# **Molecular Mechanism behind Stay Green Trait in Bread Wheat (***Triticum aestivum* **L.)**



# **By SADIA LATIF Registration No. 03041311003**

**Department of Plant Sciences Faculty of Biological Sciences Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, Pakistan 2022**

# **Molecular Mechanism behind Stay Green Trait in Bread Wheat (***Triticum aestivum* **L.)**



*A Thesis Submitted to the Quaid-i-Azam University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of* 

## **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**in**

**Plant Sciences** 

**By**

## **SADIA LATIF**

**Registration No. 03041311003** 

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### APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the research work presented in this thesis, entitled as "Molecular Mechanism behind Stay Green Trait in Bread Wheat *(Triticum aestivum* L.)" was conducted by Ms. Sadia Latif (Registration No. 03041311003) under the supervision of Dr. Umar Masood Quraishi, Associate Professor, Department of Plant Sciences, Quaidi-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. No part of this thesis has been submitted anywhere else for any other degree. This thesis is submitted to Department of Plant Sciences, Faculty of Biological Sciences, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan in the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the field of Plant Sciences.

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*He who issues forth in search of knowledge is busy in the cause of Allah till he returns from his quest.*



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## **ANNEXURE**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

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*Sadia Latif* 

## **Molecular Mechanism behind Stay Green Trait in Bread Wheat (***Triticum aestivum* **L.)**

### <span id="page-25-0"></span>**Abstract**

Stay-green refers to -heritable delayed foliar senescence during grain filling", is associated with retention of chlorophyll and improved photosynthesis together with the maintenance of assimilated carbon supply during grain filling stage. Consequently, confirming maximum mass per grain. Stay-green trait has received substantial attention from crop breeders owing to crop improvement under abiotic and biotic stresses. The stay-green trait needs to be further explored at morpho-physiological, biochemical, and, molecular levels for introgression in the future breeding programs. Our first study aimed to unraveled the genetic composition of the stay-green trait in a diverse germplasm consisting of landraces, green revolution, post green revolution, elite cultivars, and CIMMYT advance cultivars using 90K SNP array by employing general linear model, mixed linear model, and fixed and random model circulating probability unification based genome-wide association mapping. Forty eight loci were detected for chlorophyll content, chlorophyll fluorescence, NDVI, stay-green indices, plant height, and tiller number. Annotation of thirty six putative genes extracted from identified loci revealed their role in plant development, defense responses under stress, flowering time control, chloroplast development, and damage tissues regeneration.

The second study aimed to demonstrate the impact of the stay-green trait in bread wheat under terminal heat stress. Field experiments (2014-2015 & 2015-2016) were conducted to investigate the influence of terminal heat stress on the morphophysiological traits in different stay-green types. In addition, the greenhouse experiment was performed to dissect the stay-green trait in functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes. Field experiments confirmed that genotypes exhibiting the stay-green trait have significantly high chlorophyll content, normalized difference vegetative index, grain yield, biological yield, kernel weight, and low canopy temperature under control and heat stress conditions. In the greenhouse experiment, functional stay-green and non-functional stay-green genotypes showed a high chlorophyll

content and photochemical efficiency, whereas biological yield and grain yield showed a significant relation with the functional stay-green genotype. The sequencing and expression analysis of chlorophyllide a oxygenase (CaO), light-harvesting complex (Cab), stay-green (SGR), and red chlorophyll catabolite reductase (RCCR) in functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes revealed variations in the exons of CaO and RCCR; and significant difference in the regulation of CaO and Cab at 7 days after anthesis under terminal heat stress.

The third study aimed to demonstrate the metabolic regulation of the secondary stay-green trait using stay-green and non-stay-green genotypes under control and heat stress treatments by employing Ultra-High‐Performance Liquid Chromatography High‐ Resolution Mass Spectrometry (UHPLC-HRMS). Analysis of Variance, Partial Least Squares Discriminant Analysis, and Significant Analysis of Metabolites identified 166 significant known metabolites. The predominant metabolites that showed significant high accumulation in non-stay-green genotype were deoxyuridine, deoxycytidine, 5' deoxyadenosine, glycyl-L-leucine, leucyl-proline, cytidine, uridine, isocytosine and adenine, whereas the dominant metabolites that showed high accumulation in stay-green genotype were ADP, phosphocholine, glutathione, 2-phosphoglyceric acid, cADPR, allantoin, trigonelline, syringic acid, spermine, and hexanesulfonic acid sulfate under control and heat stress treatments. The variation in the levels of metabolites in non-staygreen and stay-green genotypes highlighted variable metabolic adjustment in stay-green genotype that reduces heat impacts.

*Chapter #1* 

*Introduction and Review of Literature* 

### **Introduction and Review of Literature**

<span id="page-28-1"></span><span id="page-28-0"></span>The dawn of agriculture has led to the evolution of human civilization from the prehistoric era to the modern era. In the modern era, 7.8 billion people directly and indirectly are fed by agriculture. Domestication and continuous selections of agronomic traits of interest has led to yield increase enabling us to withstand food security (Salamini *et al.*, 2002; Eckardt, 2010). Domestication, a colossal evolutionary step has guided the acclimatization and speciation, ultimately creating novel species (Darwin, 1905). The domestication of cereal crops has played a major role in the development of human civilization. Since the beginning of Agriculture, humans have selected crops against visual agronomic traits. This selection continued till the early  $19<sup>th</sup>$  century (Brown, 2010). Beginning of  $20<sup>th</sup>$  century marked the rediscovery of Mendel's laws and their utilization in crops (Smýkal *et al*., 2016). However, most agronomic traits are quantitative in nature and do not follow Mendel's law of inheritance. Quantitative agronomic traits are governed by the interaction and additive effect of multiple genes. Each locus contributes relatively weak individual effects. Environment also influences these traits (Doust *et al*., 2014). Though, crop evolution and improvement were based on selections rather than prior knowledge of genes involved lead to persistent increase in crop yield. In addition to selection, improvement in agronomic practices e.g., fertilizers, pesticide, and farm practices also played a dividend role in improvement of agricultural crops (FAO, 2011). Green revolution and deployment of short statured wheat and rice has been marked as most important milestones in the agricultural era. Since 1960, cereals grain yield has significantly improved (Figure 1.1).

### <span id="page-28-2"></span>**1.1. Socioeconomic importance of wheat**

Species of *Poaceae* family which are consumed as staple food are called cereals. The major cereal crops included Maize, Wheat, Rice, Sorghum, Millets, Oat, and Rye. Cereals are the backbone of food security, as they provide approximately 60% of daily nutrients to the world population (Varshney, 2006).



### <span id="page-29-0"></span>*Figure 1.1. Trends in worldwide major cereal crops production since the green revolution [On the x axis are the years since the green revolution, whereas the y axis represents world yield (hectogram/hectare)] (Source: http://www.fao.org/faostat).*

The golden ear of wheat has been the symbol of food security. It provides nearly 20% of the total calories and proteins and is a staple food of around 40% of the world population (Curtis, 2019; Giraldo *et al*., 2019). Wheat is the youngest polyploid crop and first domesticated crop of the world (Hanson *et al.,* 1982; Charmet *et al*., 2011). Hexaploid wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) is cultivated around the globe for bread, chapati, cakes, and noodles. Tetraploid durum wheat (*Triticum durum)*, is used for making pasta, biscuits, and noodles (Peña, 2019; Giraldo *et al*., 2019).

Wheat can be adapted to variable agro-climatic zones that include tropical and temperate climatic conditions. This ability has enabled farmers in every continent to cultivate wheat. Unlike other crops, the presence of gluten protein makes wheat loaf visco-elastic, suitable for variable human consumption. Wheat is also nutritionally rich and provides carbohydrates, minerals, protein and dietary fibers (Curtis *et al*., 2002) to humans as well as animals. The socio-economic importance plus industrial applications makes wheat the most important commodity from farm via market to table.

### <span id="page-30-0"></span>**1.2. Wheat production and consumption**

Globally, wheat is cultivated on 218 million hectares versus 162 million hectares for rice and 177 million for maize. America, Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Pakistan, Russia, and Ukraine are the leading wheat producers of the world (Figure 1.2).



### <span id="page-30-1"></span>*Figure 1.2. Wheat Production in the major world wheat producting nations since 1961. (Source:* **<http://www.fao.org/faostat>***). x-axis represents years since green revolution and y-axis represents wheat yield.*

Pakistan is ranked  $8<sup>th</sup>$  in terms of wheat production, with annual wheat yield approximately 25.5 million metric tons (MMT) in 2020. Approximately, 80% of Rabi cultivation is wheat in Pakistan (9 million hectare). The export value of wheat is 41.1 billion US dollars, highest among all cereals, (*[http://faostat.fao.org](http://faostat.fao.org/)*). The average per capita consumption of wheat and its products in 2019 was 67.8kg, which is 47% of total cereal consumption. In Pakistan, per capita consumption of wheat is highest in the world (115kg). This makes wheat the highest consumed product as well as has a great impact on the economy of Pakistan. Wheat crop contributes 10% to the agriculture sector and 2.1% to the national GDP (Source: Economic Survey of Pakistan 2017-18).

#### <span id="page-31-0"></span>**1.3. Future outlook of wheat**

Worldwide population is growing at an alarming rate; it is projected to increase to 9.7 billion from the current 7.9 billion people by 2050. This makes food security a daunting task for agriculturists in general and wheat breeders specifically. Approximately, a 2% annual increase in wheat production will ensure our food security in 2050. Reduction in land resources, water resources and variable climatic conditions has made food security one of the biggest challenges of this decade (FAO, 2017).

#### <span id="page-31-1"></span>**1.4. Wheat genome and evolution**

Among cereals, wheat has the largest genome  $\sim$ 17 giga base-pairs. Wheat is an allohexaploid and has 21 pairs of chromosomes belonging to three sub-genomes (A, B, and D). The three genomes each consisting of 14 chromosomes are evoluted from different diploid species (Sakamura, 1918; Kihara, 1919; Sax, 1922; Kihara, 1924; Sears, 1952). Wheat genome has approximately eighty percent of repetitive elements (Mayer *et al*., 2014). Comparative studies have estimated that all cereals have evolved from a common ancestor about 50 to 70 million years back (Bolot *et al.*[, 2009;](file:///C:/Users/Dr.Umar/Downloads/Thesis%20txt%202.docx%23_ENREF_5) Alaux *et*  al., 2018). The A-genome ancestor *Triticum urartu* (genome  $A^u A^u$ ) was naturally crossed with B-genome ancestor *Aegilops speltoides* (genome SS) and resulted in an amphi-tetraploid *Triticum turgidum* (genome  $A^{\mu}A^{\mu}BB$ ). This species is the progenitor of durum wheat. The next event of polyploidization occurred around 10,000 years ago. The tetraploid *Triticum turgidum* was naturally crossed with D-genome *Aegilops tauschii* to produce allohexploid *Triticum aestivum L.* (Figure 1.3). Continuous selection and natural mutations have assisted in creation of actual free thrashing, soft bread wheat.

#### <span id="page-31-2"></span>**1.5. Wheat growth and development**

 Wheat yield is dependent on intricate interactions between biological, economical, technological, and ecological factors. Till date, breeders and farmers are working on devising strategies and methodologies to improve crop yield. The key solution to this problem is to reduce pre- and post-harvest losses. Researchers have



### <span id="page-32-0"></span>*Figure 1.3. Evolution of wheat from diploid Triticum urartu, Aegilops speltoides, and Aegilops tauschii to allo-hexaploid Triticum aestivum (Source: Rahman et al., 2020)*

broaden the scope of identification of strategies and methodologies from farming practices, utilization of chemical fertilizers, to exploring the genetic diversity, to use of wild relatives, to hybrid wheat, and even to transgenic approaches to find solutions for this problem. Basics of all future development depend upon our understanding on plant growth and development.

 As discussed earlier, wheat is the best adapted crop of the world. It is planted in both tropic and temperate climatic conditions. Due to complex genome, wheat is to adapt to various osmotic conditions from littoral to xerophytic water availability (Curtis *et al*., 2002). This in addition to different utility makes wheat one of the most diverse cereal

crop. The classification of wheat is done based on its cropping pattern (winter or spring wheat), based on its grain softness (soft, medium hard or hard), based on its grain color (red, amber, white)*.* Spring wheat is cultivated in early winters (November) and harvested in summers (April-May) in Asia, Africa, and lower latitudes. As compared to spring wheat, winter wheat which is cultivated in October and harvested in May-June in Europe, North America, China, and higher latitudes.

Wheat is a C-3 plant and needs a cool environment to initiate vegetative growth. It is planted in Rabi season, as compared to other cereal crops (maize and rice) which are planted in kharif season. The development of wheat plants is divided into different growth stages. Physiology and morphology of these stages have significant positive impact on eventual grain yield. The brief description of these morphological stages is described below.

#### <span id="page-33-0"></span>*1.5.1. Wheat growth stages*

[Hanft and Wych, \(1982\)](file:///C:/Users/Dr.Umar/Downloads/Thesis%20txt%202.docx%23_ENREF_31) grouped wheat growth into four stages that are growth stage E (germination to emergence), growth stage 1 (tillering, stem elongation), growth stage 2 (stem elongation to booting to heading), and growth stage 3 (anthesis to grain filling to physiological maturity). The duration of these stages are dependent upon the genotype as well as environmental conditions.

 The life of a wheat plant starts with the imbibition of seeds. After imbibition, the seed is sprouted with the emergence of radicle and coleoptile. Seminal roots develop from radicle, while coleoptile elongates to form first leaf. The emergence of first leaf determines the start of the seedling stage. The second crown tiller emerges from the auxiliary bud of the primary tiller. Tiller formation marks the end of seedling stage and start of growth stage 1. Tiller formation is one of the most important yield determining stages of wheat developmental phases, as it has a significant impact on plant yield. Tiller formation in general lasts for 10-20 days after emergence. Production of new leaves in addition to halt in production of new tillers marks the end of tillering stage. Now the plant enters into growth stage 2 in which development of sexual organs occurs for eventual reproductive stage. Internode of each tiller is elongated to form a stem. Booting

is initiated with the development of the head inside the sheath of the flag leaf. The head emerges from the flag leaf after 10-20 days of booting. Just after the heading (2-5 days), anthesis is initiated. Wheat plants are often self-pollinated. After fertilization and initial cellular divisions, endosperm cells and amyloplasts are formed. The initial phase just after fertilization is called as the lag phase. After the lag phase grain filling is initiated and lasts for about 20-30 days. The first phase of filling is known as milky or water ripe phase. In this phase endosperm is developed and storage of starch and protein is initiated. Then comes dough developmental phase, linear grain growth and starch deposition in the endosperm is continued (Jones *et al.,* 1985). This is the stage of grain development where it gains most of its weight and all the food/vitamins stored during vegetative phase are translocated to seeds. At physiological maturity, the seed dough loses the water and gets hardened and final grain weight is achieved. This phase is called the ripening phase, which has a direct impact on eventual yield of the crop.



#### <span id="page-34-1"></span>*Table 1.1. Life cycle of spring wheat in Pakistan*

#### <span id="page-34-0"></span>*1.5.2. Wheat yield and related traits*

Wheat crop is preferred over other Rabi crops due to its high agronomic adaptability, crop yield, and production of palatable foods adapted to different cultures of the world. Stable increase in wheat production to meet our global food demands, is one of the major goals of wheat breeders in this century. Crop yield is the annual rate of return of the crop. Breeders have tried to increase the grain yield per unit area since the origin of agriculture. To date, yield is the target of all breeding programs. Crop yield is a quantitative trait which is significantly influenced by environmental factors. Combinations of different morphological, physiological, anatomical, and genetic traits influence the eventual yield. To improve crop yield we should understand and dissect these traits (Gupta *et al*., 2008). The extent of divergence of grain yield is explained by the following equation.

### $GY(unit\ area) = No.$  of plants (per unit area) X Tiller Number X SPS X KW

Where, *GY*= grain yield; SpS=spikelet per spike; KW= kernel weight.

Each phase of plant growth has an eventual impact on different component of grain yield (Figure 1.4).



<span id="page-35-1"></span>*Figure 1.4. Wheat development stages along with the associated yield components at each developmental stage (Khadka et al., 2020).* 

#### <span id="page-35-0"></span>**1.6. Factors affecting wheat yield**

Wheat, the largest cultivated cereal in different agro-ecological zones, is affected by numerous biotic and abiotic stresses during its life cycle.
## *1.6.1. Biotic factors*

The biotic factors that influence crop yield include microbes (bacteria, fungi, and viruses), pests (insects and birds), and weeds. In the recent decade, crop breeders and researchers are exploring genetic resources for stress resistance. This approach is more effective in a way that it is environmental friendly and economical compared to the conservation agriculture approach that uses pesticides which have more input cost and deteriorate the environment (Table 1.2).



## *Table 1.2. List of biotic factors and causal agents that influences wheat yield*

## *1.6.2. Abiotic factors*

Abiotic factors that affects crop yield includes resources (water, light, carbondioxide, nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K), stressor (salinity, soil PH, temperature and flood), and xenobiotic factors (air pollutants, organic and inorganic toxins) (Figure 1.5). Water is a major limiting factor; approximately 25% of the total agriculture land is affected by water deficit due to irregular patterns in rainfall. Drought stress limits crop production more than any other abiotic factor by influencing growth and development of plants (Shao *et al*., 2009; Rad *et al.*, 2012). Water deficit induces early senescence, resulting in yield losses [\(Farooq](#page-208-0) *et al*., 2009; Praba *et al.*, 2009; Ji *et al*., 2010; Sarto *et al.,* 2017). The prolonged exposure to high light intensity can also decline wheat yield by reducing grain filling duration (Abhinandan *et al.*, 2018). The macronutrients that include NPK frequently applied as fertilizers play a vital role in plant growth and development (Kulcheski *et al*., 2015). Approximately, 40% of the irrigated area under wheat cultivation is affected by heat stress (Reynolds *et al*., 2001). Wheat yield declined by 6% with 1℃ rise in temperature above 15℃ (Asseng *et al.,* 2013). High temperature stress results in oxidative damage, which results in early leaf senescence and decrease in crop yield (Sairam *et al*., 2000; Wilkinson and Davies, 2002; Dias and Lidon, 2009). Due to anthropogenic activities, almost 20% of the agricultural land has been affected by salinity stress (Shrivastava and Kumar, 2015). The rapid industrialization has resulted in an increase in xenobiotics including air pollutants, organic, and inorganic toxins, which negatively influences quality and quantity of grain harvest. Grain yield improvement under reduced land and water resources and adverse environmental conditions is a daunting task.

## **1.7. Mechanisms of biotic and abiotic stress tolerance**

Plants have evolved different intricate morphological, physiological, and anatomical mechanisms to manage the harmful effects of environmental stresses. Some



# *Figure 1.5. Abiotic factors influencing growth and development of wheat (Source: Willey, 2015)*

plants exhibit stress tolerance, whereas others display avoidance mechanism (Peleg and Blumwald, [2011;](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00299-017-2119-y#ref-CR80) Mickelbart *et al*., [2015\)](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00299-017-2119-y#ref-CR68). The plant's stress responses are regulated at different organization levels. Cellular level responses include membrane system adjustments, cell wall structural modifications, cell cycle alteration, and low molecular weight molecules like abscisic acid, jasmonic acid, salicylic acid, and ethylene synthesis (Fujita *et al*., 2006; Onaga and Wydra, 2016). Genomic level plant responses included altered expression of stress induced genes, which are involved in protecting plants against stresses. These genes can be divided into two categories, first group consist of genes encoding membrane osmolyte synthesis enzymes, antioxidant enzyme (superoxide dismutase, glutathione transferases, dehydrins), membrane proteins, and macromolecular protection proteins such as chaperons and LEA protein and second group included genes that encodes transcription factors, signal-transduction proteinases, protein kinases, and

receptor and ribosomal protein kinases (Dos Reis *et al*., 2012). The altered accumulation of phenolic compounds, terpenoids, flavonoids, alkaloids, and isoflavonoids are also involved in stress responses (Akula and Ravishankar, 2011). At the morphological level, evolution of stress avoidance mechanism allowed plants to escape the negative impacts of environmental stresses by reducing plant vegetative growth, early heading, and premature senescence [\(Cramer](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpls.2020.00879/full#B12) *et al*., 2011; [Maggio](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpls.2020.00879/full#B58) *et al*., 2018). However, premature senescence results in significant yield losses. During the last decade, plant breeding and genetic engineering approaches have been deployed to overcome yield reduction caused by stresses, only a few studies have been successful. One of the novel attributes that grabbed the attention of crop breeders is delayed senescence. Genotypes displaying delayed senescence/ stay-green phenotype can tolerate biotic as well as abiotic stresses and can be used as a potential source of genetic improvement in important cereal crops (Kassahun *et al*., 2010; Luche *et al*., 2015; Abdelrehman *et al*., 2017). Stay-green trait has been linked with better performance in sorghum, rice, maize, and wheat under heat, drought, and spot blotch infection (Joshi *et al*., 2007; Borrell *et al*., 2014; Kumari *et al*., 2007).

#### **1.8. Stay-green**

The term stay-green is relatively new in origin, the first record found in a publication —Investigation into the cultivation and processing of 5 broad bean varieties" by Steinbuch and coworkers in 1962 (Thomas and Ougham, 2014). Stay-green referred to cultivars, mutants, or transgenic plants with a trait of heritable prolonged foliar greenness during terminal grain filling duration or delayed senescence compared with wild type or reference genotypes (Thomas and Ougham, 2014; Thomas and Smart, 1993). They can be classified into functional stay-green type or non-functional stay-green type (Thomas and Smart, 1993; Park *et al*., 2007; Thomas and Ougham, 2014). In the functional staygreen, retention of chlorophyll is associated with increased photosynthesis and the supply of assimilated carbon is maintained during the grain filling stage, thus confirming the maximum mass per grain. Senescence syndrome progresses unhurriedly by delaying canopy development from carbon capture to nitrogen mobilization. There are two types of functional stay-green, type A and type B. In type A plants, senescence is initiated late, whereas in type B senescence initiation is on time but the progression of senescence is delayed. In non-functional stay-green retention of chlorophyll does not couple with increase in the photosynthetic capacity of the plant, thus has no impact on yield improvement. Non-functional stay-green plants can be divided into type C, type D, and type E. Type C refers to a cosmetic type, in which the chlorophyll degradation pathway is impaired, whereas the rest of the senescence event proceeds at normal rate. Type D also called as pseudo-stay green, dies before the completion of senescence and appears green. Type E called hyper green has higher accumulation of chlorophyll, so during senescence it will take longer to degrade chlorophyll (Hortensteiner, 2009; Thomas and Howarth, 2000) (Figure 1.6). The features that determine stay-green include duration of senescence, rate of senescence, and chlorophyll content at anthesis (Harris *et al*., 2007).



# *Figure 1.6. Classification of stay-green genotypes (Source: Thomas and Howarth, 2000, Ho¨rtensteiner, 2009).*

Senescence is the programmed final developmental stage of a plant that results in progressive loss of green leaf area (Nood´en, 1988). Senescence initiates during development in response to abiotic factors (drought, inadequate nutrition, high or low temperature, oxidative stress, shade and ozone) and biotic factors (like pathogen attack). Senescence is regulated by different pathways. Under stress different hormones are

regulated in plants. The hormones involved in the senescence process include cytokinin, ethylene, abscisic acid, jasmonic acid, brassinosteroids, and gibberellins. Ethylene, abscisic acid, and jasmonic acid are linked to a common pathway during senescence. A transcription factor ORE9 is up-regulated by the hormones and ORE9 disrupts an unknown protein that results in leaf senescence. The *Arabidopsis* mutant ORE9 showed delayed senescence when treated with ethylene, abscisic acid and jasmonic acid (Woo *et al*., 2001). High cytokinin levels delays the phenomena of senescence, whereas low cytokinin levels lead to early senescence (Masferrer *et al*., 2002). A homeobox gene Knotted 1 controlled by a promoter of the senescence-associated gene SAG12, expression in plants can increase chlorophyll and cytokinin levels that delays senescence (Buchanan– Wollaston *et al*., 2003). A senescent leaf when treated with cytokinin can reactivates proteins and chlorophyll synthesis, and retains photosynthesis (Howarth, 2000; Zavaleta-Mancera *et al*., 1999). Cytokinin delays leaf senescence by inducing the expression of extracellular invertase that synthesizes hexose monomers from sucrose in the apoplastic pathway which are then supplied to sink tissues (Lara *et al*., 2004). Gibberellins also delay leaf senescence (Gibson, 2005). Brassinosteroid enhances the process senescence (Yin *et al*., 2002). Over expression of an acyl hydrolase encoding SAG101 gene induces leaf senescence (Yoshida, 2003) (Figure 1.7).

