



# Morphological and Pathogenic Variability in *Alternaria solani* Causing Early Blight Disease in Tomato (*Lycopersicon esculentum* Mill.) in Chhattisgarh, India

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## Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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## ABSTRACT

The variability is a well-known phenomenon in genus *Alternaria solani* and may be noticed as changes in etiology, growth and sporulation and pathogenicity. Therefore, present investigation was carried out on 'morphological and pathogenic variability of *Alternaria solani* causing early blight in Tomato (*Lycopersicon esculentum* Mill.) in Chhattisgarh (India)'. Seven isolates of *Alternaria solani* were collected from different district of Chhattisgarh and studied on morphological and pathogenic variations among the isolates of *Alternaria solani*. Longest conidia with beak (39.17–

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74.35µm) were observed in isolate AS-6, while smallest conidia (28.12–58.35µm) were recorded in isolate AS-3. However, width of conidia was maximum (8.82–24.23µm) in isolate AS-3 and thin conidia (8.13 – 19.48µm width) in isolate AS-7. Maximum beak length (7.64–14.78µm) was observed in isolate AS-4 and minimum beak length was recorded in isolate AS-3 (4.18–7.62µm). Highest vertical septa 2–11 was recorded in isolate AS-7 followed by AS-2. Whereas, maximum horizontal septa were recorded in isolate AS-6 followed by isolate AS-3 and AS-4. Pathogenic variability test was performed to analyze the virulence of different isolates of *Alternaria solani* on Pusa Ruby variety of tomato under pot culture. Most virulent isolate was found AS-6 which exhibited maximum PDI (88.89%) and AUDPC (2302.22) followed by AS-5 and AS-7, while AS-1 was found least virulent which showed minimum PDI (40.00%) and AUDPC (995.56).

**Keywords:** AUDPC; conidia; isolates; disease intensity; morphological variability; pathogenic variability.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Early blight disease is a threat to the profitable cultivation of tomato. The disease causes reduction in quantity and quality of tomato fruits drastically. Early blight is one of the most important foliar disease of tomato which causes about 80 – 86 percent reduction in fruit yield [1]. It is caused by *Alternaria solani* (Ellis and Martin) Jones and Grout. According to morphological characters and physiologic analysis of *A. solani*, it bears large, long beaked and concatenated conidia. The mycelium consisted of septate, branched, light brown hyphae, which turned darker with age [2]. *Alternaria solani* produce uniforned, beaked, single separate conidia on simple conidiophores. Like other members of the genus *Alternaria*, *A. solani* has transverse and longitudinal septate conidia, multinucleate cells and dark-coloured (melanized) cells [3]. Conidia contained 5–10 transverse septa and 1–5 longitudinal septa. The conidia of *Alternaria solani* were observed 35–75 µm in length and 10–20 µm in width and 2–7 transverse septa and 1–4 longitudinal septa [4]. Its multicellular pigmented spores are produced in chains or in branching fashions. The spores are broadest near the base and taper gradually to an elongate beak under natural epiphytotic condition.

Variability in genus *Alternaria* is well-known phenomenon to changes in conidia shape and size, growth and sporulation, pathogenicity etc. In *A. solani*, there is a variation between the populations from different areas have been reported by several workers [5,6]. *Alternaria solani* found to be a highly variable pathogen [7,8]. It is well known that the variation in plant pathogens directly affects the disease control measures especially development of resistant cultivars and effective fungicides. Analysis of morphological and pathogenic variation within

pathogen populations is helpful in understanding host-pathogen interaction, epidemiology and developing strategies for resistance against pathogen [9]. Besides, these there are no much information available on variability of *Alternaria solani* in different locality of Chhattisgarh. Therefore, present investigation was carried out on 'morphological and pathogenic variability of *Alternaria solani* causing early blight in Tomato (*Lycopersicon esculentum* Mill.) in Chhattisgarh (India)'.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Sample Collection

