



## Review

# Interrelation of Ca<sup>2+</sup> and PE\_PGRS proteins during *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* pathogenesis

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In today's era tuberculosis is a major threat to human population. The lethality of this disease is caused by very efficiently thrived bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* (*M. tuberculosis*). Ca<sup>2+</sup> plays crucial role in maintenance of cellular homeostasis. Bacilli survival in human alveolar macrophages majorly depends on disruption in Ca<sup>2+</sup> signaling. Bacilli sustainability in phagosome lies in the interruption of phagolysosomal fusion, which is possible because of low intracellular Ca<sup>2+</sup> concentration. Bacilli contain various Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding proteins which help in regulation of Ca<sup>2+</sup> signaling for its own benefit. For the survival of pathogen, it requires alteration in normal Ca<sup>2+</sup> concentration in healthy cell. In this review we aim to find the various Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding domains which are present in several Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding proteins of *M. tuberculosis* and variety of roles played by Ca<sup>2+</sup> to survive bacilli within host cell. This manuscript emphasizes the Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding domains present in PE\_PGRS group of gene family and their functionality in *M. tuberculosis* survival and pathogenesis.

**Keywords.** Ca<sup>2+</sup> signaling; Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding domains; Ca<sup>2+</sup>; dormant stage; *M. tuberculosis*; PE\_PGRS

**Abbreviations used:** Ca<sup>2+</sup>, calcium ions; CAMLP, calmodulin-like proteins; *M. tuberculosis*, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*; PE, Pro-Glu sequence; PE\_PGRS, proline-glutamic polymorphic GC-rich repetitive sequence; TB, tuberculosis.

## 1. Introduction

Tuberculosis (TB) has become a serious disease for the human population as it infests and persists successfully in host. Till date the global scenario of cause of TB worldwide is chaotic (Meena and Rajni 2010; Kumari and Meena 2014). According to a WHO report, TB is the ninth leading cause of death worldwide and approximately 10.4 million people fell ill in 2017 (WHO 2017). According to previous studies, whole genome sequencing of *M. tuberculosis* provides better understanding of microbial pathogenesis and etiology (Cole 1999). A distinct multigene family found in *M. tuberculosis* genome consists of two closely related subfamilies PE (Pro-Glu sequence) and PE\_PGRS (Proline-glutamic polymorphic GC-rich repetitive sequence), which form 5% of total *M. tuberculosis* genome (Meena 2015). PE subfamily consists of 38, while PE\_PGRS contains 61 homologous genes which are distributed throughout *M. tuberculosis* genome (Tekaiia *et al.* 1999). The PE\_PGRS has conserved N terminal PE domain, which shows high similarity to PE family members and variable C terminal PGRS domain. PGRS domain contains repeats of Gly-Gly-Ala and

Gly-Gly-X, where X can be any amino acid (Poulet and Cole 1995). PE\_PGRS genes encode proteins of multiple lengths, widely varying from range of 175 to 1901 amino acids. The presence of many related genes in *M. tuberculosis* infers that the encoded proteins must play role in survival and growth of mycobacterial cell within its chosen environment. PE\_PGRS is still very unique to *M. tuberculosis* as it is not found in genome of any other organisms (Brennan and Delogu 2002). So, it makes PE\_PGRS genes an exciting field of research in *M. tuberculosis* pathogenesis. Previous studies on these genes showed that they aid as virulence factor of *M. tuberculosis* during infection and expressed in macrophage during granuloma formation in host (Ramakrishnan *et al.* 2000). PE\_PGRS group of subfamily has the potential to bring strong immune response within host cell and promote apoptosis and necrosis in eukaryotic cell (Dheenadhalayan *et al.* 2006). During invasion of any pathogen inside the host cell, core atmosphere of the cell changes leads to the cascade of abnormal events. These cells require messenger molecules which can act as notable indicator of manipulative events (Shaw and Meena 2016). For this purpose, Ca<sup>2+</sup> plays a crucial role by behaving as a

secondary messenger in the host cell (Clapham 2007). To effectively endorse a variety of functions by PE\_PGRS gene family, they need a binding domain for  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ . Numerous binding domains are available which effectively control  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration. Abundant host factors affect the varied functionality of PE\_PGRS group of genes during infection. This article deals with the role and interaction of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  with PE\_PGRS genes in the pathogenesis of *M. tuberculosis*.

