

# Discovery and Structure Optimization of a Series of Isatin Derivatives as *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* Chorismate Mutase Inhibitors

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In this study, the crystal structure of the *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (MTB) enzyme chorismate mutase (CM) bound to transition state analogue (PDB: 2FP2) was used as a framework for virtual screening of the BITS-Pilani in-house database (2500 compounds) to identify new scaffold. We identified isatin as novel small molecule MTB CM inhibitors; further twenty-four isatin derivatives were synthesized and evaluated *in vitro* for their ability to inhibit MTB CM, and activity against *M. tuberculosis* as steps towards the derivation of structure–activity relationships (SAR) and lead optimization. Compound 3-(4-nitrobenzylidene)indolin-2-one, 24 emerged as the most promising lead with an IC<sub>50</sub> of 1.01  $\pm$  0.22  $\mu$ M for purified CM and MIC of 23.5  $\mu$ M for M. tuberculosis, with little or no cytotoxicity.

Key words: chorismate mutase, isatin, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, tuberculosis

**Abbreviations:** e-pharmacophore, energy-based pharmacophore; MIC, minimum inhibitory concentration; MTB CM, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* chorismate mutase.

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Tuberculosis (TB), an infection caused by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (MTB), has become a major global health concern. Presently, MTB kills approximately 1.6 million people annually and has infected one-third of the world population, rendering TB the second most lethal infectious disease after HIV/AIDS.<sup>a</sup> With 400 000 new cases annually, multiple drug-resistant TB is emerging rapidly, calling urgently for new anti-TB therapeutics. No truly new TB

introduction of rifampicin in 1965. It is thus necessary to search for new and more effective antimycobacterial agents with novel mechanisms of action to combat the emergence of drug resistance and to shorten the duration of therapy (1). Chorismate occupies a central place in the shikimate pathway for the biosynthesis of the aromatic amino acids. Chorismate mutase (CM) (EC 5.4.99.5) catalyses the Claisen rearrangement of chorismate to prephenate via an endo-oxabicyclic transition state (Figure 1), the first committed step in the biosynthesis of tyrosine and phenylalanine in bacteria (2). Mycobacterium tuberculosis possess two chorismate mutases belonging to different subclasses (3), the secreted enzyme (\*MtCM,  $\gamma$ -subclass) and the housekeeping enzyme (MtCM,  $\delta$ -subclass), whereas the former is primarily involved in directing the protein from the cytoplasm to the pseudoperiplasmic space and may have some role in host-pathogen interaction. It is the secreted enzyme (usually referred to as \*MtCM) that is likely related to pathogenicity and virulence of MTB (4-8). As vertebrates do not possess the shikimate pathway for the biosynthesis of aromatic compounds and lacks CM activity, this enzyme represents a prime target for the development of antibacterials. In spite of the tremendous opportunity that MTB CM offers as a target for the development of potential antimicrobial agents, very little has been achieved in this regard. A structure-based discovery programme by Agrawal et al. has earlier identified four molecules as potential inhibitors of M. tuberculosis chorismate mutase (MtCM) with low  $K_i$  values (9). The most promising analogue in the study (4-(3,4-dimethoxyphenethylamino)-3-nitro-5-sulfamoylbenzoic acid) exhibited a  $K_i$  of 5.7  $\pm$  1.2  $\mu$ M. But later an *in vitro* (8) and *in vivo* (10) evaluation of a library of molecules designed and synthesized based on Agrawal claims proved to be completely ineffective, with Munack et al. (8) recently discrediting Agrawal's work in his study, as the reported lead molecules proved to be inactive. Although the recent research efforts from Pal and his co-workers identifying a series of N-aryl substituted thieno[2,3-d]pyrimidin-4(3H)ones (11), 3-chloroquinoxaline (12), fused triazinone (13) and 2-aminochromenes (14) derivatives as potential \*MtCM inhibitors with IC50 values in the lower micromolar range are encouraging, MTB CM inhibitors with K<sub>i</sub>/IC<sub>50</sub> values significantly below the  $\mu$ M range still await discovery.

drugs have been developed for nearly 40 years since the



Figure 1: Chorismate mutase reaction scheme.