An intensive roving survey was conducted during Rabi 2016-17 and 2017-18 in seven districts of Chhattisgarh viz. Kabirdham, Durg, Bemetara, Rajnandgaon, Bilaspur, Raipur and Mungeli to know the diversification in *Alternaria solani* on tomato. One sample of diseased leaves showing typical early blight symptoms were collected from growing tomato plants from each district. Diseased sample collected from various places were designated as follows:

Location	Designation
Village - Arasnara, District - Durg	AS-1
Village - Pipariya, District - Bemetara	AS-2
Village - Saleghori, District - Mungeli	AS-3
Village – Sakari, District - Bilaspur	AS-4
Village - Kalegondi, District - Rajnandgaon	AS-5
Village - Khadhauda, District - Kabirdham	AS-6
Village – Horticulture Farm, IGKV, Raipur	AS-7

## 2.2 Isolation of *Alternaria solani*

Standard tissue isolation technique was followed to obtain *A. solani* culture described by Naik et al. [6]. The leaves were microscopically examined to confirm the presence of the fungus. After confirming for the presence of fungal spores, isolation was done by following standard tissue isolation method. The infected leaves were brought to laboratory and cut into small bits measuring about 2mm. Surface of spaceman was sterilized with 0.1% mercuric chloride (HgCl<sub>2</sub>) solution for 1 minute and wash thrice with sterile distilled water. Then one piece of specimen was transferred on Potato Dextrose Agar (PDA) medium in the center of Petri dish. These petri dishes were incubated under B.O.D. incubator at 25±2°C. Pure culture of the *A. solani* was obtained by hyphal tip culture and single spore culture technique.

## 2.3 Purification of *Alternaria solani*

The culture was purified by single spore technique described by Johnson and Booth [10]. A single block of 5 mm diameter was cut out from the fungal colony near the margin with the help of sterilized cork borer and transferred to 5 ml sterile distilled water in a test tube. It was mixed thoroughly to make a uniform spore suspension. One milliliter of spore suspension was spread on the surface of plain agar medium in Petri plates and incubated at 25±2°C for 24 h. The plates were observed for germinating spores under stereoscopic microscopic and finally germinating spores were lifted by inoculation needle and transferred aseptically to potato dextrose agar slants for further growth. The pure cultures obtained were maintained by repeated sub-culturing at an interval of 30d for further studies. The stock cultures of all isolates grown on PDA slants stored at 5°C in refrigerator.

## 2.4 Identification of the Pathogen

Spores of *Alternaria solani* were taken from the pure culture and mounted on the clear glass slide. Spores were mixed with thoroughly with lactophenol in order to obtain a uniform spread over slide and covered with cover slip. The spores and hyphae of the fungus were observed under compound microscope. *Alternaria solani* was identified following the cultural and morphobiometric characteristics criteria as per described by Ellis [11].

## 2.5 Morphological Variability

The morphological characteristics of respective isolate of *A. solani* including was studies on PDA medium. *Alternaria solani* was grown on PDA medium. Observations were also recorded on length of beak, conidia size (length and width) and septation in conidia (vertical and horizontal) from 10d old culture of each isolate. Seven slides from edge of active pure culture of each isolate were prepared using of light microscope, all the observed fungal feature of *Alternaria solani* were recorded. Conidia size was measured with the help of Ocular and stage micrometer using 20x power objective of light microscope. Numbers of spore were also counted per microscopic field with the help of compound microscope in which single block of 5 mm diameter disc was cut out from the 10 days old fungus colony near the margin by sterilized cork borer and was transferred to 5 ml sterile distilled water in a test tube. Later it was mixed thoroughly to make a uniform spore suspension. One small drop of spore suspension was taken on a slide and average spore count of three microscopic fields under low power (10x) objective of the microscope. Sporulation was categorized as below:

No. of spore per microscopic field	Designation
0	- (nil)
1-10	+ (poor)
11-20	++ (moderate)
21-30	+++ (good)
31 and above	++++ (excellent)