## 2. $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ binding domains in *M. tuberculosis*

$\text{Ca}^{2+}$  shows its effect by changing its intracellular concentration, and these alterations are generated by various  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding molecules, which in turn decline free  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration within the cell.  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  has been reported to have a major role in phagocytosis of the pathogen through various receptor-mediated events (Meena *et al.* 2016).  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  transmits the information via phosphorylation event, protein interaction or change in gene expression (Hashimoto and Kudla 2011). These proteins are predominantly found in eukaryotes and are well studied, but in prokaryotes, their role is still not clear (Permyakov and Kretsinger 2009). According to recent studies, some common bacteria like *Escherichia coli*, *Bacillus subtilis* and *Pseudomonas* have shown various gene expression and cellular processes by varying extracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration, thus indicating the importance of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  in prokaryotic life (Patrauchan *et al.* 2007; Naseem *et al.* 2009; Oomes *et al.* 2009; Bilecen and Yildiz 2009; Dominguez 2011). Further, whole genome sequencing showed the presence of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding domains in *M. tuberculosis*.  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding proteins have different domains like EF-hand domain, helix-loop-helix, Greek key motifs of  $\beta\gamma$ -crystalline, etc. (Yang 2001; Michiels *et al.* 2002; Rigden *et al.* 2003; Zhou *et al.* 2006; Aravind *et al.* 2009). There is a need to further investigate and find the role of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding proteins in prokaryotes. Calmodulin (CaM) is a widely known  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding protein family which plays a major role in  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -mediated signaling in various cellular responses. CaM is a sensor protein which has 4 EF-hand motifs and binds to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  whenever its concentration increases, thus simultaneously altering various enzymatic activities (Cheung 1982). Increase in cytoplasmic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  is known to bring structural change in CaM by altering the structure of CaM-dependent protein kinase-II (CamKII) (Harmon *et al.* 1985). In prokaryotes, calmodulin-like proteins (CAMLP) were discovered in *Bacillus subtilis* (*B. subtilis*) and *Escherichia coli* (Fry *et al.* 1986). Later, the presence of CAMLP was shown in various strains of *M. tuberculosis*, like *Mycobacterium bovis* (*M. bovis*), *Mycobacterium smegmatis* (*M. smegmatis*), *Mycobacterium phlei* (*M. phlei*) and *M. tuberculosis* (Burra *et al.* 1991; Burra *et al.* 1995; Falah *et al.* 1988; Sharma and Meena 2017). Further, it was revealed that bacterial CAMLP have homology with

eukaryotic CaM in terms of binding domain, like EF-hand domain with different binding sites. Recently, it was discovered that the product of gene Rv1211 of *M. tuberculosis* H<sub>37</sub>Rv is an effective CAMLP, as it shows the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -dependent activation of PDE (phosphodiesterase) and NAD (Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide) kinase, which is exact feature of eukaryotic calmodulin (Reddy *et al.* 1992; Koul *et al.* 2009).  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signaling pathway is one of the major tracks other than MAPK (mitogen-activated protein kinase) and IFN- $\gamma$  (interferon-gamma), which is used by *M. tuberculosis* bacilli to prevent phagosome-lysosome fusion within host (Koul *et al.* 2004). Phagolysosome formation, phagosome acidification, recruitment of lysosomal hydrolases, etc., are results of alteration in cytoplasmic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration (Harmon *et al.* 1985). In eukaryotic cells,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration is low compared to the extracellular matrix because several cellular organelles like endoplasmic reticulum, mitochondria, etc., sequester the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ions and maintain a sharp gradient of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  along the wall of the organelles (Gilabert 2012; Shaw and Meena 2016). In similar manner prokaryotic cells also uphold the gradient of cytosolic  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ions, but the mechanism behind it is still ambiguous (Torrecilla *et al.* 2000; Jones *et al.* 1999; Zhou *et al.* 2006). Possibly, some kind of CAMLP is required by bacterial cells to maintain the transient change in  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration. Proteomic analysis of *B. subtilis* by autoradiography suggested that various protein components bind with  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  (Dominguez 2011). In prokaryotic cells,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  is stored in periplasmic space, which functions as barrier to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  entry and plays a major role in  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  homeostasis across the membrane (Gangola and Rosen 1987).

