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## **Review Article**

# Proteins Involved in the Molecular Mechanisms of Plant Photosynthesis under Drought Stress

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## ABSTRACT

Drought affects morphological, physiological, biochemical and molecular processes in plants resulting in growth inhibition, stomata closure with consecutive reduction of transpiration, decrease in chlorophyll content and inhibition of photosynthesis and protein changes. Important stages of photosynthesis are the light reactions of photosynthesis, Calvin cycle and starch biosynthesis that each of them have important molecular into self-processes. Recognize and study of these proteins and molecular are important for breeding programs. Proteomics is a potent tool for understanding basic processes in plant growth and development, as well as for examining changes in specific proteins in response to environmental fluctuations. By analyzing differentially expressed proteins under drought conditions we sought deeper knowledge, attempted to identify key protein-encoding genes that could be used as candidate marker protein and drought stress responsible proteins have been analyzed in plant. So, study and understanding of molecular pathway in plantcell such as these pathways into chloroplast and related to photosynthesis have a high importance.

Key words: Drought stress, Energy production, Molecular mechanism, Photosynthesis

## INTRODUCTION

Drought is the most severe stress and the main cause of significant losses in growth, productivity of crop plants, and finally their yields (Ludlow and Muchow, 1990). Drought affects morphological, physiological, biochemical and molecular processes in plants resulting in growth inhibition, stomata closure with consecutive reduction of transpiration, decrease in chlorophyll content and inhibition of photosynthesis and protein changes (Lawlor and Cornic, 2002; Yordanov et al., 2003) to cope with osmotic changes in their tissues. Among the factors that contribute to this photosynthesis reduction, stomatal closure can be considered as a direct response to leaf water potential reduction induced by drought (Santos et al., 2004; Santos et al., 2006). During exposure to drought stress carbon metabolism and relations between sink and source organs are perturbed, as well as the metabolism of elements that are normally absorbed with water. Cellular responses include osmotic adjustment, regulation of water circulation (aquaporins), protection or degradation of proteins, and protection against oxidative stress (Kramer, 1980).So, when plants were subjected to drought stress, a number of physiological and morphological responses

were observed and the magnitude of the response varies among species and between varieties within a crop species (Kramer, 1980). The response to drought was an increased level of a bscisic acid, the accumulation of unusual metabolites such as proline and polyamines, alterations in activity of certain enzymes and the induction of a specific set of genes (Skriver and Mundy, 1990). Drought stress is known to reduce photosynthetic rate and the extent of this decrease depends on osmotic adjustment and genotypic differences (Arnau et al., 1997). On the other hands, Riccardi et al., (2004) have demonstrated that plant response to water deficit shows some genetic variations. Water stress tolerance has been documented in almost all plants but its extent varies from species to species (Chaitanya et al., 2003). Crop plants which can use water most efficiently and maintain acceptable yields are perspective regarding their tolerance. Drought tolerance is a complex trait where several characteristics influence plant success during vegetation period (Ingram and Bartels, 1996). It is achieved by modulation of gene expression and accumulation of specific protective proteins and metabolites (Reddy et al., 2004; Zang and Komatsu, 2007). Proteomics is a potent tool for understanding basic processes in plant growth and

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development, as well as for examining changes in specific proteins in response to environmental fluctuations. By analyzing differentially expressed proteins under drought conditions we sought deeper knowledge, attempted to identify key protein-encoding genes that could be used as candidate marker protein (Peng et al., 2009). Using proteomics technique, drought stress responsible proteins have been analysed in plant (Ali and Komatsu, 2006). The results suggested that actin depolymerizing factor was one of the target proteins expressed in leaf blades, leaf sheaths and roots under drought stress but not under cold and salt stresses and/or abscisic acid treatment. The proteomics of drought stress acclimation has been done with the conclusion that proteins contributing to basic carbon metabolism were significantly increased (Fulda et al., 2011). The leaf apoplast was examined as a compartment, which sensitively and differentially responds to drought and salinity with consequences for plant growth (Ramanjulu et al., 1999). The more drought tolerant genotype had control stomata function to allow carbon fixation at stress thus improving water use efficiency and photosynthetic capacity (Yordanov et al., 2000).

So, drought stress effect on the different part of plant cellular that recognize of molecular process into this steps is important for identification of types of proteins that are candidate to tolerant under drought stress. Generally, grouping of proteins in studies of proteomics that in present study was described according to importance of them follow.