## 2.6 Pathogenic Variability

In order to confirm the identification of early blight disease and its causal agent, the pathogenicity test was carried out under pot culture. Four-week-old seedlings of Pusa Ruby variety of tomato were transplanted into the pot. Three replications were maintained for each isolate and nine seedlings of tomato were grow in each replicate. Pathogenic variability of seven isolates of *A. solani* was studied by applying detached leaf technique. The spore suspension (3×10<sup>6</sup> spore/ml) of each isolate was separately prepared from 10 days old pure culture of the representative isolates. Healthy growing nine tomato plants were inoculated at room temperature by spraying of spore suspension of each isolate. The spore suspension was sprayed on tomato plants 20 days after transplantation of seedlings, and the inoculated tomato plants were covered by polythene bags

for about 30 h to retain optimum humidity. The observed symptoms on plants for each isolate of the fungus were compared to the original symptoms of early blight. Observations on first appearance of symptoms, disease severity and typical symptoms were recorded. The pathogen was re-isolated from artificially inoculated tomato leaves and the morphological and cultural characteristics were compared with original pathogen. Based on these characteristics, the test isolates were categorized as highly virulent, moderately virulent and a mildly virulent. To study the virulence potential variability of each isolate, the disease severity was continuously measured at seven days intervals after inoculation. Disease severity was recorded using 0 – 5 disease rating scale described by Pandey et al. [12] with little modifications. Disease rating scale as follows:

Rating	Reaction Description
0	Free from infection
1	One or two necrotic spots on a few lower leaves of plants, covering nearly 1 – 10% of the surface area of the plant
2	A few isolated spots on leaves, covering nearly 11 – 25% of the surface area of the plant
3	Many spots coalesced on the leaves, covering 26 – 50% of the surface area of the plant
4	Irregular, blighted leaves and sunken lesion with prominent concentric rings on the stem petiole, fruit, covering 51 – 75% leaf area of the plant.
5	Whole plants blighted, leaf and fruits starting to fall, covering more than 75% leaf area of plant.

Percent disease index (PDI) for each isolate were calculated as follows:

$$\text{Percent disease index (PDI)} = \frac{\text{Sum of individual disease rating}}{\text{Total no. of plant examined} \times \text{Maximum no.of disease rating}} \times 100$$

Area under the disease progress curve (AUDPC) was calculated by using following formula:

$$\text{AUDPC} = \sum_{i=1}^n [0.5(x_{i+1} + x_i)][t_{i+1} + t_i]$$

Whereas,

$x_i$  = Cumulative disease severity expressed as a proportion at the  $i^{\text{th}}$  observation

$t_i$  = Time (days after planting) at the  $i^{\text{th}}$  observation

$n$  = Total number of observations

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Morphological Characterization of the *Alternaria solani* Isolates

Investigations on morphological characteristics of the test isolates of *A. solani* showed highly variability based on their conidial size, beak length and septation. Highest length of conidia with beak was varies from 39.17–74.35 $\mu\text{m}$  in isolate AS-6, 29.86–73.23 $\mu\text{m}$  in AS-7 and least length was 28.12–58.35 $\mu\text{m}$  in AS-3. However, highest beak length of conidia was ranged 7.64–14.78 $\mu\text{m}$  in AS-4 and least 4.18–7.62 $\mu\text{m}$  in AS-3. Variation in width of conidia was also observed among the isolates of *A. solani*. Width of conidia was varied from 8.82–24.2387 $\mu\text{m}$  in AS-3 and least 7.91–19.5687 $\mu\text{m}$  in AS-2. In case of septation, horizontal septation was found maximum (2–11) in isolate AS-7 followed by AS-2 (3–10), AS-6 (3–9) and AS-4 (3–7), while least horizontal septa (3–6) was observed in isolate AS-1 and AS-5. However, maximum vertical septa (1–3) was observed in isolate AS-3, AS-4 and AS-6 and minimum vertical septa (0–2) was found in isolate AS-1, AS-2, AS-5 and AS-7 (Table 1; Fig. 1).

