and annotated separately. The genes coding for all proteins were analyzed separately after the removal of all internal stop codons. The selection pressure amongst the lineages of SARS CoV2 from June 2020 to December 2021 was assessed using Datamonkey Adaptive Evolution Server by Single-Likelihood Ancestor Counting (SLAC) model, Fixed Effect Likelihood (FEL) and Mixed Effects Model of Evolution (MEME). FEL and SLAC report both positively and negatively selected sites but MEME reports sites under positive selection. The results were expressed as dN-dS at a 0.1 level of significance. The mutated sites exhibiting selective pressure were annotated using Molecular Evolutionary Genetics Analysis (MEGA 11) software.

### ***Prediction of effect of non-synonymous mutations under positive selective pressure on the functionalities of SARS-CoV-2***

The effect of the non-synonymous mutations on the functionalities of SARS Co-V2 was predicted using the software Protein Variation Effect Analyser (PROVEAN) on the assumption that protein sequences evolutionarily conserved among living

organisms have survived natural selection (Choi *et al.*, 2012). The threshold value was subjected to a -2.5 default value below which the mutation was predicted to have a deleterious effect.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Synonymous and non-synonymous mutations***

Total 192 mutations were found to be present in the spike protein of 423 Delta variants out of which 67 were synonymous and 125 were non-synonymous mutations. The complete list of synonymous and non-synonymous mutations is given in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively.

### ***Prediction of effect of non-synonymous mutations on protein functionality***

The effect of non-synonymous substitution on the protein functionality was estimated using PROVEAN. Out of total 125 non-synonymous substitutions, nine mutations were found to have a deleterious effect on the functionality of Spike protein. Remaining 116 non-synonymous mutations were found to have neutral effect on the functionality of spike protein (Table 1). The SARS Co-V2 has got well adapted in the human population so it was anticipated that most of the mutations to be neutral (Duffy, 2018).

### ***Selection pressure analysis on the spike protein***

The spike protein sequences were subjected to selection pressure analysis using data monkey.org. FEL and SLAC address the question that which site in a gene is subjected to pervasive mutation that is consistently present across the entire phylogeny. MEME addresses which site in a gene is subjected to pervasive or episodic mutation. Therefore, all three procedures were adopted for selection pressure analysis. The details of the sites under positive and negative selection have been depicted in Table 3. In the SLAC model one site was found under positive selection and three sites under negative selection. In the FEL model two sites were found under positive selection and twenty three sites under negative selection. In the MEME model, two sites were found under positive selection. The positive selection sites



**Table 1: List of non-synonymous mutations in the genome of Delta variants of SARS-CoV-2 circulating in India, their PROVEAN score and their effect on functionality of protein. The threshold value is -2.5 default value below which the mutation was predicted to have a deleterious effect.**

Mutation	PROVEAN SCORE	Prediction Cut-off -2.5	Mutation	PROVEAN SCORE	Prediction Cut-off -2.5
A1020S	-0.811	Neutral	L1141W	-1.571	Neutral
A1078S	-0.359	Neutral	L176F	-0.175	Neutral
A222S	0.204	Neutral	L249F	0.526	Neutral
A222V	-0.096	Neutral	L335F	-0.29	Neutral
A243S	0.592	Neutral	L452R	0.559	Neutral
A263E	-1.048	Neutral	L517H	-0.482	Neutral
A27S	0.905	Neutral	L54S	-0.861	Neutral
A288S	-1.506	Neutral	L5F	-1.126	Neutral
A623S	0.3	Neutral	L849I	-1.471	Neutral
A623T	-0.635	Neutral	L922F	-2.286	Neutral
A701S	-0.12	Neutral	M1237I	-1.382	Neutral
A701V	0.597	Neutral	M153K	-0.122	Neutral
A831V	1.231	Neutral	N1173K	<b>-4.298</b>	<b>Deleterious</b>
A845S	0.924	Neutral	N148D	-0.458	Neutral
A879S	-0.361	Neutral	N440S	-0.49	Neutral
A892S	0.698	Neutral	N460Y	-0.299	Neutral
C1236F	<b>-4.061</b>	<b>Deleterious</b>	N501Y	-0.09	Neutral
C1247F	-1.723	Neutral	N532S	-1.081	Neutral
D1163Y	-2.465	Neutral	P1162S	<b>-2.722</b>	<b>Deleterious</b>
D1199Y	<b>-6.528</b>	<b>Deleterious</b>	P26S	1.34	Neutral
D1260N	-0.87	Neutral	P621S	1.593	Neutral
D215Y	-0.215	Neutral	P681R	0.741	Neutral
D228Y	0.226	Neutral	P812R	-1.019	Neutral
D574N	0.606	Neutral	Q1071H	-1.72	Neutral
D614G	0.598	Neutral	Q1208H	-1.327	Neutral
D796H	-0.263	Neutral	Q14R	0.258	Neutral
D80Y	-0.102	Neutral	Q23R	-0.239	Neutral
D950N	-1.631	Neutral	Q613H	-0.917	Neutral
E1262D	-0.59	Neutral	Q677H	0.002	Neutral
E156G	-1.631	Neutral	R214L	-0.393	Neutral
E471Q	0.445	Neutral	R21T	1.484	Neutral
E484K	0.128	Neutral	R346K	0.344	Neutral
E484Q	0.353	Neutral	S221A	-0.374	Neutral
E516Q	0.237	Neutral	S477G	0.294	Neutral
E868D	-0.226	Neutral	S477I	-1.31	Neutral
F157I	-0.174	Neutral	S494L	-0.308	Neutral
F515L	-0.203	Neutral	S698L	-0.345	Neutral
G1124V	0.478	Neutral	S939C	<b>-2.853</b>	<b>Deleterious</b>
G1167V	0.293	Neutral	S939F	<b>-3.094</b>	<b>Deleterious</b>
G1219C	-0.855	Neutral	S943T	-0.711	Neutral
G1219V	-0.54	Neutral	S98F	-1.636	Neutral
G142D	-0.277	Neutral	T109A	-2.024	Neutral
G75V	-0.282	Neutral	T1100I	<b>-3.154</b>	<b>Deleterious</b>
H1101N	-0.055	Neutral	T19R	-0.839	Neutral
H1101Y	1.26	Neutral	T20I	-0.373	Neutral
H1159R	-2.163	Neutral	T274I	-2.006	Neutral
I1179V	-0.795	Neutral	T284I	-0.717	Neutral
I410S	-1.527	Neutral	T299I	3.189	Neutral
I934V	-0.683	Neutral	T478K	-0.524	Neutral
K1191N	-1.707	Neutral	T478R	-0.839	Neutral
K417N	0.27	Neutral	T547I	<b>-3.72</b>	<b>Deleterious</b>
K77T	0.643	Neutral	T732I	-2.143	Neutral

