**Original Research Article**

**Morpho-biochemical characterization of cherry tomato genotypes grown in open condition**

**ABSTRACT**

Cherry tomatoes are high value vegetables that can be the vegetable replacement of grapes. Cherry tomatoes in diverse shape and colour can be attractive to the consumers and therefore, earn high market value. Cherry tomatoes are mostly grown under protected conditions, but in India farmers mostly do not have access to protected structures. Thus, genotypes suited for open field condition are necessity. Seven cherry tomato genotypes were grown on the trellis in open field at the Indo-Gangetic plains of Bihar, India and morpho-biochemical characterization of the genotypes was carried out. All the genotypes except one had indeterminate growth habit. The fruits were of red, pink and yellow colour and round, oval, plum and pyriform shape. The average fruit weight was below 10 g which is ideal for cherry type tomatoes. The total soluble solids ranged between 5.13 to 11.47 ºBrix, titrable acidity from 0.13 to 0.28%, ascorbic acid content from 12.34 to 23.66 mg per 100g FW. Among the seven genotypes, BRCT-1, BRCT-37, BRCT-38 and Swarna Ratan performed well under open field conditions with respect to fruit morphological and quality aspect and may be recommended for open field condition or used as donor parents in breeding programmes.

**INTRODUCTION**

Cherry tomatoes, believed to be progenitors of modern-day cultivated tomatoes (Ram, 2014) is botanically known as *Solanum lycopersicum* var. *cerasiforme*. Cherry tomatoes are usually small sized and round shaped tomatoes, and supposedly are genetic admixture of domesticated garden tomatoes and wild current type tomatoes (Nesbitt and Tanksley, 2002). The first domestication of tomatoes occurred in the Puebla-Veracruz area of Mexico from its centre of origin at South America in form of weedy cherry tomatoes (Kiple and Ornelas, 2000).

Cherry tomatoes can be spherical or slightly oval in shape and may vary in size from the tip of a thumb to the diameter of a golf ball (1.5-3.5 cm). red is the most popular colour, and Orange, yellow, and pink are also available. Cherry tomatoes are an excellent source of phytochemicals and antioxidants, including lycopene and beta-carotene, flavonoids, vitamin C, carotenoids, and a variety of other crucial substances. It can be consumed raw, like fresh fruit, or cooked. They are also perfect for preparing dishes like sauce, soup, ketchup, puree, curries, paste, powder, rasam, and sandwiches. According to the USDA (2018), one cup (149 g) of cherry tomatoes contains about 27 kcal energy, 1.31 g protein, and 5.80 g carbs. It has a broad range of applications in the treatment of chronic diseases and as a pain reliever due to its anti-inflammatory properties (Lekshmi and Celine, 2015). The increased dry matter and soluble solids content of cherry tomato varieties compared to regular-sized fresh market cultivars which is attributed to the enhanced amount of sugars (fructose and glucose) and organic acids (citric and malic), which in turn play a significant role in determining the greater sweetness, sourness, and overall flavour intensity of most cherry varieties. The ripe fruits of tomatoes contain different important pigments and phytonutrients (Schierle et al. 1997; Holloway et al. 2000; Livny et al. 2002; Canene-Adams et al. 2005; Toor and Savage 2005; Perveen et al. 2013; Campestrini et al. 2019). Carotenoids, which give ripe tomatoes their red, orange, or yellow colour, are the main pigments found in cherry tomatoes. Carotenoid synthesis occurs in chromoplast. Lycopene and β-carotene, offer a variety of health benefits (Khachik et al. 2002), i.e., reduces blood pressure, diminishes the risk of prostate and other cancers, cardiovascular diseases, has positive effect on skeletal system and neurogenerative diseases including Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s (Przybylska 2020). Natural mutant alleles are available in tomato germplasm which modify the ripe tomato fruit colour and pigment composition and result in variation of colour.