The microscopic examination was done on septation in conidia of different isolates of *Alternaria solani*. Highest horizontal septa were recorded in isolate AS-7, while least horizontal septa were observed in isolate AS-1 and AS-5. However, maximum vertical septa were observed in isolates AS-3, AS-4 and AS- and minimum was found in isolate AS-1, AS-2, AS-5 and AS-7. Conidia length with beak and beak length were varying among the isolate. Highest width of conidia was recorded in isolate AS-3 and minimum width of conidia was found in isolate AS-7. It's indicated that the morphology of the *Alternaria solani* were varied from location to location. The conidial features of *A. solani* test isolates investigated in the present study agreed with the findings of Alhussaen [13] who reported that the mycelia width between 0.8 – 1.5 $\mu\text{m}$  and conidia are 35 – 75 $\mu\text{m}$  in length and 10 – 20 $\mu\text{m}$  in width and 2 – 7 transverse septa and 1 – 4 longitudinal septa. Nikam et al. [14] also reported that, amongst test isolate of *A. solani*, the highest mycelial width was recorded in AsJI (64.2 $\mu\text{m}$ ). The average conidial size (LxB) and their beak length were highest in the

isolate AsBd (42.18×15.18 and 13.1µm) respectively. Conidial septation of horizontal and vertical septa was also found to be varied among the test isolates of *A. solani*. Naik et al. [6] found that, the conidia were solitary, straight or slightly flexuous, 19.5 – 70 µm in length and 6 – 22 µm width with 2 – 7 transverse septa and 1-4 longitudinal septa. Similar type result is also obtained by several workers [11,15-17].

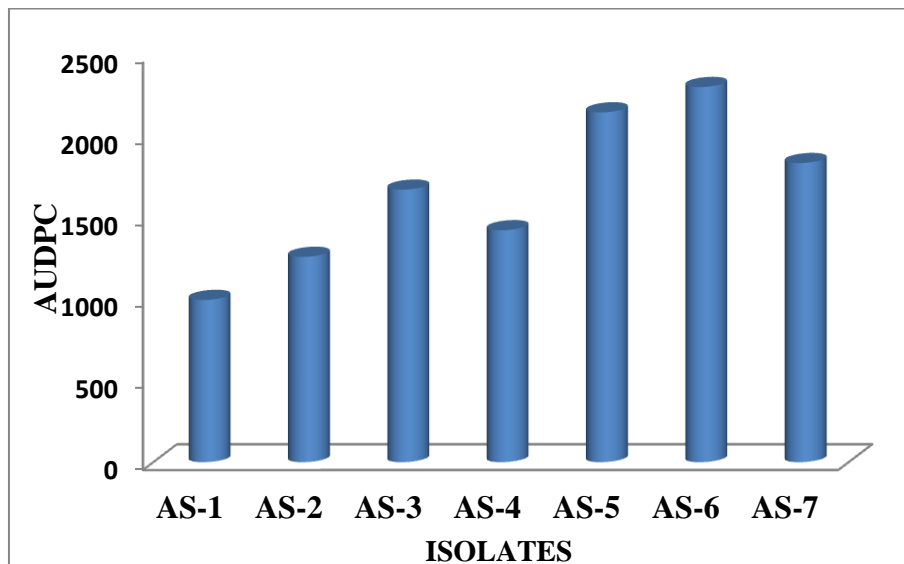
### 3.2 Pathogenicity Test and Pathogenic Variability

Data pertaining to appearance of symptoms, Percent Disease Index (PDI) and Area Under Disease Progress Curve (AUDPC) on tomato plants inoculated with different isolates have been presented in Table 2. Typical symptoms of early blight were appeared on the leaves after 3–4 days from inoculation of tomato seedlings, which was similar to those observed on naturally infected tomato plants and the morphological and cultural characteristics of the *A. solani* were