### The Light reactions of photosynthesis

Chloroplasts are organelles for photosynthesis. Chloroplasts also participate in the amino acid, vitamin, isoprenoid, and lipid biosynthesis, as well as reduction of nitrite and sulfate (vanWijk, 2000; Baginsky and Gruissem, 2004). A previous study has proposed that there are~3000 proteins in mature chloroplasts that have specialized distributions and functions (Leister, 2003). Chlorophyll binding proteins are synthesized as precursor molecules in the cytoplasm and imported into the chloroplast where they are inserted in the thylakoid membranes (Bassi et al., 1997). They have several functions including light harvesting, energy dissipation and pigment storage. As components of the light harvesting complexes in plants, the primary functions of chlorophyll a/b binding proteins is the absorption of light and the transfer of the excitation energy to the photochemical reaction centers (Bassi et al., 1997: Ganeteg et al., 2001). In some cases, plants are exposed to higher light intensities than used in photosynthesis. Therefore, to prevent photo inhibition and damage to the photosynthetic machinery, excess energy is then dissipated by these light-harvesting proteins. In addition, chlorophyll a/b binding proteins are believed to have a function in pigment storage (Bassi et al., 1997). Hydrogen ions are also released in the process, creating a transmembrane chemiosmotic potential that is utilized by ATP syntheses during ATP synthesis Photolysis of water occurs in the oxygen-evolving complex (OEC) of Photosystem II (PSII) reaction centers (McEvoy and Brudvig, 2006; Sproviero et al., 2007). The OEC is composed of four manganese ions, calcium and possibly chloride ions, which are bound to extrinsic proteins

(McEvoy and Brudvig, 2006). Photosystem II OEC proteins are involved in retaining calcium and chloride ions, two inorganic cofactors for the water-splitting reaction (Ifuku et al., 2005). The oxygen evolving enhancer protein is believed to have a dual function; (i) optimizing the manganese cluster during photolysis and (ii) protecting the reaction centre proteins from damage by oxygen radical formed in light (Heide et al., 2004). In plants, this enzyme exists in two different forms; photosynthetic and heterotrophic forms, which are encoded for by different genes and may be associated with different metabolic pathways (Gummadova et al., 2007). Ferrodoxin-NADP oxidoreduct as escatalvse the reversible electron transfers between one electron carrier systems (ferrodoxin) and the two-electron carrying NADP (H) (Thomas et al., 2006). In chloroplasts, the main physiological function of this enzyme is to catalyze the final step of the photosynthetic electron transport, providing NADPH, which is then utilized in the carbon fixation step of the Calvin cycle (Arakaki et al., 1997). Also, FNRs are involved in the photosynthetic machinery where electrons are transferred from ferredoxins or flavodoxins to NADPH and are also implicated in protection against ROS (Caruso et al., 2008). In fact, isoforms of FNRs are assigned to a number of functions with differing catalytic properties (Moolna and Bowsher, 2010). In the Figure 1 general scheme of the light reactions of photosynthesis was showed.

As plants are exposed to a water deficit the absorbed light energy through the photosynthetic pigments exceeds its rate of consumption through the Calvin cycle (through decreases in proteins involved in the Calvin cycle), leading to photo-damage to the photosynthetic machinery, particularly the photosystem II (PSII) reaction center core proteins D1 and D2 (Aro et al., 1993).Plants have evolved mechanisms to avoid damage several to the photosynthetic machinery such as antenna modulations; decreasing the size of antennae to reduce the amount of absorbed light (Eberhard et al., 2008) is one mechanism that proteins in the antennae of the photosystems are the light-harvesting complex proteins (LHC). Other proteins changing within the photosynthesis machinery category are the extrinsic subunits of the PSII complex, known as oxygen-evolving complex (OEC) proteins, that are involved in the stabilization of the PSII complex (Ifuku et al., 2008) and its impairment is proposed to be the rate limiting step in the photo-damage process to the PSII (Takahashi and Murata, 2008).On the other hands, HCF136, a protein that is essential for the repair and assembly of the PSII complex (Plucken et al., 2002), decreased at under drought stress decreased (Ford et al., 2011).