The key events that occur during senescence are the degradation of chlorophyll and disruption of photosynthetic apparatus that results in decrease in photosynthetic efficiency (Weng *et al*., 2005; Zhang *et al*., 2006). Chlorophyll catabolism is a multistep process that converts chlorophyll to non-fluorescent chlorophyll catabolites (NFCC). The process involves six chlorophyll catabolic enzymes, metal chelator, and transport system that delivers chlorophyll catabolic product to vacuole. The steps involved in chlorophyll degradation includes: conversion of chlorophyll b (Chl b) to 7-hydroxymethyl chlorophyll *a* (HMChl a) in the presence of Chl b reductase. HMChl a is then converted to chlorophyll a (Chl a) by HMChl a reductase. Chlorophyll a degrades to pheophorbide *a* (Pheide *a*) by pheophytinase, which breaks phytol side chain by removing the central magnesium atom. Pheide *a is* catalyse to form the primary fluorescent chlorophyll catabolite (PFCC) by pheide *a* oxygenase and red chlorophyll catabolite reductase. PFCC present in chloroplast is then transferred to vacuole, where it



is converted to NFCC because of the vacuolar acidic pH [\(Hortensteiner and Krautler,](#page-208-1)  [2011\)](#page-208-1) (Figure 1.8).

*Figure 1.7. Leaf senescence pathway* 



*Figure 1.8. Chlorophyll degradation pathway* 

# *1.8.1. Phenomics of the stay-green trait*

Variability in the duration and progression of senescence during terminal grain filling period can be used to measure the stay-green trait. Historically, phenotyping of the

stay-green trait relied on visual scoring (Thomas and Smart, 1993). Stay-green trait scored on 1 to 5 scale (Reddy *et al*., 2007), 0 to 9 scale (Joshi *et al*., 2007) or 1 to 10 scale (Silva *et al*., 2001) for both flag leaf and spike on the basis of visual greenness at the late grain filling stage. The difference between the flag leaf score and spike score was used to characterize the genotypes into different groups, stay-green (3-6), moderately stay-green (2-3), moderately non-stay-green (1-2), and non-stay-green (0-1). Till 2010, most of the studies refer stay-green for leaf greenness despite the fact that other organs such as stem and spike also contribute to plant total photosynthesis. Spike captures approximately 20% of carbon dioxide absorbed by flag leaf in wheat (Teare *et al*., 1972). Spikes contribute to grain yield improvement and the yield can be increased up to 70% in wheat and barley under stress conditions (Thorne, 1963; Biscoe *et al*., 1973; Araus *et al*., 1993; Maydup *et al*., 2010). Accurate non-destructive method periodic Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) measurements by Greenseeker proposed by Christopher and colleagues to study the stay-green trait under field conditions estimate stay-green from the entire plant canopy. The information was used to calculate time from anthesis to senescence onset , mid senescence, near complete senescence, maximum NDVI level, rate of senescence, and green leaf area duration (Christopher *et al*., 2014). Recently, a High Resolution Plant Phenomics Centre at Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization has developed a portable Phenomobile consisting of Greenseeker to measure NDVI together with Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) to detect the canopy green biomass and leaf area (Deery *et al*., 2014). Satellite based remote spectral imaging has been deployed in modeling vegetation indices (Bauerle *et al*., 2012) that can be used to identify or design the genotypes better adapted to changing environments. Agronomics evaluation of the stay-green trait showed its positive correlation with yield (Duvick *et al*., 2004; Pinto *et al*., 2016).

## *1.8.2. Physiology behind the stay-green trait*

 The physiology behind the stay-green phenotype is not yet clear. Thomas and Smart consider plants as stay-green, if they have higher water and chlorophyll content at maturity (Thomas and Smart, 1993). It is hypothesized that nitrogen and water management are associated with the stay-green trait. It has been elucidated that a balance

between nitrogen demand by the grain and nitrogen supply during grain filling leads to the expression of stay-green trait (Borrell *et al*., 2001; Borrell and Hammer, 2000). In sorghum, the stay-green trait was found to be associated with higher leaf nitrogen (Borrell *et al*., 2001). Addition of nitrogen fertilizer can delay leaf senescence and maintain the rate of photosynthesis (Zhang *et al*., 1997; Mi *et al*., 2007). Stay-green phenotype can be the result of improved water management by plant (Hammer, 2006). The plant having an active green leaf during terminal development phases requires access to water. So, the stay-green genotypes minimize or optimize the water use (Kholová *et al*., 2010b) or have a deeper root system to extract maximum water (Vadez *et al*., 2007). Plants can retain more water by reducing leaf area or conductance of the canopy (Kholová *et al*., 2010a; Kholová *et al*., 2010b). Reduced leaf area at anthesis results in stay-green phenotype by reducing the water losses (Hammer, 2006). It has been suggested that the stay-green can be the result of high water use efficiency (Van Oosterom *et al*., 2006).

## *1.8.3. Genomics of the stay-green trait*

 Stay-green genotype results by the disruption in the normal phenomena of senescence. Genes which are regulated during senescence are called senescence associated genes (SAGs) (Lim *et al*[., 2003\)](#page-188-0). Microarray studies elucidated large changes in gene expression in adult *Arabidopsis thaliana* during senescence (Buchanan-Wollaston *et al*., 2005; van der Graaff *et al*., 2006; Wagstaff *et al*., 2009). [Gepstein](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Gepstein%20S%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=14617064) and coworkers confirmed the differential expression of 130 non-redundant genes by Northern blot analysis (Gepstein *et al*., 2003). Buchanan-Wollaston in 2005 revealed around 800 SAGs concomitant with the dramatic change in physiology accompanying the program cell death (PCD) process (Buchanan-Wollaston *et al*., 2005). The Leaf Senescence Database (LSD) was developed that initially included 1145 SAGs from 21 species (Liu *et al*., 2010). More recently, Leaf Senescence Database 2 (LSD2), an extension of LSD contains 5356 SAGs from 44 species (Li *et al*., 2014). Genes involved in the chlorophyll degradation pathway have been studied extensively to demonstrate their role in the staygreen trait. Chlorophyll degradation begins with the conversion of chlorophyll b to 7 hydroxymethyl chlorophyll a, the gene involved is non-yellow color 1 or non-yellow

color one like (NOL). Non yellow coloring 1 (NYC1) mutants retain their chlorophyll content during senescence induced by dark (Kusaba *et al*., 2007). Non yellow coloring 3 (NYC3) mutant in rice also retains higher chlorophyll a and chlorophyll b concentration, but other senescence parameters proceed at normal rate suggesting it a non-functional stay-green mutant (Morita *et al*., 2009). 7-hydroxymethyl chlorophyll a is converted to chlorophyll a using 7-hydroxymethyl chlorophyll a reductase (HMCR) (Meguro *et al*., 2011). A complex stay-green gene, chlorophyll catabolic enzyme gene and light harvesting complex (SGR-CCE-LHCII) is formed by interaction between SGR and CCEs in LHCII. It is a dilemma whether HMCR is a component of SGR-CCE-LHCII. Staygreen rice gene (SGR) mutants were used to identify SGR gene in rice that encodes a unique chloroplast protein that is responsible for foliar greenness during senescence. The SGR mutants maintain a stay-green trait because of non-disruption of light-harvesting chlorophyll binding protein (LHCP) complexes. The SGR interacts with LHCPII, forming SGR-LHCPII complexes in the thylakoid membrane. Over expression of SGR regulates chlorophyll degradation by inducing LHCPII disassembly (Park *et al*., 2007). Chlorophyll a is converted to pheophorbide a oxygenase via chlorophyllide and pheophytin using chlorophyllide a oxygenase (CaO), and pheophytinase (PPH) or accelerated cell death 1 (ACD1) genes. Overexpressing the CaO gene has been reported to photosynthesize for a longer duration and retain a larger biomass (Biswal *et al*., 2012). Mutants deficient with PPH exhibit a stay-green phenotype and ACD1 inhibition led to photo-oxidative damage of the cell (Tanaka *et al*., 2003). *Arabidopsis* mutant deficient in PPH exhibits stay-green phenotype because of non-disruption of chlorophyll during senescence (Schelbert *et al*., 2009). Pheophorbide converts to red chlorophyll catabolite; the gene involved is pheophorbide a oxygenase (PaO). The gene SGR like PaO was upregulated during dark-induced senescence. The expression of SGR and PaO was enhanced by abscisic acid (ABA) and inhibited by cytokinin. SGR over expression resulted in decrease in the number of lamellae in the grana thylakoids that caused decline in chlorophyll content. In the SGR mutants, Pheophorbide a was also detected that propose a possible role of SGR in the regulation of PaO. In *Pisum sativum* and *Festuca pratensis*, the stay-green phenotype was induced by the disruption of PaO (Vicentini *et al*., 1995). Red chlorophyll catabolite converts to primary fluorescence chlorophyll

catabolite (pfCC), the gene involved is accelerated cell death 2 (ACD2) (Wüthrich *et al*., 2000). A cytoplasmic gene (cytG), two recessive alleles d1 and d2 and a dominant G is responsible for greenness in foliages, pod walls, seed coats and embryos [\(Guiamét](#page-210-0) *et al*., [1990\)](#page-210-0). CytG is responsible for stability of chlorophyll b by hindering its conversion to chlorophyll a (Guiamet *et al*., 1991). During senescence, d1d2 homozygote delays soluble protein degradation (Guiamet and Giannibelli, 1996). The marker genes for senescence RuBisCO (RBCS) and Chlorophyll a/b binding protein (CAB) can elucidate the stay-green trait by detecting whether photosynthetic machinery is intact or disrupted (Rampino *et al*., 2006). Genes associated with the stay-green trait are listed in the Table 1.3

## *1.8.4. Quantitative trait loci studies for the stay-green trait*

The genetic basis behind the stay-green trait has been explored in numerous plant species by employing Quantitative Trait Loci (QTL) mapping approach. In *Festuca pratensis*, genetic analysis of the non-yellow mutant using Amplified Fragment Length Polymorphism (AFLP) markers revealed that stay-green trait was control by a single recessive nuclear allele referred to as Senescence-Induced-Deficiency (SID) (Thomas, 1987; Thomas *et al*., 1997). In the Lolium population, leaf senescence was associated with six QTLs (Thorogood *et al*., 1999). Early senescence gene was mapped on chromosome number 4 in *Arabidopsis* (Nakamura *et al*., 2000).

In sorghum, three QTLs stg1, stg2, and stg3 were detected using Restriction Fragment Length Polymorphism (RFLP) markers. These regions included genes for key photosynthetic enzymes, heat shock protein, and abscisic acid responsive gene (Xu *et al.*, 2000). Successful introgression of the stay-green QTLs stg1, stg3, stg4, and SZtgb via marker-assisted backcrossing from B35 sorghum line to R16 synchronized line raised drought stress tolerance capacity in the introgression lines produced [\(Kassahun](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0103-84782015001001755#B20) *et al*., [2010\)](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0103-84782015001001755#B20).

# *Table 1.3. List of genes identified for stay-green trait*



In maize, QTL mapping revealed 14 loci concomitant with stay-green and kernel yield traits [\(Zheng](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0103-84782015001001755#B40) *et al*., 2009).

Cha and co-workers mapped a gene sgr between RG662 and C985 markers on chromosome 9 using RFLP markers in glutinous *japonica* rice Hwacheong-*wx* mutant. The mutant showed delayed yellowing but photosynthetic activity was similar to that of the non-stay-green plants. Thus, the mutation only affects the chlorophyll degradation pathway (Cha *et al.*, 2002). A functional stay-green japonica rice -SNU-SG1" was crossed with two regular lines (M23 and Ilpum) to develop F2 and RIL populations for the identification of QTLs responsible for stay green trait. Three QTLs, dcfs7, dcf9, and dcfs9 were detected on chromosome number 7 and 9 in both populations for the staygreen trait (Yoo *et al*., 2007). In rice, four QTLs tcs4, csfl6, csfl9 and csfl12 linked with the stay-green trait were identified on chromosome 4, 6, 9, and 12 respectively in two RIL populations by a cross between Suweon490 and SNU-SG1 and Andabyeo and SNU-SG1. The stay-green QTLs that include *Csfl6* and *Tcs9* co-localized with grain yield QTLs (*Yld6* and *Yld9*), thus strengthening the link between stay-green attribute and high productivity (Fu *et al.*, 2011).

In barley, the stay-green trait was associated with nine QTLs. Of the nine QTLs one QTL was found consistent in all environments, indicative of a simple genetic mechanism controlling the stay-green trait [\(Emebiri, 2013\)](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0103-84782015001001755#B13).

In wheat stay-green -Chirya" and non-stay-green -Sonalika" derived population used for QTL mapping identified three QTLs on chromosome number 1AS, 3BS, and 7DS associated with the stay-green trait (Kumar *et al*., 2010). Another QTL study for the stay-green trait in wheat detected 44 loci associated with stay-green and related traits. The stable QTLs with more repeatable effect were detected on chromosome 2A, 4A, 1B, 2B, 4B, and 7D. Co-location of the stay-green trait QTLs and performance traits QTLs confirmed that the stay-green attribute is an important adaptive trait under non-stress and heat stress environments (Pinto *et al*., 2016).

## *1.8.5. Transcriptomics studies for senescence and stay-green trait*

Approximately, 200 transcription factors that differentially express during leaf senescence includes APETALA2, basic-leucine zipper, WRKY, NAC, two MYB transcription factors (MYBa and MYBb), PTF1 (Pi starvation-induced transcription factor 1), GLK1 (Golden-like 1) and an F-box protein, zinc finger, and GRAS families (Buchanan-Wollaston *et al*., 2005). Over expression of WRKY6 transcription factor results in necrosis. It activates the promoter of Senescence-Induced Receptor Kinase1in senescent leaves (Robatzek and Somssich, 2002). High expression of WRKY53 also results in premature senescence, however the WRKY53 mutants revealed stay-green phenotype (Miao *et al*[., 2004\)](#page-218-0). Expressed sequence tags (EST) database revealed the role of 20 NAC transcription factors during senescence (Guo *et al*[., 2004\)](#page-205-0). ORESARA1 (ORE1 or ANAC092) is a NAC transcription factor that triggers age regulated cell death. The accumulation of ORE1 is prevented by miRNA164 in young leaves but during aging the down regulation of miRNA164 results in up-regulation of ORE1 expression [\(Kim](#page-209-0) *et al*[., 2009\)](#page-209-0). NAP (activated by AP3/PI), NAC family transcription factor promotes premature senescence (Guo and Gan, 2006). ORE1 SISTER1/ANAC059 is a NAC transcription factor that positively regulates leaf senescence (Balazadeh *et al*., 2011). ORE9 is an F-box protein and it is suggested that over expression of ORE9 promotes leaf senescence as mutants that lack ORE9 delays leaf senescence (Woo *et al*., 2001). F box proteins are components of SCF-type E3 complexes that function as ubiquitin ligase (Lechner *et al*., 2006). ORE9 interacts with core SCF subunits (Stirnberg *et al*., 2007). The ATE1 (arginyl- tRNA:protein arginyltransferase) part of the ubiquitin-dependent proteolytic system, is a positive regulator of senescence (Yoshida *et al*., 2002). The ring type ubiquitin ligase and the plant U-box E3 ubiquitin ligase Senescence-Associated Ubiquitin Ligase1 (SAUL1) negatively regulates leaf senescence (Peng *et al*., 2007). SAUL1 mutant that lacks the expression of SAUL1 gene positively regulates senescence under low light conditions (Raab *et al*., 2009). NLA mutation results in early senescence under nitrogen limiting conditions (Peng *et al*., 2007) (Table 1.4).

<b>TF</b> family	Gene	<b>Effect</b>	Reference		
WRKY	WRKY6	<b>NSG</b>	Robatzek and Somssich., 2002		
	WRKY30	<b>NSG</b>	Besseau et al., 2012		
	WRKY53	<b>NSG</b>	Miao et al., 2004		
	WRKY54	SG	Besseau et al., 2012		
	WRKY57	SG	Jiang et al., 2014		
	WRKY70	SG	Besseau et al., 2012		
	ORE1 SISTER1	<b>NSG</b>	Balazadeh et al., 2011		
	NAM-B1	<b>NSG</b>	Uauy et al., 2006		
	ANAC019	<b>NSG</b>	Hickman et al., 2013		
<b>NAC</b>	ANAC055	<b>NSG</b>	Hickman et al., 2013		
	OsNAP	<b>NSG</b>	Zhou et al., 2013; Liang et al., 2014		
	VNI <sub>2</sub>	SG	Yang et al., 2011		
	JUB1a	SG	Wu et al., 2012		
homeodomain	KNAT2	SG	Hamant et al., 2002		
<b>GARP</b>	GLK <sub>2</sub>	SG	Rauf et al., 2013		
<b>GBF</b>	GBF1	<b>NSG</b>	Smykowski et al., 2010		
	NtERF3	<b>NSG</b>	Koyama et al., 2013		
	AtERF4	<b>NSG</b>	Koyama et al., 2013		
	AtERF8	<b>NSG</b>	Koyama et al., 2013		
	SIERF36	<b>NSG</b>	Upadhyay et al., 2013		
	RAV <sub>1</sub>	<b>NSG</b>	Woo et al., 2010		
AP2/ERF	GmRAV	<b>NSG</b>	Zhao et al., 2008		
	EDF1	SG	Chen et al., 2011		
	EDF <sub>2</sub>	SG	Chen et al., 2011		
	SUB <sub>1</sub> A	SG	Fukao et al., 2012		
	CBF <sub>2</sub>	SG	Sharabi-Schwager et al., 2010		
	CBF3	SG	Sharabi-Schwager et al., 2010		
	CRF <sub>6</sub>	SG	Zwack et al., 2013		
	TCP <sub>2</sub>	<b>NSG</b>	Schommer et al., 2008		
	TCP3	<b>NSG</b>	Schommer et al., 2008; Koyama et al., 2013		
	TCP4	<b>NSG</b>	Schommer et al., 2008		
<b>TCP</b>	TCP5	<b>NSG</b>	Koyama et al., 2013		
	TCP10	<b>NSG</b>	Schommer et al., 2008; Koyama et al., 2013		
	TCP13	<b>NSG</b>	Koyama et al., 2013		
	TCP19	SG	Danisman et al., 2012		

*Table 1.4. List of Transcription factors (TF) associated with the stay-green trait* 



## *1.8.6. Proteomics studies for senescence and stay-green trait*

More than 9000 different proteins were identified in barley in early and late senescence lines. Proteins that were up-regulated in early senescent line were related to pathogenesis, intracellular receptors or co-receptors, membrane receptors or co-receptors, pathogen cell walls attacking enzymes (glucanases), cuticle modifying enzyme and DNA repair enzymes (Mason *et al*., 2016). The F box protein coronatine-insensitive 1 is a key regulator in jasmonic acid dependent pathways. In *Arabidopsis*, 35 coronatine-insensitive 1 dependent proteins regulated by jasmonic acid were identified. Rubisco activase, a COI1-dependent JA-repressed protein is down-regulated during leaf senescence (Shan *et al*., 2011). Senescence progression is accompanied by disruption of chlorophyll and decrease in photosynthesis related proteins (Bate *et al*., 1991). In chloroplast the proteolysis begins during early senescence. Plastidial peptide hydrolases are involved in degradation of rubisco and stromal enzymes in chloroplast. Cysteine proteases are also expressed during senescence but their role in chloroplast degradation is not clear yet (Hörtensteiner and Feller, 2002).

## *1.8.7. Metabolomics studies of the stay-green trait*

 Till date, stay-green trait has not been explored at metabolic level. The mutants showed that impairing chlorophyll synthesis can result in early senescence because of the accumulation of phototoxic intermediates (Tanaka and Tanaka, 2007, Mochizuki *et al*.,

2010). The biosynthetic pathways of plant secondary metabolites can abet in elucidating the complex metabolic reactions occurring during chlorophyll degradation (Jørgensen *et al*., 2005), which might contribute towards our understanding of the metabolic pathways underlining the stay-green trait.

## *1.8.8. Phytohormones studies of the stay-green trait*

 Alteration in the phytohormone metabolism and signaling can result in stay green phenotype, particularly networks involving cytokinins and ethylene (Woo *et al*., 2001; Yan *et al*., 2007). Cytokinin prevents leaf senescence but once senescence is initiated it can't halt the process (Weaver *et al*., 1998). Cytokinin biosynthesis gene Isopentyl transferase (IPT) under the control of SAG12 promotor was expressed in *Agrobacterium*  and tobacco plants were produce with delayed leaf senescence (Gan and Amasino, 1995). It is found in transgenic tobacco that the over expression of isopentenyl transferase, an enzyme for cytokinin biosynthesis, results in increase in chlorophyll and cytokinin levels and delay leaf senescence (Ori *et al*., 1999). In wheat the expression of *pSAG12-IPT* slows the process of senescence but grain yield was not enhanced (Sykorova *et al.*, 2008). When senescence-associated receptor-like kinase (SARK) promoter was used, IPT expression in tobacco increased cytokinin in leaves. There was no effect on the phenotype of plants under normal conditions but leaf senescence was prevented in the plant under drought stress with dramatic grain yield improvement (Rivero *et al*., 2007). Mutations in cytokinin receptors such as AKH3 can cause reduced chlorophyll content in the leaf (Riefler *et al*., 2006). Many genes associated with ethylene biosynthesis are upregulated during senescence (van der Graaff *et al*., 2006). The MKK9-MPK3/MPK6 signaling cascade has a role in ethylene signaling. Therefore it is possible that it regulates ethylene dependent leaf senescence (Zhou *et al*., 2009). A mutant *ore9-1* showed delayed senescence in response to downstream signaling of MeJA, ethylene and abscissic acid (ABA) (Woo *et al*., 2001). ABA dependent receptor kinase (RPK1) overexpression results in early senescence whereas mutation in these RKP1 delays senescence [\(Lee](#page-203-0) *et al*[., 2011\)](#page-203-0). ABA effects age dependent senescence, it make the senescence process faster once it has been started. ABA cannot induce senescence in premature plants [\(Lee](#page-203-0) *et al*., [2011;](#page-203-0) Weaver *et al*., 1998). ABA under low nitrogen condition can promote biosynthesis

of chlorophyll and inhabit chlorophyll degradation (Oka *et al*[., 2012\)](#page-220-0). E3 ubiquitin ligase SAUL1 mutant showed early senescence and resulted in increased ABA levels under low light conditions (Raab *et al*., 2009). This increase in ABA was due to the over expression of ABA biosynthesis gene AAO3. Mutation in *auxin response factor 2(arf2)* results in delayed senescence (Ellis *et al*., 2005). Over expression of YUCCA6, an auxin biosynthesis gene delayed the phenomena of senescence (van der Graaff *et al*., 2006). Jasmonic acid (JA) biosynthesis genes up regulate in response to age dependent senescence (van der Graaff *et al*., 2006). A transcription factor OsDOS in rice is a JA related negative regulator of leaf senescence (Kong *et al*[., 2006\)](#page-191-0). JA dependent Rubisco activase in *Arabidopsis* also found to be negative regulator of senescence (Shan *et al*., 2011). Mutation in histone deacetylase gene (*HDA6),* the gene involves in the expression of JA response genes results in delayed senescence (Wu *et al*., 2008). Mutants deficient in Salicyclic acid (SA) degraded chlorophyll at a normal rate but the photosystem II remain functional thus maintain photosynthesis for longer duration (Abreu and Munne-Bosch, 2009). The genes associated with SA and senescence are specific for natural senescence (Buchanan-Wollaston *et al*., 2005; van der Graaff *et al*., 2006).