This study describes the *in silico* discovery of isatin as novel small molecule inhibitor of MTB chorismate mutase, and further, a library of its derivatives was synthesized and was evaluated *in vitro* for their ability to inhibit MTB CM enzyme and whole-cell MTB as steps towards the derivation of structure–activity relationships.

Rational inhibitor design relies both on mechanistic and structural information about the target enzyme. The mechanism of the uncatalysed MTB CM reaction is known to involve a transition state with a chair-like conformation, Figure 1. In fact, the endo-oxabicyclic dicarboxylic acid (15), a good geometric mimic of this transition state. is currently the best inhibitor of a broad range of chorismate mutases consistent with the hypothesis that the enzymatic process proceeds through a corresponding bicyclic transition state (16). In this study, an energy-based pharmacophore model (e-pharmacophore), developed using chorismate mutase-transition state analogue (CM-TSA) complex as a template, was explored to carry out a highthroughput virtual screening of our in-house (BITS-Pilani) small molecule database (2500 compounds). Glide XP (extra precision) module of Schrödinger 9.2 was utilized for docking of the molecules on to the active site pocket of MTB CM, and isatin was identified as a potential lead (Figure 2). The methodology employed in e-pharmacophore

generation and molecular docking approach has been described thoroughly in the experimental section of supporting information (Appendix S1). Important interactions as evidenced from docking studies for isatin were associated with Arg 134 and Lys 60. Such interactions were predicted to be crucial for enzyme activity, diagrammatic representation of which in comparison with that of transition state analogue is given in Figure 3. In the enzyme inhibition studies, isatin showed excellent MTB CM inhibition with IC<sub>50</sub> of 1.08  $\pm$  0.1  $\mu$ m. To investigate the potential of this lead, a series of substituted isatin derivatives were synthesized and evaluated for their ability to inhibit MTB CM enzyme, to explore the structure-activity relationship (SAR) as well as to evaluate their antimycobacterial potency.

A library was designed with the goal of obtaining a lead series with tractable SAR and potencies better than the previously identified virtual screening hit, isatin **1**. The isatin derivatives were synthesized from isatin by a simple and straightforward route as delineated in Schemes 1, 2 and 3. It was decided to first explore the *N*-1 position of isatin by introducing various alkyl, aryl and amide derivatives to understand its importance in activity determination. Alkylation of isatin with corresponding alkyl iodides using  $Cs_2CO_3$  as base in acetonitrile gave the desired





3-(3-Methoxyphenyl)-5,6,7,8-tetrahydrobenzo[b]thieno[2,3-d]pyrimidin-4(3H)-one IC\_{50} = 19.80 ± 1.02  $\mu{\rm M}$ 



2-chloro-3-(5,6-difluoro-1*H*-indol-3-yl)quinoxaline IC<sub>50</sub> = 19.74  $\mu$ м





Figure 2: Reported Mycobacterium tuberculosis chorismate mutase inhibitors.

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Figure 3: View of key interactions among the residues in the active site of MTB CM. Amino acids are represented in green (C), blue (N), red (O) and hydrogen (H); ligand molecules are represented with yellow. (C) coloured atoms. Polar contacts are in blue dashes. (A) Interaction of TSA, (B) interaction of isatin.

alkylated derivatives, compounds 2-5 in good yield (17,18). The Chan-Lam methodology (19,20) was successful in achieving the N-phenyl derivative 6. N-Acetyl derivative 7 was prepared by acetylating with acetic anhydride under refluxing conditions (21), and pivaloyl group 8 was introduced by treatment with pivaloyl choride using triethylamine as base in tetrahydrofuran. We then focused on the carbonyl group at C-3 position, which was further modified into their corresponding semicarbazone, thiosemicarbazone and oxime derivatives (22-24) 9-10 & 15, by refluxing with semicarbazide, thiosemicarbazide and hydroxylamine hydrochloride, respectively, in ethanol. A similar strategy was also employed in the case of the N-acetyl isatin as well to give the N-acetyl analogue 11-12. Schiff bases 13-14 were prepared by refluxing isatin with the corresponding amines in ethanol in the presence of catalytic amount of acetic acid



