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Essential Gene Identification and Drug Target Prioritization in *Leishmania* species

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PAPER

7 Essential Gene Identification and Drug Target Prioritization in *Leishmania* species[†] 8

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10 Leishmaniasis is one of the neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), mainly affecting impoverished 11 communities and having varied ranges of pathogenicity according to the diverse spectrum of 12 clinical manifestations. It is endemic in many countries and poses major challenges to healthcare systems in developing countries. Despite the fact that most of the current mono and combination 13 14 therapies are found to be failures, clear perception of gene essentiality for parasite survival are 15 now desideratum to identify potential biochemical targets through selection. Here we used 16 metabolic network of L. major, we have performed a comprehensive set of in silico deletion 17 mutants and systematically recognized a clearly defined set of essential proteins by combining 18 several essentiality criteria. Here we summarize the efforts to prioritize potential drug targets up to 19 a five-fold enrichment compared with a random selection.

22 Introduction

23 The genomic strategy on many microbial pathogens has 24 been studied to identify effective novel drugs and their 25 targets; however such exertions have not yet reached full fruition in the opportunistic pathogen like Leishmania that 26 27 can attack immune-compromised patient.¹ Leishmaniasis can 28 be considered as endemic, sporadic or epidemic, with 29 different clinical features according to genetic variability 30 within the species.² The study of Leishmania metabolism 31 has gained importance due to the widespread emergence of 32 drug resistance to the current chemotherapeutics and the lack of new anti leishmanials to substitute.3-5 To survive 33 34 environmental hardship, Leishmania alter their metabolism 35 to encompass the requirements of cellular proliferation.⁶ 36 This functional response facilitates the metabolic pathways 37 to adapt to the changing genetic and environmental hardship.7 Diverse studies on Leishmania have exhibited 38 resembling metabolic perturbations.8-10 The utility of 39 40 systems approaches has become a key for other biological 41 disciplines and predicting the naturally occurring genetic perturbations by growth conditions.^{10, 11} 42

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44 In the present study, we used genome-scale reconstructed L. 45 major metabolic pathway of Chavali et al (2008). It consists 46 of gene-protein-reaction association (GPRs) constructed 47 through extensive survey of literature and databases.

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approach appears specifically appropriate for analyzing gene 63 deletions and helps to understand metabolic networks for a 64 wider range of perturbations.¹⁴ 65 Fundamental investigation to understand metabolic networks, leads to valuable insights into their function.^{15,16} 66 67 Hence, we performed lethality fraction analysis when all 68 reactions corresponding to the metabolite are removed. This 69 analysis based on network functions suggested that even the 70 least connected nodes in genome scale metabolic networks 71 are just as likely to be critical to the overall network functions as the most highly connected nodes.^{17,18} Additional 72 73 outcome comprise the depiction of network robustness and 74 potency of new drug targets in the vicinity of enzyme 75 inhibitors.¹⁹ This strategy of systems analysis not only make 76 a provision for semantic data integration, simulation, 77 analysis, visualization and hypothesis generation but also it 78 stimulates the research to discover novel drug targets in 79 infectious neglected diseases.²⁰ Here we have attempted to

The L. major model contained 1112 reactions, 1101

metabolites, and 560 genes.⁶¹ Church and co-workers illustrated that Minimization Of Metabolic Adjustment

(MOMA) accurately identifies some lethal gene deletions, which are not identified by FBA.^{13, 51} We used MOMA

approach to estimate metabolic phenotype by minimizing the

Euclidean norm in flux space with respect to the wild type,

calculated through quadratic programming (QP). This

80 prioritize the drug targets by using several essentiality filters 81 like druggability, assayablility, epistatic interactions, 82 molecular weight, sequence and structural likeness with 83 proteome and microbiome of human to arrange potential 84 anti-leishmanial drug targets in the order of priority.

85 We also carried out comparative analysis of binding pockets 86 of highly prioritized targets of Leishmania with human 87 highly similitude proteins in order to reckon their

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characteristic feature for target binding.²¹ This may aid in
the drug discovery process in analyzing the mutual dealings
between distantly associated proteins.

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92 Results

93 The L. major model (iAC560) containing 560 genes, 1112 94 reactions, 1101 metabolites and 8 unique sub-cellular 95 localizations were considered for the study. The present in 96 silico gene knockdown studies included single and double 97 gene knockouts, reaction deletions using MOMA. Each of 98 the 560 genes in the core L. major amastigotes model was 99 knocked out corresponding to 560 genes using MOMA, and 100 the resulting relative growth rates were plotted in Fig. 1. 101 Reaction deletion predictions in amastigotes obtained using 102 MOMA are shown in the form of a bar plot in Fig. 2B. In 103 order to quantify L. major prioritized drug targets, we 104 encountered three primary challenges. The first involved the 105 specific use of MOMA models. The second included the 106 essentiality criteria and the third included the filtering targets 107 through comparison with experimentally validated drug 108 targets, sequence analysis, pocket volume and pocket depth 109 analysis.



Fig. 1 Gene knockout screen obtained using MOMA in double gene deletion analysis of amastigotes in *Leishmania* species. Color scale represents the biomass growth.

115 Previous studies were also reported to demonstrate that the 116 Leishmania model under diverse conditions by using FBA, predicted deletion mutant variability with high accuracy.25 117 118 However, in the present study, Genes in iAC560 Leishmania 119 model were 'knocked-out' simultaneously through double 120 gene knockout predictions using MOMA (Fig. 1) to explain 121 the dynamics of the metabolic network of Leishmania (Fig. 122 2B).