#### *1.8.9. Stay-green trait under abiotic stresses*

 Increase temperature and irradiance promotes the production of reactive oxygen species (ROS). This results in cell damage and hasten the loss of foliar greenness [\(Christiansen, 1978;](#page-192-0) McDonald and Vanlerberghe, 2004). In stay-green genotypes, the negative impact of heat stress is coped by minimized the generation of ROS. The plant pigments such as xanthophylls and carotenes protect the chloroplast and photosynthetic apparatus by dissipating excessive radiant energy (Zhao and Tan, 2005; Suzuki and Mittler, 2006). The detail mechanism behind the stay-green trait under stress has not yet been explored. However, the stay-green has been associated with yield improvement under abiotic stresses.

## **1.9. Conclusion and Future Perspectives**

Stay-green trait has been studied in monocots very extensively. A functional type stay-green in sorghum, rice, maize, and wheat revealed a direct relationship of stay-green trait with grain yield (Borrell and Hammer, 2000; Spano, 2003; Yoo *et al*., 2007; Fu and Lee, 2008; Echarte *et al*., 2008). In wheat stay-green trait was found to influence the grain yield and biomass up to 25.7% under field conditions (Chen *et al*., 2010; Luo *et al*., 2006). A stay-green hybrid winter wheat XN901 also showed a positive significant correlation with grain yield, grain yield improves by 15% with six days increase in grain filling duration (Gong *et al*., 2005).

Stay-green occupies central position under changing climate by showing tolerance to heat and drought stress. In cereal crops such as sorghum, rice and wheat, the QTLs studies under high temperature and drought stress unveil QTLs for stay-green trait and performance traits at the same location confirming that the stay-green phenotype is associated with productivity augmentation.

Understanding the mechanism behind functional stay-green trait that is associated with improved photosynthetic efficiency can be a key component to boost yield particularly under adverse environmental conditions. The trait needs to be explored in different crops under different environmental conditions to harness the advantage in grain yield, quality, and tolerance to biotic and abiotic stresses. The stay-green trait may provide the breeder with a solution to major stresses and yield improvement.

## **1.10. Aims and objectives of the study**

The general aim of the present study was to evaluate the stay-green trait in historical bread wheat panel, identify quantitative trait loci associated with the stay-green trait, access the stay-green trait under terminal heat stress, determine expression profiles of the stay-green trait related genes, and reveal comprehensive array of metabolites associated with stay-green trait.

Specific aims of each chapter were:

- *Chapter#2:* The objective of the study was to unravel the genetic basis behind the stay-green trait using 90K SNP array by GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU based Genome Wide Association Mapping in a diverse panel comprising landraces, green revolution, post green revolution, elite cultivars, and CIMMYT advance cultivars.
- *Chapter#3:* The study aimed to examine the association of the stay-green trait with the chlorophyll content, photochemical efficiency, normalized difference vegetative index (NDVI), canopy temperature, grain yield, biological yield, kernel weight, expression profile of chlorophyll catabolism pathway genes (CaO, SGR, and RCCR), and the photosynthetic responsive gene (Cab) in bread wheat under terminal heat stress.
- *Chapter#4:* The objective of the study was to demonstrate the differential accumulation of metabolites in the leaf tissues of non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes in control and heat stressed plants during grain filling duration using UHPLC-HRMS based untargeted global metabolomics to unveil the mechanism behind stay-green trait in relation to heat stress tolerance.

*Chapter #2* 

# *Genome-Wide Association Study of Stay-green Trait in Triticum aestivum L.*

## *Chapter #2*

## **Genome-Wide Association Study of Stay-green Trait in** *Triticum aestivum* **L.**

## **2.1. Abstract**

The global climate extremes with diminishing quality and quantity of arable land are projected to significantly reduce the global cereal production. The crop yield needs to be enhanced by 70% to meet the food requirement of the increasing global population of 9 billion by 2050. To cope with yield losses due to climatic extremes and increasing crop yield to meet future food demand, there is an urgent need for exploring sustainable strategies for yield improvement. The functional stay-green trait seems to be a significant adaptive mechanism that confirms maximum mass per grain by maintaining chlorophyll content, photosynthetic capacity, and supply of assimilated carbon during the terminal stages of development under adverse conditions. The genetic basis behind stay-green trait is complex and has not been fully explored in wheat. The present study aimed to parse the genetic composition of the stay-green trait in a diverse germplasm consisting of landraces, green revolution, post green revolution, elite cultivars, and CIMMYT advance cultivars using 90K SNP array by GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU based genome-wide association study (GWAS). The morpho-physiological traits including chlorophyll content, chlorophyll fluorescence, normalized difference vegetative index (NDVI), plant height, tiller number, spike length, spikelet per spike, thousand kernel weight, grain yield, and biological yield were evaluated during field experiments from 2012-2016. The staygreen indices: SPAD chlorophyll content at heading, absolute difference in the SPAD chlorophyll content, relative difference in the SPAD chlorophyll content, cumulative SPAD chlorophyll content, NDVI at heading, absolute difference in NDVI, relative difference in NDVI, cumulative NDVI were determined from chlorophyll content and NDVI measured at different time points. Analysis of variance revealed significant difference between genotypes for chlorophyll content, chlorophyll fluorescence, NDVI, plant height, tiller number, spike length, spikelet per spike, grain yield, and biological yield. Heritability of the measured traits varied between 0.427-0.73. Chlorophyll content, chlorophyll fluorescence, NDVI, and stay-green indices showed positive correlation with thousand kernel weight, grain yield, and biological yield. GWAS identified 83 highly significant marker trait associations at  $-\log(10(p)) \ge 4.3$ , scattered over 48 loci in wheat genome, for chlorophyll content, chlorophyll fluorescence, NDVI, stay-green indices, plant height, and tiller number. Of these, 20 loci identified by multiple GWAS methods were selected for gene identification to list the potential candidate genes for future studies. These 20 loci had 342 high confidence protein coding genes based on the International Wheat Genome Sequence Consortium reference assembly RefSeq v1.0. Only 36 out of 342 genes had descriptors in the reference assembly which were involved in primary mechanisms of plant growth, development, stress tolerance, flowering time control, chloroplast development, and damage tissues regeneration. The identified loci from a genetically diverse germplasm through rigorous GWAS methods provide basis for future studies to search for candidate genes underlying the stay-green trait in wheat.

#### **2.2. Introduction**

Stay-green refers to mutants, transgenic plants, or cultivars with the trait of heritable extended foliar greenness during late grain filling duration compared with wild type or reference genotype (Thomas and Stoddart, 1975; Thomas and Smart, 1993; Thomas and Howarth, 2000; Thomas and Ougham, 2014). The stay-green genotypes are classified into functional stay-green and non-functional stay-green. The functional staygreen plants are the target of plant breeders as they have the potential to delay chlorophyll degradation, retain photosynthetic activity, and increase plant productivity. The functional stay-green genotypes either delay senescence (Type-A) or delay progression of senescence (Type-B). The non-functional stay-green plants maintain chlorophyll content, but maintenance of chlorophyll content is not coupled with increase in photosynthetic activity and plant productivity. In the non-functional stay-green genotypes, chlorophyll degradation impairs with rest of the senescence events (Type-C), or plant dies before or at the mid of senescence (Type-D), or chlorophyll accumulation is higher in some genotypes compared with wild type, so chlorophyll degradation will take longer but the genotypes possess normal photosynthetic capacity (Thomas and Howarth, 2000; Jiang *et al*., 2004; Ho¨rtensteiner, 2009; Sato *et al*., 2009; Schelbert *et al*., 2009; Thomas and Ougham, 2014; Shimoda *et al*., 2016; Zhao *et al*., 2019). The functional type

stay-green maize, rice, wheat, and sorghum reveal a direct relationship of the stay-green trait with grain yield (Borrell and Hammer, 2000; Spano *et al*., 2003; Yoo *et al*., 2007; Fu and Lee, 2008; Echarte *et al*., 2008). In wheat stay-green trait was found to influence the grain yield up to 25.7% under field conditions (Luo *et al*., 2006). A stay-green hybrid winter wheat XN901 showed an increase in grain yield by 15% with 6 days increase in grain filling duration (Gong *et al*., 2005). Stay-green trait has been considered as a mechanism of tolerance to abiotic and biotic stresses (Kumari *et al*. 2007; Joshi *et al*., 2007; Borrell *et al*., 2014; Pinto *et al*., 2016; Adeyanju *et al*., 2016; George-Jaegglia *et al*., 2017; Kamal *et al*., 2018). For decades, the stay-green trait has been considered as a selection criterion for improving crop yield, as extended greenness during post-anthesis ensures maximum mass per grain. Despite of the importance of the stay-green trait in yield improvement, the genetic basis behind the stay-green trait is not yet well understood.

Historically, the phenotyping of the stay-green trait relied on a subjective visual scoring approach. The stay-green trait was scored on 1-5 scale (Reddy *et al*., 2007), 0-9 scale (Joshi *et al*., 2007; Kumar *et al*., 2010), and 1-10 scale (Silva *et al*., 2001) for both flag leaf and spike on the basis of visual greenness at the late grain filling stage. The difference between the flag leaf score and spike score and leaf area under greenness were used to characterize the genotypes into different groups, stay-green, moderately staygreen, moderately non-stay-green, and non-stay-green (Joshi *et al*., 2007). Later, the handheld SPAD meter was used for the quantification of the stay-green trait as it offers an accurate measurement of the individual flag leaf greenness. The SPAD chlorophyll values were used to calculate stay-green indexes that included rate of senescence and green leaf area at maturity (Harris *et al*., 2007). The GreenSeeker, a precise nondestructive high throughput approach has been used to measure total canopy greenness. The periodic normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) measurements from GreenSeeker were used to calculate stay-green indices that included time from anthesis to senescence onset, mid senescence, near complete senescence, maximum NDVI level, rate of senescence, and green leaf area duration (Lopes & Reynolds, 2012; Christopher *et al*., 2014; Pinto *et al*., 2016; Christopher *et al*., 2018). These approaches enabled the quantification of the stay-green trait in large number of samples used in Quantitative trait loci (QTL) mapping. In the present study both SPAD chlorophyll and NDVI values were used to calculate the stay-green indices that were flag leaf score at heading, canopy score at heading, absolute difference in the flag leaf score at heading and 30 days after heading, absolute difference in the canopy score at heading and 30 days after heading, relative difference in the flag leaf score at heading and 30 days after heading, relative difference in the canopy score at heading and 30 days after heading, cumulative SPAD score, and cumulative NDVI score (Zhao *et al*., 2019). The assessment of the stay-green trait allows identification of the loci controlling the stay-green trait which can be used as tools for marker assisted selection in plant breeding.

With the advent of high throughput phenotyping and genotyping, the molecular basis of complex trait can be elucidated by the quantitative trait loci (QTL) mapping (Langridge and Reynolds, 2015). Among QTL mapping approaches, genome-wide association study (GWAS) has a greater advantage; as GWAS offers higher QTL mapping resolution and explores all the evolutionary recombination events (Buckler and Thornsberry, 2002; Flint-Garcia *et al*., 2003; Yu and Buckler, 2006). For QTL mapping, simple sequence repeats, expressed sequence tags, restriction fragment length polymorphism, amplified fragment length polymorphism, random amplified polymorphic DNA, diversity array technique, and single nucleotide polymorphism markers have been employed. The high density single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) have been widely used (Ibrahim *et al*., 2020). General Linear Model (GLM), Mixed Linear Model (MLM), and Fixed and random model Circulating Probability Unification (FarmCPU) using PLINK, TASSEL, GAPIT, GenABEL, EMMAX, GEMMA, GCTA, and FarmCPU\_pkg packages have been used in GWAS (Purcell *et al*., 2007; Bradbury *et al*., 2007; Aulchenko *et al*., 2007; Kang *et al*., 2010; Yang *et al*., 2011; Lipka *et al*., 2012; Zhou and Stephens, 2012; Tang *et al*., 2016; Yin et al., 2021). With the increase in number of samples and SNPs in GWAS, the computational analysis using these packages has become more challenging. To improve the computational efficiency, the Memoryefficient Visualization-enhanced Parallel-accelerated (rMVP) package has been developed that effectively processes the large data-sets, efficiently estimates population structure, rapidly evaluates variance components, and implements GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU analysis methods for marker trait association (Yin *et al*., 2021).

Genetic variability for the stay-green trait has been exploited in maize, rice, wheat, soybean, oat, pea, fescue, and other plant species (Thomas and Stoddart, 1975; Thomas and Smart, 1993; Duvick *et al*., 2004; Armstead *et al*., 2006; Barry *et al*., 2008). In wheat, the QTL mapping of the stay-green trait using a recombinant inbred lines population between the stay-green Chirya-3 and the non-stay-green Sonalika under field conditions identified three QTLs (*QSg.bhu*-*1A*, *QSg.bhu*-*3B* and *QSg.bhu*-*7D)* on chromosome 1AS, 3BS and 7DS. The three stay-green QTLs explained 38.7% of the phenotypic variation (Kumar *et al.*, 2010). Shi *et al*., (2017) identified 28 QTLs for the chlorophyll content and 43 QTLs for NDVI using a high density genetic map comprising 2,575 markers under altered water regimes. Remarkably in several studies, stay-green QTLs co-localized with QTLs of other agronomics traits, this can allow the simultaneous selection of important agronomics traits in breeding. Huang *et al*., (2004) detected QTL for the stay-green trait and QTL for grains per spike on the similar region of the chromosome 3BS (Huang *et al*., 2004). Pinto *et al*., (2016) identified 44 QTLs for the stay-green trait and other important agronomic traits, some of the genomic regions associated with stay-green trait were found to have an effect on NDVI, canopy temperature, length and rate of grain filling, grain number, grain weight, and yield. Christopher *et al*., (2018a) detected the stay-green QTL co-localized with QTLs for the root number of seedlings and Rht height genes. The co-localization of the stay-green loci and performance trait loci confirmed that the stay-green phenotype is useful for yield improvement in hot and water limited environments (Pinto *et al*., 2016; Christopher *et al*., 2018a).

Deeper understanding of physiological and molecular basis of the stay-green trait is crucial to reduce the negative effects of the changing climate. So far few bi-parental QTL mapping studies demonstrated the genetic basis of the stay-green trait in wheat (Huang *et al*., 2004; Kumar *et al.*, 2010; Pinto *et al*., 2016; Shi *et al*., 2017; Christopher *et al*., 2018a). Therefore, the present study aimed to explore QTLs associated with the stay-green trait by GWAS using historical spring wheat cultivars of Pakistan and advance cultivars of CIMMYT. GWAS using GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU models was performed to identify QTL associated with chlorophyll content, NDVI, stay-green indexes, and yield parameters in wheat historical panel of Pakistan.

## **2.3. Materials and methods**

## *2.3.1. Plant material*

A diverse historical panel of 125 Pakistani bread wheat cultivars including landraces, green revolution, post green revolution, and elite cultivars adapted to different climatic zones (irrigated, semi-arid, and arid) and 25 CIMMYT advance varieties were selected for field trials (Annexure 2.1). The seeds of the selected cultivars were obtained from Wheat Wide Crosses Laboratory, National Agricultural Research Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan.

## *2.3.2. Field experiment*

The selected association panel was subjected to field trials for five consecutive cropping seasons from 2012 to 2016 at National Agricultural Research Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan located between  $33^{\circ}40^{\circ}28$ "N latitude and  $73^{\circ}7^{\circ}28$ "E longitude. Plantation was done on November 15 each year in an alpha lattice design. Each plot consisted of four 1 m rows with a sowing density of 20 seeds per row and spaced 20 cm apart from adjoining plots. The field trials were managed by standard agronomic management practices.

## *2.3.3. Phenotyping*

The traits evaluated were chlorophyll content, photosynthetic efficiency, normalize difference vegetative index, plant height, tiller number, spike length, spikelet per spike, thousand kernel weight, biological yield, and grain yield. All the traits were measured according to the procedures described by Pask *et al*., 2012.

The chlorophyll content was determined at booting, heading, anthesis, 10 days after anthesis (DAA), 20 DAA, and 30 DAA using SPAD 502 PLUS chlorophyll meter (Konica Minolta). Chlorophyll content was measured from 1/3 of the distance, 1/2 of the distance, and 2/3 of the distance from base of the flag leaves of three central plants for each genotype during mid-day between 11am and 3pm. The average of nine readings from three replicates at each time point was used for further analysis. To evaluate the stay-green trait four indices were used; the SPAD chlorophyll content of flag leaf at heading (SFH), absolute difference in the SPAD chlorophyll content at heading and the SPAD chlorophyll content at 30 DAA (ADSF= SPAD chlorophyll content at heading - SPAD chlorophyll content at 30 DAA), relative difference in the SPAD chlorophyll content at heading and the SPAD chlorophyll content at 30 DAA (RDSF= ADSF/SFH), and cumulative SPAD chlorophyll content at booting, heading, anthesis, 10 DAA, 20 DAA, and 30 DAA (CSF= Sum of SPAD chlorophyll content at booting, heading, anthesis, 10 DAA, 20 DAA, and 30 DAA).

Chlorophyll fluorescence parameter fv/fm (maximum quantum yield of PSII) was measured at booting, heading, anthesis, 14 DAA (mid grain filling duration), and 21 DAA (near complete physiological maturity) from the flag leaves using Pocket PEA chlorophyll fluorimeter (Hansatech) during mid-day between 11 am and 2 pm. The chlorophyll fluorimeter relied on leafclips system that pre-conditions (dark adaption) the flag leaf. The dark treatment using leafclips was applied for 20 minutes prior to measuring the chlorophyll fluorescence parameters.

Normalize Difference Vegetative Index (NDVI) was recorded at heading, anthesis, 14 DAA (mid grain filling duration), and 21 DAA (near complete physiological maturity) between 11 am and 2 pm by measuring the canopy reflectance at 660 nm and 770 nm [(R770-R660)/(R770+R660)] with a handheld GreenSeeker crop sensor (Trimble). The distance between the canopy and the NDVI meter was kept around 50 cm. The stay-green trait was calculated by using four indices: 1. NDVI at heading (NH), 2. Absolute difference in the NDVI values at heading and NDVI values at 21 DAA (ADN= NDVI at heading - NDVI at 21 DAA), 3. Relative difference in the NDVI values at heading and NDVI values at 21 DAA (RDN= AND/NH), and 4. Cumulative NDVI values at heading, anthesis, 14 DAA, and 21 DAA (CN= Sum of NDVI at heading, anthesis, 14 DAA, and 21 DAA).

Plant height (PH) was assessed by measuring the plant from base to tip of the spike excluding awn using a measuring rod at physiological maturity. Tillers per plant (TN) were recorded by counting the total number of fertile tillers in individual plant at anthesis. Spike length (SL) was determined by measuring the spike from base of the rachis to tip of the upper spikelet, excluding awns at physiological maturity. Spikelet per spike (SPS) was recorded by counting the spikelet number from base (sterile spikelet) to tip (fertile spikelet) of the spike. The average values from three biological replicates for PH, TN, SL, and SPS were used for statistical analysis. The above ground biomass excluding row edges was harvested, dried, and weighed using an electronic balance to determine biological yield (BY). The harvested above ground biomass was threshed and grain harvest obtained after threshing was weighed using an electronic balance to measure grain yield (GY).

#### *2.3.4. Statistical analysis*

Phenotypic data was subjected to best linear unbiased predictions (BLUPs) analysis using lme4 package in R version 3.5.1 (Bates *et al*., 2015). BLUPs estimate the real breeding value of a trait by eliminating environmental anomalies (Robinson, 1991; Viana *et al*., 2010; Mi *et al*., 2011). BLUPs data for each trait was used for descriptive statistics, and correlation analysis. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on primary five years field data for each trait. Descriptive statistics and ANOVA were performed by XLSTAT version 2014.5.03. Trait correlations were analyzed and visualized using GGally package in R version 3.5.1.

## *2.3.5. Genotyping*

The genomic DNA was extracted from fresh leaves of 25 days old wheat seedlings according to the CIMMYT Molecular Genetics Manual (Dreisigacker *et al*., 2012). The DNA with 50-100 ng/ $\mu$ L concentration per sample was sent to CapitalBio<sup>®</sup> genotyping facility in Beijing for genotyping via high-density Illumina 90K Infinium SNP array consisting of 81,587 markers (Akhunov *et al*., 2009; Wang *et al*., 2014). Genome Studio program version 2011.1 was used for genotype calling. Genetic similarities were estimated by PowerMarker v.3.0 with Dice coefficient based on ratio of shared alleles (Liu *et al*., 2005). Polymorphism information content was employed to determine genetic diversity at each chromosomal locus. Monomorphic markers, markers having missing values more than 20% or allele frequency less than 5% or an unclear SNP

calling were removed. The effective 20,853 SNP markers were used for estimation of population structure analysis, principal component analysis, kinship analysis, and genome wide association mapping. The International Wheat Genome Sequence Consortium reference assembly (IWGSC) RefSeq-v.1.0 was used to determine physical positions of SNP markers along chromosomes.

#### *2.3.6. Population structure*

Population structure was determined using STRUCTURE software 2.3.3, which uses model-based Bayesian cluster analysis. A total of 1000 unlinked SNP markers, 100,000 burns in iterations followed by 500,000 Markov- Chain iteration were used to give a putative number of subpopulation between k= 1 to 15 (Pritchard *et al*., 2000). Sampling variance was estimated by 10 independent runs for each k. The rate of change of log probability between the successive values basis for ∆K was used to estimate K (Evanno *et al*., 2005; Quraishi *et al*., 2011).

#### *2.3.7. Linkage disequilibrium, genome wide association analysis and gene annotation*

The observed allele frequency and expected allele frequency were used to calculate linkage disequilibrium (LD) in TASSEL v.5.0. The Memory efficient Visualization enhanced and Parallel accelerated (rMVP) R package with default setting was used for Genome Wide Association Study (GWAS). The rMVP employed three models i.e., General Linear Model (GLM), Mixed Linear Model (MLM), and Fixed and random model Circulating Probability Unification (FarmCPU) to estimate the marker trait associations (MTA). For multiple testing correction, the bonferroni correction (bonferroni correction= 1/ total number of markers) was applied to calculate the threshold. The association between marker and trait was considered significant if the – log10 (p) value was greater than the threshold of  $-\log 10$  (p)  $\geq 4.3$  (p <0.000047). Finally, genes associated with the locus were extracted from *Triticum aestivum* genes (IWGSC) dataset at Ensembl Plants using BioMart function.

#### **2.4. Results**

*2.4.1. Descriptive statistics, analysis of variance, and heritability* 

The minimum, maximum, mean, standard deviation, variance, and heritability of the morph-physiological traits evaluated under the field trials from 2012-2016 are presented in Table 2.1. The analysis of variance revealed significant difference between genotypes for CHL\_20DAA, CHL\_30DAA, fv/fm\_14DAA, CSF, ADSF, RDSF, PH, TN, SL, SPS, GY, and BY. The heritability of the morpho-physiological traits varied between 0.427 - 0.73 (Table 2.1), which indicated that the traits were significantly influenced by genetic factors and thus suitable for genetic association study.