## 3. $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ binding motif

PE\_PGRS genes family is one of the unique gene sequences in genome analysis, as it is confined to only *M. tuberculosis* H<sub>37</sub>Rv strain (Copin *et al.* 2014). RTX (repeats in toxin) superfamily is a group of exoproteins that act as cytolysins and cytotoxin secreted by bacteria. These family proteins possess two distinct features, a unique way of exporting across the bacterial wall, and they have tandem repeats of nonapeptide GGXGXD/NXUX, where X represents any amino acid and U is non-polar or hydrophobic large residue which binds to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  (Coote 1992; Baumann *et al.* 1993). These nonapeptide repeats craft a  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding motif popularly known as parallel  $\beta$ -helix or  $\beta$ -roll (Lilie *et al.* 2000). Due to the presence of these nonapeptides, various PE\_PGRS gene family members are also stated as cell surface exposed adhesion molecules (Delogu *et al.* 2004; Sachdeva *et al.* 2005) which further involve in pathogenesis (Bachhawat and Singh 2007). Oddly, 56 of 61 PE\_PGRS genes consists of these nonapeptide sequence; however, their functional characterization is still ambiguous (Michiels *et al.*

**Table 1.** List of various Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding domains and proteins in *M. tuberculosis*

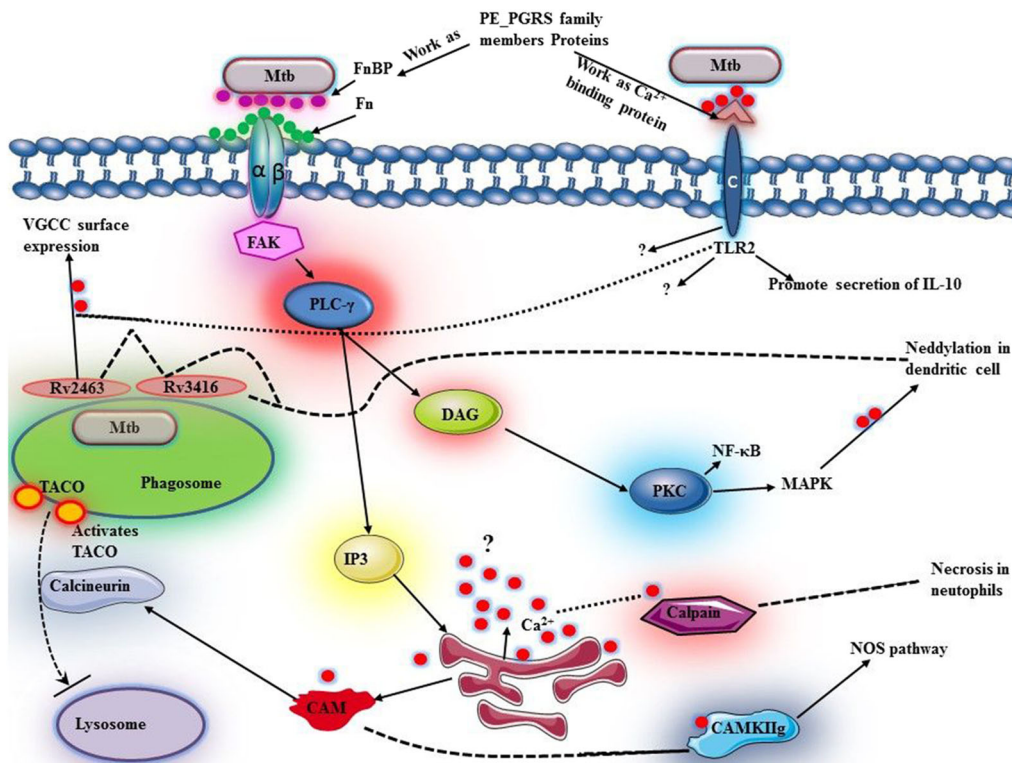
Calcium binding motif	Binding sequence	Description	Calcium binding proteins in <i>M. tuberculosis</i>	References
Parallel $\beta$ -helix or $\beta$ -roll	GGXGXD/NXUX	X is any amino acid, U is unpolar or hydrophobic large residue	PE_PGRS family binding proteins	Gilbert (2012), Jones <i>et al.</i> (1999), Torrecilla <i>et al.</i> (2000), Gangola and Rosen (1987), Copin <i>et al.</i> (2014), Coote (1992), Baumann <i>et al.</i> (1993)
EF-hand binding motif/domain	Dx[DN]xDGx[ILV][DSTN]xDXDXDG	Two $\alpha$ helices which consist of acidic amino acids	Rv1211 contains one prototypic calcium binding EF-hand motif	Lilie <i>et al.</i> (2000), Delogu <i>et al.</i> (2004), Sachdeva <i>et al.</i> (2005), Koul <i>et al.</i> (2009)
Greek key motif	N/D-N/D-#-I-S/T-S, #	Unique ser/thr hydroxyl group	Calmodulin-like proteins	Rigden <i>et al.</i> (2003), Bachhawat and Singh (2007), Michiels <i>et al.</i> (2002)
Big domain	DNSNKDITSAVTDxSNxDxxSxVT	Immunoglobulin-like Ca <sup>2+</sup> binding domains	Leptospira immunoglobulin-like protein LigA and LigB	Yeruva <i>et al.</i> (2016), Kretsinger (1976), Rigden and Galperin (2004)
Ca <sup>2+</sup> dodecin	Rv0379 of <i>M. tuberculosis</i>	Like copper binding domain	Calcium dodecin (Rv0379)	Wistow (1990), Srivastava <i>et al.</i> (2014)