## The Calvin cycle

Water deficiency leads to stomatal closure in leaves; thereby, decreasing the carbon dioxide flow into leaves and inducing the increased hydrolysis of starches and accumulation of sugars as well as the decreased output of photosynthetic products. All of these changes result in decreased photosynthesis (Lawlor and Cornic, 2002). During photosynthesis, light energy absorbed by the photosynthetic pigments in the chloroplasts is converted to chemical energy through the photosynthesis machinery

Stroma

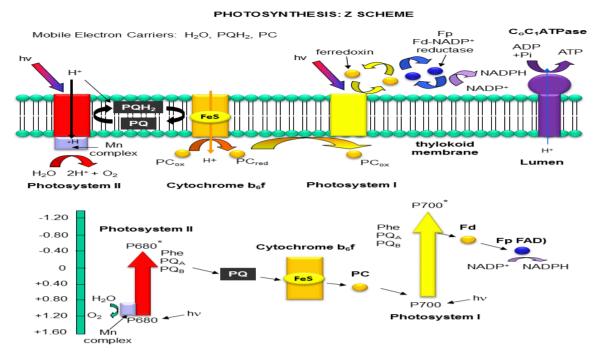


Fig. 1: Molecular process into the light reactions of photosynthesis.

with this chemical energy used for CO2 fixation in the Calvin cycle. Under a water deficit, the CO2 concentration in leaves decreases due to stomatal closure (Kaiser and Kappen, 1997) leading to a corresponding decrease in the activities of enzymes involved in Calvin cycle (Chaves et al., 2002). The Calvin cycle (also termed the reductive pentose phosphate pathway) is a metabolic pathway that produced pentose sugars (Heldt, 1997). The Calvin cycle, which consists of carboxylation, reduction and renewal phases, is the primary pathway of photosynthesis in plants. The cycle is characterized by phases; the carboxylation, three reduction and regeneration phases (Spreitzer and Salvucci, 2002). Rubisco, an enzyme involved to carbon dioxide fixation in photosynthesis, that a multimeric enzyme with two subunits; large (50-55 kDa) and small (12-18 kDa). Larg subunit of Rubisco has a catalytic subunit and small subunit is regulative (Andersson and Backlund, 2008). The key photosynthetic enzyme in plants is Rubisco (ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase/oxygenase) which takes part in CO2 fixation and photorespiration (Bowes and Ogren, 1972). This enzyme is localized in the chloroplast stroma. Rubisco accounts for about 30-60% of the total soluble protein in plants. The enzyme constitutes a large pool of stored leaf nitrogen (20-30%) that can be quickly remobilized under stress and senescence (Kaiser et al., 1987).

Generally, drought induces metabolic changes related to protein turnover (alterations in protein synthesis, maintaining the level of some proteins or protein degradation) (Bray, 1997). In accordance with Medrano *et al.*, (1997) the amount of Rubisco protein is slightly affected by moderate and even prolonged severe drought. Some data about a reduction in Rubisco amount in stressed plants also exist (Chaves *et al.*, 1991). Both the synthesis and assembly of Rubisco depend on two

genomes. The RLS (Rubisco Large Subunit) are encoded by a single chloroplast gene whereas RSS (Rubisco Small Subunit) are encoded by a small family of nuclear genes (Musrati et al., 1998). The correct folding of the RLS requires chaperonin system consisting of Rubisco binding protein (RBP) or cpn60 (the analog of GroL) and cochaperon in cpn10 (the analog of GroES). The Rubiscoholo enzyme assembly in chloroplast stroma is an ATP-dependent process (Kaiser et al., 1987). Skriver and Mundy (1990) indicate that the level of cpn 60 is coordinated positively with that of Rubisco under normal conditions. Very limited data are available to date concerning the response of cpn 60 to stress conditions, especially to drought (Musrati et al., 1998). Down regulation of Rubisco large subunit has been observed in drought stressed susceptible wheat lines (Demirevska et al., 2009) showing its involvement in drought tolerance mechanism. Drought induced the decrease in rubisco binding protein content at the leaf level in alfalfa (Aranjuelo et al., 2010). In maize leaves, the response to water deficit showed genetic variation. Some increased proteins were induced specifically in one of the two studied genotypes while others were significantly induced in both genotypes but to a different level or with different kinetics (Riccardi et al., 2004). The activity of Rubisco is regulated by Rubisco activase protein (RA) that possesses ATPase activity (Kaiser et al., 1987). The function of RA is to remove tightly bound sugar phosphates from the active centers of Rubisco. It is considered that RA protein is not a conventional enzyme and belongs to the ATPase family associated with various cellular activities (AAA<sup>+</sup> proteins), a class of chaperone-like proteins acting on other macromolecules and catalyzing mechanical processes, such as assembly, operation and disassembly of protein complexes (Martin and Smith, 1995). There are converse data about the abundance of RA under drought conditions (Salekdeh et al., 2002). RA protects chloroplast protein synthesis from drought stress as a chaperone. Chaperons like RBP and RA might associate to each other by protein-protein interactions facilitating directly Rubisco assembly and activation or promoting different processes (Ramanjulu et al., 1999). Inhibitory effects of environmental stresses on photosynthetic machinery of plants are well established; among these stresses drought is of particular importance (Nogues and Baker, 2000; Flexas and Medrano, 2002). Although RuBis CO, a central enzyme in the photosynthetic machinery, would be expected to be down-regulated due to the inhibition of photosynthesis in response to drought stress. previous studies showed contradictory results. Some researchers reported its up-regulation (Caruso *et al.*, 2008: Ge et al., 2012), whereas others found down-regulation (Gao et al., 2011) or even both (Guo et al., 2012) in response to abiotic stresses such as drought and salinity.

