Effect of season and year on azadirachtin A and oil content in neem (Azadirachta indica A. Juss) seeds and relationship of azadirachtin A and oil content with rainfall, temperature and humidity

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National Research Centre for Agro-forestry, Jhansi 284 003, India

In the present study, azadirachtin A and oil content on kernel basis have been estimated continuously for four years (2001–04) in 16 neem trees belonging to 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, and selected from progeny and provenance trials established in 1994 at the National Research Centre for Agro-forestry, Jhansi. These two biochemical parameters were also estimated in some trees which produce fruits in November. Coefficient of variation over the years was calculated for these parameters. Correlation studies of azadirachtin A and oil content were done with atmospheric temperature, rainfall and relative humidity. Results suggested that azadirachtin A was highly influenced by environmental factors compared to oil content in seeds. Positive and significant correlation was found for azadirachtin A and oil content with relative humidity, and negative and significant correlation with atmospheric temperature. Regions with comparatively low temperature (30–35°C) and high humidity (45–55%) during the period of flower initiation to fruit maturity favour high azadirachtin A and oil content in neem seeds. A one-year study on azadirachtin content in neem is not sufficient for arriving at any conclusions.

Keywords: Azadirachtin A, coefficient of variation, neem, oil content.

NEEM (Azadirachta indica A. Juss), a botanical cousin of mahogany, has been considered important for centuries due to its medicinal and insecticidal properties. Among various bioactive biochemicals present in the neem seeds, azadirachtin, a lamioid, is highly valued as an anti-feedant replant and growth disturbing chemical against a variety of insect pests1. High azadirachtin content (>0.50% by kernel weight) neem seeds are sold in the market at around Rs 10 per kg; otherwise the price is less than Rs 3 per kg. Due to low azadirachtin (<0.50%) content in the seeds, only around 24% of the neem seeds are collected for processing to manufacture azadirachtin formulations2. Earlier studies suggested that the azadirachtin content is influenced by genotypes, regions, habitats and climatic conditions3–7. In these studies the set of genotypes tested was not similar in all geographical areas. Every region/habitat has a different set of genotypes. Therefore, it is difficult to conclude that the variation in azadirachtin content in seeds is due to environmental factors or genotypes, or the interaction of environment and genotypes. Therefore, in the present study 16 trees belonging to 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan were selected from provenance and progeny trials of neem established in 1994, to study the effect of atmospheric temperature, relative humidity, rainfall and year on azadirachtin A and oil content in seed kernels over four years (2001–2004). In the same populations, besides the selection of 16 trees, seven trees were also identified in which flower initiation started in the first week of July and fruits matured in November (named as winter fruits). Fruits of these seven trees were collected in November 2005 (winter fruits) and July 2007 (summer fruits). Azadirachtin A and oil content of these fruits were also estimated.

For the estimation of oil content and azadirachtin A, greenish-yellow seeds (250 g) were picked directly from each selected tree. Fruits were depulped manually and washed thoroughly with clean water. Depulped seeds were dried in shade till constant weight. Next, 80 g kernels was taken from the seeds of each sample by manual decortication and converted into kernel powder using an electric grinder. Then 10 g powder was put in Whatman thimble and placed in Soxhlet unit of 250 ml R.B. flask containing petroleum ether (60–80°C) (200 ml) in condenser. The Soxhlet was kept overnight and the material was extracted. The extract was collected in a flask and organic solvent was completely removed by distillation under vacuum. The remaining oil content was weighed to get the oil yield. The solid residue left in the thimble was extracted with methanol (HPLC-grade) in the Soxhlet for 6 h at temperature below 60°C. The extract was collected in a flask and the volume of methanol extract containing azadirachtin A was measured and transferred to 250 ml corning bottle. A part of the sample (4 ml) was filtered in a culture tube through Durapore Hydraulic filter 0.22 μm (Millipore) at the time of injecting into the HPLC (Shimadzu) apparatus. The sample (20 μl) was injected using autoinjector. Azadirachtin was separated on Phenmxn C-18 coloum (250×4.6 mm ID, 5 μl) using acetonitrile: water (40: 60) @ 1 ml min⁻¹ and the peak was monitored at 217 nm. Azadirachtin A content was determined following the methods of Kearney et al.8 and Venkateshwarulu et al.9. Standard azadirachtin A (99%) was procured from Trifolio-MGmddi (Germany). A standard solution of azadirachtin A was prepared by dissolving 1 mg compound in 25 ml methanol (HPLC-grade).

Data on rainfall, atmospheric temperature and relative humidity during the period of flower initiation to fruit maturity were taken from Metrological Laboratory.
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Indian Grassland and Fodder Research Institute, Jhansi. Coefficient of variation for oil content and azadirachtin A over the years was calculated. Correlation coefficients for azadirachtin A and oil content with rainfall, minimum and maximum atmospheric temperature, relative humidity (II) during the period of flower initiation to fruit maturity were calculated.