2002). Another domain, namely, EF-hand, is present, which is about 70 to 184 amino acids in length, possessing high phenylalanine/tyrosine ratio (Yeruva *et al.* 2016). Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding domain in this superfamily is flanked by two  $\alpha$ -helices which consist of acidic amino acids (Kretsinger 1976). Dx[DN]xDGx[ILV][DSTN]x is the sequence pattern which typically constitute Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding loop with minor changes in others (Rigden and Galperin 2004). Another widely found Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding domain is Greek key motif of  $\beta\gamma$ -crystalline (Wistow 1990) in which Ca<sup>2+</sup> coordination is conserved as N/D-N/D-#-I-S/T-S, in which # residue offers the carbonyl chain and I residue provides the hydrophobic core of the domain (Srivastava *et al.* 2014). This motif requires unique ser/thr hydroxyl group for Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding (Lin *et al.* 2008). Yet another Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding domain is Big domain, which is related to a group of proteins having immunoglobulin-like Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding domains (Halaby *et al.* 1999). It is recognized in several enzymes, transporters, molecular chaperons and other membrane-bound proteins (Raman *et al.* 2011). Although the nature of binding domain is not identified, tandem repeats of DNSNKDITSAVTDxSNxDxxSxVT sequences are present (Arockiasamy *et al.* 2011). A very unique and distinctive Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding domain is reported in *M. tuberculosis* gene Rv0379 which has 71 kDa protein and is thought to be involved in protein transportation as secE2 (Barnham *et al.* 2003). This protein is identified as Ca<sup>2+</sup> dodecin by its crystal structure, which is not seen anywhere else in the genome. The folds of Ca<sup>2+</sup> dodecin show similarity as copper binding domain of amyloid precursor protein of Alzheimer's disease (Ikura *et al.* 2002), as shown in table 1. Variety of Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding domains are found in prokaryotic organisms with wide structural

range, and binding of Ca<sup>2+</sup> to these proteins confers various structural deformations, which affect structural or functional changes in cell.