123 Consequently, those having harmful effects on the 124 organism's survival identified and divided as lethal, trivial 125 lethal and non-lethal genes (Fig. 2C). The reaction deletion 126 analysis helps in searching a metabolic network for reactions 127 that are critical to the production of biomass. Each reaction 128 can be classified as essential by substantially reducing flux 129 through the biomass function. This was performed by 130 removing each reaction in the network and measuring the 131 predicted flux through the biomass function in case of single 132 reaction deletion (Fig. 2B). The proteins are classified as 133 lethal, trivial lethal (Fig. 2D) or non-lethal by observing the 134 levels of biomass (Fig. 2C).



138 139 Fig. 2 Workflow to define the localization of essential proteins in amastigote 140 stage of Leishmania species. (A) Metabolic network of L. major consisting of 141 560 genes and their corresponding 1112 reactions and 1101 metabolites. (B) 142 143 Reaction deletion obtained using MOMA. (C) Through MOMA analysis 10% of the reactions are found to be lethal, 34% as trivial lethal (represented in (D)) 144 145 and 56% as non lethal. Lethal gene deletions can be divided into lethal, trivial lethal or non-trivial lethal. Trivial lethal means that at least one of the genes 146 147 involved in a single deletion is lethal. In non-trivial, both genes involved in the double deletions are not lethal individually as single gene deletions but are 148 lethal in combination. (E) Distribution of the target proteins in different cellular 149 compartments. The maximum number of proteins are localized in the cytosol i.e 150 151 50.9%

152 Epistatic interactions in *Leishmania* species

153 *Leishmania* can adapt to dynamically changing needs. These 154 systems can adapt to their environment, thereby creating an 155 emergent behavior at different stages of *Leishmania* life 156 cycle.

158 The effects of single and double gene deletions are 159 quantified on two phenotypic traits. A comparative analysis 160 demonstrates that the maximum phenotypic growth rate 161 averaged over amastigotes and promastigotes of Leishmania 162 lacking deletions for double mutants are highly effective 163 than that of single mutants. This indicates the positive 164 epistatic effect. This characteristic likelihood contributed by 165 genes is appropriate to a diversity of functional classes for 166 comparing MOMA and FBA epistasis predictions to 167 experimental flux data for Leishmania. For this purpose, we 168 used a standard MOMA model, which uses quantitative 169 genetic theory for analyzing high order epistatic interactions 170 for wild type and stage specific amastigotes of L. major. 171 This model allowed us to verify the epistasis along with its 172 different genetic components in L. major. Epistatic analysis 173 also contributed meaningful support to the reaction deletion 174 results. Our results suggest that the data on the rate of 175 growth can be used as a substitution for the rate of total metabolism when we want to study the robust individual 176 177 interactions or estimate the mean epistatic effect. It is 178 essential to analyze both flux and growth in order to sense 179 individual effects of epistasis.²⁶Also, to figure out epistasis 180 we used novel metric that is useful to give a clue how the 181 two-mutation combine affects the growth rate. The results 182 obtained where number of interactions, can be beneficial for 183 the prediction of phenotype and for targeting interventions.