Results showed reasonable range of variation between the trees for oil content and azadirachtin A (Tables 1 and 2). The range of variation was 0.089–0.800% for azadirachtin A and 34.56–50.00% for oil content on kernel basis. Coefficient of variation over the years was high for azadirachtin A compared to oil content for each tree. It ranged from 13.38% to 73.31%, with a mean of 36.93%. In the case of oil content it ranged from 1.98% to 12.34%, with a mean of 1.28% (Tables 1 and 2). These results indicate that azadirachtin A is highly influenced by environmental factors compared to oil content.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample no.</th>
<th>Pedigree</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Coefficient of variation (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>F15L9T6</td>
<td>43.74</td>
<td>41.20</td>
<td>43.11</td>
<td>40.38</td>
<td>42.11</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
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<td>19</td>
<td>F15L10T14</td>
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<td>39.56</td>
<td>35.82</td>
<td>42.98</td>
<td>40.15</td>
<td>6.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>F15L11T12</td>
<td>46.24</td>
<td>44.27</td>
<td>42.85</td>
<td>42.79</td>
<td>44.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>F15L11T20</td>
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<td>41.69</td>
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<td>42.77</td>
<td>39.24</td>
<td>8.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
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<td>40.90</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>F14L4T18</td>
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<td>43.27</td>
<td>44.34</td>
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<td>43.99</td>
<td>44.50</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>38.80</td>
<td>38.27</td>
<td>43.09</td>
<td>42.02</td>
<td>9.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean: 42.93 41.87 42.29 43.27 42.59 1.28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample no.</th>
<th>Pedigree</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Coefficient of variation (%)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>0.330</td>
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<td>0.132</td>
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<td>0.149</td>
<td>0.247</td>
<td>0.219</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.127</td>
<td>0.182</td>
<td>0.191</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
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<td>0.133</td>
<td>0.262</td>
<td>0.208</td>
<td>26.56</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.271</td>
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<td>0.427</td>
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<td>0.219</td>
<td>0.196</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.405</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.153</td>
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<td>0.270</td>
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<td>0.111</td>
<td>0.229</td>
<td>0.208</td>
<td>34.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>F14L7T8</td>
<td>0.590</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td>0.309</td>
<td>0.267</td>
<td>0.342</td>
<td>43.43</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>F14L7T9</td>
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<td>0.580</td>
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<td>0.171</td>
<td>0.306</td>
<td>0.321</td>
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<td>F14L14T19</td>
<td>0.250</td>
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<td>0.289</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.800</td>
<td>0.225</td>
<td>0.200</td>
<td>0.186</td>
<td>0.353</td>
<td>73.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean: 0.411 0.169 0.187 0.267 0.258 36.93
This is further confirmed by high average azadirachtin A content (0.81%) in the seeds obtained in November compared to those obtained in July (0.29%) in the same set of trees (Table 3). On the other hand, average oil content of seeds that mature in November was 46.46% as against 49.65% for seeds obtained in July, that is statistically at par with winter seeds. Therefore, preference should be given to breed varieties which produce fruits in November rather than July. Moreover, seeds obtained in November are less infected by fungus compared to those obtained in July. Hence reduce the chances of aflatoxin in seeds. High value of coefficient of variation for azadirachtin suggests that it is not desirable to draw any conclusion on any aspect related to azadirachtin content based on a single-year data. To identify high azadirachtin content genotype/genotypes of neem, it is essential to test the genetic materials in at least 2–3 locations over 3–4 years. Contrary to this, identification of high oil content genotype/genotypes is comparatively easy.

Correlation coefficients were estimated for azadirachtin A and oil content with rainfall, minimum and maximum atmospheric temperature, and relative humidity (II) during the period of flower initiation to fruit maturity. Correlation studies have shown that there was negative and significant correlation of azadirachtin A with maximum (-0.9769) and minimum (-0.8891) atmospheric temperature. This suggests that high temperature (more than 40°C) during the period of flower initiation to fruit maturity reduces azadirachtin A in seeds. On the other hand, positive and significant correlation of azadirachtin A was observed with relative humidity (II) (0.9930). Thus, high humidity favours high azadirachtin content. Rainfall had a positive but not significant correlation (0.7106) with azadirachtin A, though the value of correlation coefficient was high.

Results of correlation studies between oil content and meteorological parameters are similar to those of azadirachtin A content in seeds. Oil content had negative and significant correlation with maximum temperature (-0.9639), and positive and significant correlation with relative humidity (II) (0.9930). Positive and non-significant correlation (0.5721) was found with rainfall. Thus, regions with comparatively low temperature (range 30–35°C) and high humidity (45–55%) during flowering to fruit maturity are more suitable to obtain neem seeds with high azadirachtin A and high oil content.