(25). All the reactions went smoothly giving the desired products in good yield. To understand the role of various substituents in phenyl core of isatin, various aryl and heteroaryl/amino groups were introduced at the 5th position of isatin core. The introduction of the aryl functionality was brought about by palladium catalysed cross-coupling reaction as described by Martinez et al. (26). Buchwald-Hartwing cross coupling was utilized to synthesize the N-aryl derivatives (27-30). Two condensation products 24-25 were also synthesized via Knoevenagel condensation of the corresponding aldehydes (31,32) with oxindole, which in turn was prepared by the one-pot Wolff-Kishner like reduction in isatin with hydrazine hydrate (33,34). All the synthesized compounds (Table 1) were characterized by <sup>1</sup>H & <sup>13</sup>C NMR, LC-MS and purity checked by elemental analysis.

The characterized isatin derivatives were then subjected to MTB CM enzyme inhibition study by adapting a previously reported protocol (5) to a 96-well plate format, as detailed in the experimental section of supporting information (Appendix S1) and the IC<sub>50</sub> values reported in Table 1. The original hit compound isatin 1 showed IC<sub>50</sub> of 1.08  $\pm$  0.1  $\mu$ M. Of twenty-four isatin derivatives synthesized, three molecules exhibited promising potency comparable with that of the initial lead isatin with IC50 of  $0.99 \pm 0.14 \ \mu\text{M}$  for 1-acetyl isatin, 7,  $1.01 \pm 0.22 \ \mu\text{M}$  for 3-(4-nitrobenzylidene)indolin-2-one, **24**, and 0.93  $\pm$  0.1  $\mu$ M for 3-((5-nitrothiophen-2-yl)methylene)indolin-2-one, 25. Dose-response curves were plotted for the more potent inhibitors 1, 7, 24, 25 and the positive control carvacrol, using graphpad prism software by taking log (inhibitor concentration) on X-axis and response (% inhibition) on Y-axis as shown in Figure 4. To analyse the interaction pattern of the active molecule reported from assay in the active site of protein, molecular docking approach was adopted. The compounds were docked to the protein active site using extra precision mode (XP) of Glide module and their docking score, and interaction pattern was compared with that of their in vitro activity, as steps towards establishing a structure-activity relationship.

The lead compound isatin, which exhibited an in vitro activity of about 1.08  $\pm$  0.10  $\mu{\rm M},$  was found to be associated in five prominent hydrogen bonds with the active site residues. The oxygen atom at  $R^1$  position was found to be bonded with Arg 72 and Arg 134. The hydrogen on nitrogen atom (N-1) was found to be in polar contact with the carboxyl oxygen of Glu 109, and the carbonyl oxygen next to nitrogen atom was found associated with Lys 60 and Arg 134. Various substitutions on isatin nucleus gave compounds with a wide range of activity. With respect to structure-activity relationship, introduction of alkyl group at N-1 position of isatin made the compounds 2–5 less active (IC\_{50} ranging from 1.96  $\pm$  0.43 to  $96.56 \pm 5.2 \ \mu\text{M}$ ) and increasing chain length decreased the activity drastically (N-methyl > N-ethyl > N-isopropyl > N-allyl). This decline in activity may be attributed to



a. R<sub>1</sub>-I, Cs<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>, CH<sub>3</sub>CN, rt (for 2-5), Cu(OAC)<sub>2</sub>xH<sub>2</sub>O, Ph-B(OH)<sub>2</sub>, Pyridine, DCM (for 6); b.Ac<sub>2</sub>O, reflux (for 7); TEA, Pivaloyl chloride, DCM, rt (for 8); c. NH<sub>2</sub>-C(X)-NH-NH<sub>2</sub>.HCl, Ethanol, 50°C (d) (i) Ac<sub>2</sub>O, reflux, (ii) NH<sub>2</sub>-C(X)-NH-NH<sub>2</sub>.HCl, Ethanol, 50°C; e. R<sub>4</sub>-NH<sub>2</sub>, AcOH (cat), Ethanol, 50°C; f NH<sub>2</sub>OH.HCl, Ethanol, 50°C.