Mutation	PROVEAN SCORE	Prediction Cut-off -2.5
T76I	-0.115	Neutral
T791I	-0.896	Neutral
T791S	-0.848	Neutral
T95I	-1.214	Neutral
V1033A	<b>-3.741</b>	<b>Deleterious</b>
V1104L	-0.604	Neutral
V1129L	-0.598	Neutral
V1133F	-1.666	Neutral
V1176F	-0.161	Neutral
V1228L	-0.457	Neutral
V143F	-0.622	Neutral
V16F	-0.797	Neutral
V483F	-0.372	Neutral
V615I	0.146	Neutral
V622F	-0.593	Neutral
V622I	-0.349	Neutral
V635A	0.209	Neutral
V6F	-0.739	Neutral
V70F	0.189	Neutral
W152K	-0.801	Neutral
W258L	-1.084	Neutral

**Table 2: List of synonymous mutations in the genome of Delta variants of SARS-CoV-2 circulating in India**

A1020A	F1148F	N122N	S514S
A263A	F275F	N606N	S591S
A263A	F306F	N679N	S691S
A411A	F456F	N777N	T385T
A475A	F55F	N824N	T716T
A694A	F888F	N925N	T778T
A701A	G1246G	P491P	T912T
C1240C	G413G	P728P	V1061V
C432C	G757G	L517L	V11V
D111D	H66H	Q134Q	V382V
D1146D	I1114I	Q14Q	V620V
D1168D	I410I	R682R	V83V
D1199D	I624I	R905R	W1217W
D294D	I692I	S1147S	Y505Y
D578D	I834I	S1175S	Y707Y
D737D	L335L	S221S	Y789Y
D848D	L7L	S477S	

were found in low number. Site numbers 142, 152 and 222 were found to be evolving under positive

**Table 3: Sites under positive and negative selection pressure in the spike protein of Delta variants circulating in India. FEL and SLAC report both positively and negatively selected sites but MEME reports sites under positive selection. FEL and SLAC address the question that which site in a gene is subjected to pervasive mutation that is consistently present across the entire phylogeny. MEME addresses which site in a gene is subjected to pervasive or episodic mutation**

Model	Sites under positive selection	Sites under negative selection
SLAC	142	294, 905, 1061
FEL	142, 222	66, 111, 134, 151, 294, 411, 456, 491, 514, 578, 591, 624, 679, 682, 716, 728, 737, 888, 905, 912, 1061, 1147, 1175
MEME	142 and 152	Nil

selection. Twenty three sites were found evolving under negative selection pressure.

In general, mutations imparting fitness to virus have been found within few weeks during the initial stage of the pandemic as exhibited by the spike protein amino acid change in D614G with high dN/dS ratio (Korber *et al.*, 2020; Zhan *et al.*, 2020).

Interestingly, the sites under RBD were not found under positive selection. In this study the sites 142, 152 and 222 which are other than RBD were found to be evolving under positive selection. It becomes paramount to determine the role of these sites in the virus transmission and pathogenesis.

## CONCLUSION

The present study signifies that the delta variants of SARS CoV-2 has got well adapted in the human population as most of the non-synonymous mutations have neutral effect on protein functionality. Few sites, other than the RBD have been found to evolving under positive selection pressure, hence, it is paramount to conduct regular genomic surveillance.

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