Several researchers have reported variation in azadirachtin content in neem seeds due to various factors. Rengasamy and Parmar\textsuperscript{5} reported that ecotypes belonging to coastal, arid and semi-arid ecosystems showed high azadirachtin A than those from the sub-humid regions. Similarly, marked variation in azadirachtin content in neem seeds of various countries has been observed by Ermel et al.\textsuperscript{3}. Seeds from Nicaragua and Indonesia have more azadirachtin followed by those from India, Burma and Mauritius. Venkateswarlu et al.\textsuperscript{2} observed marked variation between different genotypes of the same location, as well as different locations, but there was no relationship between azadirachtin A content and rainfall, humidity and temperature. Seasonal variation in azadirachtin A, B and F was reported by Sidhu and Behl\textsuperscript{6}. Winter stress appears to favour synthesis of azadirachtin B and F in seeds. Kaushik et al.\textsuperscript{7} reported that azadirachtin was affected by climate and habitat. Annual variation in azadirachtin content was significant. The highest azadirachtin content was recorded in neem tree populations growing in the southern parts of India.

In all the above studies, seeds did not belong to the same genotypes tested in various locations and the studies were not conducted over several years. Thus, it is difficult to conclude whether variation in azadirachtin content in seeds is due to climatic factors, soil types, genetic make-up or a combination of these. On the other hand, in the present study genotypes were the same, planted in the same location, and the variation observed might be due to climatic factors. It can be concluded that seeds of neem

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**Table 3. Oil content and azadirachtin A (% on kernel basis) of seven neem trees that bear fruits during the winter season**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
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<td>0.41</td>
<td>107.32</td>
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<td>50.99</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>126</td>
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<td>0.29</td>
<td>134.48</td>
<td>48.93</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>+2.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>127</td>
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<td>0.28</td>
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<td>48.06</td>
<td>-2.50</td>
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<tr>
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<td>388.24</td>
<td>43.55</td>
<td>45.14</td>
<td>-3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.19</td>
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<td>46.06</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>-15.80</td>
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<td>130</td>
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<td>0.37</td>
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<td>44.91</td>
<td>48.26</td>
<td>-6.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131</td>
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<td>0.30</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>45.11</td>
<td>52.77</td>
<td>-6.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>179.31</td>
<td>46.46</td>
<td>49.65</td>
<td>-6.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(t\) (5%) \(= 6.61^*\) 2.07 (NS)

\(*\) Significant at 1% level; NS, Not significant.
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obtained in November have 2–4 times more azadirachtin A than those obtained in July. Thus, emphasis should be
given to identify genotypes of neem that will give fruits in
November, rather than in rainy season. These seeds
will also be less infected with fungi that deteriorate the
quality of seeds.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT We thank the Director, National
Research Centre for Agro-forestry, Jhansi for providing facilities.

Received 7 September 2009; revised accepted 18 August 2010

Modelling of a magnetic anomaly in
east Ganga basin and its implications
on the tectonics of the region

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V. Pradeep Kumar
National Geophysical Research Institute, Hyderabad 500 007, India

Magnetic data around Muzaffarpur in the eastern
part of the Ganga basin display a conspicuous magnetic
anomaly in an otherwise relatively smooth magnetic
terrain. The anomaly with intense amplitude of about
1500 nT is located at the junction of the west Patna
Fault and the Sitamarhi Fault. The low–high axis of
this anomaly is oriented at 45°E, suggesting that the
source possesses remanent magnetism. Magnetic mod-
elling reveals that the source, located at a depth of
4200 m, is polarized at an inclination of 10°S and decli-
nation of 45°E. This implies that the causative source
is emplaced when this part of the continent is located
5° south of the equator and is tilted 50°E with respect to
the present position, describing a moment of the
northward journey of the Indian plate after its break-
up from Antarctica.

Keywords: Aeromagnetics, magnetic anomaly, remanent
magnetism, tectonics.

The Ganga basin occupying a vast area of about
300,000 km² in the northern part of India is bounded by
the Himalayas in the north and the Aravallis in the west.
The Vindhyans and the Bundelkhand granite delimit its
boundary to the south, whereas the Chota Nagpur Plateau
serves as its eastern boundary. As the entire area is covered
under a thick blanket of alluvium, the subsurface geology
(1) was inferred from geophysical data and drill-
ing. The area was covered by airborne magnetic surveys³–⁴,
and ground magnetic, gravity and seismic surveys⁵–⁸. The
geophysical data over the Ganga basin was interpreted in
detail in terms of subsurface structures³,⁶–⁷.

Although the magnetic anomalies over a thick sedi-
mentary sequence of the Ganga basin are expected to
display gentle gradients, data in the eastern part of the basin
north of Muzaffarpur exhibit intense anomalies. The ver-
tical magnetic intensity map⁵–⁷ (Figure 2) of this area
shows intense anomalies (marked A and B) of about
1500 nT, spreading over an area of about 30 × 40 sq km.
Although both the anomalies appear to be similar, data
coverage of anomaly B is sparse and hence only anomaly
A is used in modelling and interpretation as described in
the following.

For magnetic modelling, it is essential to know the
nature of magnetic anomalies which depend not only on

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