Cherry tomatoes are considered high value crops and often grown under protected structures. However, Indian small and marginal farmers often do not have facilities to grow these crops under protected structures. Therefore, genotypes that perform efficiently under open conditions are the need of the day. The present study was undertaken where a set of cherry tomato genotypes was grown under open field condition and their morpho-biochemical performance was studied.

**MATERIAL AND METHOD**

In this study, a total of seven parental tomato genotypes, collected from different institutes across India or developed at Bihar Agricultural University, Sabour were used. The details of the parental genotypes are given in Table 1. These genotypes were grown in open field condition at Vegetable Research Farm, Bihar Agricultural College, Bihar Agricultural University, Sabour, Bhagalpur (Bihar) which lies in the Indo-gangetic plains of Bihar, during *Rabi* season of 2022-23 and the plants were trained on iron trellis. The plants were planted at a spacing of 60 cm x 50 cm.

**Table 1: List of parental genotypes used in the current study**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Sl. No.** | **Parents** | **Source** |
|  | BRCT-1 | Developed and maintained at BAU, Sabour |
|  | BRCT-1 R | Developed and maintained at BAU, Sabour |
|  | BRCT-32 | Developed and maintained at BAU, Sabour |
|  | Swarna Ratan | Collected from ICAR-RCER, Palandu, Ranchi and maintained at BAU, Sabour |
|  | BRCT-37 | Developed and maintained at BAU, Sabour |
|  | BRCT-23 | Developed and maintained at BAU, Sabour |
|  | BRCT-38 | Developed and maintained at BAU, Sabour |

Twelve qualitative morphological traits, six fruit morphological traits (polar and equatorial diameter, fruit shape index, average fruit weight, pericarp thickness and locule number) and three traits related to quality aspect (total soluble solids, titrable acidity and ascorbic acid content) were studied. The quantitative data were subjected to statistical analyses, i.e., Analysis of variance for CRD and Duncan’s multiple range test for estimation of variation between the genotypes. The analyses were carried out by using the OPSTAT software (Sheohar et al., 1998).

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The morphological attributes and biochemical composition of the seven cherry tomato genotypes namely BRCT-1, BRCT-32, Swarna Ratan, BRCT-37, BRCT-23, and BRCT-38 was studied. Evidently, these genotypes hold promise for unravelling the intricacies of fruit colour variation in cherry tomatoes. All parental lines had a consistent predominant plant structure characterized by indeterminate nature, except BRCT-32 which was semi-determinate in nature. The presence of green pigmentation in both the leaf and stem, as well as the occurrence of medium leaf serration, was noted in the majority of the genotypes. In immature fruits, all lines had a green colouration, whereas mature fruits of the BRCT-1 were yellow while BRCT-32, BRCT-37 and BRCT-38 exhibited pink colour and BRCT-23 and Swarna Ratan showed red colour. Fruit from all genotypes had yellow peel, with the exception of BRCT-32, BRCT-37 and BRCT-38, which had colourless skin. It may be noted that tomato fruit colour is a resultant of colour and skin colour together and red colour with colourless skin gives the pink colouration to the fruit. Pink colour tomato fruits were first described by Lindstorm (1925) characterized by transparent epidermis lacking yellow pigment. During ripening of tomato, the flavonoid naringenin chalcone accumulates in the skin of the tomato, which is responsible for the natural yellow skin colour of the fruits (Hunt and Baker 1980). The presence of the single dominant *Y* allele results in this natural process, while mutations at the *y* locus leading to recessive *y* locus result in the absence of the naringenin chalcone and thereby leading to pink tomato fruits (Lindstrom 1925; Rick and Butler 1956). The candidate gene governing this colourless skin phenotype responsible for the *y* locus is the flavonoid biosynthetic pathway transcription factor *Solanum lycopersicum* *MYB12* (*SlMYB12*) (Wang et al. 2018; Ballester et al. 2010; Adato et al. 2009).