#### 4. Varied roles of Ca<sup>2+</sup> in *M. tuberculosis* pathogenesis

Ca<sup>2+</sup> is an important and multipurpose molecule which is used by cells in their growth and proper functionality, whether they are prokaryotic or eukaryotic. It is a key element to convey various cellular messages intracellularly and regulates normal routine tasks of cell (Sanders *et al.* 1999; Berridge *et al.* 2000; Berridge *et al.* 2003; Hashimoto and Kudla 2011; Zampese and Pizzo 2012). The amount of free Ca<sup>2+</sup> within the cell rapidly changes according to stimulus and varied concentration of Ca<sup>2+</sup>, which in turn is sensed by cell to respond in a particular direction. Ca<sup>2+</sup> concentration is not solely enough to make change in cellular processes; it also depends on signal specifications like its speed, frequency and magnitude (Jayachandran *et al.* 2007). In response to stimulus initiated by Ca<sup>2+</sup> signaling, a chain of downregulated Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding proteins are activated, which further aids in progression of the signaling pathway. During aerosol transmission of bacilli, they get engulfed by alveolar macrophages through phagocytosis. The foremost step of *M. tuberculosis* survival within host is to inhibit the formation of phagolysosome (Ferrari *et al.* 1999). FnBPs binds with Fn through integrin receptor and initiates PKC $\alpha$  (protein kinase C alpha) pathway. This increases Ca<sup>2+</sup> concentration in cell and initiates several signaling cascade. Coronin/TACO is activated by calcineurin, which is Ca<sup>2+</sup>- and calmodulin-dependent ser/thr phosphatase. It is also an actin binding



**Figure 1.** Schematic representation of multiple roles played by  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  in context to Mtb survival and pathogenesis inside host cell. Invasion of bacilli in healthy macrophage cell initiates after binding of FnBP proteins with integrin receptor present on cell membrane. This binding initiates Plc- $\gamma$  pathway, which dissociates its substrate PIP2 (Phosphatidylinositol 4,5-bisphosphate) into DAG (Di-acyl glycerol) and IP3. IP3 activates  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channel present on ER, which enhances intracellular  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  level. This increased level of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  is necessary for phagocytic action of macrophage. Mtb manipulates this signaling by using its various  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding proteins.  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binds to CAM, which activates CAMKIIg and Calcineurin. Calcineurin activates TACO or coronin protein, which binds with the membrane of phagosome inhibits lysosome. Another  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -dependent protease calpain activates and initiates necrosis in neutrophils. The other component of PIP2 is DAG, which initiates PKC pathway, which in turn activates NF- $\kappa$ B and MAPK pathway. MAPK pathway induces neddylation in dendritic cells. Rv2463 and Rv3416 are Mtb proteins which increased the surface level expression of VGCC (Voltage gated calcium channel). There is another way to infect macrophage through PE\_PGRS genes having  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  binding domain. These proteins interact with TLR2 receptor and change the IL-10 signaling in favor of bacilli survival. There are yet undiscovered paths which are activate by PE\_PGRS proteins.

protein which adheres at phagosome membrane and prevents the maturation of phagosome containing bacilli (Majeed *et al.* 1998; Trimble and Grinstein 2007). Generally, higher  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  concentration is required in phagocytosis process. Therefore, elevated level of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  ion is used by bacilli in favor of its own sustainability (Malik *et al.* 2000; Vergne *et al.* 2003). Higher concentration of  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  minimizes severe immune response during Mtb infection and also inhibits heavy inflammation. Majorly, calmodulin is the molecule which binds  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and initiates PKC $\alpha$  and CAMKIIg ( $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ /calmodulin-dependent protein kinase II gamma) (Yadav *et al.* 2004; NYU 2015). According to a recent study, use of siRNA and inhibitors of CAMKIIg depicts that it is pro-apoptotic and critical for activation of ERK1/2 (extracellular signal regulated kinases). By inhibiting ERK1/2, production of NOS2 (nitric oxide synthase 2) and NO (nitric oxide) also decrease. In *Mycobacterium fortuitum*, it had been reported that ERK1/2 and NOS2 axis activation through PKC $\alpha$  pathway is important for caspase-dependent