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LmjF05.0350	Trypanothione metabolism	g	Х	Х	Х	Х		Х	Х	Х	Х		Х	
LmjF12.0530	Glycolysis/Gluconeogenesis	g	X	Х	X	X	X	X	Х	X	X	Х	Х	
LmjF36.1960	Fructose and mannose metabolism	с	X		X	X	Х	Х	X	X	Х		X	
LmjF35.1190	Citrate Cycle (TCA)	m	X	v	X	X	v		X	X	v		X	v
LmjF01.0500	Fatty acyl CoA synthetase 2	с	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
LmjF32.1580	Fructose and mannose metabolism	c	X V	X V	X V	X V	X V		X V	X V	X V		X V	X V
LinjF01.0470 L miF01.0490	Fatty Acid Degradation	C	A V	A V	A V	A V	A V		A V	A V	A V		A V	A V
LinjF01.0490	Urea Cycle	c	A X	A X	A X	A X	A X		A X	л Y	л Х		A X	A Y
LmiF34 0110	Purine Metabolism	c	X	Λ	X	X	X		X	X	X	x	X	Λ
LmiF31.2460	Glycerophospholipid metabolism	c	X		X		21		X	X	X		X	
LmjF28.1970	Pentose Phosphate Pathway	c	X		X				X	X	X		X	
LmjF35.4410	Amino acid permease	e	Х	Х	Х	Х			Х				Х	
LmjF29.1960	Citrate Cycle (TCA)	g	Х		Х				Х	Х	Х		Х	
LmjF09.1040	Glycerophospholipid metabolism	с	Х		Х				Х	Х	Х		Х	
LmjF15.1140	Tryptophan Metabolism	с	Х	Х	Х				Х	Х			Х	
LmjF15.1040	Tryparedoxin peroxidase	g	Х	Х	Х				Х	Х			Х	
LmjF19.0710	Citrate Cycle (TCA)	g	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х		Х	Х	Х		Х	
LmjF32.2950	Purine Metabolism	n	Х		Х	Х	Х		Х	Х	Х		Х	
LmjF34.0080	Pentose Phosphate Pathway	c	Х		Х	Х	Х		Х	Х	Х		Х	
LmjF24.0320	Citrate Cycle (TCA)	m	X		X				X			X	X	
LmjF30.3120	Methionine Metabolism	с	X		X		37		X		X	Х	X	
LmjF35.38/0	Purine Metabolism	n	X	Х	X	v	X		X	Х	Х		X	X
LmjF35.3340	Streptomycin Biosynthesis	C	A V	v	A V	A V	A V		A V				A V	A V
LilijF32.1960 L miF17.0360	Bycerophospholipid metabolism	m c	A V	Λ	A V	A V	A V		A V				A V	A V
LmjF13 1620	Steroid Biosynthesis	r	X		X	X	X		X				X	X
LmiF36 2260	Purine Metabolism	c	X		X	X	X		X			X	X	Λ
LmiF31.2470	Pyrimidine Metabolism	c	X		X		X		X			X	X	Х
LmjF34.1090	Glycerophospholipid metabolism	g	X	Х	X	Х	X		Х		Х			X
LmjF06.0460	Nicotinate and Nicotinamide Metabolism	c	Х		Х		Х		Х	Х				Х
LmjF07.0090	Methionine Metabolism	с	Х		Х	Х	Х		Х			Х		
LmjF30.3080	Glycine, serine and threonine metabolism	с	Х		Х				Х				Х	
LmjF36.0060	Pentose and Glucuronate Interconversions	g	Х		Х				Х				Х	
LmjF28.1970	Pentose Phosphate Pathway	c	Х		Х				Х		Х		Х	
LmjF34.2110	Glycerophospholipid metabolism	m	Х	Х	Х				Х				Х	
LmjF34.3780	Fructose and mannose metabolism	g	Х		Х				Х				Х	
LmjF26.2480	Glycerophospholipid metabolism	с	X		X				X				X	
LmjF07.0200	Glycerophospholipid metabolism	m	X	X	X	X 7	37		X				X	
LmjF14.1360	Streptomycin Biosynthesis	с	X	Х	Х	Х	X		X	v	v		X	
LmjF35.1480	Arginine and Proline Metabolism	g	A V		v	v	A V		A V	Л	A V		A V	
LilijF35.2720 LmiF28.0800	Purine Metabolism	n	A V		A V	A V	A V		A V		A V		A V	
LmjF28.0890	Methionine Metabolism	п С	л Х	x	X	л Х	X		X X		X		A X	
LmjF26 2700	Pentose Phosphate Pathway	c	X	X	X	Λ	X	x	X		Λ		X	X
LmjF26 1620	Glycerophospholipid metabolism	c	X	1	X		X	1	X				X	X
LmiF30.3600	Oxidative phosphorylation	m	X		X		X		X		Х		X	X
LmjF21.1770	Oxidative phosphorylation	m	X		X		X		X		X		X	X
LmjF14.1200	Glycerophospholipid metabolism	с	X	Х	X		X		Х				Х	Х
LmjF21.1340	Oxidative phosphorylation	а	Х		Х		Х		Х				Х	Х
LmjF36.3010	Glutathione Metabolism	с	Х		Х		Х		Х		Х		Х	Х
LmjF31.2970	Fatty Acid Synthesis	m	Х	Х	Х	Х	Х		Х					
LmjF32.2870	Glycerophospholipid metabolism	с	Х			Х	Х		Х				Х	Х
LmjF35.1180	Citrate Cycle (TCA)	g	Χ						Х	Х				
LmjF23.0110	Fructose and mannose metabolism	c	Х	Х	Х		Х		Х		Х		Х	

 Table 1. Prioritized essential targets of Leishmania Species. Gene deletion analysis provided essential targets for Leishmania Species.

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189 It was found that epistasis relative to metabolic fluxes can be 190 robustly detected independent of the metric used. Here we 191 used multiplicative model and the conclusions drawn were 192 tried out to be relative to various metrics.²⁷ These diverse 193 classes of epistasis denote various ways in which the collective effect of two gene deletions may assume 194 195 expectations and can indicate various types of fundamental 196 issues that underlie functional relationships between genes.^{24,28} The analysis of growth and flux phenotypes 197 198 makes the classification of interactions more complex due to 199 the fact that genetic perturbation can cause an increase or 200 decrease in fluxes, while the growth rate only decreases.² 201 This demonstrates that interactions related to metabolic flux 202 phenotypes can lead to deep intuitive understanding of 203 various features of the functional aspects between genes.

204 Metabolic systems approaches have provided various target 205 genes and the proteins encoded by them. Some of these have 206 been validated as potential targets against amastigotes of 207 Leishmania as given in the literature, however, our study 208 presumably provides a prioritized list of target genes and 209 proteins for developing anti-leishmanial drugs (Table. 1).

210 The genes, enzymes, reactions related to this study have 211 been provided in the (Supplementary information 1). These 212 targets are subjected to prioritization by using various essentiality criteria's, which is helpful for the researchers in 213 214 drug discovery process of neglected tropical diseases (Table. 215 1).

217 Criteria to prioritize L. major -specific drug targets

218 The drug targets obtained from the study were prioritized 219 using the following essentiality criteria. These include (1) 220 the targets should represent growth-essential genes and (2) 221 they must possess experimental crystal structure information 222 (3) the sequence of the targets should not be homologous to 223 human proteins (4) there should be information on biological 224 assays.