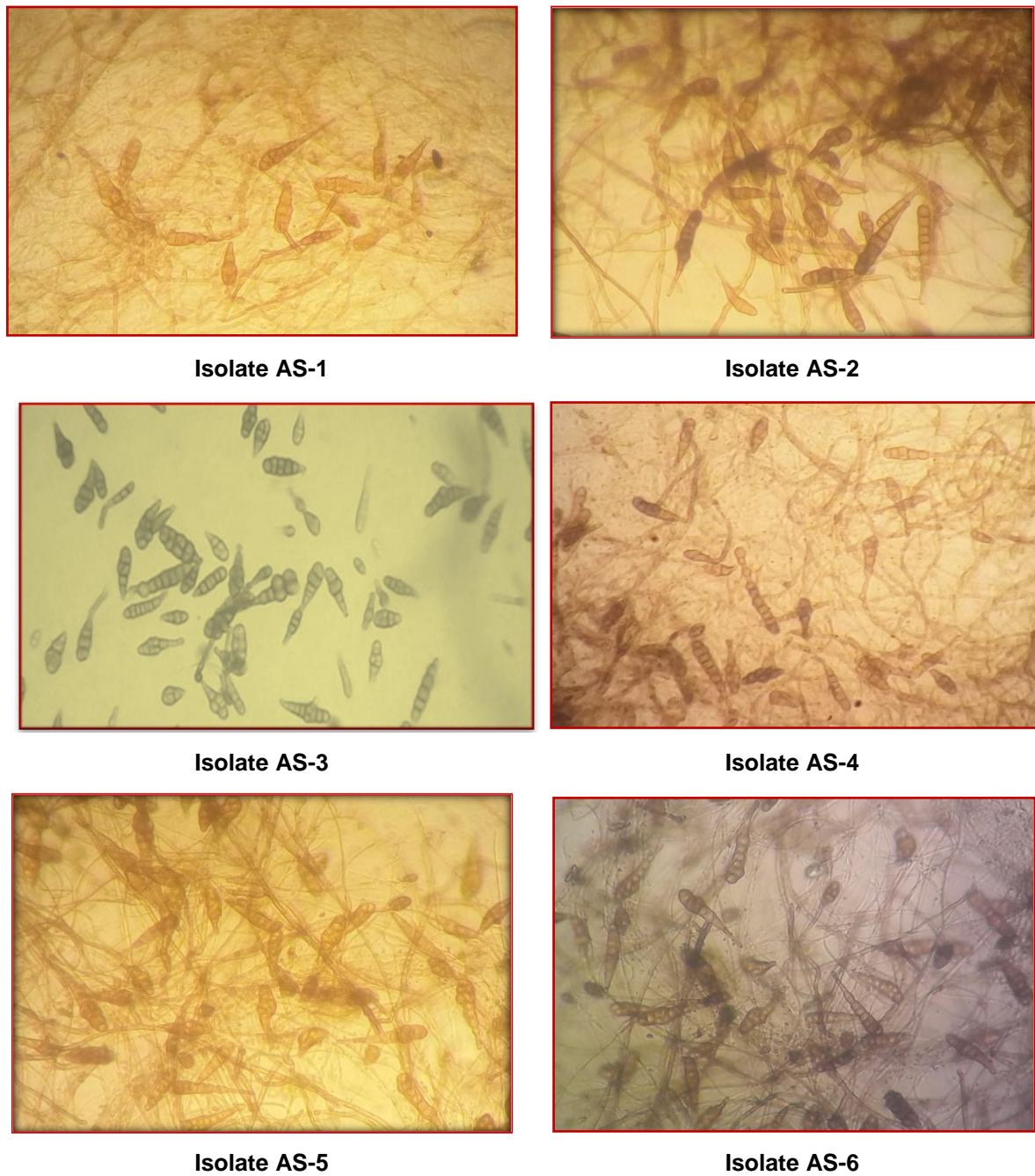
compared with original pathogen. Appearance of symptoms was early noticed 3 – 4 days after inoculation in isolate AS-6 followed by isolate AS-5 and AS-7 (3 – 5 days after inoculation), AS-3 and AS-4 (4 – 5 days after inoculation), AS-2 (6 – 7 days after inoculation), while late symptoms was appeared in isolate AS-1(6 – 8 days after inoculation). Disease severity was recorded up to 42 days of inoculation at 7 days intervals and PDI was calculated as per formula described in materials and methods. At 42 d after inoculation, highest PDI was observed 88.89 percent in isolate AS-6 followed by AS-5 (84.44%). However, least PDI was observed in isolate AS-1. In case of Area Under Disease Progress Curve (AUDPC), isolate AS-6 showed maximum AUDPC (2302) followed by AS-5(2147), AS-7(1836), AS-3(1672), AS-4(1423), AS-2(1260). However, minimum AUDPC was observed in isolate AS-1 (996). Present investigation indicated that the isolate AS-6 was found most virulent followed by AS-5 and AS-7. While, isolate AS-1, AS-2 and AS-4 was found moderately virulent (Figs. 2, 3).