<b>Trait</b>	Year	Range	Mean±std.	<b>ANOVA</b>		
			<b>Deviation</b>	(p value)	Heritability	
CHL_T	2016-2017	31.27~54.27	45.71±3.97	0.06	0.55	
	2015-2016	38.44~55.30	47.04±3.61			
	2014-2015	$30.90 - 57.57$	39.88±4.43			
	2013-2014	31.13~49.27	40.45±4.02			
	2012-2013	35.97~56.60	44.76±3.93			
	<b>BLUPs</b>	$41.3 - 46.39$	43.59±0.98			
CHL B	2016-2017	$32.33 - 53.87$	44.26±4.32	0.188	0.53	
	2015-2016	27.08~51.00	39.13±4.48			
	2014-2015	28.87~50.57	36.27±4.04			
	2013-2014	$28.22 - 51.55$	42.09±4.40			
	2012-2013	$36.47 - 52.95$	43.71±3.26			
	<b>BLUPs</b>	$37.92 - 44.87$	$41.11 \pm 1.19$			
CHL H	2016-2017	$29.57 - 55.13$	43.96±4.52	0.187	0.5	
	2015-2016	$34.50 - 50.19$	43.28±2.85			
	2014-2015	23.37~45.53	34.89±4.28			
	2013-2014	23.33~58.20	43.73±6.99			
	2012-2013	29.10~54.87	42.60±5.41			
	<b>BLUPs</b>	37.00~45.57	41.69±1.32			
CHL_A	2016-2017	35.47~56.30	46.52±4.26	0.282	0.52	
	2015-2016	21.20~52.90	35.60±5.83			
	2014-2015	25.33~45.87	34.78±3.81			
	2013-2014	$25.63 - 57.30$	40.34±5.77			
	2012-2013	29.97~51.27	38.58±4.73			
	<b>BLUPs</b>	34.64~44.39	$39.27 \pm 1.72$			

*Table 2.1. Descriptive statistics, analysis of variance, and heritability of the morphological traits evaluated under field trials* 







Standard deviation (Std. deviation), Chlorophyll content at tillering (CHL\_T), Chlorophyll content at booting (CHL\_B), Chlorophyll content at heading (CHL\_H), Chlorophyll content at anthesis (CHL\_A), Chlorophyll content at 10 days after anthesis (CHL\_10DAA), Chlorophyll content at 20 days after anthesis (CHL\_20DAA), Chlorophyll content at 30 days after anthesis (CHL\_30DAA), photosynthetic efficiency at heading (fv/fm\_H), photosynthetic efficiency at anthesis (fv/fm\_A), photosynthetic efficiency at 14 days after anthesis (fv/fm\_14DAA), photosynthetic efficiency at 21 days after anthesis (fv/fm\_21DAA), NDVI at heading (NDVI\_H), NDVI at anthesis (NDVI\_A), NDVI at 14 days after anthesis (NDVI\_14DAA), NDVI at 21 days after anthesis (NDVI\_21DAA), Plant height (PH), Tiller number (TN), Spike length (SL), Spikelet per spike (SPS), Thousand kernel weight (TKW), Grain yield (GY), Biological yield (BY), Best linear unbiased predictions (BLUPs)

## *2.4.2. Correlation analysis*

The BLUPs for all the morpho-physiological traits were subjected to correlation analysis. Correlation analysis revealed positive correlation between chlorophyll content at tillering, booting, heading, anthesis, 10 DAA, 20 DAA, and 30 DAA with thousand kernel weight (0.346\*\*\*, 0.276\*\*, 0.163, 0.073, 0.199, 0.177, 0.241\*), grain yield (0.125, 0.388\*\*, 0.077, 0.234\*, 0.470\*\*\*, 0.317\*\*, 0.313\*\*), and biological yield (0.096, 0.247\*\*, 0.004, 0.267\*, 0.281\*\*, 0.194, 0.234\*) (Figure 2.1). The photosynthetic efficiency (fv/fm) at heading, anthesis, 14 DAA, and 21 DAA displayed significant positive correlation with thousand kernel weight (0.243\*\*, 0.225\*\*, 0.270\*\*, 0.238\*\*) and grain yield (0.195\*\*, 0.299\*\*\*, 0.409\*\*\*, 0.238\*\*), whereas photosynthetic efficiency at anthesis and 14DAA showed significant positive correlation with biological yield (0.222\*\*, 0.262\*\*) (Figure 2.2). NDVI at heading and anthesis displayed significant positive correlation with thousand kernel weight (0.183\*, 0.173\*). NDVI at heading, anthesis, 14 DAA, and 21 DAA showed significant positive correlation with grain yield  $(0.289***, 0.310***, 0.193*, 0.234**)$  and NDVI at heading, anthesis, and 21 DAA exhibited significant positive correlation with grain yield  $(0.352***, 0.287***, 1.14)$ 0.204\*) (Figure 2.3). Stay-green indices SHF, CSF, ND, and CN showed positive correlation with thousand kernel weight (0.163, 0.317\*\*, 0.183\*, 0.320\*\*), grain yield (0.077, 0.449\*\*\*, 0.289\*\*, 0.398\*\*), and biological yield (0.004, 0.293\*\*, 0.352\*\*\*, 0.266\*), whereas ADSF, RDSF, ADN and RFN showed negative correlation or slight positive correlation with thousand kernel weight (-0.009, -0.098, 0.033, 0.028), grain yield (-0.128, -0.247\*, 0.009, -0.285\*\*), and biological yield (-0.140, -0.226\*, -0.007, - 0.382\*\*\*). TN, SL, and SPS showed slight positive correlation with grain yield (0.115, 0.147, 0.189) and biological yield (0.058, 0.150, 0.199) (Figure 2.4).

CHL T	CHL_B	CHL H	CHL A	CHL_10DAA	CHL_20DAA	CHL_30DAA	TKW	GY	BY	
$0.3 -$ $0.2 -$ $0.1 -$ $0.0 -$	Corr: $0.346***$	Corr: $0.559***$	Corr: $0.245*$	Corr: 0.041	Corr; 0.097	Corr: 0.138	Corr: $0.346***$	Corr: 0.125	Corr: 0,096	<b>CHLT</b>
$44 -$ 42 $38 -$		Corr: $0.385***$	Corr: $0.303**$	Corr: $0.378***$	Corr: 0.190	Corr: $0.316**$	Corr: $0.276**$	Corr: $0.388***$	Corr: $0.247*$	CHL B
$42 -$ 41 39			Corr: $0.425***$	Corr: 0.111	Corr: 0.120	Corr: 0.104	Corr: 0.163	Corr: 0.077	Corr: 0.004	CHL_H
$40 -$ 39 37				Corr: $0.249*$	Corr: $0.432***$	Corr: $0.219*$	Corr: 0.073	Corr: $0.234*$	Corr: $0.267*$	CHLA
$40 -$ $38 -$ $36 - 1$ $34 -$					Corr: $0.550***$	Corr: 0.178.	Corr: 0.199.	Corr: $0.470***$	Corr: $0.281**$	CHL_10DAA
$40 -$ 35 25						Corr: $0.272**$	Corr: 0.177.	Corr: $0.317**$	Corr: 0.194.	CHI_20DAA
$19.0 -$ $18.5 -$ 18.0							Corr: $0.241*$	Corr: $0.313**$	Corr: $0.234*$	AADOR_HO
$\frac{36}{35}$ 34 33 $\frac{32}{31}$								Corr: $0.221*$	Corr: 0.201.	TKW
160 140. 120 100									Corr: $0.604***$	QY
$550 -$ 500 450 400 $350 -$ 42 43 44 45 46	38 40 42 44	39 40 41 42	39 37 38 40	34 38 36	40 25 30 35 40	17.07.58.08.59.0	32 33 34 35 36 31	100 120 140 16080400450500550		œ

*Figure 2.1. Correlation analysis between chlorophyll content at tillering (CHL\_T), booting (CHL\_B), heading (CHL\_H), anthesis (CHL\_A), 10 days after anthesis (CHL\_10DAA), 20 days after anthesis (CHL\_20DAA), 30 days after anthesis (CHL\_30DAA), thousand kernel weight (TKW), grain yield (GY), and biological yield (BY).*


*Figure 2.2. Correlation analysis between photosynthetic efficiency (fv/fm) at heading (fv/fm\_H), anthesis (fv/fm\_A), 14 days after anthesis (fv/fm\_14DAA), 21 days after anthesis (fv/fm\_21DAA), thousand kernel weight (TKW), grain yield (GY), and biological yield (BY).* 



*Figure 2.3. Correlation analysis between NDVI at heading (NDVI\_H), anthesis (NDVI\_A), 14 days after anthesis (NDVI\_14DAA), 21 days after anthesis (NDVI\_21DAA), thousand kernel weight (TKW), grain yield (GY), and biological yield (BY).*



*Figure 2.4. Correlation analysis between stay-green indices including SPAD chlorophyll of the flag leaf at heading (SFH), absolute difference in SPAD chlorophyll of the flag leaf (ADSF), relative difference in SPAD chlorophyll of the flag leaf (RDSF), cumulative SPAD chlorophyll of the flag leaf (CSF), NDVI at heading (ND), absolute differences in NDVI (ADN), relative difference in NDVI (RDN), cumulative NDVI (CN) and agronomic traits including plant height(PH), tiller number (TN), spike length (SL), spikelet per spike (SPS), thousand kernel weight (TKW), grain yield (GY), and biological yield (BY).*

# *2.4.3. Population structure and linkage disequilibrium*

Population structure was determined using the rate of change in log probability between K values. The graph of K against  $\Delta K$  showed a break in slop at K= 7 which indicated that cultivars were divided into seven sub-groups. Group-1 consisted of post green revolution cultivars adapted to irrigated areas, Group-2 included post green revolution cultivars adapted to rainfed areas, Group-3 included landraces and their derivatives, Group-4 comprised of green revolution cultivars and their derivatives, Group-5 included green revolution cultivars adapted from CIMMYT, Group-6 included post green revolution cultivars adapted from CIMMYT and Group-7 composed of elite cultivars having Inqalab-91 genetic background. The population structure revealed that about 65% of the cultivars had admixture and 35% of the population had single genetic background (Figure 2.5). LD was estimated in TASSEL standalone 5.0 for each of the three wheat sub-genomes  $(A, B \& D)$ . The distance at which LD decayed to half of its maximum value ( $r^2$  value) was considered as LD decay distance. This was 300, 800 and 500 Kb for A, B and D sub-genomes, respectively.



*Figure 2.5. Population structure of the mapping panel. (a) The average logarithm of probability of likelihood and delta K, where K =7, (b) Membership co-efficient showing whole population is partitioned into seven sub-populations.* 

#### *2.4.4. Marker trait association analysis*

rMVP detected a total of 1786 MTAs [FarmCPU (881), GLM (660), and MLM(245)] associated with chlorophyll content, chlorophyll indices, chlorophyll fluorescence, NDVI, NDVI indices, PH, TN, SL, SPS, TKW, GY, and BY at -log10(p)  $\geq$ 3 (Annexure 2.2). Of the 1786 MTAs, 83 [FarmCPU (54), GLM (29)] linked with chlorophyll content, chlorophyll indices, chlorophyll fluorescence, NDVI, NDVI indices, PH, and TN were statistically significant with -log10(p)  $\geq$ 4.3 (the threshold calculated via Bonferroni correction). The highly significant markers were scattered over 48 loci on wheat genome (A genome= 24, B genome= 20, D genome= 4) on the basis of LD decay distance. Eight loci were associated with chlorophyll content on chromosomes 1B, 3B, 4A, 4D, 5A, 5B, and 7A. For photosynthetic efficiency (fv/fm), two loci were identified on chromosomes 2B and 5A. For NDVI, 23 loci were detected on chromosomes 1A, 1D, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, 6A, 6B, 7A, and 7B. For stay-green indices, six loci were detected on chromosomes 1B, 1D, 2B, 3A, and 6A. For PH, eight loci were detected on chromosomes 2A, 2B, 3A, and 6B. Two loci for TN were detected on chromosome 1B and 6D (Table 2.2).

Chlorophyll content at tillering was associated with locus q7A-1 (tag SNP: BS00109911\_51) found on chromosome 7A. Chlorophyll content at heading was associated with two loci, q5A-2 (tag SNP: BS00078076\_51) and q5A-3 (tag SNP: BS00066127\_51) found on chromosome 5A. Chlorophyll content at anthesis was linked with loci q3B-1 (tag SNP: BS00085434 51), q4A-2 (tag SNP: Excalibur c55561 127), and  $q4D-1$  (tag SNP: BobWhite  $c4264$  325) present on chromosomes 3B, 4A, and 4D, respectively. Chlorophyll content at 10DAA was associated with locus q5B-1 (tag SNP: BS00110064 51) located on chromosome 5B. Chlorophyll content at 20DAA was linked with locus q1B-4 (tag SNP: Ex c29452 302) found on chromosome 1B (tag SNP: Table 2.2, Figure 2.6, Figure 2.7, Figure 2.8).

Photosynthetic efficiency (fv/fm) at heading was associated with locus  $q2B-3$  (tag SNP: Ra\_c6728\_590) found on chromosome 2B. Photosynthetic efficiency (fv/fm) at 21 DAA was associated with locus q5A-1 (tag SNP: Excalibur c5398 695) located on chromosome 5A (Table 2.2).

NDVI at heading was associated with loci q1D-1, q2B-2, and q6B-2 [RAC875\_c2070\_566 (1D), Ku\_c57425\_413 (2B), and BS00074947\_51 (6B)]. NDVI at anthesis was associated with loci q1D-1, q3A-4, q5A-4, q6A-1, q6A-2, q6B-1, q7A-2,

Locus	Locus ID	Chr	Tag SNP	Tag SNP Pos	Locus Start	Locus End	Tag SNP LOG10(p)	Method	Trait
1	$q1A-1$	1A	Ku_c6979_182	346446236	346146236	346746236	4.6615532	FarmCPU	NDVI 14DAA
2	$q1A-2$	1A	wsnp Ex c750 1474184	592090936	591790936	592390936	4.3296625	FarmCPU	NDVI 14DAA
3	$q1B-1$	1B	BS00110900 51	10361155	9561155	11161155	4.8127826	FarmCPU	TN
4	$q1B-2$	1B	Tdurum contig44219 318	15169586	14369586	15969586	4.8400309	GLM, FarmCPU	<b>CN</b>
5	$q1B-3$	1B	RAC875 c42275 224, BobWhite c36862 84	631832802, 631999928	631032802	632632802	4.8529549, 4.8529549	GLM, FarmCPU	$\ensuremath{\mathsf{CSFL}}\xspace$
6	$q1B-4$	1B	Ex c29452 302	678432525	677632525	679232525	4.7973436	GLM, FarmCPU	CHL 20DAA
7	$q1D-1$	1D	RAC875 c2070 566	417149	$\boldsymbol{0}$	917149	4.5226502	FarmCPU	NDVI_A, NDVI_H
$\,8\,$	$q1D-2$	1D	Excalibur_c56999_109	459837951	459337951	460337951	4.8529549	GLM, FarmCPU	<b>CSFL</b>
9	$q2A-1$	2A	Tdurum contig12761 125	727243449	726943449	727543449	4.4888447	$\operatorname{GLM}$	PH
10	$q2B-1$	2B	BS00023221 51	94199616	93399616	94999616	4.5211195	$\operatorname{GLM}$	NDVI_21DAA
11	$q2B-2$	2B	Ku c57425 413	108905283	108105283	109705283	4.8114226	GLM, FarmCPU	RDN, NDVI H
12	$q2B-3$	2B	Ra_c6728_590	134090399	133290399	134890399	4.4831116	GLM, FarmCPU	$fv/fm$ H
			BS00046164 51,	697510323,			5.4476698,		
13	$q2B-4$	2B	BS00046165 51,	697510334,	696710323	698310323	5.0887964,	GLM, FarmCPU	NDVI 21DAA
			Excalibur c36280 764	697512054			4.6584825		
14	$q2B-5$	2B	wsnp Ex c22271 31463467, BobWhite_c2244_259,	700456564, 700456873,	699656564	701256564	4.5425788, 4.3835976	FarmCPU	NDVI_21DAA
			wsnp Ex_c22271_31463382	700457023			4.3835976		
15	$q2B-6$	2B	wsnp Ex_c26818_36041748	710281768	709481768	711081768	4.6008498	FarmCPU	PH
16	$q2B-7$	2B	Ra c13298 434	732344105	731544105	733144105	5.9407979	GLM, FarmCPU	PH
17	$q2B-8$	2B	Ra c5004 2033 Ra c5004 1902	733713735 733713866	732913735	734513735	5.9407979, 4.5704379	GLM, FarmCPU	PH
			Ku c2936 1987,	782154304,					
18	$q2B-9$	2B	wsnp_CAP11_c1820_985143,	782533975,	781354304	782954304	4.5774803	FarmCPU	$\rm PH$
			Ku c16249 315	782534125					
19	$q3A-1$	3A	Excalibur_c11079_749	32201535	31901535	32501535	4.689403	GLM, FarmCPU	PH
20	$q3A-2$	3A	wsnp Ex c28310 37444843	487458132	487158132	487758132	4.5334271	FarmCPU	ADSFL, RDSFL

*Table 2.2. Identification of target loci based on the significant SNPs from the GWAS results.* 

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q7A-3, q7A-4, q7A-5, q7A-6, q7A-7, q7A-8, q7B-1, and q7B-2 [RAC875\_c2070\_566 (1D), Ku\_c10817\_611 (3A), wsnp\_Ex \_c17268\_25935536 (5A), Tdurum contig55193 296 and BS00058159 51 (6A), BS00092845 51 (6B), Excalibur c27658 264, CAP8 c4980 112, BobWhite rep c65070 369, CAP12 c2355 239, BS00002510 51, Tdurum contig42487 1555, BS00091168 51, and wsnp Ex rep c104560 89241494 (7A) and Kukri c24422 423 and Kukri c32807 579 (7B]. NDVI at 14 DAA was associated with loci q1A-1, q1A-2, and q4A-1 [Ku\_c6979\_182 (1A), wsnp\_Ex\_c750\_1474184 (1A), and RFL\_Contig1053\_65 (4A)]. NDVI at 21DAA was associated with q2B-1, q2B-4, and q2B-5 [BS00046164\_51, BS00046165\_51, Excalibur\_c36280\_764, wsnp\_Ex\_c22271\_31463467, BS00023221 51, BobWhite c2244 259, wsnp Ex c22271 31463382] located on chromosome 2B (Table 2.2, Figure 2.9, Figure 2.10, Figure 2.11).

ADSF and RDSF were associated with q3A-2 (wsnp\_Ex\_c28310\_37444843) located on chromosome 3A. CSF was associated with q1B-3 and q1D-2 [RAC875 c42275 224 (1B), BobWhite c36862 84 (1B), and Excalibur c56999 109 (1D)]. RDN was associated with q2B-2 and q6A-3 (Ku\_c57425\_413 and BS00011010\_51) found on chromosome 2B and 6A, respectively. CN was associated with q1B-2 (Tdurum contig44219 318) found on chromosome 1B (Table 2.2, Figure 2.12, Figure 2.13, Figure 2.14).

Plant height was associated with q2A-1 (Tdurum contig12761 125) found on chromosome 2A, q2B-6, q2B-7, q2B-8, and q2B-9 (Ra\_c13298\_434, Ra\_c5004\_2033, wsnp Ex c26818 36041748, Ku c2936 1987, wsnp CAP11 c1820 985143, Ku c16249 315, and Ra c5004 1902) present on chromosome 2B, q3A-1 and q3A-3 (Excalibur\_c11079\_749 and RAC875\_c4641\_773) found on chromosome 3A, and  $q6B-3$ (RFL Contig2387 1410) located on chromosome 6B (Table 2.2, Figure 2.15). TN was associated two loci, q1B-1 and q6D-1 (BS00110900 51 and Tdurum contig10194  $765$ ) found on chromosome 1B and 6D, respectively (Table 2.2, Figure 2.16).



*Figure 2.6. The Density Distribution plot, QQ-plot, and Manhattan plot for chlorophyll content at anthesis (CHL\_4\_A). (a) The density plot is showing the distribution of chlorophyll content at anthesis, (b) QQ-plot is representing deviation of the obtained p values from the expected values in GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU of chlorophyll content at anthesis, and Manhattan plot is showing the* **P** *values of the entire GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU analysis of chlorophyll content at anthesis.* 



*Figure 2.7. The Density Distribution plot, QQ-plot, and Manhattan plot for chlorophyll content at 10 days after anthesis (CHL\_5\_10 DAA). (a) The density plot is showing the distribution of chlorophyll content at 10 DAA, (b) QQ-plot is representing deviation of the obtained p values from the expected values in GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU, and Manhattan plot is showing the* **P** *values of the entire GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU analysis of chlorophyll content at 10 DAA.* 



*Figure 2.8. The Density Distribution plot, QQ-plot, and Manhattan plot for chlorophyll content at 20 days after anthesis (CHL\_6\_20 DAA). (a) The density plot is showing the distribution of chlorophyll content at 20 DAA, (b) QQ-plot is representing deviation of the obtained p values from the expected values in GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU for chlorophyll content at 20 DAA, and Manhattan plot is showing the* **P** *values of the entire GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU analysis for chlorophyll content at 20 DAA.* 



*Figure 2.9. The Density Distribution plot, QQ-plot, and Manhattan plot for Normalized Difference Vegetative Index at Heading*   $\overline{(NDVIH)}$ . (a) The density plot is showing the distribution of NDVI H, (b) QQ-plot is representing deviation of the obtained p *values from the expected values in GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU for NDVI\_H, and Manhattan plot is showing the* **P** *values of the entire GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU analysis for NDVI\_H.* 



*Figure 2.10. The Density Distribution plot, QQ-plot, and Manhattan plot for normalized difference vegetative index at anthesis*   $\overline{(NDVI\ A)}$ . (a) The density plot is showing the distribution of NDVI A, (b) QQ-plot is representing deviation of the obtained p *values from the expected values in GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU for NDVI\_A, and Manhattan plot is showing the* **P** *values of the entire GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU analysis for NDVI\_A.* 



*Figure 2.11. The Density Distribution plot, QQ-plot, and Manhattan plot for normalized difference vegetative index at 21 days after anthesis (NDVI\_21DAA). (a) The density plot is showing the distribution of NDVI\_21DAA, (b) QQ-plot is representing deviation of the obtained p values from the expected values in GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU for NDVI\_21DAA, and Manhattan plot is showing the* **P** *values of the entire GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU analysis for NDVI\_21DAA.* 



*Figure 2.12. The Density Distribution plot, QQ-plot, and Manhattan plot for cumulative chlorophyll content (CSFL). (a) The density plot is showing the distribution of CSFL, (b) QQ-plot is representing deviation of the obtained p values from the expected values in GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU for CSFL, and Manhattan plot is showing the* **P** *values of the entire GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU analysis for CSFL.* 



*Figure 2.13. The Density Distribution plot, QQ-plot, and Manhattan plot for relative difference in the normalized difference vegetative index (RDN). (a) The density plot is showing the distribution of RDN, (b) QQ-plot is representing deviation of the obtained p values from the expected values in GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU for RDN, and Manhattan plot is showing the* **P** *values of the entire GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU analysis for RDN.* 



*Figure 2.14. The Density Distribution plot, QQ-plot, and Manhattan plot for cumulative normalized difference vegetative index (CN). (a) The density plot is showing the distribution of CN, (b) QQ-plot is representing deviation of the obtained p values from the expected values in GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU for CN, and Manhattan plot is showing the* **P** *values of the entire GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU analysis for CN.* 



*Figure 2.15. The Density Distribution plot, QQ-plot, and Manhattan plot for plant height (PH). (a) The density plot is showing the distribution of PH, (b) QQ-plot is representing deviation of the obtained p values from the expected values in GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU for PH, and Manhattan plot is showing the* **P** *values of the entire GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU analysis for PH.* 



*Figure 2.16. The Density Distribution plot, QQ-plot, and Manhattan plot for tiller number (TN). (a) The density plot is showing the distribution of TN in selected panel, (b) QQ-plot is representing deviation of the obtained p values from the expected values in GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU, and Manhattan plot is showing the* **P** *values of the entire GLM, MLM, and FarmCPU analysis.* 

# *2.4.5. Genes of interest*

Of the 48 loci, 20 loci (each identified by two models, FarmCPU and GLM) were used to extract genes from Ensembl Plants database for wheat genes using BioMart function.