Scheme 2: Synthetic protocol adopted to attain compounds **16–23**; modifications explored at C-5 position.



a. R4-B(OH)2, Pd(PPh3)4. Diglyme, 1MNa2CO3, reflux; b.R5-NH2, Xantphos, Pd(OAc)2, NaOt-Bu, Toluene, 80°C

a. NH2-NH2.H2O, Ethanol; b.R6-CHO, Piperidine (cat), Ethanol, reflux.

Scheme 3: Synthetic protocol adopted to attain compounds 24–25; modifications explored at C-3 position.

the loss of polar contact of compounds with Glu 109. *N*-Phenyl isatin showed a moderate  $IC_{50}$  of  $23.3 \pm 2.0 \ \mu$ M. Introduction of simple acetyl group made the compound (**7**) equally active (0.99  $\pm$  0.14  $\mu$ M) or slightly more potent than isatin, Figure 5, whereas bulky acyl derivative like pivaloyl derivative **8** reduced the activity many fold (41.0  $\pm$  3.6  $\mu$ M). Replacement of oxygen on isatin at R<sup>1</sup> position with semicarbazones and thiosemicarbazones

**9–10** and its *N*-acyl derivatives **11–12** brought about a decline in activity, indicating the importance of third ketone group, which forms the hydrogen bond with Arg 72 and Arg134 of MTB CM. Schiff bases of isatin derivatives **13–14** with 2-amino-

R<sub>6</sub> = 4-nitrophenyl, 5-nitrothiophene.

24-25

5-nitrothiazole and 2-amino-6-nitrobenzothiazole made the compounds completely inactive (>100  $\mu$ M), suggesting that the substitution of aromatic bulkier groups at  $R^1$ 

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Table 1: Biological activities of isatin derivatives