**Table 1. Morphological variability among the isolates of *Alternaria solani* on PDA medium**

Isolates	No. of horizontal septation	No. of vertical septation	Length of conidia with beak (µm)	Beak length (µm)	Width of conidia (µm)
AS-1	3 – 6	0 – 2	32.12 – 68.63	6.68 – 13.23	8.12 – 21.36
AS-2	3 – 10	0 – 2	34.34 – 73.14	5.76 – 12.37	7.91 – 19.56
AS-3	2 – 7	1 – 3	28.12 – 58.35	4.18 – 7.62	8.82 – 24.23
AS-4	3 – 7	1 – 3	33.61 – 71.43	7.64 – 14.78	9.32 – 22.86
AS-5	3 – 6	0 – 2	30.53 – 63.14	4.25 – 8.87	7.05 – 20.56
AS-6	3 – 9	1 – 3	39.17 – 74.35	7.23 – 14.16	8.63 – 21.63
AS-7	2 – 11	0 – 2	29.86 – 73.23	3.63 – 13.65	8.13 – 19.48



**Fig. 1. Area Under Disease Progress Curve (AUDPC) on tomato variety pusa ruby**

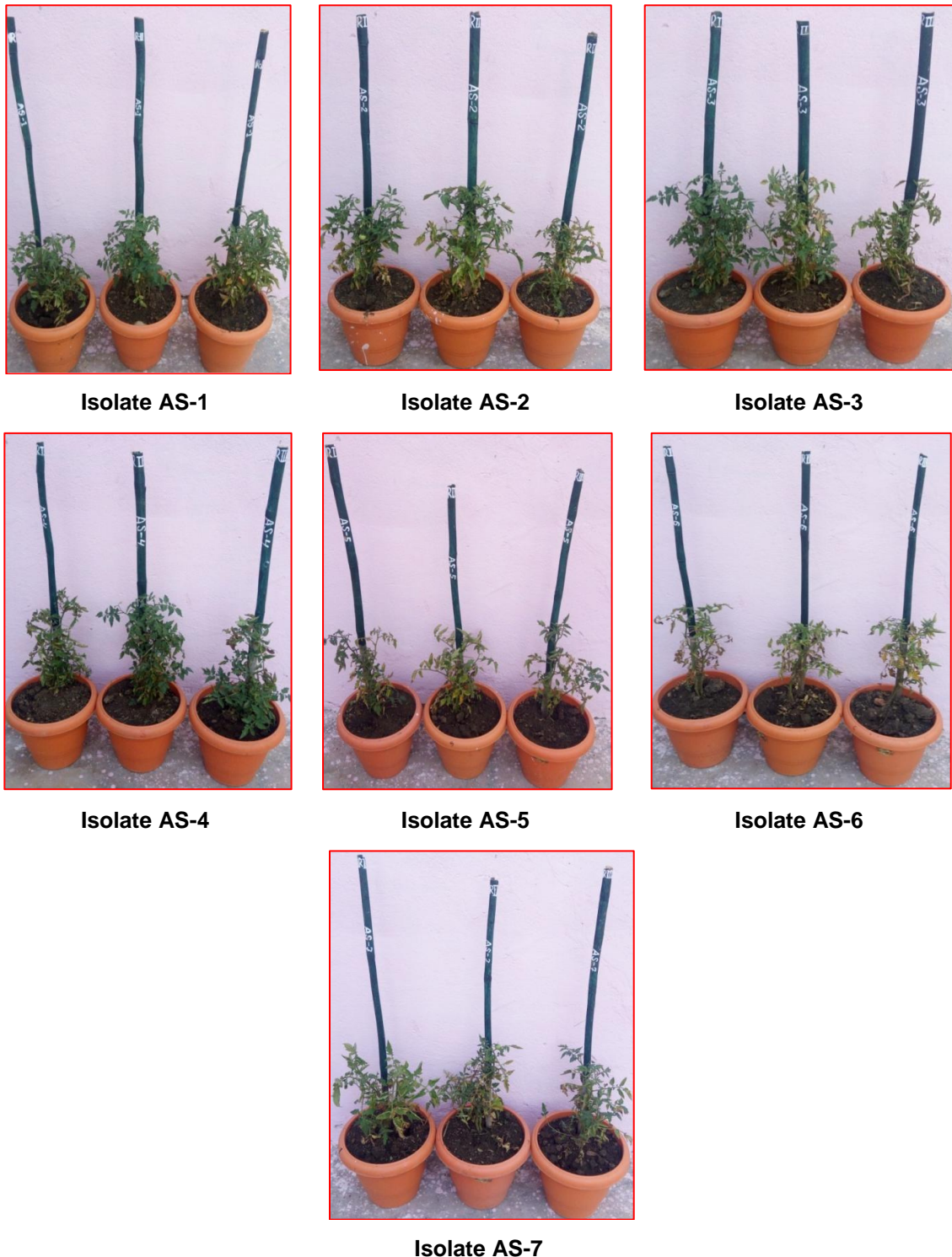


**Fig. 2. Morphological variability among the isolates of *Alternaria solani* on PDA medium**

**Table 2. Pathogenic variability among the isolates of *Alternaria solani* on variety pusa ruby**

Isolates	Symptoms appearance (Days after inoculation)	PDI at 42 days after inoculation	AUDPC
AS-1	6 – 8	40.00	996
AS-2	6 – 7	48.49	1260
AS-3	4 – 5	64.44	1672
AS-4	4 – 5	55.56	1423
AS-5	3 – 5	84.44	2147
AS-6	3 – 4	88.89	2302
AS-7	3 – 5	75.56	1836





**Fig. 3. Pathogenic variability among the isolates of *Alternaria solani* on variety pusa ruby**

Pathogenic variability regarding to appearance of symptoms, PDI and AUDPC among the isolates of *Alternaria solani* were recorded on variety Pusa Ruby. Symptoms were early noticed in isolate AS-6, while a delay symptom was appeared in isolate AS-1. Highest PDI was

observed in isolate AS-6, while least PDI was observed in isolate AS-1. Isolate AS-6 showed maximum AUDPC and minimum AUDPC was observed in isolate AS-1. On the basis of pathogenic variability, it is concluded that the isolate AS-6 (Kabirdham isolate) was found