apoptosis (Banerjee *et al.* 2014). Earlier studies also revealed that Rv2463 and Rv3416 genes of *M. tuberculosis* involve in neddylation, which is a process similar to ubiquitination in which NEDD8 protein binds to its target proteins having its own E1 and E2 enzymes (Datta *et al.* 2016). These genes modulate NEDD8 and cullin-1 association. This connotation also belongs to  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and MAPK-dependent pathway which suppresses host immune system via modulating neddylation process in dendritic cells (Huang *et al.* 2004; Chadha *et al.* 2015). One of the genes Rv0805 is dinuclear metallohydrolase and involves in signal transduction by binding of two divalent metal ions (Podobnik *et al.* 2009).  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  also binds with Rv0805 but the binding sites are different. Here  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  acts as an activator of enzymatic activity and also promotes the hydrolysis of substrate even in the absence of metal ions (Shenoy *et al.* 2007). Some studies also suggest the involvement of VGCC (voltage-gated  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  channel) in regulation of *M. tuberculosis* survival and pathogenesis inside host. VGCC are the  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ -permeable channels found

in excitable membranes. One of the gene of *M. tuberculosis*, *Rv2463*, was reported to regulate VGCC surface expression in host cells (Nejatbakhsh and Feng 2011), where Ca<sup>2+</sup> plays a key role in the appearance of *CACNA 1S* (a gene belong to a family which provide instructions for the formation of Ca<sup>2+</sup> channel). This regulation is directed by MyD88-independent TLR pathway in which transcription factor pCREB and STIM 1 and STIM 2 (stromal interaction molecule 1 and 2), which are ER-associated Ca<sup>2+</sup> sensors, are also involved. Fascinatingly, ROS (reactive oxygen species) plays negative role in the expression of *CACNA 1S* which revealed that ROS and pCREB cross-regulate and direct this pathway (Antony *et al.* 2015). PE\_PGRS genes containing nona-domain have the ability to bind with Ca<sup>2+</sup> and initiate infection in macrophage through TLR2 (toll-like receptor). This binding modifies IL-10, an anti-inflammatory interleukin, signaling. One recent study reported that these proteins binds TLR2 with lower affinity when Ca<sup>2+</sup> concentration is depleted within cell. It revealed the importance of PE\_PGRS with Ca<sup>2+</sup> in *M. tuberculosis* pathogenesis (Yeruva *et al.* 2016), as shown in figure 1. As PE\_PGRS family proteins possess both Fn and Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding domains, they act as adhesion as well as signaling molecules (Meena and Meena 2016 and Monu and Meena 2016). According to another report, in *Leptospira* species, LigB protein containing Fn and Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding domain revealed that its binding with Fn during adhesion is enhanced by the presence of Ca<sup>2+</sup>. So, we can say that availability of Ca<sup>2+</sup> in host cell boosts the attachment of pathogen with membrane (Lin *et al.* 2008). To know the role of Ca<sup>2+</sup> further in the pathology of *M. tuberculosis*, we need detailed signaling inputs and outputs of bacilli infection in host cell.

## 5. Summary

Ca<sup>2+</sup> is a multipurpose molecule in maintenance of cellular homeostasis. Ca<sup>2+</sup> acts as an important signaling molecule in all aspects of cell growth. To modulate cell functionality, different Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding proteins are involved in changing Ca<sup>2+</sup> concentration. It is also a multifaceted molecule which enhances several pathways and regulates the immune cells during any pathogenic infection. To enhance the bacterial survival within host, low Ca<sup>2+</sup> concentration is maintained. This is achieved by the presence of various Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding proteins in *M. tuberculosis*. These Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding proteins further manipulate the Ca<sup>2+</sup> signaling so as to benefit bacilli survival. PLC- $\gamma$  pathway is the basic signaling cascade of Ca<sup>2+</sup>. Calcinuerin promote the inhibition of the basic phagocytic function of cell, i.e. fusion of phagolysosome. Varied Mtb proteins having variety of Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding domains enhance the binding efficiency and produce different results, which help bacteria to remain inside the cell. The interconnection of Ca<sup>2+</sup> and PE\_PGRS proteins in the pathogenic aspect of bacilli has provided interesting facts: PE\_PGRS family members of proteins are involved in adhesion and as

signaling modulator by working as an FnBP and Ca<sup>2+</sup> binding proteins. To know the deep molecular mechanism behind the survival of bacilli in host cells, we need to elucidate the variety of role played by Ca<sup>2+</sup> and its binding proteins with major emphasis on PE\_PGRS members.

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