In response to drought, closure of stomata to reduce water loss simultaneously leads to reduction in CO2 assimilation. At low CO2 to O2 ratios RuBisCO, the key enzyme of the Calvin cycle, switches to its oxygenase activity a process known as photorespiration (Nogues and Baker, 2000; Wingler *et al.*, 2000). As a result, an upregulation in RuBisCO levels may also indicate an increase in the photorespiration rate which may be the case for the drought sensitive genotype (Salekdeh *et al.*, 2002; Ge *et al.*, 2012). Although this energy depleting process is generally considered as damaging to plants, photorespiration may prevent over reduction and, thus, photo-inhibition of photosystem II, thereby protecting the photosynthetic electron transport chain (Wingler *et al.*, 2000).

Based on the primary product of carbon fixation, plants are classified as C3 and C4 species. Oxaloacetate (a four-carbon compound) and 3-phosphoglycerate (a threecarbon compound) are the primary products of carbon

assimilation in the C4 and C3 plants, respectively. Functionally, RuBisCO proteins catalyse carbon fixation (carboxylation) reactions in the Calvin cycle of photosynthetic plants. In this process, ribulose 1,5bisphosphate (RuBP), a 5-carbon compound serves as an acceptor molecule for CO2 to form an unstable 6-carbon The 6-carbon intermediate compound compound. immediately breaks down, forming two molecules of 3phosphoglycerate (3PGA) (Tabita et al., 2007; Andersson and Backlund, 2008). The end product of this carboxylation reaction, 3PGA, is phosphorylated by ATP to form 1.3-biphosphoglycerate and ADP. This reaction in catalysed by a cytosolic 3-phosphoglycerate kinase. GAPDH plays a key role in reducing glycerate 3phosphate into glyceraldehyde-3-phosphate. The latter is not only a photosynthetic product but also the substrate of ribulose 5-phosphate. The above reaction is one of the two that occur in the second phase (reduction phase) of the Calvin cycle (Macdonald and Buchanan, 1997). In the third phase, RuBP molecules are regenerated to allow the first carbon fixation step to occur. The regeneration phase is characterized by a series of enzymatic reactions that convert triose phosphate to RuBP (Macdonald and Buchanan, 1997). Together with others, these two enzymes catalyze reactions, which ultimately result in the formation of ribulose-5-phosphate. The ribulose-5phosphate is then phosphorylated to form RuBP by phosphoribulokinase. To complete the cycle, RuBP is then used as a substrate by RuBisCo in the first phase of carbon fixation. Some of the triose phosphate produced in the Calvin cycle is used for sucrose and starch biosynthesis (Raines, 2003; Tamoi et al., 2005). Fructose-1.6-bisphosphatase. which catalvzes fructose-1.6diphosphate to fructose-6- phosphate, plays an important regulatory role in the Calvin cycle and the transportation of photosynthetic intermediates (Kiddle et al., 1999). In the Calvin cycle, transketolase catalyzes glycerate 3-