more virulent as compare to other isolates. The result obtained in the present study agreed with the findings of Castro et al. [7] study on variability of *A. solani* under greenhouse conditions based on the inoculation of 7 isolates on 14 tomato genotypes and reveal that all the isolates showed different degree of virulence on 14 tomato genotypes, demonstrating the existence of high level of variability in the fungus. Singh et al. [4] reported that out of 10 isolates, only three major groups were recorded on the basis of SAS analysis likewise Group-A were highly virulent (MF-4 and PN-4), Group-C indicate virulent (BG, AF-2, EC-1 and RF-1) and Group-E were less virulent (BHU-1, IIVR, SF-1 and BX-2) with all the five varieties. Similar results were also reported by Rahmatzai et al. [18]. They observed that the isolate AS1 of *A. solani* was mostly virulent with maximum level of disease incidence (53.5%) and disease severity (32%), whereas, the AS2 isolate noted the least early blight incidence of 27% and disease severity of 18%. AS1 isolate produced properly clear early blight symptoms on leaves, stem and even fruits and was found to be virulent causing sever disease in tomato plants.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Morphological and pathogenic variability was observed among the isolates of *Alternaria solani* which were collected from different location of Chhattisgarh. On the basis of morphological and pathogenic variability it is concluded that the isolate AS-6 (Kabirdham isolate) was found more virulent as compare to other isolates. It's indicated that the virulence of the *Alternaria solani* was varied from area to area.

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#### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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