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226 Druggability, Assayablility, Essentiality, Molecular 227 weight

228 In addition to the above filters, we also considered the 229 other features such as druggability range, assayablility, 230 essentiality and molecular weight of the targets and the 231 features were given different weights. The scores for 232 parameters such as druggability and assayablility were set 233 to an optimal value of +35. The criterion of essentiality 234 was regarded significant in the study and therefore it was 235 given a score of +50. The criterion of molecular weight 236 bears the score of +20 depending on the weight of the 237 polypeptide of the target gene.

239 Presence of crystal structure

240 The crystal structures assist in rational drug design by 241 providing essential practical assets in high throughput 242 screening for lead generation and optimization studies. Both, 243 Protein Data Bank (PDB) (http://www.rcsb.org) and 244 ModBase database (http://modbase.compbio.ucsf.edu) were 245 manually searched for the presence of protein crystal 246 structures of Leishmania as obtained from the above study. 247 The scores for the availability of crystal structure were kept 248 as high as +50 because it confers mainly pragmatic 249 advantages, while identifying a new drug target.

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Probable binding site analysis for the 10 prioritized targets Binding sites and active sites are often associated with structural features of receptors/proteins. The study of proteins binding pocked volume and its electrochemical

256 257 properties may aid in the rational design of novel 258 compounds. In this study, we analyzed the size of the 259 binding pockets of the all prioritized targets of Leishmania 260 and human homologs. This provides a preliminary 261 explanation for the large divergences in the size of binding 262 pockets (Fig. 3). Some of these prioritized targets are present 263 only in Leishmania. For example, Trypanothione reductase 264 (TR) is found exclusively in Leishmania and can be targeted 265 for obtaining anti-leishmanial (Table 1) agents.



Prioritized Targets

267 268 269 Fig. 3 Comparative representation of probable binding pocket volume analysis for the ten targets. 270

271 Structural information on the prioritized targets 272

273 Applying all the essentiality criteria yielded four crystal 274 structures out of the top ten prioritized proteins. The four 275 crystal structures were obtained from Protein Data Bank 276 (PDB) and were subjected to further analysis of probable 277 binding pocket volume analysis. The four targets are 278 Trypanothione reductase (TR), Nucleoside diphosphate 279 kinase B (NDKb), Glucose-6-phosphate isomerase (G6PI) 280 and Phosphomannomutase (PMM). 281

282 Further, the corresponding human proteins were obtained 283 from the PDB and the targets from the both Leishmania and 284 human were analyzed using comparative Molecular 285 Electrostatic Potential (MEP) calculation and cavity-depth 286 (CD) analysis. 287

288 **Trypanothione reductase(TR)** 289

290 Trypanothione reductase (TR), an NADPH-dependent 291 disulfide oxidoreductase (Fig. 4) is identified as a unique 292 viable chemotherapeutic drug target for Leishmania. 293 Trypanothione reductase (TR) is acting as a main 294 detoxificant of toxic radicals released during dexoyribonucleotide and hydroperoxide synthesis.52-54 295 296 Various computational approaches were implemented to 297 identify prospective ligands and High-throughput screening 298 lead the identification of novel inhibitors for Trypanothione reductase.55,56 299

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Fig. 4 Trypanothione and glutathione redox system

Until now six crystal structures (PDB ID: 4APN, 4ADW,
2YAU, 2X50, 2JK6, 2W0H) are published for *Leishmania infantum* trypanothione reductase.

BioLip⁶¹ indicated that residues viz., SER14, LEU17, GLU18,
TRP21, VAL53, VAL58, SER109, TRY110, MET113,
SER394, SER395, PHE396, THR397, LEU399, HIS461 and

312 GLU467 are presumably present in the active site.



Fig. 5 Active site at dimeric interface. The ligand (JVO)is shown in the dimeric interface.

316
317 Paola B et al also reported the binding of the ligand in the
318 dimeric interface and showed that CYS52 and CYS57 are
319 essential residues for the overall catalysis. Numerous gold
320 containing compounds were also evaluated by Colotti G et
321 al. Repurposing of anti-arthritic drug aurinofin, a gold
322 containing ligand was clinically established for thiol and
323 selenol groups of proteins like trypanothione reductase.⁵⁷⁻⁶⁰

324 A comparative analysis of trypanothione reductase TR was 325 also carried out with glutathione reductase, a well known 326 target which is present in human which is also a NADPH-327 dependent disulfide oxidoreductase but they are mutually 328 exclusive in terms of its substrates glutathione and its analog 329 trypanothione. Comparative representation of probable 330 binding pocket volume analysis of trypanothione reductase 331 and glutathione reductase showed huge difference between 332 pocket volumes showing its rationality to define as a drug 333 target (Fig. 3). The blast results also show there is 35%

4 sequence identity with glutathione reductase, indicating that
5 trypanothione reductase (TR) acts is specific target for
6 Leishmania.

Nucleoside diphosphate kinase B (NDKb)

340 Nucleoside diphosphate kinase B (NDKb) was also used for 341 detailed comparative study of the probable binding site as its 342 crystal structure for both human and *Leishmania* are 343 available. Nucleoside triphosphate is a precursor for DNA 344 and RNA synthesis. NDKb enzyme is responsible for 345 nucleoside triphosphates synthesis, which is used, in various 346 cellular processes by *Leishmania* species. NDKb is mainly 347 involved in transfer of γ phosphate from nucleoside 348 triphosphates to nucleoside diphosphates. The whole 349 reaction is depicted as follows: 350

$$NDK + N_{1}TP \leftrightarrow NDK - P + N_{1}DP \leftrightarrow NDK - P + N_{2}DP$$

 $\leftrightarrow NDK + N_{2}TP$

353 Its role in purine-salvage pathway makes this target more
attractive for drug discovery because protozoa unable to
synthesize purines by de novo mechanism and depend upon
host for survival.