The majority of these genotypes exhibited a persistent presence of dark green shoulders at immature stage. Two genotypes, BRCT-1 and Swarna Ratan, were reported to have low ribbed fruits, while others did not exhibit ribbing on fruits. The presence of a pointed and indented blossom end pattern of fruits was seen in the BRCT-32 and Swarna Ratan genotypes respectively, while the remaining genotypes

**Table 2. Qualitative traits of the seven cherry tomato genotypes**

exhibited a flat pattern. Each parental line exhibited additional characteristics such as yellow flowers and ease of peeling of fruit. Plum fruit shape was detected in BRCT-1 and BRCT-1-R, pyriform in BRCT-32, oval in BRCT-37 and round in BRCT-23, BRCT-38 and Swarna Ratan.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Parent** | **BRCT-1** | **BRCT-1-R** | **BRCT-32** | **Swarna Ratan** | **BRCT-37** | **BRCT-23** | **BRCT-38** |
| **Plant Structure** | Indeter  minate | Indeter  minate | Semi-deter  minate | Indeter  minate | Indeter  minate | Indeter  minate | Indeter  minate |
| **Leaf Colour** | Green | Green | Green | Green | Green | Green | Green |
| **Leaf Serratior** | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium | Medium |
| **Stem Colour** | Green | Green | Green | Green | Green | Green | Green |
| **Immature Fruit Colour** | Green | Green | Green | Green | Green | Green | Green |
| **Mature Fruit Colour** | Yellow | Red | Pink | Red | Pink | Red | Pink |
| **Green Shoulder** | Dark Green Shoulder | Dark Green Shoulder | Dark Green Shoulder | Dark Green Shoulder | Dark Green Shoulder | Dark Green Shoulder | Dark Green Shoulder |
| **Fruit Ribbing** | Low | No | No | Low | No | No | No |
| **Fruit Blossom End** | Flat | Flat | Pointed | Indented | Flat | Flat | Flat |
| **Flower Colour** | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow | Yellow |
| **Fruit Shape** | Plum Shaped | Plum Shaped | Pyriform Shaped | Round | Oval | Round | Round |
| **Easiness of Pelling** | Easy | Easy | Easy | Easy | Easy | Easy | Easy |
| **Peel Colour** | Yellow | Yellow | Colourless | Yellow | Colourless | Yellow | Colourless |

Among the fruit morphological characters, average fruit weight ranged from 6.14 to 8.35 g, polar diameter from 23.22 to 43.80 mm, equatorial diameter from 16.89 to 23.49 mm, fruit shape index from 1.01 to 2.61 and pericarp thickness from 1.83 to 2.23 mm. These values are in line with the findings of Chandni et al. (2021). All the fruits were bilocular. Highest average fruit weight was observed in BRCT-1-R which was at par with Swarna Ratan, while the lowest values were noted in BRCT-23 and BRCT-38. The polar diameter was highest, while equatorial diameter was least in BRCT-32, which reflected in its highest fruit shape index also, and the shape of this genotype was pyriform in shape. Three genotypes, BRCT-23, BRCT-37 and Swarna Ratan were round with their fruit shape index being 1.00 or near to 1.00, while BRCT-1 and BRCT-1-1 were plum shaped and BRCT-38 was oval in shape. Vasquez et al. (2024) depicted the relation between fruit shape index and tomato shape and suggested that higher values of fruit shape index pointed towards long, obovoid, pyriform and cylindrical shape of tomato fruits, while lower values could mean flattened fruits.