Locus	Chr	<b>Tag SNP</b>	Locus	Locus	<b>Tag SNP</b>	Trait
ID			<b>Start</b>	End	LOG10(p)	
$q1B-2$	1B	Tdurum contig44219 318	14369586	15969586	4.840030902	CN
$q1B-3$	1B	RAC875 c42275 224	631032802	632632802	4.8529549	$\ensuremath{\mathsf{CSFL}}\xspace$
$q1B-4$	1B	Ex c29452_302	677632525	679232525	4.797343561	CHL 20DAA
$q1D-2$	1D	Excalibur c56999 109	459337951	460337951	4.8529549	<b>CSFL</b>
$q2B-2$	2B	Ku c57425 413	108105283	109705283	4.81142255	RDN, NDVI H
$q2B-3$	2B	Ra c6728 590	133290399	134890399	4.483111594	fv/fm H
$q2B-4$	2B	BS00046164 51	696710323	698310323	5.447669843	NDVI 21DAA
$q2B-7$	2B	Ra c13298 434	731544105	733144105	5.940797889	PH
$q2B-8$	2B	Ra c5004 2033	732913735	734513735	5.940797889	PH
$q3A-1$	3A	Excalibur_c11079_749	31901535	32501535	4.689402959	PH
$q3A-4$	3A	Ku c10817 611	708246032	708846032	5.186923741	NDVI_A
$q3B-1$	3B	BS00085434_51	749557865	751157865	4.60295062	CHL A
$q4A-2$	4A	Excalibur c55561 127	450583765	451183765	5.034662751	CHL A
$q4D-1$	4D	BobWhite c4264 325	120681547	121681547	4.703459538	$CHL_A$
$q5A-1$	5A	Excalibur c5398 695	29727274	30327274	4.780595038	fv/fm_21 DAA
$q5B-1$	$5\mathrm{B}$	BS00110064 51	397038250	398638250	4.443068306	CHL 10DAA
$q6A-2$	6A	Tdurum contig55193 296	6296817	6896817	4.991917958	NDVI_A
$q6B-1$	6B	BS00092845_51	10498715	12098715	5.186923741	NDVI A
$q7A-7$	7A	CAP8 c4980 112	719271317	719871317	5.778586875	NDVI A
$q7A-8$	7A	BS00002510 51	720700126	721300126	4.942483964	NDVI A

*Table 2.3. Loci identified by multiple GWAS methods selected for candidate gene analysis.* 

A total of 826 genes at 20 multi-method GWAS loci were extracted from wheat reference assembly RefSeq v1.1. Of 826 genes, 342 were high confidence protein coding genes and only 36 had description available at IWGSC assembly. The known high confidence protein coding genes encode Beta-galactosidase, serine/threonine-protein kinase WNK3, Fatty acyl-CoA reductase, Beta-amylase, Cysteine proteinase inhibitor,

Glycosyltransferase, Phosphatidylinositol 4-phosphate 5-kinase, Cyclin-U1-1, Peroxidase, Protein COFACTOR ASSEMBLY OF COMPLEX C SUBUNIT B CCB4, chloroplastic, Eukaryotic translation initiation factor 3 subunit I, Protein DAMAGED DNA-BINDING 2, zinc metalloprotease EGY2, chloroplastic, Similar to 14-3-3 protein 6, Protein detoxification, GID2 protein isoform 1, ATP-dependent DNA helicase, Laccase, Kinesin-like protein, phospholipase D, RBR-type E3 ubiquitin transferase, nonspecific serine/threonine protein kinase, P-loop containing nucleoside triphosphate hydrolases superfamily protein, and putative RNA-binding protein (Annexure 2.3).

#### **2.5. Discussion**

The functional stay-green trait enables plant to maintain its chlorophyll content, and photosynthetic activity for longer duration during terminal phase of plant life cycle, consequently improves plant productivity (Thomas and Ougham, 2014; Zhang *et al*., 2019; Kamal *et al*., 2019). The stay-green trait has been associated with better performance under non-stress and stress environments (Christopher *et al*., 2008; Pinto *et al*., 2010; Bogard *et al*., 2011; Lopes and Reynolds, 2012; Pinto *et al*., 2016) the negative impact of stay-green trait on yield has been rarely reported (Derkx, *et al*., 2012). Therefore, elucidation of morpho-physiological and genetic mechanisms associated with the stay-green trait may contribute towards yield sustainability under changing environment. In the present study, a positive correlation between chlorophyll content (tillering, booting, heading, anthesis, 10DAA, and 20DAA, and 30DAA), thousand grain weight, grain yield and biological yield was observed. Photosynthetic efficiency (fv/fm) at heading, anthesis, 14DAA, and 21DAA also displayed significant positive correlation with thousand kernel weight and grain yield. The NDVI at heading, anthesis, 14DAA, and 21DAA showed significant positive correlation with grain yield. Our results are in alignment with previous studies that reported positive correlation of the chlorophyll content and fv/fm with grain yield (Talukder *et al*., 2014, Azam *et al*., 2015; Pinto *et al*., 2016). Chlorophyll content and photosynthetic efficiency can be used as selection criteria for grain yield improvement in breeding programs (Vijayalakshmi *et al*., 2010 and Azam *et al*., 2015; Pinto *et al*., 2016). In the present study, the stay-green indices, CSF and CN showed significant positive correlation with thousand grain weight, grain yield and

biological yield, whereas RDSF displayed a significant negative correlation with grain yield and biological yield. Our results are in alignment with find by Pinto *et al*., (2016). Pinto *et al*., (2016) reported significant positive correlation of stay-green trait with thousand kernel weight, kernel number, and grain filling duration. The yield advantages associated with the stay-green can be attributed to higher antioxidant activities, lower malondialdehyde concentration, delayed chlorophyll degradation, extended photosynthesis, and higher carotenes and xanthophylls that dissipate the excessive radiation energy [\(Zhao and Tan, 2005;](#page-203-0) Suzuki and Mittler, 2006; Luo *et al*., 2006; Luo *et al*., 2013).

Grain yield improvement under non-stress and stress environment is the ultimate aim of the plant breeding programs. Identification of loci for the stay-green trait can be useful in enabling marker assisted selection to achieve the goal of yield sustainability under varying environments. In the present study, GLM, MLM, and Farm CPU based genome wide association mapping enabled detection of 48 loci on chromosome 1A, 1B, 1D, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4D, 5A, 5B, 6A, 6B, 6D, 7A and 7B for chlorophyll content, photosynthetic efficiency, NDVI, stay-green indices, plant height, and tiller number. Of the 48 loci, 5 were detected by GLM, 23 were identified by FarmCPU, and 20 loci were explored by both GLM and FarmCPU. Chlorophyll content was associated with q1B-4, q3B-1, q4A-2, q4D-1, q5A-2, q5A-3, q5B-1, and q7A-1 on chromosome 1B, 3B, 4A, 4D, 5A, 5B, and 7A. Previous study by [Hassan](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Hassan%20FS%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=30425437) *et al*., 2018 detected six quantitative trait loci (QTLs) for chlorophyll content on chromosome 2D, 3B, 4A, 6A, 6B, and 7D. Huang *et al*., (2018) detected 59 marker trait associations for chlorophyll content on chromosome 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6A, 6B, 7A, and 7B in durum wheat. Pinto *et al*., 2016 detected 9 QTLs for chlorophyll content on chromosome 1B, 2B, 2D, 3B, 4B, 5B, and 6A. Photosynthetic efficiency was linked with q2B-3 and q5A-1 found on chromosome 2B and 5A, respectively. [Hassan](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Hassan%20FS%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=30425437) *et al*., (2018) identified three QTLs for fv/fm; QFv/Fm-1D, QFv/Fm-3B, and QFv/Fm-6A on chromosome 1D, 3B, and 6A. In the present study, loci for NDVI were detected on chromosome 1A, 1D, 2B, 3A, 4A, 5A, 6A, 6B, 7A, and 7B. Pinto *et al*., (2016) identified QTLs for NDVI on 1B, 1D, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 4A, 4B, 4D, 5B, 6A, 7A, and 7B. The QTLs for stay-green indices, CN detected on chromosome 1B, CSF found on chromosomes 1B and 1D, and RDN associated with

chromosomes 2B and 6A. A study by Pinto et al., (2016) identified QTLs for stay-green trait on chromosome 2A, 4B, 4D, 6A, and 7D. Kumar *et al*., (2010) detected three QTLs for stay-green trait on chromosome 1A, 3B, and 7D.

Gene annotation for 20 loci identified by two methods revealed the presence of 342 high confidence genes in these regions, only 36 were known genes. Locus q4A-2 (tag SNP: Excalibur c55561 127,  $-\log(10(p)= 5.03)$  associated with chlorophyll content was linked with TraesCS4A02G178600 gene encoding ATP-dependent DNA helicase. The ATP-dependent DNA helicases are associated with stability of chromosomes, and normal growth and development in rice (Hong *et al*., 2010). TraesCS4D02G133800 gene encoding Laccase linked with q4D-1 (tag SNP: BobWhite c4264 325,  $-\log 10(p) = 4.7$ ) associated with chlorophyll content is involved in plant defense responses and regeneration of damage tissues under stress (Berthet *et al*., 2012; Wang *et al*., 2015; Janusz *et al*., 2020). Loci q5B-1 (tag SNP: BS00110064\_51, -log10(p) = 4.44) associated with chlorophyll content are linked with TraesCS5B02G222500, TraesCS5B02G223200, and TraesCS5B02G223800 genes encoding Phospholipase-D, RBR-type E3 ubiquitin transferase, and Non-specific serine/threonine protein kinase. The phospholipase-D plays an imperative role in regulating the cellular physiological mechanisms involved in plant growth, development, and stress responses (Hong *et al*., 2016; Ji *et al*., 2018; Wang *et al*., 2019a; Lu *et al*., 2019). RBR-type E3 ubiquitin transferase plays key role in germination of seedlings, control plants flowering time, development of chloroplast, and stresses response (Shu and Yang, 2017). RBR-type E3 ubiquitin transferase has been linked with width and weight of rice grain (Song *et al*., 2007). Non-specific serine/threonine protein kinase has been associated with plant stresses response and programmed cell death. Serine/threonine protein kinase acts as the central processing unit that receives signal from environment/ hormone/ other external factor receptors and converts the input into output via modification in gene expression, cell metabolism, growth, and development (Hardie, 1999; Afzal *et al*., 2008). Non-specific serine/threonine protein kinase has been associated with potassium use efficiency in wheat (Safdar *et al*., 2020). Locus q5A-1 (tag SNP: Excalibur c5398 695,  $-log10(p) = 4.78$ ) associated with chlorophyll fluorescence is linked with TraesCS5A02G032500 genes encoding Kinesin like protein. Kinesin like protein involves in movement of chloroplast through chloroplast-actin-filament, cell

division, and cell growth (Geelen and Inzé, 2001; Vanstraelen *et al*., 2004; Suetsugu *et al*., 2010; Li *et al*., 2012). In rice, Kinesin like protein has been associated with seed length [\(Kitagawa](javascript:;) *et al*., 2010). Locus q2B-2 (Ku\_c57425\_413, -log10(p)= 4.8) associated with NDVI is linked with TraesCS2B02G141700, TraesCS2B02G501700, TraesCS2B02 G501800, TraesCS2B02G502100, TraesCS2B02G502300, TraesCS2B02G502600, TraesCS2B02G502800, TraesCS2B02G503100, TraesCS2B02G503400, and TraesCS2B02G503500 encoding beta-amylase, cysteine proteinase inhibitor, glycosyltransferase, phosphatidylinositol 4-phosphate 5-kinase, and cyclin-U1-1. Betaamylase stimulation results in maltose accumulation, which acts as a compatible solute in the stroma of chloroplast under temperature stress. Beta-amylase protects membranes and electron transport chain (Kaplan and Guy, 2004). Cysteine proteinase inhibitor is a key molecule involved in development and regulation of defense responses under heat, cold, drought, salinity, and oxidative stress (Zhang *et al*., 2008; Huang *et al*., 2012; Sun *et al*., 2014). Transgenic plants with higher expression of cysteine proteinase inhibitor exhibited better growth, higher antioxidase activity, lower malondialdehyde content, and greater cell viability (Li *et al*., 2015). The cysteine proteinase inhibitor improves abiotic stress tolerance by acting against cysteine proteinase activated that accumulates under stress and leads to hastened programmed cell death (Solomon *et al*., 1999; Belenghi *et al*., 2003). Glycosyltransferase is associated with detoxification of harmful molecules produced under abiotic and biotic stresses (Bowles *et al*., 2005; Shi *et al*., 2020). Glycosyltransferase catalyzes the biosynthesis of anthocyanins and flavonoids, which are involved in scavenging reactive oxygen species (Shi and Xie, 2014). Phosphatidylinositol 4-phosphate 5-kinase is associated with flowering time. The suppression of phosphatidylinositol 4-phosphate 5-kinase gene in transgenic rice results in earlier heading (Ma *et al*., 2004). Locus q1B-2 [Tdurum\_contig44219\_318, -log10(p)= 4.84] associated with cumulative NDVI is linked with TraesCS1B02G030400 and TraesCS1B02G032500 encodes for Beta-galactosidase and Probable serine/threonineprotein kinase WNK3, respectively. Beta-galactosidase is involved in polysaccharides degradation of cell wall under stress. Beta-galactosidase has been reported in germinating seeds and ripening fruit (Ali *et al*., 1995; Edwards *et al*., 1998, Balasubramaniam *et al*., 2005). During senescence, β-glucosidase activity enhances with lose of photosynthesis in

plants (Mohapatra *et al*., 2010). Probable serine/threonine-protein kinase WNK3 modulates photoperiod pathway and regulates flowing time (Wang *et al*., 2008). Locus q1B-3 [RAC875 c42275 224,  $-log10(p) = 4.85$ ] associated with CSF was linked with TraesCS1B02G402600 gene encoding Fatty acyl-CoA reductase. The fatty acyl-CoA reductases are associated with biosynthesis of long chain alcohols and are also involved in heat, cold, drought, and powdery mildew stress responses in wheat (Chai *et al*., 2018). For further information on genes which have not been studied in wheat, it may be useful to look at the close grass relatives such as rice which is now potentially used as a reference for grasses. Future gene expression experiments on these 342 genes will help for in-depth analysis and more accurate information on candidate gene(s) for stay-green trait in wheat.

# **2.6. Conclusion**

The stay-green attribute can be used in breeding programs for yield stability under changing environment. Present study demonstrated significant difference for chlorophyll content, chlorophyll fluorescence, plant height, tiller number, spike length, spikelet per spike, grain yield, and biological yield in the selected diversity panel. Heritability of the chlorophyll content at 20DAA and 30DAA, chlorophyll fluorescence at 14DAA, and cumulative chlorophyll content was relatively high, thus can be considered as potential traits that can be used in the evaluation of the stay-green trait. Chlorophyll content, chlorophyll fluorescence, NDVI, and stay-green indices showed positive correlation with thousand kernel weight, grain yield, and biological yield. Forty eight loci were detected for chlorophyll content, chlorophyll fluorescence, NDVI, stay-green indices, plant height, and tiller number. The identified loci were associated with thirty six putative genes which are involved in plant development, defense responses under stress, flowering time control, chloroplast development, and damage tissues regeneration. Further, exploration of these loci by expression profiling of the underlining genes may contribute towards our understanding of the stay-green trait and can be used as potential markers in marker assisted selection to develop superior stay-green cultivars that yield high under environmental stresses.

*Chapter #3* 

# *Deciphering the Role of the Stay-Green Trait to Mitigate Terminal Heat Stress in Bread Wheat*

# **Deciphering the Role of the Stay-Green Trait to Mitigate Terminal Heat Stress in Bread Wheat**

#### **3.1. Abstract**

The present study aimed to reveal the impact of the stay-green trait in bread wheat under terminal heat stress. Field experiments (early and late sowing; for two consecutive years) were conducted to investigate the influence of terminal heat stress on the morphophysiological traits in different stay-green types that included non-stay-green, moderately non-stay-green, moderately stay-green, and stay-green. In addition, the greenhouse experiment was performed to dissect the stay-green trait in functional stay-green, nonfunctional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes. The results of the field experiments confirmed that genotypes exhibiting the stay-green trait have significantly high chlorophyll content, normalized difference vegetative index, grain yield, biological yield, kernel weight, and low canopy temperature under control and heat stress conditions. In the greenhouse experiment, functional stay-green and non-functional stay-green genotypes showed a high chlorophyll content and photochemical efficiency, whereas biological yield and grain yield showed a significant relation with the functional staygreen genotype under control and terminal heat stress treatments. The sequencing and expression analysis of chlorophyllide a oxygenase (CaO), light-harvesting complex (Cab), stay-green (SGR), and red chlorophyll catabolite reductase (RCCR) in functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes revealed variations in the exons of CaO and RCCR; and significant difference in the regulation of CaO and Cab at 7 days after anthesis under terminal heat stress. This study confirms that genotypes displaying the stay-green trait can aid wheat breeders to cope with increasing temperature in the impending decades.

# **3.2. Introduction**

Agriculture and climate change are internally correlated, as climate change is the main cause of biotic and abiotic stresses. Agriculture is being affected by climate changes

in different ways e.g., variations in global atmospheric  $CO<sub>2</sub>$  levels, changes in average temperature, heat waves, annual rainfall, and modifications in microbes, pest, or weeds (IPCC, 2014; Arunanondchai *et al*., 2018; Noya *et al*., 2018; Raza *et al*., 2019). Escalating global temperature together with intense and frequent heat episodes is of rising concern to global food security (Fontana *et al*., 2015; Mueller *et al*., 2015). High temperature adversely affects the yield potential of crops by influencing its metabolic pathways and yield losses may reach up to 40% under severe heat stress during the grain filling duration (Wollenweber *et al*., 2003; Hays *et al*., 2007). Increasing crop productivity together with the reduction in the environmental footprint is a daunting task if we want to achieve the -*Zero* hunger sustainable developmental goal" (Siebert *et al.*, 2014). Cereal crops are considered as the ultimate custodian of global food security. Among cereals, the golden ears of bread wheat have been considered as a symbol of global food security since the dawn of civilization. Wheat production, with decreasing land and water resources in variable climatic conditions, needs to be increased by 60% to reach the required ~840 million tonnes by 2050 (Sharma *et al*., 2015).

High temperature stress during the grain-filling period of the plant life cycle is termed as terminal heat stress. During the grain-filling duration, a  $1^{\circ}$ C rise in temperature above 15°C is estimated to reduce the wheat yield by 6% (Challinor *et al*., 2014; Akter and Islam, 2017). Heat stress causes oxidative damage which induces lipid peroxidation, protein degradation, enzyme inactivation, instability of thylakoid membranes, decrease in chlorophyll content, and reduced rubisco activity (Sairam *et al*., 2000; Dias and Lidon, 2009). It also elevates transpiration rate, pH of leaf sap, and abscissic acid production that leads to premature leaf senescence (Wilkinson and Davies, 2002). These changes in the plant physiological mechanism result in reduced starch accumulation, days to maturity, thousand kernel weight, altered grain starch lipid composition, and shriveled grains (Balla *et al*., 2012). Plants have evolved different mechanisms to cope with heat stress such as escape, avoidance, and stay-green (Sharma *et al*., 2019). The stay-green trait has been considered as an indicator of high temperature stress tolerance by decelerating plant growth cycle and increasing plant productivity (Kumari *et al*., 2007; Pinto *et al*., 2016).

Stay-green, referred to as -heritable delayed foliar senescence", is broadly classified into functional and non-functional stay-green. In the functional stay-green, retention of chlorophyll is coupled with increased photosynthetic capacity and yield potential of plants in contrast to the non-functional stay-green type. Functional stay-green is divided into type A (senescence is initiated late) and type B (progression of senescence is slow), whereas non-functional stay-green is further classified into type C (cosmetic type), type D (pseudo stay-green), and type E (hyper green) (Hortensteiner, 2009; Thomas and Ougham, 2014). The stay-green trait has been documented in maize, oat, rice, arabidopsis, soyabean, sorghum, wheat, and other plants species (Grbić and Bleecker, 1995; Cha *et al*., 2002; Duvick *et al*., 2004; Armstead *et al*., 2006; Rampino *et al*., 2006; Barry *et al*., 2008; Wei *et al*., 2011; Fang *et al*., 2014). The genetic basis behind stay-green is complex and varies in different plant species. Various studies indicated the involvement of a multi-protein complex comprising of chlorophyll catabolic enzymes, stay-green protein, and light-harvesting complex protein (Sakuraba *et al*., 2012). The first two components of the multi-protein complex i.e., chlorophyll catabolic enzymes and stay-green protein, are linked with the chlorophyll degradation pathway. Chlorophyll catabolism is a multistep process that initiates with the conversion of chlorophyll b to 7-hydroxymethyl chlorophyll a in the presence of chlorophyll b reductase. The 7-hydroxymethyl chlorophyll a is converted into chlorophyll a and the reaction is catalyzed by 7-hydroxymethyl chlorophyll a reductase (Takamiya *et al*., 2000). Chlorophyll a degrades to pheophorbide a using magnesium dechelatase and pheophytinase, which removes the central magnesium atom and breaks the phytol side chain (Suzuki *et al*., 2002; Christ and Hörtensteiner, 2014; Shimoda *et al*., 2016). Then, pheophorbide a is catalyzed into primary fluorescent chlorophyll catabolite by the action of pheophorbide a oxygenase and red chlorophyll catabolite reductase (Hortensteiner *et al*., 1995). Primary fluorescent chlorophyll catabolite is transferred from chloroplast to vacuole where it is converted into non-fluorescent chlorophyll catabolite (Hortensteiner and Krautler, 2011). Mutations in the chlorophyll catabolic enzyme genes can result in a stay-green phenotype by delaying the foliar senescence (Thomas and Ougham, 2014; Kuai *et al*., 2018). The light-harvesting complex protein, the third element of the multiprotein complex, accounts for approximately half of the total chlorophyll involved in

photosynthesis (Niyogi *et al*., 2005; Bellafiore *et al*., 2005; Szabó *et al*., 2005; Paulsen *et al*., 2010). The current study focused on the chlorophyllide a oxygenase (CaO), lightharvesting chlorophyll a/b binding protein (Cab), stay-green (SGR), and red chlorophyll catabolite reductase (RCCR) genes.

The CaO gene is involved in the synthesis of chlorophyll b from chlorophyll a by the oxidation of a methyl group to a formyl group (Tanaka *et al*., 1998; Espineda *et al*., 1999; Oster *et al*., 2000; Nagata *et al*., 2004). The over expression of the CaO gene results in an enhanced chlorophyll b content, changed chlorophyll a/b ratio, increased light-harvesting chlorophyll protein, boosted light capture, and the electron transport of photosystem I and II (Biswal *et al*., 2012). The Cab harvests photons that are converted into biochemical energy and biomass during photosynthesis. The Cab genes are downregulated under abiotic and biotic stresses (Seki *et al*., 2002; Hazen *et al*., 2005; Guo *et al*., 2009; Manickavelu *et al*., 2010). However, a high expression level has been observed in the tolerant genotypes (Hazen *et al*., 2005; Guo *et al*., 2009). The SGR also called the non-yellowing (NYE1) gene encodes for magnesium dechelatase, which catalyzes the conversion of chlorophyll a into pheophytin a *(*Christ and Hörtensteiner, 2014; Shimoda *et al*., 2016). The up-regulation of SGR results in chlorophyll degradation by reducing the number of lamellae in the grana thylakoids (Jiang *et al*., 2007). The RCCR, also known as accelerated cell death 2 (ACD2), catalyzes red chlorophyll catabolite to primary fluorescence chlorophyll catabolite (Hörtensteiner, 2006; Sugishima *et al*., 2009). The RCCR mutants accumulate red chlorophyll catabolite, which induces the production of reactive oxygen species and causes cell death (Mach *et al*., 2001; Pruzinska *et al*., 2007). The up-regulation of the RCCR gene is connected with defense responses under abiotic and biotic stresses (Mach *et al*., 2001; Yao and Greenberg, 2006; Pruzinska *et al*., 2007; Tang *at al*., 2011; Zhang *et al*., 2011; Cheng *et al*., 2012).

The stay-green trait seems to improve grain yield under high temperature stress by retaining chlorophyll content, improving photosynthetic capacity, and extending the grain-filling period (Reynolds *et al*., 2000; Kumari *et al*., 2013; Pinto *et al*., 2016). The precise mechanism behind the stay-green trait as an adaptive trait to heat stress still needs to be explored. The present study aimed to examine the association of the stay-green trait with the chlorophyll content, photochemical efficiency, normalized difference vegetative index (NDVI), canopy temperature, grain yield, biological yield, kernel weight, the expression profile of chlorophyll catabolism pathway genes (CaO, SGR, and RCCR), and the photosynthetic responsive gene (Cab) in bread wheat under terminal heat stress. Furthermore, it is the pioneer study that unraveled the CaO, SGR, and RCCR gene expression in relation to the stay-green trait in *Triticum aestivum* under high temperature stress.