Fig. 6 Nucleoside diphosphate kinase B (NDKb) binding site (A) Human Nucleoside diphosphate kinase B binding site. This figure indicates the probable binding site of NDKB with the important residues (B) *Leishmania* Nucleoside diphosphate kinase B binding site. Green and yellow pocket together form a binding pocket, which are accordance with experimental results.

366 Probable binding site analysis of NDKb reveals that the active site of human (with volume 18Å³) is smaller than that of site 367 of Leishmania with volume 30Å³) (Fig. 6).³⁰ SiteID reported 368 the presence of 8 residues (Tyr52, Leu64, Tyr67, Årg68, 369 370 Arg105, Lys12, His118 and Gly119) in human NDKb (PDB 371 ID: 1NUE) active site, in which the presence of His118 is in 372 accordance with the experimental results of Morera et 373 al.³¹LeishmaniaNDKb (PDB ID: 3NGS) active site showed 374 the presence of Asp13, Leu63, Lys11, Tyr66, Gly112, 375 Asn114, Arg87, Thr93, and Arg104 in this presence of Lys11, 376 Arg87, Thr93, Arg104, Leu63, Tyr66, Gly112 and Asn114 In the binding.³² 377

Further MEP and cavity-depth analysis were performed on
human and *Leishmania* NDKb to differentiate the active site.
Superimposing both *Leishmania* NDKb and human NDKb
provided RMSD deviation of 0.94 A. Cavity depth analysis

indicates that *Leishmania* NDKb binding site cavity is slightly
deep and wider than the human NDKb showing the 15.90 Å



Fig. 7 Nucleoside diphosphate kinase (NDKb) cavity depth (Fig. A and B) and MEP analysis (Fig. C and D) (A) Human Nucleoside diphosphate kinase cavity depth. Cavity is narrow and long than the *Leishmania* NDKb (B) Leishmania Nucleoside diphosphate kinase B cavity depth. Cavity is wider than human NDKb (C) Human Nucleoside diphosphate kinase B MEP analysis. Colour coding indicates that this has low electronegative potential than *Leishmania* NDKb (D) *Leishmania* Nucleoside diphosphate kinase MEP analysis. Deep purple colour indicates more electronegative potential of the *Leishmania* NDKb and difference from human NDKb cavity.

distance between LYS52 –GLY118 residues in *Leishmania*NDKb (Fig. 7A) and 14.00Å in between ILE52 - GLY118 in
case of human NDKb as and (Fig. 7B). The MEP analysis
report is shown corresponding (Fig. 7C and 7D).

1 These results show that human active site has less 2 electronegative potential than that of *Leishmania*, and there 3 are significant differences in these two structures proven as a 4 valuable step toward the understanding of specific ligand 3 design.

407 Glucose-6-phosphate isomerase (G6PI) and
408 Phosphomannomutase (PMM) active site analysis details are
409 given in (Supplementary information 2).

411 Relation to a close homolog

412 Targets are sorted out and ranked or prioritized on the basis
413 of high-level sequence homology to its host or any other
414 homolog. Eventually, intended pathogen specific drug target
415 may be sought out which is having a remedial influence and
416 without undesirable secondary effect on host.

417 One of our goals was to prioritize *L. major*-specific targets.
418 Thus, positive high score of +25 was imputed to targets,
419 which are absent in the human host and highly conserved
420 across the *Leishmania* species in order to subside
421 interactions in the host. Homologs to humans were penalized
422 by because they may involve in undesirable interactions with
423 proteins of which may be toxic in human.

425 Discussion

426 The biggest factor resulting in the diversity of species and427 their genomes is natural selection, parasites that are better428 suited to their changing environment would have different

429 characteristics and will favorably adapt to that change and as 430 a result. Such changes are favored by the environment and 431 will become more frequent due to the increased chances of 432 the organisms survival. Out of the various unicellular 433 eukaryotes known, *L. major* is unique in its evolutionary 434 development and success rate of survival may be driven by a 435 genetic abnormality.¹²

436 The laboratory conditions and experiments have induced 437 various resistance mechanisms, which are increasingly being 438 understood by DNA microarrays and proteomics studies. 439 The current challenge is to get a prioritized drug targets by 440 systematically deleting genes and reactions involved with 441 relative to the biomass (i.e. observable phenotypes) in a 442 stage specific genome-scale metabolic model of L. major 443 and this information can be useful in the endeavour for 444 tracking resistance. The metabolic reactions distinctively 445 expressed in stage specific amastigote of L. major are 446 catalyzed by enolase, alcohol dehydrogenase, ATP synthase 447 and hexokinase. We altered the boundary states of these 448 reactions to alter the genome scale metabolic model in to 449 amastigotes stage. Based on the computational algorithms 450 such as MOMA and FBA, we obtained genes that affected 451 the growth rate to the maximum extent in case of both single 452 and double gene deletions. These genes are considered to be 453 essential for the survival of the organism as observed by the 454 knock out studies and thus these can be potential targets 455 against the infection. By performing FBA, we identified 456 10% of reaction knockouts in the network as lethal and 12% 457 as trivial lethal, and proposed 78% as non lethal reactions. In 458 case of MOMA the results were slightly different such as 459 10% were found as lethal, 34% as trivial lethal and 56% as 460 non-lethal. In case of amastigotes the results were nearly 461 similar to that obtained for wild type, with 10% genes as 462 lethal and 12% as trivial lethal, and proposed 79% as non-463 lethal using FBA. Whereas, MOMA provided 10% as lethal, 464 34% as trivial lethal and 56% as non lethal in amastigotes 465 showing that the metabolic pathway has undergone some 466 adjustment by taking another path for completion and thus 467 providing other essential targets. These essential targets are 468 further subjected to different protein essentiality criteria with 469 scoring. The study of subcellular localization of proteins is 470 crucial for genome annotation, protein function prediction 471 and drug discovery.