**Table 3. Fruit morphological traits of the seven cherry tomato genotypes**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Genotypes** | **Equatorial Diameter (mm)** | **Polar Diameter (mm)** | **Fruit shape index** | **Average fruit weight(g)** | **Pericarp thickness** | **Locule number** |
| BRCT-1 | 20.79 bcd | 24.22 a | 1.17 ab | 7.49 bc | 2.23 c | 2 a |
| BRCT-1-R | 20.53 bc | 32.24 b | 1.57 c | 8.35 d | 2.03 abc | 2 a |
| BRCT-23 | 23.49 d | 23.54 a | 1.00 a | 6.14 a | 1.93 ab | 2 a |
| BRCT-38 | 19.55 b | 24.16 a | 1.24 b | 6.14 a | 2.13 bc | 2 a |
| BRCT-37 | 22.58 cd | 24.53 a | 1.09 ab | 7.00 b | 1.83 a | 2 a |
| BRCT-32 | 16.89 a | 43.80 c | 2.61 d | 7.07 b | 1.93 ab | 2 a |
| SWARNA RATAN | 22.89 cd | 23.22 a | 1.01 a | 7.90 cd | 1.93 ab | 2 a |

Note: values with different alphabets are significantly different

Among the biochemical traits, total soluble solids (TSS) ranged between 5.13 to 11.67 °Brix, titrable acidity from 0.13 to 0.28%, ascorbic acid content from 12.34 to 23.66 mg per 100g FW. Previous studies by Yimchunger et al. (2018) have reported TSS content between 5.25 to 8.63 °Brix, which corroborates with our findings. Studies of Chandni et al. (2020) also revealed similar values of TSS, acidity and ascorbic acid for cherry tomatoes grown under open field conditions. The previous findings of Lakra et al. (2020) for ascorbic acid is also in accordance with our findings. TSS was highest in BRCT-1-R, while it was least in BRCT-37. The three genotypes, BRCT-1-R, BRCT-1, BRCT-38 and Swarna Ratan had high TSS (>7.5 ºBrix), which is considered ideal for cherry tomatoes. These genotypes may serve as donors for TSS. The titrable acidity was highest in Swarna Ratan and least in BRCT-1-R. The ascorbic acid content was highest in BRCT-38, at par with BRCT-23, Swarna Ratan BRCT-32, BRCT-1-R and BRCT-32. The least ascorbic acid was observed in BRCT-1 which was at par with BRCT-37.

**Table 4 Fruit quality traits of the seven cherry tomato genotypes**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Genotypes** | **TSS (ºBrix)** | **Acidity (%)** | **Ascorbic acid (mg/100g FW)** |
| BRCT-1 | 10.20 d | 0.20 bc | 12.34 a |
| BRCT-1-R | 11.47 e | 0.14 a | 19.9 b |
| BRCT-23 | 5.93 b | 0.18 b | 20.6 b |
| BRCT-38 | 8.00 c | 0.23 c | 23.6 b |
| BRCT-37 | 5.13 a | 0.19 b | 15.4 a |
| BRCT-32 | 6.00 b | 0.21 bc | 19.73 b |
| SWARNA RATAN | 7.97 c | 0.28 d | 20.57 b |

Note: values with different alphabets are significantly different

Wide variability in cherry tomato genotypes across the world for morphological and quality traits as well as bioactive compounds has been reported by various researchers like Mukherjee (2019), Venkadeswaran et al. (2018), Ramya et al. (2016), Renuka et al. (2014), Rosales et al. (2011), Stommel et al. (2005) and Medina and Lobo, indicating great potential for improving the crop. The seven genotypes under study have exhibited high levels of variation for the different fruit morphological and quality traits and their performance has been quite good under open field conditions. These genotypes, particularly, BRCT-1, BRCT-37, RCT-38 and Swarna Ratan may be recommended for cultivation in the open field or serve as good donors for improving the quality of cherry tomatoes and creation of diversity.

**CONCLUSION**

Sufficient variation for fruit morphological and quality traits as well as qualitative traits among the seven cherry tomato genotypes was observed. BRCT-1, BRCT-37, BRCT-38 and Swarna Ratan were found to perform well under open field conditions and may be used as donors for quality traits and other morphological traits.

COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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