# **3.3. Materials and methods**

#### *3.3.1. Phenotyping*

#### *3.3.1.1. Field experiment*

The diversity panel consisting of 123 bread wheat genotypes including landraces, green revolution cultivars, post-green revolution cultivars, elite genotypes, and synthetic derivatives was subjected to field trials (Annexure 3.1). The field experiments were performed for two consecutive years (2014–2015 and 2015 –2016) with early and late sowing to investigate the impact of heat stress. Planting was done on November 15 and December 31 each year in alpha lattice design at the National Agricultural Research Centre, Islamabad, located between 33.6701° N latitude and 73.1261° E longitude. The average temperature ranged between 2.8-34.6  $\degree$ C and 3.7-37.2  $\degree$ C at the experimental site during November 2014-May 2015 and November 2015-May 2016, respectively. The daily maximum and minimum temperature is given in Annexure 3.2. The field experiments consisted of four rows of 1 m per plot for each genotype, with a sowing density of 20 seeds per row. The fertilizers were applied during land preparation using standard agricultural procedures and the irrigation regime was practiced to ensure the crop growth without water limitation. The evaluated traits were chlorophyll content, normalized difference vegetative index (NDVI), canopy temperature (CT), plant height (PH), tiller number (Til No), spike length (SL), spikelet per spike (SpS), days to maturity (DM), biological yield (BY), grain yield (GY), and thousand kernel weight (TKW). All the morpho-physiological traits were determined using standard protocols as described by Pask *et al*., (2012).

The chlorophyll content was measured at booting, heading, anthesis, seven days after anthesis (7DAA), 14 days after anthesis (14DAA), and 21 days after anthesis (21DAA) in the flag leaves using the Chlorophyll Meter (SPAD-502). The normalized difference vegetative index (NDVI) was recorded at heading, anthesis, 14DAA, and 21DAA using the Trimble handheld Green-seeker. An Infrared Thermometer (Telatemp AG-42) was used to record canopy temperature at heading, anthesis, 14DAA, and 21DAA. The chlorophyll content and NDVI were measured between 11:30 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. and the canopy temperature was recorded between 1:00 p.m. and 2: 00 p.m. on windless and cloudless day. PH (cm) was determined at maturity by measuring individual culms from the soil surface to the tip of the spike excluding awn, using a meter rod. Fertile tillers per plant were recorded at the flowering stage. SL (cm) was measured from the base of the rachis to the tip of the terminal spikelet excluding awn using a meter rod. SpS was recorded by counting the total number of spikelets from the base to the tip of the spike. Chlorophyll content, PH, Til No, SL, and SpS were measured in three replicates. DM was recorded when more than 50% of the plants per plot exhibited a loss of complete greenness. All the above-ground biomass excluding borders was harvested, dried, and weighed to determine the BY  $(g)$ . The harvested above-ground biomass was threshed and weighed to obtain the GY (g). The thousand kernel weight was determined by weighing 200 seeds and multiplying the obtained weight with 5.

#### *3.3.1.2. Greenhouse experiment*

The greenhouse experiment was conducted to dissect the stay-green trait in functional stay-green (Nepal-38), non-functional stay-green (SG-30), and non-stay-green (Sonalika) genotypes under controlled greenhouse conditions at South Dakota State University, USA (Annexure 3.3). The genotypes were selected on the basis of morphophysiological traits evaluated during the field experiments (Nepal-38 and SG-30 showed maximum values for chlorophyll content, NDVI, and days to maturity compared to Sonalika whereas, SG-30 showed shriveled grains under control conditions). The sterilized seeds of the selected genotypes were grown in the pots filled with Metromix<sup>®</sup>360 soil mixture and each pot contained four plants. The experiment was laid out in a completely randomized design with six biological replicates. During the experiment,

the greenhouse conditions were maintained at  $24/18$  °C day/night temperatures with a photoperiod of 12 h. Half plants of each genotype at anthesis were transferred to a growth chamber for heat stress treatment at 36/28 °C day/night temperatures. The pots were well watered throughout the experiment and a teaspoon of Osmocote (15N-9P-12K) was applied at tillering and booting.

The leaf chlorophyll content and photosynthetic efficiency of photosystem II (ØII) were determined using the Chlorophyll Meter (SPAD-502) and the handheld MutispeQ, respectively. Both the chlorophyll content and ØII were measured at anthesis, 7DAA, and 14DAA from the flag leaf between 12 p.m. and 2 p.m. using six replicates. The chlorophyll content for each sample was determined from three parts of the same flag leaf and the average was recorded. The ØII was measured using the photosynQ application via a global plant census project according to the manufacturer's protocol. The biological yield and grain yield per plant were determined using three biological replicates. The plant above ground biomass was harvested, dried, and weighed to obtain the biological yield per plant. After threshing, the grain harvest per plant was weighed to obtain the grain yield per plant.

#### *3.3.2. Genotyping*

#### *3.3.2.1. Sample preparation*

The leaf samples were harvested at anthesis, 7DAA, and 14DAA from both the control and heat-treated samples in triplicate. The samples were washed with distilled water, incised with a sharp blade, immediately shifted to liquid nitrogen, and stored at −80 °C to prevent any degradation. Leaf tissues were freeze dried for 48 h using FreeZone Freeze Dryer System by Labconco. The lyophilized leaf tissues were ground into fine powder using tissuelyser. The sequencing and expression analysis were performed at the Plant Molecular and Cellular Biology Laboratory, University of Florida, USA.

# *3.3.2.2. DNA extraction and gel electrophoresis*

Total genomic DNA was isolated from 20 mg of the lyophilized leaf tissues using MagJET Plant Genomic DNA Kit by Thermo Scientific, following the manufacturer's

protocol. To confirm the presence of DNA, the isolated DNA  $(4 \mu L)$  was mixed with 6X loading dye (2 µL) and resolved on 1% agarose gel. The gel was viewed using a gel documentation system (Bio-Rad).

# *3.3.2.3. Identification of CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR genes in the wheat genome*

For sequence accession in *Triticum aestivum*, the gene, cDNA, and protein sequences of the orthologous and phylogenetically closely related species that included *Brachypodium distachyon*, *Hordeum vulgare*, *Sorghum bicolor*, *Oryza sativa,* and *Zea mays* were used. The gene, cDNA, and protein sequences of CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR in reference species were obtained from the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI). The complete coding sequence of each gene from the reference species was blasted in Ensembl Plants against *Triticum aestivum* to obtain the genes, cDNA, and protein sequences in *Triticum aestivum* (Annexure 3.4). Sequence homologies between the cDNA and the protein sequences of *Triticum aestivum, Brachypodium distachyon*, *Hordeum vulgare*, *Sorghum bicolor*, *Oryza sativa,* and *Zea mays* were determined by multiple sequence alignment using the Clustal Omega tool.

# *3.3.2.4. Phylogenetic analysis*

Molecular evolutionary genetics analysis (Mega 6.06) was used for phylogenetic analysis (Tamura *et al*., 2013). The neighbor-joining method employing the p-distance and boot-strap with 1,000 replicates was used to compute the phylogenetic tree using amino acid sequences (Nei and Kumar, 2000).

#### *3.3.2.5. Primer designing*

The primers were designed using Primer3 plus (Annexure 3.5). The primers were checked for hairpin structure, self or heterodimer formation using Integrated DNA Technology.

# *3.3.2.6. Amplification and sequencing*

The CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR genes were amplified in functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes using the primers listed in Annexure 3.5. The reaction cocktail was prepared using 10  $\mu$ L of Go TAQ Master Mix, 1

 $\mu$ L of primer forward, 1  $\mu$ L of primer reverse, 1.5  $\mu$ L of DNA template, and 6.5  $\mu$ L of PCR water. The PCR profile used was; 95 °C for 4 min, followed by 40 cycles of 95 °C for 45 sec, 56–62 °C for 30 sec, 72 °C for 1 min, and the final extension at 72 °C for 10 min. The amplified PCR products were sent for sequencing to the Genomic Centre, University of Florida. The sequences were subjected to multiple sequences alignment using CLUSTALW to reveal variations.

# *3.3.2.7. RNA extraction, gel electrophoresis, and qubit assay*

Total RNA was extracted from the lyophilized leaf samples (200 mg) using the plant RNA reagent (Trizol by Ambion, Life Technologies) followed by treatment with Qiagen on column DNaseI (RNeasay Mini Kit, Part 2, QIAGEN) according to the manufacturer's protocol. RNA integrity was confirmed using 1.5% formaldehyde agarose, gel stained with ethidium bromide. The quantification of RNA was done using a Qubit RNA assay following the Qubit RNA BR Assay kit protocol.

# *3.3.2.8. cDNA synthesis and quantification*

First strand cDNA was synthesized by the reverse transcription of 3 µg of the RNA template in the presence of a random hexamer primer (50 ng), deoxyribonucleotide triphosphates dNTPs (10 mM), 10X reverse transcriptase buffer (2  $\mu$ L), MgCl<sub>2</sub> (100 mM), dithiothreitol DDT (0.2 M), RNase (40 U), and superscript III reverse transcriptase (200 U). The total reaction volume for each sample was 20  $\mu$ L. The standard reaction conditions as described in Superscript III First Strand Synthesis System for RT-PCR were followed (Invitrogen, Life Technologies). The cDNA was quantified by a Qubit 2.0 Fluorometer using the DsDNA feature.

#### *3.3.2.9. Transcript abundance by reverse transcription quantitative PCR*

Real-time quantitative PCR was performed in a total reaction volume of 25 µL for each sample, containing 12.5 µL SYBR Green PCR Master Mix (Applied Biosystems, 4309155), 1  $\mu$ L of cDNA (5 ng/ $\mu$ L), 1.25  $\mu$ L each primer forward and reverse, and 9  $\mu$ L PCR water using the BIO-RAD CFX Connect Real time PCR system. The standard real time PCR profile by SYBR Green PCR Master Mix, Applied Biosystems, was used, which included polymerase activation at 95 °C for 10 min followed by 40 cycles of denaturation at 95 °C for 30 sec and annealing at 60 °C for 1 min. The melt curve temperature was from 65  $\degree$ C to 95  $\degree$ C.

Amplification efficiency was determined for each primer pair using ten-fold cDNA dilution series in triplicate ( $n = 3$ ). The threshold cycle (CT) values of ten-fold cDNA dilution series were plotted to obtain the slope using linear regression. The efficiency was calculated using the following formulas:

$$
Efficiency=10^{-(1/\text{slope})} \tag{1}
$$

$$
Percentage Efficiency = (E - 1) \times 100 \tag{2}
$$

For expression profiling, the CT values were normalized using the ACTIN2 gene (Buchner *et al*., 2015) expression as:

$$
\Delta CT(Control) = CT(Control) - CT(Reference gene)
$$
 (3)

$$
\Delta CT(Treated) = CT(Treated) - CT(Reference gene)
$$
\n(4)

In the second step, the value of the  $\Delta CT$  control was subtracted from the  $\Delta CT$ stress and the relative expression levels were determined using 2-ΔΔCT Livak's method (Livak and Schmittgen, 2001). The log2 fold change was determined to demonstrate the up-regulation or down-regulation of the gene transcript.

#### *3.3.3. Statistical analysis*

Heatmap for NDVI was developed by ClustalVis, a tool to visualize the clusters of multivariate data. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the phenotypic and expression profiling data was performed using XLSTAT Version 2014.5.03 by Tukey's honest significant difference (HSD) test to determine the effect of treatments on groups.

#### **3.4. Results**

## *3.4.1. Phenotyping*

# *3.4.1.1. Field experiment*

The germplasm was categorized into non-stay-green, moderately non-stay-green, moderately stay-green and stay-green groups on the basis of the NDVI. This rating scale
was developed considering the mean NDVI values at heading, anthesis, 14DAA, and 21DAA together with a time point at which the NDVI decline was initiated. The genotypes showing a mean NDVI of 0.40->0.495, 0.495->0.55, 0.55->0.605, and 0.605- 0.66 were classified into non-stay-green, moderately non-stay-green, moderately staygreen, and stay-green groups, respectively. The majority of the genotypes were classified as moderately non-stay-green (30.9%) followed by moderately stay-green (27.6%), staygreen (26.8%), and non-stay-green groups (14.7%) (Figure 3.1).

#### *Physiological traits*

The chlorophyll content measured at booting, heading, anthesis, 7DAA, 14DAA, and 21DAA showed a significant decline among all the groups under heat stress treatment. The chlorophyll content greatly varied between the groups at day 14 and day 21 after anthesis under control; and at day 7, day 14, and day 21 after anthesis under high temperature stress (Figure 3.2, Annexure 3.6).

The NDVI at heading, anthesis, 14DAA, and 21DAA declined among all the groups under terminal heat stress. Significant variation was observed between groups and treatments for the NDVI at all-time points. The stay-green group showed maximum values for the NDVI at all-time points under control and heat stress conditions (Figure 3.3, Annexure 3.6).

The CT was recorded at heading, anthesis, 14DAA, and 21DAA. CT increased under heat stress conditions among all the groups, except for the non-stay-green and moderately non-stay-green groups at 14DAA. CT revealed significant variations among the groups and treatments at all-time points. The stay-green group and non-stay-green group showed minimum and maximum mean values, respectively, at all the time points (Figure 3.4, Annexure 3.6).

#### *Morphological traits*

The PH, Til No, SL, SpS, DM, GY, BY, and the TKW significantly declined under heat stress conditions among all the groups. The Til No, SpS, GY, BY, and the TKW depicted significant difference among the groups. The maximum mean values for



the Til No, SL, SpS, BY, GY, and the TKW were observed in the stay-green group under control and heat stress conditions (Figure 3.5, Annexure 3.6).

*Figure 3.1. Heatmap depicting the normalized difference vegetative index (NDVI) in the non-stay-green (NSG), moderately non-stay-green (MNSG), moderately stay-green (MSG), and stay-green (SG) genotypes at different developmental stages under control condition. The blue color represents the maximum value for the NDVI and the red color indicates the minimum value for the NDVI.* 



*Figure 3.2. Chlorophyll content (CHL) in the non-stay-green (NSG), moderately nonstay-green (MNSG), moderately stay-green (MSG), and stay-green (SG) groups under control (C) and heat stress (HS) conditions. (a) Chlorophyll content at booting; (b) chlorophyll content at heading; (c) chlorophyll content at anthesis; (d) chlorophyll content at seven days after anthesis (7DAA); (e) chlorophyll content at 14 days after anthesis (14DAA); and (f) chlorophyll content at 21 days after anthesis (21DAA). Bars represent the least square means from the 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 field trails. Error bars depict the standard errors and different lowercase letters denote the significant differences among the groups and treatments at p < 0.05.* 











*Figure 3.5. Variation in the morphological traits between the non-stay-green (NSG), moderately non-stay-green (MNSG), moderately stay-green (MSG), and stay-green (SG) groups under control (C) and heat stress (HS) conditions. (a) Plant height; (b) tiller number; (c) spike length; (d) spikelet per spike; (e) days to maturity; (f) biological yield; (g) grain yield; and (h) thousand kernel weight. Bars represent the least square means from the 2014–2015 and 2015–2016 field experiments. Error bars depict the standard errors and different lowercase letters representing significant differences among the groups and treatments at p < 0.05.* 

## *3.4.1.2. Greenhouse experiment*

## *Physiological traits*

The chlorophyll content decreased in the non-stay-green genotype after seven days from anthesis and the value declined with an increase in duration under high temperature stress. In the non-stay-green genotype, the decline in chlorophyll content was 25% and 85% after seven and fourteen days from anthesis, respectively, whereas the functional and non-functional stay-green genotypes maintained the chlorophyll content during high temperature stress (Figure 3.6a, Annexure 3.7).

The ØII decreased in the non-stay-green and functional stay-green genotypes under heat stress treatment compared to the control. The percentage decrease observed in the non-stay-green genotype was 32% and 79% after seven and fourteen days from anthesis under high temperature stress. Whereas the functional stay-green genotype showed 6% and 15% decline in the ØII compared to the control after seven and fourteen days of heat stress (Figure 3.6b, Annexure 3.7).



*Figure 3.6. Chlorophyll content and photosynthetic efficiency in the functional staygreen (FSG), non-functional stay-green (NFSG), and non-stay-green (NSG) genotypes at 0, 7, and 14 days after anthesis under control (C) and high temperature stress (HS). (a) Chlorophyll content; and (b) photosynthetic efficiency. Line graphs represent the least square means. Error bars represent standard errors and different lowercase letters indicate the significant differences among genotypes and treatments at p < 0.05.* 

## *Biological yield and grain yield*

The BY varied greatly among functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes. The BY significantly declined under terminal heat stress conditions in the non-stay-green genotype. The functional stay-green genotype showed a maximum yield under the control and stress conditions. The functional stay-green, nonfunctional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes showed 6.7%, 7%, and 52% decline in the biomass, compared to the control (Figure 3.7a, Annexure 3.7).

The GY varied significantly among all the genotypes. The functional stay-green genotype showed a maximum yield under the control and stress conditions. The percentage reduction in the GY was 4%, 5%, and 59% in the functional stay-green, nonfunctional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes, respectively, under high temperature stress (Figure 3.7b, Annexure 3.7).



*Figure 3.7. Biological yield and grain yield of the functional stay-green (FSG), nonfunctional stay-green (NFSG), and non-stay-green genotypes (NSG) under control (C) and terminal heat stress (HS) conditions. (a) Biological yield; and (b) grain yield. Bars represent the least square means and the error bars refer to the standard errors. Different lowercase letters represent significant difference among the genotypes and treatments at p < 0.05.* 

# *3.4.2. Genotyping*

# *3.4.2.1. Identification of CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR in the wheat genome*

The CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR in *Triticum aestivum* consisted of nine exons of 1653 bp, a single exon of 800 bp, three exons of 843 bp, and two exons of 1002 bp, respectively, as coding regions. The coding regions and protein sequences of CaO, Cab,

SGR, and RCCR in *Triticum aestivum*, *Brachypodium distachyon*, *Hordeum vulgare*, *Oryza sativa*, *Sorghum bicolor,* and *Zea mays* showed a high degree of homology (Table 3.1).

*Table 3.1. Homology in the coding regions and amino acid sequences of chlorophyllide a oxygenase (CaO), light-harvesting complex (Cab), stay-green (SGR), and red chlorophyll catabolite reductase (RCCR) in Triticum aestium, Brachypodium distachyon, Hordeum vulgare, Oryza sativa, Sorghum bicolor, and Zea mays.* 

Gene	Plant	<b>Triticum</b> aestivum		<b>Brachypodium</b> distachyon		Hordeum vulgare		Oryza sativa		Sorghum bicolor		Zea mays		
		cDNA	Protein	cDNA	Protein	cDNA	Protein	cDNA	Protein	cDNA	Protein	cDNA	Protein	
CaO	Triticum aestivum	100	100	89.53	94.73	96.98	99.45	82.24	86.85	81.67	85.4	81.3	85.03	
	Brachypodium distachyon	89.53	94.73	100	100	89.66	94.55	84.65	88.15	82.35	87.06	81.92	86.32	
	Hordeum vulgare	96.98	99.45	89.66	94.55	100	100	82.31	87.04	81.55	85.58	81.06	85.21	
Cab <b>SGR</b> <b>RCCR</b>	Oryza sativa	82.24	86.85	84.65	88.15	82.31	87.04	100	100	84.98	90.74	84.31	90.74	
	Sorghum bicolor	81.67	85.4	82.35	87.06	81.55	85.58	84.98	90.74	100	100	93.49	95.57	
	Zea mays	81.3	85.03	81.92	86.32	81.06	85.21	84.31	90.74	93.49	95.57	100	100	
	Triticum aestivum	100	100	92.04	95.82	94.88	98.87	90.18	90.15	91.81	91.29	90.93	91.67	
	Brachypodium distachyon	92.04	95.82	100	100	91.16	96.2	86.51	91.19	88.04	91.95	87.28	91.95	
	Hordeum vulgare	94.88	98.87	91.16	96.2	100	100	87.3	90.53	89.56	91.67	87.92	92.05	
	Oryza sativa	90.18	90.15	86.51	91.19	87.3	90.53	100	100	90.15	92.83	89.14	92.08	
	Sorghum bicolor	91.81	91.29	88.04	91.95	89.56	91.67	90.15	92.83	100	100	95.61	98.49	
	Zea mays	90.93	91.67	87.28	91.95	87.92	92.05	89.14	92.08	95.61	98.49	100	100	
	Triticum aestivum	100	100	82.21	76.43	94.55	93.07	80.54	77.69	77.96	74.62	79.49	73.83	
	Brachypodium distachyon	82.21	76.43	100	100	83.21	77.42	80.58 77.82		76	75	77.72	76.52	
	Hordeum vulgare	94.55	93.07	83.21	77.42	100	100	81.68	77.01	78.47	73.31	79.1	72.41	
	Orvza sativa	80.54	77.69	80.58	77.82	81.68	77.01	100	100	80.1	77.44	78.97	75.29	
	Sorghum bicolor	77.96	74.62	76	75	78.47	73.31	80.1	77.44	100	100	87.61	82.97	
	Zea mays	79.49	73.83	77.72	76.52	79.1	72.41	78.97	75.29	87.61	82.97	100	100	
	Triticum aestivum	100	100	79.61	73.93	91.75	92.68	79.9	79.92	73.29	69.6	72.71	67.38	
	Brachypodium distachyon	79.61	73.93	100	100	80.23	77.83	78.3	76.19	74.64	69.44	73.31	68.83	
	Hordeum vulgare	91.75	92.68	80.23	77.83	100	100	79.45	79.51	75.73	73.17	74.92	73.66	
	Oryza sativa	79.9	79.92	78.3	76.19	79.45	79.51	100	100	74.32	74.41	73.67	73.23	
	Sorghum bicolor	73.29	69.6	74.64	69.44	75.73	73.17	74.32	74.41	100	100	90.59	90.66	
	Zea mays	72.71	67.38	73.31	68.83	74.92	73.66	73.67	73.23	90.59	90.66	100	100	

## *3.4.2.2. Phylogenetics of CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR*

Phylogenetic analysis was performed using the amino acid sequences for the targeted genes from *Triticum aestivum*, *Brachypodium distachyon*, *Hordeum vulgare*, *Sorghum bicolor*, *Oryza sative,* and *Zea mays*. Phylogenetic analysis revealed a close relationship of *Triticum aestivum* and *Hordeum vulgare* for the CaO, Cab, and SGR, whereas the maximum similarity was observed between *Triticum aestivum* and *Oryza sative* for the RCCR gene (Figure 3.8).





## *3.4.2.3. Amplification and sequencing of CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR*

The CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR genes were amplified in functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes. The amplified regions were sequenced to explore the variations in the gene sequences among functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes (Annexure 3.8, Annexure 3.9).

The partial sequences of Cab and SGR genes showed no variation between functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes. The CaO gene revealed a single nucleotide variation in the non-stay-green genotype where cytosine was replaced by guanine at the position 292 of exon 8. This resulted in a change in amino acid sequence at the position 489 where glutamic acid was replaced by aspartic acid in the non-stay-green genotype. The partial RCCR gene sequence revealed great variation. The amino acid sequence of RCCR showed variations at position 204 (valine is replaced by alanine), 264 (alanine is replaced by glycine), 275 (valine is replaced by glycine), and 290 (lysine is replaced by arginine) in the functional stay-green and nonstay-green genotypes.

## *3.4.2.4. Expression analysis of CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR under terminal heat stress*

Expression profiling in relation to the stay-green trait was performed using functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes. Expression profiling was done at anthesis, 7DAA, and 14DAA in the control and heattreated samples with three biological replicates and three technical replicates. The amplification efficiency for the Actin2, CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR genes primers were found between 91 and 103.9%.