472 The knowledge of protein localization helps in 473 characterizing the cellular function of hypothetical and 474 newly discovered proteins. Subcellular localization 475 determines the environments in which proteins operate and 476 influences protein function by regulating access to and 477 availability of all types of molecular interaction partners. We 478 observed that the proteins were present in different 479 organelles of the parasite. Some were present integral to 480 membrane or in mitochondria, cytosol, glycosome, nucleus, 481 flagellum, or other complexes. The (Fig. 2E) shows the 482 percentage wise distribution of various proteins in different 483 cellular compartments with maximum number of proteins 484 present in the cytosol.

485 These highly prioritized targets are subjected to BLAST

486 against the entire human proteome of NCBI to get homology

487 information and to filter out the proteins with high similarity

488 (Fig.8D). 489

490 We performed active site analysis on top 10 prioritized491 targets. This reveals the similarity between the *Leishmania*492 and human proteins. This study reveals that there are small

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- 493 differences between the homologues but if we consider
- 494 cavity depth and electrostatic potential of active site it can
- 495 give clues for better design drugs.



Fig. 8 Work flow to get prioritized drug target from genome scale metabolic network. (A) Metabolic network of *L.major* consisting of 560 genes and their corresponding 1112 reactions and 1101 metabolites. (B) Analyzing gene deletions and their corresponding reactions through MOMA and FBA (C) Filtering through several essentiality criteria (D) Sequence and structure level analysis (E) Prioritized drug targets for *L.major*.

504 All these promising drug targets are compared with an 505 experimentally testable hypothesis. The metabolic network 506 was validated with experimental knockout data from related 507 Leishmania and Trypanosoma species. The findings have 508 enabled us to discover more about the organism's natural 509 variation and genetic structure, which is vital for developing 510 effective treatments. These findings have important 511 implications and help in understanding the parasitic 512 variations and the genetic basis of disease. Dispensable 513 genes upon various analysis might be important, but under 514 conditions not yet examined in the laboratory. 515

516 Materials and Methods

We used a metabolic model of L. $major^{12}$ in order to get 517 518 essential drug targets. Quadratic programming was applied 519 to first find a feasible flux distribution. For all predictions, 520 Minimization Of Metabolic Adjustment (MOMA) was 521 employed to simulate the behavior of gene knockouts and 522 their corresponding reactions that are essential for the 523 production of biomass in the proliferating cells. During the 524 knockdown process few genes reduced the maximal biomass 525 production rate in >1 and those genes were considered to be 526 growth supporting. The majority of the knockouts (95%) 527 results in either no reduction of growth on its deletion were 528 identified in the obtained outcome. The commercial CPLEX 529 solver through the TOMLAB® optimization environment 530 was utilized for resolving linear programming (LP), 531 quadratic programming (OP), and other problems on an Intel 532 Pentium 4 processor operating on Windows 7.

532

FBA It maximizes an objective function under different
constraints using LP. In this study, we seek for a steady state
flux distribution (v) that gives rise to the optimization of the
phenotype under mass balance, flux capacity and
thermodynamic constraints. ³⁴⁻³⁷ The LP problem is
exemplified as follows:

$$v_{\min} \le v \le v_{\max}$$

 $\max f^T v$.

S.v = 0.

542 Where S is an $n \times m$ sparce matrix which could incorporate 543 experimental data including number of metabolites denoted 544 by "n", and number of reactions denoted by "m", f is an 545 objective function maximization of biomass in the metabolic 546 networking which is indicated by a reaction that deplete 547 biomass constituents. Thermodynamic constraints (T) that 548 restrain the flow of direction and capacity constraints are 549 obligated by setting v_{min} and v_{max} . Whereas v_{min} is denoted as lower bound and v_{max} is denoted as lower bound and v_{max} as 550 551 upper bound on flux distribution. 552

553 MOMA It uses quadratic programming to minimize the sum of squares difference between wild type and mutant flux distribution. It solves by minimizing Euclidean distance metric from the wild type flux distribution commonly not obtained by FBA. ¹³ MOMA tests the hypothesis that a gene deletion causes minimal flux redistribution with respect to the wild type metabolism.

 $min(v-w)^T(v-w),$

S.v = 0.

 $v_{min} \le v \le v_{max}$

vi = 0.

 $j \in A$

560 MOMA problem is exemplified as follows 561

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564 Whereas w denoted as wild type flux distribution, and set of 565 reactions related with the knock out genes are denoted as A. 566 MOMA searches for a point in the null space of a mutant 567 metabolic network with the shortest distance from the initial 568 flux vector of a wild type metabolic network. This objective 569 function can be formalized as a standard quadratic 570 programming (QP) problem under a set of linear constraints. 571 If the null space of a mutant network is not empty, a solution 572 that minimizes the distance will always exist. MOMA can be 573 used for effectively calculating the significant phenotypic 574 behavior of several metabolic networks after a gene deletion^{13, 38} 575 providing an alternative perspective for 576 understanding metabolic systems under various 577 perturbations.