Compound	R	$R^1$	R <sup>2</sup>	M.P (°C)	IC <sub>50</sub> (µм) <sup>а</sup>	MIC (µм) <sup>b</sup>	Cytotoxicity <sup>c</sup> % inhibition at	
ID							50 <i>μ</i> м	100 <i>μ</i> M
1	Н	0	Н	199–200	1.08 ± 0.10	340.13	39.53 ± 0.04	47.10 ± 0.03
2	CH <sub>3</sub> -	0	Н	133–134	$1.96 \pm 0.43$	310.60	$28.1 \pm 0.12$	$38.6\pm0.06$
3	$C_2H_5-$	0	Н	86–88	$22.70 \pm 3.12$	285.71	$14.06\pm0.10$	$31.6\pm0.06$
4	(CH <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>2</sub> CH-	0	Н	76–77	$75.12 \pm 5.20$	132.28	$13.93\pm0.02$	$25.80\pm0.08$
5	CH2=CHCH2-	0	Н	89–90	$96.56 \pm 5.20$	267.38	$39.89\pm0.15$	$64.90\pm0.24$
6	$C_{6}H_{5}-$	0	Н	139–141	$23.30\pm2.00$	28.02	$9.77\pm0.04$	$29.09\pm0.13$
7	CH3CO-	0	Н	141–142	$0.99\pm0.14$	228.30	$17.31 \pm 0.05$	$24.62\pm0.02$
8	(CH <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>3</sub> CCO-	0	Н	157–158	$41.00\pm3.60$	125.63	$27.81 \pm 0.02$	$38.57\pm0.06$
9	Н	NH <sub>2</sub> NHC(S)N=	Н	232–234	$66.90 \pm 5.80$	60.96	$29.97 \pm 0.01$	$31.71 \pm 0.05$
10	Н	$NH_2NHC(O)N=$	Н	266–268	$54.09 \pm 2.40$	132.28	$30.07 \pm 0.14$	40.36 ± 0.21
11	CH <sub>3</sub> CO-	$NH_2NHC(S)N=$	Н	247–249	$30.50 \pm 2.60$	50.59	$25.91 \pm 0.02$	$38.6 \pm 0.01$
12	CH <sub>3</sub> CO-	NH <sub>2</sub> NHC(O)N=	Н	235–237	25.00 ± 3.40	108.24	22.99 ± 0.10	32.31 ± 0.04
13	Н	O <sub>2</sub> N S N	Н	191–193	>100.00	91.24	0.05 ± 0.15	23.27 ± 0.20
14	н	O <sub>2</sub> N N	Н	124–126	>100.00	77.16	$29.53\pm0.07$	36.58 ± 0.07
15	н	HON=	Н	227_229	98 14 + 6 20	77 16	25.22 + 0.06	42.62 + 0.08
16	Н	0	CoHr-	208-211	$37.10 \pm 2.50$	112 10	$0.46 \pm 0.18$	$32.02 \pm 0.00$
17	Н	0	2 3-(Cl) <sub>2</sub> C <sub>2</sub> H <sub>2</sub> -	223-225	95 70	85.64	$25.10 \pm 0.10$	$32.43 \pm 0.02$
18	Н	0	2,5-(CH <sub>3</sub> ) <sub>2</sub> C <sub>6</sub> H <sub>3</sub> -	156–159	36.50	119.20	$26.74 \pm 0.08$	$31.95 \pm 0.09$
19	Н	0	HNN—	109–111	39.90 ± 2.80	108.22	31.61 ± 0.01	42.56 ± 0.03
20	н	0	Me-N_N-	133–135	31.90 ± 2.60	102.04	23.32 ± 0.01	31.18 ± 0.02
21	Н	0	F <sub>3</sub> C	131–133	55.70 ± 1.80	66.50	60.58 ± 0.04	87.10 ± 0.01
22	н	0	N-	154–156	25.60 ± 1.50	108.69	29.97 ± 0.07	40.98 ± 0.04
23	Н	0	O N N N	146–149	28.80 ± 1.20	38.46	21.22 ± 0.01	33.27 ± 0.07

Compound							Cytotoxicity $^{\rm c}$ % inhibition at	
Compound ID	R	$R^1$	$R^2$	M.P (°C)	IC <sub>50</sub> (µм) <sup>а</sup>	MIC $(\mu M)^{b}$	50 <i>μ</i> м	100 <i>µ</i> M
24	Н	4-NO <sub>2</sub> -C <sub>6</sub> H <sub>4</sub> CH=	Н	223–225	1.01 ± 0.22	23.50	19.97 ± 0.05	24.17 ± 0.02
25	Н	O <sub>2</sub> N S H	Н	234–236	0.93 ± 0.10	183.83	18.03 ± 0.01	25.57 ± 0.05
26 27 28		Isoniazid Rifampicin Ethambutol		nd nd nd	nd nd nd	0.66 0.23 15.31	nd nd nd	nd nd nd

nd, not determined.

<sup>a</sup>MTB chorismate mutase.

<sup>b</sup>Minimum inhibitory concentration against *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* H37Rv.

<sup>c</sup>RAW 264.7 cell line.



Figure 4: Dose-response curve with error bars (black colour) for the positive control carvacrol and potent inhibitors compound 1, 7, 24 and 25.

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Figure 5: 2D interaction profile of compounds 1, 7 and 25 with the active site residues. GLH 109 indicates the protonated glutamate residue. The pink dashed lines representing hydrogen bonding with the side chains of the residues. Amino acids are represented in green (hydrophobic), blue (polar), red (negatively charged) and purple (positively charged).