The expression pattern of the CaO gene revealed a significant relation with the stay-green trait. In the functional stay-green genotype, an up-regulation of the CaO gene was observed at 7DAA. However, the relative abundance of the gene transcript was reduced till 14DAA. In the non-functional stay-green genotype, the gene transcript slightly increased at 14DAA. The non-stay-green genotype showed a significant decrease in the log2 fold change of the CaO gene at 7DAA under terminal heat stress condition (Figure 3.9a).

The expression pattern of the Cab gene also showed significant relation with the stay-green trait. The log2 fold change of the Cab gene revealed a decrease in the relative abundance of the gene transcript among all the genotypes. However, the decrease was more pronounced in the non-stay-green genotype at 7DAA (Figure 3.9b).

The expression analysis of the SGR gene revealed an increase in the gene transcript among all the genotypes under heat stress treatment. There was a constant increase in the SGR gene transcript in the functional stay-green and non-stay-green genotypes, whereas an increase in the expression of the SGR gene in non-functional staygreen was more obvious after 7 days of anthesis (Figure 3.9c).

Expression analysis depicted an up-regulation of the RCCR gene in functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes. The relative abundance of the gene transcript increased consistently after day 7 and 14 of anthesis in the functional stay-green genotype. In non-functional stay-green and non-stay-green genotypes, an increase in the expression of RCCR gene was more evident at 7DAA (Figure 3.9d).

## **3.5. Discussion**

Global temperature is predicted to increase by 3  $^{\circ}$ C to 5  $^{\circ}$ C by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Mile and Liffey, 2018). The increasing global temperature is of major concern to sustainable agriculture. High temperature stress adversely affects plant productivity, particularly when it occurs during reproductive and grain filling period of the plant life cycle (Wollenweber *et al*., 2003; Farooq *et al*., 2011). The stay-green trait has been considered as a mechanism of tolerance to terminal heat stress. Since crop productivity is related to the duration and rate of senescence, it is expected that stay-green genotypes with longer grain-filling duration and a faster grain filling rate can sustain productivity under stress (Kumari *et al*., 2013). Studies have reported the association of the stay-green trait with better performance in wheat under terminal heat stress (Reynolds *et al*., 2000; Kumari *et al*., 2013; Pinto *et al*., 2016). In the present study, the germplasm consisting of land races, green revolution, post green revolution, elite genotypes, and synthetic derivatives was categorized into non-stay-green, moderately non-stay-green, moderately stay-green, and stay-green groups on the basis of the NDVI. The use of the Green-seeker to measure the NDVI is a high throughput approach that has been used for the precise quantification of the stay-green trait in recent years. It offers an integrated measure of the



*Figure 3.9. Fold change in the relative abundance of the CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR gene transcripts among functional stay-green (FSG), non-functional stay-green (NFSG), and non-stay-green (NSG) genotypes under terminal heat stress. FSG: functional stay-green (Nepal-38), NFSG: non-functional stay-green (SG-30), and NSG: non-stay-green (Sonalika). (a) Expression pattern of CaO; (b) expression pattern of Cab; (c) expression pattern of SGR; and (d) expression pattern of RCCR. Bar represents the least square mean of the log2 fold change using three biological and three technical replicates. The error bars refer to the standard errors and the different lowercase letters represent significant difference among the genotypes at p < 0.05.* 

total canopy greenness including leaves, stems, and spikes (Lopes and Reynolds, 2012; Pinto *et al*., 2016; Christopher *et al*., 2018a). The Chlorophyll meter and visual scoring were also used to measure the stay-green trait (Harris *et al*., 2007; Kumar *et al*., 2010), but these approaches are more subjective. The current study demonstrated the response of non-stay-green, moderately non-stay-green, moderately stay-green, and stay-green genotypes to the terminal heat stress under field conditions. The PH, Til No, SL, SpS,

chlorophyll content, NDVI, GY, BY, and TKW significantly declined, whereas CT increased under high temperature stress among all the groups, several previous studies also reported a reduction in chlorophyll content, Til No, kernel weight, shoot, and grain mass under high temperature stress (Viswanathan and Khanna‐Chopra, 2001; Mohammadi *et al*., 2004; Shah *et al*., 2005). However, genotypes depicting the staygreen trait showed significantly high chlorophyll content, NDVI, GY, BY, TKW, and low CT under control and terminal heat stress treatments. A study by Pinto and coworkers also revealed a positive association of the stay-green trait with yield, TKW, and low CT in wheat under terminal heat stress (Pinto *et al*., 2016). The association of the stay-green trait with low canopy temperature confirms a link between stay-green expression, roots, and gas exchange, whereas a high value of canopy temperature in nonstay-green genotypes is an indicator of low evaporative cooling that is linked with low stomatal conductance and gas exchange. Christopher *et al*., (2018b) proposed that staygreen genotypes can extract extra moisture late in the season which confers a yield advantage.

The greenhouse experiment was conducted to elucidate the stay-green trait in functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes under terminal heat stress. Chlorophyll content and photosynthetic efficiency significantly declined in the non-stay-green genotype after seven days from the anthesis, whereas the functional stay-green and non-functional stay-green genotypes showed negligible variations. Thomas and Ougham, (2014) attributed the retention of greenness and photosynthetic efficiency in the functional stay-green genotypes to yield improvement. In the present study, the maintenance of the chlorophyll content and photosynthetic efficiency resulted in increased BY and GY in the functional stay-green genotype under the control and heat stress treatments. Despite the increased chlorophyll content and photochemical efficiency in the non-functional stay-green genotype, the low BY and GY can be presumed to be due to the disruption in nutrient assimilation or yield improvement locus on the chromosome seven of wheat that was not linked with the stay-green phenotype (Pinto *et al*., 2016). Whereas the functional stay-green trait may be controlled by quantitative trait loci (QTLs) that are common for stay-green, yield, and yield components (Pinto *et al*., 2016). The present study also confirmed that the reduction in

photosynthetic efficiency was proportional to the yield reduction in the functional staygreen, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes under terminal heat stress.

The genetic basis behind the stay-green trait is complex and varies in different plant species. The multi-protein complex that includes chlorophyll catabolic enzymes, stay-green protein, and the light-harvesting complex protein is considered to be associated with the stay-green trait (Sakuraba *et al*., 2012). In the present study, selected chlorophyll catabolism and photosynthetic responsive genes were analyzed. The cDNA and protein sequences of CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR obtained from *Triticum aestivum*, *Brachypodium distachyon*, *Hordeum vulgare*, *Oryza sativa*, *Sorghum bicolor,* and *Zea mays* showed a high degree of percentage similarity. A previous study by Mueller and coworkers showed great percentage similarity in the amino acid sequences of CaO in *Hordeum vulgare*, *Arabidopsis thaliana*, *Brachypodium distachyon,* and *Oryza sativa* (OsCaO 1, OsCaO2) (Mueller *et al*., 2012). Xiao and coworkers showed high sequence homology between the RCCR gene sequences from *Solanum lycopersicum*, *Nicotiana tabacum*, *Vitis vinifera*, *Ricinus communis*, *Fragaria vesca* subsp vesca, *Brassica napus,* and *Arabidopsis thaliana* (Xiao *et al*., 2015). High sequence homology suggests that the genes are highly conserved during evolution *(*Park *et al*., 2007). The present study also revealed the partial gene sequences and amino acid sequences of CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR in functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes. The CaO and RCCR sequences showed few variations. These sequence variations need to be explored in the complete germplasm to be used as potential biomarkers for the markerassisted selection for the stay-green trait in wheat. The expression pattern of CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR at 0DAA, 7DAA and 14DAA was determined in functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes. The expression profiling of the CaO gene showed significant relation with the stay-green trait. The CaO gene was upregulated in the functional stay-green genotype and down-regulated in the non-stay-green genotype at 7DAA. It is assumed that the increased abundance of the CaO gene transcript in the stay-green genotype was associated with delayed senescence. Sakuraba *et al*., (2012) and Kusaba *et al*[., \(2007\)](#page-210-0) previously reported that an over expression of the CaO gene transcript can cause increased chlorophyll b accumulation and delayed senescence.

The over expression of the CaO gene in *Arabidopsis* resulted in reduced chlorophyll a:b ratio and an increased light-harvesting complex apoprotein (Tanaka *et al*., 2001). Biswal *et al*., (2012) reported the controlled up-regulation of the CaO gene that resulted in increased chlorophyll b biosynthesis and modulated the expression of several thylakoid proteins, which increased the antenna size, rate of electron transport, carbon dioxide assimilation, and dry matter accumulation. The CaO mutant pale green leaf (pgl) in rice with chlorophyll b deficiency exhibited early senescence under terminal heat stress due to the accumulation of reactive oxygen species (Yang *et al*., 2016). Expression profiling of photosynthetic responsive Cab gene depicted a reduction in gene transcript among all the genotypes under terminal heat stress. However, the decline in the expression of the Cab gene in the non-stay-green genotype was far greater compared to the functional staygreen and non-functional stay-green genotypes at 7DAA. The expression pattern of the Cab gene intriguingly correlates to the stay-green trait. The down-regulation of the LHCP genes under biotic and abiotic stresses has been reported in several studies (Seki *et al*., 2002; Hazen *et al*., 2005; Guo *et al*., 2009; Manickavelu *et al*., 2010; Wang *et al*., 2011). The up-regulation of the Cab gene is associated with increased photosynthetic capacity (Fan *et al*., 2017). In the present study, the expression analysis of SGR showed nonsignificant variation between the genotypes. However, the up-regulation of the SGR gene was observed among all the genotypes under terminal heat stress. The expression profiling before day seven of heat stress may illustrate the role of the SGR gene in functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes. Park *et al*., (2007) revealed an increase in chlorophyll degradation with the increase in SGR expression. Moreover, it has been reported previously that the number of SGR genes varies among species and homologous SGR genes are not always associated with yellowing. In *Arabidopsis*, SGR1 over expression promoted leaf yellowing, whereas SGR2 over expression caused the stay-green phenotype (Sakuraba *et al*., 2015). The current study revealed an up-regulation of the RCCR gene among all the genotypes under heat stress, whereas no significant variation was observed between the genotypes. The increase in the relative abundance of the gene transcript was more pronounced in the nonfunctional stay-green type at 7DAA and in the functional stay-green genotype at 14DAA. CaRCCR gene up-regulation under biotic and abiotic stresses had been previously

reported by Xiao *et al*., (2015). The up-regulation of the RCCR gene is associated with the defense responses in plants under stress conditions (Xiao *et al*., 2015). The present study demonstrated that the expression pattern of CaO and Cab at 7DAA is proportional to the increase/decrease in the chlorophyll content and photosynthetic capacity in functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes under terminal heat stress.

## **3.6. Conclusion**

The present study proposed an integrated way to classify a large set of genotypes into non-stay-green, moderately non-stay-green, moderately stay-green, and stay-green types on the basis of the NDVI values recorded between heading and maturity. All the morpho-physiological traits showed significant variations among non-stay-green, moderately non-stay-green, moderately stay-green, and stay-green types under control and heat stress treatments. The genotypes characterized into the stay-green type depicted high chlorophyll content, NDVI, GY, BY, and TKW and low CT under control and heat stress conditions. The study also revealed the response of functional stay-green, nonfunctional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes to terminal heat stress. Chlorophyll content and photochemical efficiency was retained for a longer duration under control and heat stress treatments in both functional stay-green and non-functional stay-green, however non-functional stay-green genotype showed shriveled grains. Thus, unraveling a non-functional stay-green type in which chlorophyll content and photosynthetic efficiency was maintained but nutrient assimilation was considered to be disrupted. The percentage reduction in biological yield and grain yield under stress corresponded to the decline in chlorophyll content and photosynthetic efficiency. The partial gene sequences of CaO and RCCR; and the expression profiling of CaO and Cab revealed significant variations between functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes. Collectively, results indicate that the stay-green phenotype can significantly mitigate the harmful aspects of the terminal heat stress by sustaining grain yield and biological yield.

*Chapter #4* 

*Ultra-High-Performance Liquid Chromatography-High Resolution Mass Spectrometry based Untargeted Global Metabolic Profiling for Stay-Green Trait in Triticum aestivum L. under Terminal Heat Stress* 

## *Chapter #4*

# **Ultra-High-Performance Liquid Chromatography-High Resolution Mass Spectrometry Based Untargeted Global Metabolic Profiling for Stay-green Trait in**  *Triticum aestivum* **L. under Terminal Heat Stress**

#### **4.1. Abstract**

Genetic improvement for heat tolerance required elucidation of biochemical processes associated with different stress tolerance mechanisms. During the recent decade, the staygreen trait has received substantial attention from crop breeders owing to the potential of increasing crop productivity under rapid warming scenario. The present study aimed to demonstrate the metabolic regulation of the secondary stay-green trait using stay-green and non-stay-green genotypes under control and heat stress treatments by employing Ultra-High‐Performance Liquid Chromatography High‐Resolution Mass Spectrometry (UHPLC-HRMS). Plants grown under control greenhouse conditions (24/18 ºC day/night temperature) were exposed to heat stress (36/28 ºC day/night temperature) at anthesis, morpho-physiological traits that included chlorophyll content, chlorophyll fluorescence, membrane stability index, biological yield, and grain yield were evaluated, and flag leaves tissues were harvested at day seven and day fourteen after imposition of heat stress for metabolic profiling. Chlorophyll fluorescence, membrane stability index, and biological yield significantly declined under heat stress; however decline was more pronounced in the non-stay-green genotype. Untargeted metabolic profiling detected 6,945 features from positive ion mode and 5,586 features from negative ion mode. Of the total detected features, 166 significant known metabolites were identified by Analysis of Variance, Partial Least Squares Discriminant Analysis, and Significant Analysis of Metabolites. The predominant metabolites that showed significant high accumulation in non-stay-green genotype were deoxyuridine, deoxycytidine, 5'-deoxyadenosine, glycyl-L-leucine, leucyl-proline, cytidine, uridine, isocytosine and adenine, whereas the dominant metabolites that showed high accumulation in stay-green genotype were ADP, phosphocholine, glutathione, 2-phosphoglyceric acid, cADPR, allantoin, trigonelline, syringic acid, spermine, and hexanesulfonic acid sulfate under control and heat stress treatments. Both non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes showed increase in accumulation of 5-hydroxy-L-tryptophan, L-kynurenine, and L-pipecolic acid and decrease in accumulation of 2-phosphoglyceric acid, shikimate, and spermidine under heat stress, however the levels varied between genotypes. Fifty five metabolic pathways have been identified where significant known metabolites were involved. The variation in the levels of myriad of metabolites in non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes under control and heat stress conditions highlighted variable metabolic adjustment in stay-green genotype that reduce heat impacts.

## **4.2. Introduction**

Hexaploid bread wheat (*Triticum aestivum* L.) is the third most important cereal crop after maize and rice with 745.26 million tonnes of average annual global production from an average cultivated area of 219.008 million hectares from 2014 to 2018 (www.fao.org/faostat/ en/#data/QC/visualize). Hexaploid bread wheat contributes to global food security by supplying carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, dietary fibers, and phytochemicals to 21% of the world population (Shewry and Hey, 2015; FAO, 2015; Enghiad *et al*., 2017). The drastic climate change is haunting global food security by limiting sustainable agriculture (Campbell *et al*., 2016; Lesk *et al*., 2016; Daryanto *et al*., 2016). Approximately 40% of the irrigated areas under wheat cultivation is being affected by heat stress (Reynolds *et al*., 2001) and it is projected that yield losses can reach to 63 to 83% under rapid warming scenario till the end of  $21<sup>st</sup>$  century (Schlenker and Roberts, 2009). High temperature stress induces oxidative damage that leads to lipid peroxidation, protein degradation, and enzyme inactivation in turn influencing the stability of thylakoid membrane by increasing membrane fluidity, decrease chlorophyll content by disruption of chlorophyll structure, reduce photosynthesis by diminishing rubisco activity, and decrease leaf relative water content by increasing transpiration rate, pH of leaf sap, and abscisic acid production (Sairam *et al*., 2000; [Wilkinson and Davies,](#page-205-0)  [2002;](#page-205-0) Dias and Lidon, 2009). These changes in the notably complex physiological processes of plant causes reduce germination rate, lessen days to anthesis and maturity, fewer spikelets/spike, slower pollen growth, reduced pollen fertility, sterile grains, abnormal ovary development, reduce seed setting, decrease in thousand kernel weight, shriveled grains, reduce starch accumulation, and alter starch lipid composition in grains

(Balla *et al*., 2012; Balla *et al*., 2019). The genetic improvement for heat tolerance required mining and breeding of superior germplasm that can adapt to future changing climate (Stratonovitch and Semenov, 2015). During the recent decade, the stay-green trait has received substantial attention from crop breeders owing to the potential of increasing crop productivity together with a dramatically shrunken environmental footprint.

Stay-green refers to mutants, transgenic plants, or cultivars with the trait of heritable impeded foliar senescence compared with wild type or reference genotype (Thomas and Stoddart, 1975; Thomas and Howarth, 2000; Thomas and Ougham, 2014). The stay-green genotypes are broadly classified into functional stay-green (Type-A and Type-B) and non-functional stay-green (Type-C, Type-D, and Type-E) depending on the performance of photosynthesis (Thomas and Howarth, 2000; Jiang *et al*., 2004; Park *et al*., 2007; Ho¨rtensteiner, 2009; Thomas and Ougham, 2014). The former is the target of plant breeders (Pinto *et al.*, 2016), as the functional stay-green genotypes have the potential to retain chlorophyll content and photosynthetic capacity, delay canopy development phase from carbon capture to nitrogen remobilization, and improve plant productivity (Thomas and Ougham, 2014). A functional type stay-green in sorghum (Borrell and Hammer, 2000), rice (Yoo *et al*., 2007; Fu and Lee, 2008), maize (Echarte *et al*., 2008) and wheat (Spano *et al*., 2003) revealed a direct relationship of stay-green trait with grain yield. Stay-green trait has been associated with better performance under abiotic and biotic stresses such as water deficit (Borrell *et al*., 2014; Christopher *et al*., 2016; George-Jaeggli *et al*., 2017; Kamal *et al*., 2018), high temperature (Kumari *et al*., 2007; Pinto *et al*., 2016), stem lodging (Rosenow *et al*., 1983a), and spot blotch infection (Josh *et al*., 2007). Little is known of the biochemical regulation of the complex staygreen trait. The core biochemical profiling of the stay-green genotypes might deepen our understanding of the stay-green trait.

The term metabolomics coined in late 1990s (Fiehn, 2002), refers to the study of unique chemical fingerprints that includes primary and secondary metabolites in a complex sample matrix associated with cellular processes (Weston *et al*., 2015). Currently, the foremost approaches used in metabolomics are targeted analysis, metabolic

fingerprinting, and metabolite profiling (Fiehn, 2002; Halket *et al*., 2005; Shulaev, 2006). With the advent of metabolite profiling, a complete set of metabolites can be measured simultaneously using multiply analytical techniques that includes Nuclear Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopy, Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry, Liquid Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry, Capillary Electrophoresis-Mass Spectrometry and Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (Sumner *et al*., 2003; Shulaev, 2006; Roessner and Bacic, 2009; Sawada and Hirai, 2013). The application of highly sensitive and selective high throughput Liquid Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry in metabolomics is increasing with the adoption of the Ultra-High-Performance Liquid Chromatography technology that has spectacularly increased the separation efficiency and decreased the analysis time (Granger *et al*., 2007). Indubitably the untargeted high throughput metabolic analysis with advanced biochemical detection techniques have made possible to study the global view of metabolism bridging the major knowledge gaps in understanding the dynamic interactions in plant stress associated metabolism (Weckwerth 2003; Kaplan *et al*., 2004).

Plant kingdom thought to contain between 2,00,000 to 10,00,000 metabolites, with an array of approximately 5,000 metabolites in a single species (Dixon and Strack, 2003; Rai *et al*[., 2017;](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1674205219302011#bib143) Fang *et al*[., 2019;](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1674205219302011#bib53) Wang *et al*., 2019b). The myriad of structurally and functionally diverse plant metabolites play a significant role in growth, development, and stress responses in plants (Wang *et al*., 2019b). The plant physiology modifies with metabolic changes under stress to adapt to a particular ecological niche (Weckwerth, 2003). Untargeted global metabolic profiling under post anthesis heat stress in wheat revealed a considerable increase in the levels of L-tryptophan, pipecolate, alphaaminoadipate, L-arginine, L-histidine, and piperidine, whereas decline in drummondol, anthranilate, dimethylmaleate, galactoglycerol, guanine, and glycerone (Thomason *et al*., 2018). Soybean showed a significant decrease in the amount of glycolysis, pentose phosphate pathway, and tricarboxylic acid cycle metabolites under heat stress (Das *et al*., 2017). A study in maize found an increase in phenylalanine, alanine, gamma aminobutyric acid, threonate, xylose, galactinol, and isoleucine, whereas a decrease in glycerol, malate, glycerate, and phosphate under heat stress [\(Obata](#page-208-0) *et al*., [2015\)](#page-208-0). So far the knowledge of metabolic regulation for the stay-green trait as a

mechanism of tolerance to terminal heat stress is lacking. Thus, comprehensive metabolic analysis of stress associate metabolism in relation to stay-green can pave the way towards understanding and successful breeding of the stress tolerant staygreen crops.

The foremost advances in the perspective of the stay-green trait expedited with the growing knowledge of leaf senescence, chlorophyll degradation, photosynthesis, and nitrogen remobilization (Hörtensteiner and Kräutler, 2011; Gregersen, 2011; Breeze *et al*., 2011; Guo and Gan, 2012; Guo, 2013). The functional stay-green type improves grain yield by adjourning senescence that is delaying chlorophyll degradation, carbon capture, and nitrogen remobilization and increasing photosynthesis (Thomas and Ougham, 2014). Functional stay-green trait has been associated with post-anthesis heat stress tolerance in *Triticum aestivum* (Reynold *et al*., 2000; Kumari *et al*., 2013; Pinto *et al*., 2016). However, metabolic regulation for the trait has not been explored. The objective of the current study is to demonstrate the differential accumulation of metabolites in the leaf tissues of non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes in control and heat stressed *Triticum aestivum* plants during grain filling duration to unveil the mechanism behind stay-green trait in relation to heat stress tolerance. The UHPLC-HRMS based untargeted global metabolomics was deployed to identify the novel metabolites and pathways varying in non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes at different time points after anthesis under control and heat stress treatments. To our knowledge, this is the first report that unraveled inclusive metabolic profiles of non-stay-green and staygreen genotypes under control and heat stress treatments to determine the metabolic regulation underlying the stay-green trait.

## **4.3. Materials and methods**

#### *4.3.1. Plant materials, growth conditions, and treatments*

The experiment was conducted under controlled greenhouse conditions at the Department of Agronomy, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. *Triticum aestivum* L. stay-green variety Nepal-38 (CHIRYA7/ANB) and non-stay-green variety Sonalika (SASONO KOMOGI/NORIN//BOB'S') were used for the present study (Latif *et al*., 2020). The seeds of the selected varieties were obtained from National Agricultural Research Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan. The seeds were surface sterilized using 95% ethanol for 2-3 minutes followed by soaking in 10% Clorox for 30 minutes and subsequent washes for 3 to 4 times with autoclaved distilled water (Khan *et al*., 2019a). The sterilized seeds were sown in pots filled with 2,000 g of the Metro-mix® 360 soil mixture with the sowing density of five seeds per pot and thinned to four plants per pot after germination. The experiment was laid out in a completely randomized design with six biological replicates. During the experiment, the greenhouse conditions were maintained at 24/18 ºC day/night temperature with a photoperiod of 12 hours. Heat stress was imposed at anthesis by shifting half of the plants to a growth chamber where the temperature was maintained at 36/28 ºC day/night temperature with a photoperiod of 12 hours. The set of plants in the greenhouse grown at 24/18 °C day/night temperature served as a control. The pots were well watered throughout the experiment and a teaspoon of Osmocote (15N 9P 12K) was applied after germination and booting. Chlorophyll content, chlorophyll fluorescence (Fv/Fm ratio and performance index), membrane stability index, biological yield, and grain yield were estimated under control and heat stress conditions. For global metabolic profiling, the leaf tissues were harvested at 7 and 14 days of the heat stress treatment.