579 Gene deletion analysis

580 We have performed gene deletion mutants for all 581 dispensable genes of the L. major (iAC560) and analysis 582 was carried out using COBRA Toolbox 2.0.4. The gene was 583 assumed to be essential, if the corresponding gene has 584 highest effect (>90% effect on biomass) on the growth. The 585 results obtained from the in silico experiments were 586 compared with previously published experimental results. 587 Single and Double gene deletions were helpful in the 588 identification of genes that are essential for growth of L. 589 major. Knockdown experiment was performed for individual 590 genes in the metabolic model and by filtering the obtained

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591 outcome the genes were classified into lethal or essential 592 with respect to amastigotes of *Leishmania*.

593 We used MOMA to observe single gene and double gene 594 deletion on the basis of biomass components; and the results

595 were compared. Transport and exchange reactions reported

596 in the literature or in databases were included in the model.³⁹

597 The biomass calculation provides a range of metabolites that **598** are essential to support growth of the metabolic **599** system.^{36,40,41}

600 601 Epistasis

602 Epistasis happens when the growth rate is being affected due 603 to mutation at one point of a locus determined by the 604 occurrence of mutations in other loci of the metabolic network.⁴²Since, epistasis illustrates genome wide genetic interactions using gene knockouts.⁴³ It provides additional 605 606 607 insights into the significant portion of antibiotic resistant 608 mutations that are research hotspots. Epistasis in the usual 609 sense defines the concept of statistical interaction.^{13,} ⁴⁴Precisely; the quantitative genetic concept of epistasis may 610 611 be epitomized for two loci by the linear model.

612

613
$$y = \mu + a_1x_1 + d_1z_1 + a_2x_2 + d_2x_2 + i_{aa}x_1x_2 + i_{ad}x_1x_2 + i_{da}x_1x_2 + i_{dd}z_1z_2$$

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615 Where x_i and z_i are dummy variables and y is a quantitative 616 phenotype related to the underlying stage specific genotype 617 at locus i. The coefficients μ , a_1 , d_1 , a_2 and d_2 denote genetic 618 parameters that may be estimated corresponding to the mean 619 effect and additive and dominance effects at the two loci; i_{aa} , 620 i_{da} , i_{da} and i_{dd} correspond to epistatic interaction effects. Lack 621 of epistasis in this model implies that all interaction 622 coefficients are zero. 623

624 Drug Target Identification

625 Weight selection for metabolic and *L.major*-specific 626 target lists

627 Essentiality data

628 In this study, simulations were carried out using COBRA 629 Toolbox 2.0.4. The genes were assumed to be essential, if 630 the corresponding gene has highest effect (>90% effect on 631 biomass) on the growth. The results obtained from the in 632 silico experiments were compared with previously published 633 experimental results. We used MOMA to observe gene 634 knockout on the basis of biomass components.³⁹ The 635 biomass calculation provides a range of metabolites that are essential to support growth of the metabolic system.^{36, 40, 41} 636 637 Genome wide gene knockout or knockdown studies can be 638 used to predict genes that are essential for growth. This 639 criterion has been considered as vital in our studies and 640 weighed heavily (+50 if essential).

641

642 Druggability

643 In this work for estimating druggability we used DoGSite⁴⁵. 644 a structure-based technique to predict druggability and 645 protein active sites based on a Difference of Gaussian (DoG) 646 approach which originates from image processing. For each 647 query a druggability score between zero and one is returned. 648 The higher the score the more druggable the pocket is 649 estimated to be. Proteins that scored >0.8 was considered as 650 significant. This criterion allows users to search for pathogen 651 genes that may be considered as drug targets. A heavy 652 weight, +35, was chosen for the "druggablity" feature in the 653 metabolic list. This weight was chosen because the chances 654 of finding a known "druggable" domain to be much higher 655 in proteins was expected, which could be mapped to known
656 metabolic pathways. In the *L. major* specific list, quiet a
657 large number of the prioritized targets were in the
658 anticipated druggability limits.

660 Assayability

661 To select targets that are most amenable to high throughput 662 screeningfor a suitable lead compound, biochemical and/or cellular assays for growth inhibition or lethality, binding and 663 664 function are required. Target is considered assayable if an 665 enzyme is included in Sigma-Aldrich's collection of assays, 666 or if it has been assayed according to the BRENDA 667 database. Establishing a meaningful assay depends on target 668 class and the information on the target and it should be 669 more heavily weighted relative to the other measures. 670 Here we present +35 for new target tracking.

672 Epistasis

673 The percentage of modulated genes and their interactions 674 should be considered significant to understand the regulation 675 of gene expression in Leishmania occuring at different 676 levels, which could contribute to disease tropism.⁴⁶ 677 Comparative stage specific epistatic analysis in L. major is 678 the first to date and may lead to understand genome-wide 679 genetic studies of interactions using gene 680 knockouts. Through this network approach we may uncover 681 hidden variation in genome-wide association and thus 682 helping to understand the disease mechanisms. Additionally, 683 the proposed metabolic approach holds a promise for 684 characterizing the gene-gene interaction landscape broadly 685 in epistatic studies. We provided +25 for epistatic 686 interactions. 687

688 Structure

695

689 Crystal structures mainly considered of practical
690 applications that would not be the primary consideration to
691 determine a new drug target. The weights for these features
692 were kept low at +7 for have a crystal structure from PDB
693 (http://www.rcsb.org)) and +5 for having PBD structure
694 from ModBase database (http://modbase.compbio.ucsf.edu).