position depletes the activity. These substitutions on isatin ring completely changed the orientation of the compound at its active site, moving it slightly out of the pocket, facing towards the solvent. Similarly, 3-(hydroxyimino)indolin-2-one 15 also showed poor activity. We modified the phenyl ring of isatin by introducing various aryl groups at the C-5 position via Suzuki coupling and amino group via Buchwald-Hartwig cross-coupling reactions. Two of the 5-phenyl-substituted isatins 16 and 18 and two of 5amino-substituted isatins 22 and 23 showed moderate activity. Compounds with substitution at  $R^2$  position of isatin with piperazine derivatives 19-21 were found to be less active, with activity ranging between 31 and 55  $\mu$ M, suggesting the unsuitability of piperazine substitution. This may be probably attributed to the orientation of these compounds towards the solvent as observed earlier. Surprisingly, two of the 3-substituted isatin derivatives like 3-(4-nitrobenzylidene)indolin-2-one 24 and 3-((5-nitrothiophen-2-yl)methylene)indolin-2-one 25 showed very potent activity with compound 25 in lower micromolar range. These substitutions were found to be suitable as the nitro group was involved in key interaction with Arg 49 and Thr 105 (Figure 5). In conclusion, only few substitutions such as acetyl group on N-1 nitrogen 7 and small arylidenes at  $R^1$  position 24 and 25 were found to be favourable, and their activity supports the same.

The compounds were further screened for their *in vitro* antimycobacterial activity against *M. tuberculosis* H37Rv by microplate alamar blue assay method (35). The lead compound isatin **1**, which showed excellent enzyme inhibition activity in the *in vitro* enzyme assay, did not show promising activity in MTB cell line, exhibiting an MIC of 340.13  $\mu$ M. The lack of translation of strong enzyme inhibition potency to antitubercular activity can be probably attributed to the inability of these molecules to penetrate the mycobacterial cell wall as evident from a lower LogP value of 0.34. All the twenty-four isatin derivatives

synthesized were found to be more potent than isatin as antitubercular compounds with MIC's range from 23.5 to 310.60  $\mu$ M. Seven compounds **6**, **9**, **11**, **17**, **21**, **23** and **24** inhibited MTB with an MIC <100  $\mu$ M, and the compound **24** was found to be most potent derivative against MTB with an MIC of 23.5  $\mu$ M. The LogP of compound **24** was also very high (2.68) when compared to the lead molecule isatin. When compared to first line antitubercular drugs such as isoniazid (MIC: 0.66  $\mu$ M), rifampicin (MIC: 0.23  $\mu$ M) and ethambutol (MIC: 15.31  $\mu$ M), compound **24** was found to be less active.

The safety profile of all the compounds were also accessed by testing *in vitro* cytotoxicity against RAW 264.7 cells at 50 and 100  $\mu$ M concentrations by (4,5-dimethylthiazol-2-yl)-2,5-diphenyltetrazolium bromide (MTT) assay (36). Mouse macrophage RAW 264.7 cells were selected for this study, as MTB generally reside in macrophage cells of humans. Percentage inhibitions of cells are reported in Table 1. The entire tested compound demonstrated good safety profile with very low toxicity towards the macrophage and showed good selectivity index (CC<sub>50</sub>/MIC), indicating the suitability of these compounds for further drug development. The most promising anti-TB compound 24 showed 24.17% inhibition at 100  $\mu$ M.

In this study, a structure-based e-pharmacophore modelling has been employed to identify small molecule inhibitors of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (MTB) chorismate mutase (CM) enzyme. Isatin **1** was identified as a potential lead with an IC<sub>50</sub> of 1.08  $\pm$  0.10  $\mu$ M. Hit expansion of compound **1** by chemical synthesis leads to a more potent inhibitor, compound 3-(4-nitrobenzylidene)indolin-2one **24** with promising *in vitro* activity against MTB CM enzyme and whole-cell MTB. Structural elements were identified that provide the basis for further optimization of the new inhibitors.

# **C**

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# Note

<sup>a</sup>Tuberculosis, Fact Sheet No. 104. World Health Organization. http://www.who.int/media centre/factsheets/fs104/ en/ (reviewed in February 2013).

# **Supporting Information**

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article:

**Appendix S1** Methodology used for docking, experimental and spectral details of all the synthesized compounds and the protocol used for biological evaluation.