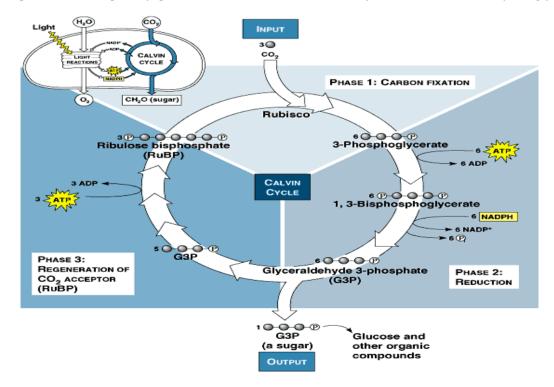


Fig. 2: Molecular process into the Calvin cycle of photosynthesis

phosphate and fructose-6-phosphate into xylose-5phosphate and erythrose-4 in ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase/oxygenase in hydrogen peroxide-stressed young rice leaves. Triosephosphate isomerase, an enzyme involved in isomerisation of dihydroxyacetone phosphate and D-glyceraldehyde-3-P has been reported to be down regulated under drought stress in wheat (Xue *et al.*, 2008). In the Figure 2 general scheme of Calvin cycle of photosynthesis have showed.

#### Starch biosynthesis

Starch is an important storage polysaccharide in plants, providing an energy source for various metabolic processes (Kruger, 1997). Starch synthesis involves three enzymes; adenosine diphosphate glucose pyrophosphatase (AGPase), a starch synthase and a branching enzyme (Guan and Keeling, 1998). Plant AGPases are tetrameric in structure, being composed of two different subunits, which are products of different genes. The small and large subunits have a subunit MW range of 50-54 kDa and 51-60 kDa respectively (Preiss, 1997). AGPasescatalyse the formation of ADP-glucose and inorganic pyrophosphate from ATP and glucose-1-phosphate (Boehlein et al., 2005). The end product of this reaction, ADP glucose is a precursor for starch synthesis (Tetlow et al., 2003). Starch synthase then transfers the glucose from ADP-glucose to the non-reducing end of a growing acceptor chain thus elongating the  $\alpha$ -1,4glucan chains. In the third step, the starch branching enzyme then cleaves an elongated  $\alpha$ -1.4 glucan chain simultaneously transferring it to an acceptor chain to form!-1,6 linkages (Guan and Keeling, 1998).

#### Malate/oxaloacetate shuttling system

Plant cells are known to contain multiple isoforms of MDHs, which differ in co-enzyme specificity, subcellular localization and biological function (Minarik et al., 2002; Ding and Ma, 2004). In plants, five different classes of MDHs are present; (i) chloroplast NADP-dependent MDH; (ii) mitochondrial NAD-dependent MDH; (iii) micro body NAD-dependent MDH; (iv) chloroplast NADdependent MDH and (v) cytosolic NAD dependent MDH (Ding and Ma, 2004). These enzymes occur as homodimers, with subunit MW ranging between 32-37 kDa for the NAD-dependent MDH and 42-43 for the NADP dependent MDHs (Ding and Ma, 2004). Generally, MDHs catalyse the interconversion of oxaloacetate and malate using the NAD/NADP coenzyme system (Minarik et al., 2002). So, Malate dehydrogenase is an important enzyme of cellular metabolism and it catalyzes the conversion of oxaloacetate and malate (Musrati et al., 1998). However, different isoforms in different subcellular locations are thought to have different functions. For example, the chloroplastic NADPdependent MDH forms part of a malate valve system (Scheibe, 2004), which converts excess NADPH into malate and transports in from the chloroplast into the cytosol (Fridlyand et al., 1998). Therefore, it is highly probable that the chloroplastic NADP-dependent MDH identified in this study might have a function in balancing reducing equivalents between the cytosol and the chloroplast stroma. In C4 plants such as sorghum and maize, this chloroplastic NADP134 dependent MDH isoform may have an additional role in the synthesis of

malate, which is transported into the chloroplast of bundle sheath cells and takes part in carbon fixation (Ding and Ma, 2004). On the other hand, cytoplasmic NADdependent MDH isoforms are less well characterized with limited structural and functional information being known. Nevertheless, a cytoplasmic NAD-dependent MDHs was isolated from wheat (TaMDH). (Ding and Ma, 2004). Since the cytoplasmic NAD-dependent MDH isoforms were shown to be present in different plants tissues (Ding and Ma, 2004), they are proposed to have housekeeping functions in plant metabolism. However, their actual physiological functions and mechanism of action are yet to be elucidated.

#### Conclusion

Photosynthesis have different stages that each of them involved with different molecular and proteins. Proteomics help to us for the recognize of candidate proteins that have important role between tolerant and susceptible genotype. So, study and understanding of molecular pathway in cell plant such as these pathways into chloroplast and related to photosynthesis have high importance.

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