696 Molecular weight

697 Often in a drug discovery program, low molecular weight
698 protein targets are considered as emerging targets for the
699 design of novel therapeutic agents in drug discovery and this
700 molecular weight parameter may in part explain oral
bioavailability. It is generally regarded as too difficult to be
702 targeted. We provided +20 for the molecular weight of <100
703 kilo Dalton.

705 Sequence homology with human proteome and human gut 706 microbiota

707 The complete human proteome from NCBI and BLAST

708 (http://blast.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/Blast.cgi) was used to filter out

709 the proteins, which hold homology of Hits accompanied

710 with the identity of \geq 35%, e-value of \leq 0.0001 with \geq 75%

711 sequence coverage. Here we have chosen a heavy weight,

+25 for the filtered out proteins. Microbes in human gut andoral flora are deeming to be influencing the immunological

713 oral flora are deeming to be influencing the immunological 714 and physicochemical properties of the host and have a

715 significant role in its development. To compare the predicted

716 proteins, a word size of 3 with CD-HIT similarity of 60%

717 was used against the complete human gut microbiota.

718 Binding site similarity analysis

719 Out of the filtered 54 proteins, 33 proteins possess 720 considerable extent of structural similarity at the binding site 721 level with human proteome, while on the contrary 21 722 proteins are not having identical binding site with human 723 proteome. Analysis of binding site identity with human 724 proteome, given us interesting points to note that several 725 targets that we listed are already experimentally validated 726 drug targets.

727 **Binding site analysis**

728 Identification of the pocket characteristics like occluded 729 cavities and surface pockets is helpful in comparative 730 analyses of protein binding sites thereby use in target 731 assessment and validation. Normally, 1-2 mouth openings 732 are observed at binding sites. These pockets differ broadly in 733 size, the majority within the range of 102-103 Å. Most 734 commonly, the biggest pocket/cavity in the protein is the 735 active site; however there are a numerous edifying exceptions.⁴⁷ For this study, structures of highly scored from 736 previous studies were collected from Protein Data Bank 737 (PDB) and/or modbase.^{48,49} To identify the difference 738 739 between the active site of highly prioritized drug targets in 740 human and Leishmania, we performed probable binding 741 sites, Molecular Electrostatic Potential (MEP) and Cavity-742 Depth (CD) analysis using SiteID and MOLCAD module of 743 SYBYL7.1⁵⁰ on a Silicon Graphics tezro workstation. SiteID 744 module is used to determine the size and location of the 745 probable binding pockets in proteins. It identifies the pockets 746 using two methods: Grid Method and Solvation Method. 747 Grid method uses flood-fill algorithm, which generates 748 numerous water spheres to form clusters that can be the 749 probable active site inside the protein. This method was used 750 to determine the probable binding sites of proteins that are 751 present in Leishmania and human. Cavity depth analysis 752 indicates the depth of the cavity from the surface. Molecular 753 surface of all protein structures were generated by 754 MOLCAD module of SYBYL7.1 and cavity depth analysis 755 was performed on highly scored proteins.⁴⁸

756 Molecular electrostatic potential of protein surface can guide 757 to identify the interaction site of receptor with ligand. 758 Gasteiger-Hückel charges were applied to the proteins. The 759 targets that are well scored from previous studies proteins 760 were subjected to Molecular Electrostatic Potential (MEP) 761 analysis and cavity depth analysis to get highly prioritized drug targets for *Leishmania* species⁴⁸ (Supplementary 762 763 information 2). 764

765 Literature dependent target validation

766 The list or predicted drug targets are substantiated based on 767 underlying functional evidence obtained from the review of 768 literature. By using manual curation technique and data 769 mining made us to identify the literature based validated 770 drug targets in L. major. Furthermore with literature survey 771 we validated the proteins are accounted to be essential or 772 non-essential in terms of Leishmania growth and survival.

773 Conclusions

774 The clinical manifestations of leishmaniasis can be caused 775 by several species of parasites belonging to the genus

776 Leishmania. Worldwide, there are 12 million people 777 currently infected and 350 million people at risk of 778 leishmaniasis, but the existing treatment options mostly rely 779 on ancient pentavalentantimonials, which have many 780 limitations including systemic toxicity in humans and drug 781 resistance in parasites. Usually during the infectious life 782 cycle, Leishmania interchange among the insect 783 promastigote stage and the vertebrate aflagellateamastigote 784 stage that proliferates within infected host macrophages 785 provoking the pathology of the disease. Our research focuses 786 on discovering new stage specific drug targets, which is 787 significant for contemporary drug discovery of neglected 788 tropical diseases, like leishmaniasis. We applied several 789 essentiality criteria to prioritize the drug target lists for L. 790 *major*, the causative agent of leishmaniasis. With our results, 791 researchers are be able to use the lists of highly prioritized 792 drug targets, those can be further carry out experimentally. 793

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797 **Author Contributions**

798 Conceived and designed the experiments: MES. MLSP. AK. 799 Performed the experiments: MLSP, MES, AK, Analyzed the 800 data: MES, MLSP. Contributed reagents/materials/analysis 801 tools: MES, MLSP. Wrote the paper: MLSP, MES, AK, and 802 AG. 803

804 **Conflict of Interest**

805 The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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