### *4.3.2 Physiological characterization*

The data was collected for physiological traits used to measure stay-green trait and known to be affected by heat stress. Chlorophyll content and chlorophyll fluorescence (the maximum quantum yield of photosystem II,  $Fv/Fm=(F_m-F_o)/F_m$  and the effective quantum yield of photosystem II,  $\Phi_{PSII} = (F_m' - F')/F_m'$ ) were used as an indirect method to measure the damage caused to chlorophyll due to heat stress and the efficiency of photosystem II under control and heat stress treatments. The traits were measured from 0 to 14 days regularly after imposition of heat stress following the methods described by Yuan *et al*., (2016), Kuhlgert *et al*., (2016) and Prinzenberg *et al*., (2018). Leaf Chlorophyll content was determined using SPAD chlorophyll meter (Model 502, Spectrum Technologies, Plainfield, IL, USA) in both control and heat stressed flag leaves from six biological replicates. Leaf chlorophyll fluorescence [Fv/Fm (mid-night) and Phi

II (mid-day)] was measured from the flag leaves using the handheld MultispeQ beta version (www.photosynq.org) in both control and heat stressed samples. The chlorophyll content and chlorophyll fluorescence were measured from the flag leaf at three parts: 1/3 of the distance from base, 1/2 of the distance from the base, and 2/3 of the distance from base), four plants per pot (a total of 12 readings) and averaged. The average value of 12 readings is considered as single replicate, six replicates per variety were used for statistical analysis. The membrane stability index (MSI) was determined from flag leaves at 0, 7 and 14 days after imposition of heat stress according to protocol described by Sairam *et al*., (1994)*.* Leaf samples (six leaf discs of uniform size) were placed in 25 mL of double-distilled water in two sets using six replicates for each variety. One set was kept at  $40^{\circ}$ C for 30 minutes and its conductivity (C1) was recorded using a conductivity meter. The second set was placed in a boiling water bath  $(100^{\circ}C)$  for 15 minutes and conductivity (C2) was recorded using a conductivity meter. The MSI was calculated as  $[1-(C1/C2)] \times 100$ .

#### *4.3.3. Biological yield and grain yield*

The plant above ground biomass (shoot and spike) was harvested, dried for 72 hours, and weighed using an electronics balance to determine the biological yield per plant. The spikes of the same plant were cut from the collar, threshed, and grain harvest obtained was weighed using an electronics balance to determine the grain yield per plant. Biological yield and grain yield were determined from six biological replicates (Pask *et al*., 2012).

#### *4.3.4. Sample collection and preparation for metabolic profiling*

Flag leaf tissues were collected during mid-day at 7 and 14 days of heat stress from both control and heat treated plants. The leaf tissues were collected from six biological replicates (six individual pots) for each variety and treatment. For sample collection, the leaf blade was washed with distilled water, incised with a sharp blade, immediately shifted to liquid nitrogen, and stored at -80ºC to prevent any degradation. The leaf tissues were lyophilized for 72 hours using FreeZone Freeze Dryer System (Labconco) and grinded to fine powder using Qiagen TissueLyser II. The finely powdered freeze dried leaf tissues were subjected to cellular extraction procedure to obtain extract used for untargeted global metabolic profiling. For extraction, 30 mg of the lyophilized leaf samples were taken in the clean eppendorf tubes followed by addition of 20  $\mu$ L of the daily internal standard mix, 750  $\mu$ L of methanol, and 750  $\mu$ L of 10 mM ammonium acetate to each sample. All the samples were subjected to vortex mixing for one minute which was followed by ultrasonication (20 minutes) at room temperature (20- 25 °C) and centrifugation at 17,000 g (10 minutes). The supernatant (200  $\mu$ L) was transferred to a clean eppendorf tube and dried down. The dried samples were constituted in 50 µL of the internal standard solution. The samples were vortex for 30 seconds, incubated at 4 ºC (10 minutes), and centrifuged at 20,000 rpm (10 minutes). The supernatant obtained was transferred to LC vials for metabolic profiling.

# *4.3.5. Untargeted global metabolomic profiling using ultra-high-performance liquid chromatography-high resolution mass spectrometry*

The untargeted global metabolic profiling was performed using Dionex UltiMate 3000 ultrahigh performance liquid chromatography system with thermo Q-Exactive Orbitrap mass spectrometer and an autosampler. The chromatographic separation was achieved on an ACE 18-pfp 100 x 2.1 mm, 2  $\mu$ m column with 0.1% formic acid in water as mobile phase A and acetonitrile as mobile phase B at a flow rate of 350  $\mu$ L/min. The column temperature was maintained at 25 ºC. All the samples were analyzed in both positive and negative heated electrospray ionization with a mass resolution of 35,000 at m/z 200 as separate injections, HESI probe temperature of 350  $^{\circ}$ C, spray voltage of 3,500 V and capillary temperature of 320 °C. The injection volume was 2  $\mu$ L for positive ion mode and 4 μL for negative ions mode.

#### *4.3.6. Data analysis*

The raw files for both positive and negative ion modes were converted to .mzXML using MS converter ProteoWizard version 3.0. MZmine 2.15 (freeware) was used for identifying features, aligning features, deisotoping peaks to remove duplicates, and gap filling to fill in any feature that may have been missed in the first alignment algorithm. All adducts and complexes from the data set were identified and removed. The data was searched against an internal retention time metabolite library developed by Southeast Center for Integrated Metabolomics, University of Florida. The mzMine data was exported in comma-separated values (CSV) format for statistical analysis. The data from both positive and negative ion modes were subjected to statistical analyses using MetaboAnalyst 4.0 server (https://www.metaboanalyst.ca/; Chong *et al*., 2018; Chong *et al*., 2019). To minimize the possible variance and improve statistical analysis, the data was checked for data integrity, filtered by interquartile range (IQR) and normalized to the sum of metabolites for each sample by selecting normalization by sum, log transformation, and autoscaling. Univariate analysis was performed by Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) using Tukey's HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) post-hoc analysis with adjusted p-value cutoff 0.05 to identify the significant metabolites and fold change analysis to unravel variations in the levels of metabolites between groups [SG\_C1/NSG\_C1, SG\_T1/NSG\_T1, SG\_C2/NSG\_C2, SG\_T2/NSG\_T2, NSG\_T1/NSG\_C1, NSG\_T2/NSG\_C2, SG\_T1/SG\_C1, and SG\_T2/SG\_C2 (where SG= Stay-green, NSG= Non-stay-green, C= Control, T= Heat stress treatment, 1= day 7 of heat stress, 2= day 14 of heat stress). Multivariate analysis was performed using a supervised method Partial Least Squares Discriminant Analysis (PLS-DA) and an unsupervised method hierarchical clustering by heatmap. The PLS-DA identified the important metabolites on the basis of variable importance in projection scores using five component model. A heat map was generated by Pearson distance measure and Ward clustering algorithm for the top 30 features selected by PLS-DA. The Significant Analysis of Metabolites (SAM) plot with delta value 0.8 and false discovery rate (FDR) 0.000431 was used to identify the most significant features. Collectively, the important metabolites were identified by ANOVA, PLS-DA, and SAM.

The pathway analysis was performed for the significant metabolites using *Oryza sativa* japonica (Japanese rice) (KEGG) library by Metaboanalyst 4.0. Kyoto Encyclopedia of Genes and Genomes (KEGG) pathway database (http://www.genome.ad.jp/kegg/pathway.html) was used to generate pathways.

Phenotypic data was analyzed using XLSTAT 2014.5.03. ANOVA was performed using Tukey Honest Significant difference to determine the level of statistical significance between groups (varieties and treatments).

## **4.4. Results**

#### *4.4.1. Physiological response*

Chlorophyll content and chlorophyll fluorescence were determined from the flag leaves of non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes between 0 to 14 days of heat stress in control and heat stress plants. Chlorophyll content significantly declined (*p<0.0001*) in the non-stay-green genotype under heat stress and the percentage decline in the chlorophyll content augmented with increase in duration of heat stress. The decrease in the chlorophyll content was evident on day 7 of heat stress in the non-stay-green genotype. The observed decline in chlorophyll content of non-stay-green genotype at 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 days of heat stress was 11%, 26%, 34%, 52%, 64%, 70%, 77%, and 85%, respectively. On the other hand, the stay-green genotype maintained the chlorophyll content in the flag leaves under heat stress treatment (Figure 4.1). The fv/fm and Phi II showed significant differences  $(p<0.0001)$  between genotypes and treatments. The fv/fm and Phi II declined in both the genotypes under heat stress conditions. However, the decline in fv/fm and Phi II was more pronounced in non-stay-green genotype. The percentage decline in fv/fm ratio in non-stay-green genotype at 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 days of heat stress was 5%, 13%, 16%, 25%, 43%, 58%, 71%, and 89%, respectively. The percentage decrease of Phi II in non-stay-green genotype was 17%, 18%, 28%, 47%, 60%, 77%, 80%, and 83% at 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 days of heat stress (Figure 4.2). The MSI was determined at 0, 7, and 14 days of heat stress in non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes. Heat stress caused significant decline  $(p<0.0001)$  in the MSI of both non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes. The percentage decline in the MSI of non-stay-green genotype at 7 and 14 days of heat stress was 19% and 84%, whereas the MSI of stay-green genotype declined by 7% and 15% under heat stress conditions as compared to control (Figure 4.3).



*Figure 4.1. Chlorophyll content in the flag leaves of non-stay-green (NSG) and staygreen (SG) genotypes under control (C) and heat stress (S) between 0 days after anthesis (A) to 14 days after anthesis (A14). Error bars represent standard error and different lowercase letters represents significant difference between genotypes and treatments at p<0.05.* 





*Figure 4.2. Photosynthetic efficiency of photosystem II (fv/fm and Phi II) of non-staygreen (NSG) and stay-green (SG) genotypes under control (C) and heat stress (S) treatment between 0 days after anthesis (A) to 14 days after anthesis (14A). Error bars represent standard error and different lowercase letters represent significant difference between genotypes and treatments at p<0.05.* 

## *4.4.2. Biological yield and grain yield*

Biological yield and grain yield showed significant differences *(p<0.0001)* between genotypes and treatments. The biological yield was reduced significantly in both the genotypes under heat stress treatment. The percentage reduction in the biological yield was 54% and 19% in non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes, respectively (Figure 4.4a). Heat stress also significantly reduced (60%) the grain yield in the non-stay-green genotype (Figure 4.4b).



*Figure 4.3. The membrane stability index of non-stay-green (NSG) and stay-green (SG) genotypes under control (C) and heat stress (S) treatments. Error bars represent standard error and different lowercase letters represent significant difference between genotypes and treatments at p<0.05.* 



*Figure 4.4. Biological yield and grain yield of non-stay-green (NSG) and stay green (SG) genotypes under control (C) and heat stress (S) treatments. Error bars represent standard errors and different lowercase letters represent significant difference between genotypes and treatments at p<0.05.* 

*4.4.3. Metabolomics for stay-green trait in Triticum aestivum under terminal heat stress* 

## *4.4.3.1. Global metabolic profiling*

All the samples were subjected to positive and negative heated electrospray ionization via UHPLC-HRMS to identify the core metabolites accumulated in non-staygreen and stay-green genotypes under control and heat stress treatments at day 7 (time point 1) and day 14 (time point 2) of heat stress. The UHPLC-HRMS based non-targeted global metabolomic profiling detected a total of 6,945 features from the positive ion mode and 5,586 features from the negative ion mode. Of the total, 185 metabolites from positive ion mode and 123 metabolites from negative ion mode were identified as known metabolites. The metabolites were highly reproducible among the six biological replicates. The identified metabolites included amino acids, acetylated amino acids, amines, polyamines, amino sugars, dipeptides, modified amino acids, alcohols and polyols, alkaloids, carbohydrates, lipids, nucleic acids, nucleobases, nucleosides, plant growth regulators, vitamins, organic acids, and organic compounds.

The PLS-DA was performed using all known metabolites in non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes under control and heat stress treatments at both the time points. The top five Partial Least Squares (PLS) components described a total of 74.2% variance. The first PLS component explained 38.7% of the total variance and the second PLS component explained 18.9% of the total variance (Figure 4.5a). The 2D scores plot between component 1 and component 2 revealed unambiguous differences between the metabolites accumulation in non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes (Figure 4.5b).

The top 30 significant known metabolites found in non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes under control and heat stress conditions were evident from heatmap. The hierarchical clustering of samples revealed two major clusters with cluster 1 including non-stay-green control and heat treated samples at different time points and cluster 2 including stay-green control and heat treated samples at different time points. The hierarchical clustering of features revealed two major clusters with different patterns of metabolite abundance. The metabolites that were highly accumulated in the stay-green genotype forming cluster 1 included 4-aminobenzoate, L-glutamic acid, taurine, L-lactic acid, cyclic ADP-ribose, cytidine monophosphate (CMP), spermine, phosphocholine, glutathione, trigonelline, syringic acid, and starch acetate. The set of metabolites highly accumulated in the non-stay-green genotype forming cluster 2 included picolinic acid, nicotinate, adenine, choline, 4-aminobutanoate, glucose/fructose, LL-2,6 diaminoheptanedioate, deoxyuridine, leu pro, glycyl-L-leucine, methionine sulfoxide,

guanosine, uridine, cytidine, isocytosine, 3-ureidopropionate, 5´-deoxyadenosine, and deoxycytidine (Figure 4.6).

Of the total 308 metabolites, 166 (269 with duplication) were identified as significant metabolites by ANOVA, PLS-DA, and SAM. The significant metabolites identified were amino acids, nucleic acids, nucleosides, nucleobases, vitamins and cofactors, sugars, amines organic acids, and organic compounds (Table 4.1, Figure 4.7). The variations in the levels of metabolites accumulated in the leaves of non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes grown under control and heat stress treatments at different time points were revealed by fold change analysis. The variation between genotypes was elucidated by determining the fold change among stay-green/non-stay-green genotypes under control and heat stress treatments at different time points. The fold change was determined for heat stress treated/control samples in non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes at two different time points to unravel variation in the levels of metabolites under heat stress (Table 4.1, Figure 4.8).



*Figure 4.5. The PLS-DA and 2D Scores plot for non-stay-green (NSG) and stay-green (SG) genotypes under control (C) and heat stress (HS) treatments at day 7 and day 14 of heat stress. The samples of two genotypes didn't overlap with each other, indicating an altered state of metabolite levels in two genotypes (T1: Day 7 of heat stress/7 Days after anthesis and T2: day 14 of heat stress/14 Days after anthesis)* 





	Compound ID	Molecular formula	Compound type	<b>ANOVA</b>		<b>SAM</b>		<b>PLSDA</b>	log2(FC)							
Metabolite				p value	<b>FDR</b>	d value	STD. DEV.		SG/NSG_T1		$SG/NSG_T2$		NSG HS/C		SG_HS/C	
								$Comp1 -$	$\mathbf C$	<b>HS</b>	$\mathbf C$	$\mathbf{H}\mathbf{S}$	<b>T1</b>	T2	<b>T1</b>	<b>T2</b>
4-Aminobutanoate	C00334	C4H9NO2	Amino Acid	1.42E-32	3.93E-30	6.18	0.02	1.76	$-4.49$	$-4.22$	$-4.8$	$-5.17$	$\blacksquare$	$-1.09$		$-1.45$
Uridine	C00299	C9H12N2O6	Nucleosides	8.46E-31	1.17E-28	6.12	0.03	1.6	$-7.35$	$-6.69$	$-6.29$	$-5.2$	$\sim$	$-1.34$		
Cytidine	C02961	C9H13N3O5	Nucleosides	6.97E-28	3.86E-26	6.01	0.04	1.6	$-6.6$	$-6.96$	$-6.68$	$-5.48$	$\blacksquare$	$-1.6$		$\sim$
Adenine	C00147	C5H5N5	Nucleobase	1.78E-27	8.20E-26	5.99	0.04	1.72	$-5.62$	$-6.67$	$-5.31$	$-3.93$	$\sim$	$-2.73$	$-1.02$	$-1.35$
Isocytosine		C4H5N3O	Nucleic acid	1.41E-26	5.57E-25	5.94	0.04	1.59	$-6.5$	$-6.69$	$-6.28$	$-5.65$	$\sim$	$-1.49$		
Glutathione	C00051	C10H17N3O6S	Vitamins and Cofactors	3.14E-26	1.09E-24	5.92	0.05	1.5	3.94	4.57	4.07	6.13	$\sim$	$-1.53$		
Nicotinate	C00253	C6H5NO2	Vitamins and Cofactors	1.12E-25	3.44E-24	5.89	0.05	1.7	$-4.62$	$-5.82$	$-4.43$	$-4.32$	$\blacksquare$	$-1.05$	$-1.23$	$\sim$
Guanosine	C00387	C10H13N5O5	Nucleosides	1.55E-24	4.28E-23	5.82	0.06	1.6	$-5.02$	$-5.69$	$-4.38$	$-4.05$	$\mathcal{L}$	$-1.39$		$-1.05$
Glycyl-L-leucine		C8H16N2O3	Dipeptide	3.29E-24	7.07E-23	5.8	0.06	1.62	$-7.06$	$-8.61$	$-8.13$	$-6.2$	1.04	$-2.57$		
Picolinic Acid	C <sub>10164</sub>	C6H5NO2	Organic Acid	3.32E-24	7.07E-23	5.8	0.06	1.65	$-4.15$	$-3.87$	$-3.85$	$-2.15$	$\blacksquare$	$-1.28$		
5'-Deoxyadenosine	C05198	C10H13N5O3	Deoxyribonucleoside	1.73E-23	3.42E-22	5.74	0.06	1.3	$-8.58$	$-9.01$	$-7.66$	$-4.85$	1.52	$-1.16$	1.09	1.66
Deoxycytidine	C00881	C9H13N3O4	Deoxyribonucleosides	3.13E-23	5.78E-22	5.73	0.06	1.33	$-9.74$	$-10.55$	$-8.13$	$-4.36$	$\sim$	$-1.89$		1.88
Leucylproline		C11H20N2O3	Dipeptide	1.25E-22	2.16E-21	5.68	0.07	1.56	$-6.68$	$-7.55$	$-7.94$	$-4.7$	1.1	$-2.47$		
Phosphocholine	C <sub>00588</sub>	C5H14NO4P	Organic Compound	1.36E-22	2.22E-21	5.67	0.07	1.45	4.73	5.05	4.99	5.02	$\sim$	$-1.33$		$-1.3$
5-Aminolevulinic Acid	C00430	C5H9NO3	Endogenous Non- Proteinogenic Amino Acid	1.60E-21	2.47E-20	5.58	0.08	1.66	$-1.56$	$-1.54$	$-1.78$	$-2.28$				
5-Hydroxyindoleacetate	C05635	C10H9NO3	Organic Acid	2.56E-21	3.73E-20	5.56	0.08	1.62	$-4.1$	$-4.21$	$-4.19$	$-2.79$		$-2.58$		
Methionine sulfoxide	C02989	C5H11NO3S	Organic Compound	3.10E-21	4.29E-20	5.56	0.08	1.51	$-3.73$	$-4.71$	$-4.39$	$-4.39$				
Starch Acetate			Sugar	5.89E-21	7.78E-20	5.53	0.08	1.24	1.68	2.34	2.37	2.73				
Deoxyuridine	C00526	$C_9H_{12}N_2O_5$	nucleoside	8.78E-21	1.11E-19	5.51	0.09	1.45	$-8.02$	$-10.08$	$-9.86$	$-6.5$	1.52	$-1.02$		
3-Ureidopropionate	C02642	C4H8N2O3	Organic Acid	9.98E-21	1.20E-19	5.51	0.09	1.52	$-2.17$	$-1.76$	$-2.66$	$\blacksquare$	$\sim$	$-1.15$		
Glucose	C00031	C6H12O6	Sugar	1.25E-20	1.44E-19	5.5	0.09	1.69	$-5$	$-3.73$	$-4.41$	$-4.93$	$-1.63$			
Glyceric acid	C00258	C3H6O4	Organic Acid	1.16E-19	$1.12E-18$	5.4	0.10	1.49	$-3.88$	$-2.36$	$-2.81$	$-2.84$	$-2.14$			
Choline	C00114	C5H13NO	Organic Compound	2.67E-19	2.39E-18	5.36	0.10	1.62	$-3.31$	$-4.25$	$-2.54$	$-3.79$			$-1.34$	$-1.53$
Taurine	C00245	C2H7NO3S	Amino sulfonic acid	8.39E-19	7.04E-18	5.3	0.11	1.51	1.45	2.37	2.05	1.7	$-1.03$			
Thiamine	C00378	C12H16N4OS	Vitamin	9.57E-19	7.80E-18	5.29	0.11	1.24	$-4.52$	$-2.87$	$-4.46$	$\sim$	$\sim$	$-1.62$	1.2	2.66
$\text{CMP}$	C00055	C9H14N3O8P	Nucleotide	1.16E-18	9.22E-18	5.28	0.11	1.31	2.28	2.59	1.41	3.37		$-2.19$		

*Table 4.1. The significant know metabolites with their compound ID, molecular formula identified by ANOVA, SAM and PLSDA in non-stay green (NSG) and stay green (SG) genotypes under control (C) and heat stress (HS) treatments at day 7 (T1) and day 14 (T2) of heat stress* 

**Molecular Mechanism behind Stay Green Trait in Bread Wheat (***Triticum aestivum* **L.) 113**




 $\sim$ 

**CHAPTER #4** 



























**b**

*Figure 4.8. The number of metabolites showing significant variation in non-stay-green (NSG) and stay-green (SG) genotype under control (C) and heat stress (HS) treatment at different time points. (a) Venn plot depicting the number of metabolites that are significantly different in stay-green genotype compared to non-stay-green genotype under control and heat stress treatment at 7 days after anthesis (T1) and 14 days after anthesis (T2), (b) Venn plot showing the number of metabolites significantly regulated in non-stay-green and stay-green genotype under heat stress compare to control at 7 days after anthesis (T1) and 14 days after anthesis (T2).* 

Of 100 metabolites that varied between stay-green genotype and non-stay-green genotype under control at time point 1, 56 were significantly higher in the non-stay-green genotype and 44 exhibited dramatically high content in the stay-green genotype, whereas of 115 total metabolites that varied between stay-green genotype and non-stay-green

genotype under control at time point 2, 64 were considerably higher in the non-stay-green genotype and 51 were highly accumulated in the stay-green genotype. The predominant metabolites in the non-stay-green genotype compared to the stay-green genotype under control at both time points were deoxyuridine, deoxycytidine, carnosine, 5' deoxyadenosine, glycyl-L-leucine, leucylproline, uridine, cytidine, isocytosine, and adenine. On the contrary, phosphocholine, ADP, trigonelline, allantoin, glutathione, asparagine, syringic acid, cyclic ADP-ribose, L-histidine, and L-lactic acid were highly accumulated in the stay-green genotype under control at time point 1 and phosphocholine, ADP, L-2-phosphoglyceric acid, D-raffinose, syringic acid, glutathione, L-glutamic acid, serotonin-NH3, allantoin, and disaccharide-6C/6C GLC-GLC/GLC-FRC/GAL-GLC were highly accumulated in the stay-green genotype under control at time point 2. Of 113 metabolites that varied between stay-green genotype and non-staygreen genotype under heat stress treatment at time point 1, 58 were significantly higher in the non-stay-green genotype and 55 showed high accumulation in the stay-green genotype, whereas of 112 metabolites that varied between stay-green genotype and nonstay-green genotype under heat stress at time point 2, 52 showed high accumulation in the non-stay-green genotype and 60 were highly accumulated in the stay-green genotype. The dominant metabolites in the non-stay-green genotype compare to the stay-green genotype under heat stress treatment at time point 1 were deoxycytidine, deoxyuridine, 5'-deoxyadenosine, glycyl-L-leucine, leucylproline, cytidine, uridine, isocytosine, adenine, and nicotinate, whereas the dominant metabolites in the non-stay-green genotype compare to the stay-green genotype under heat stress treatment at time point 2 were deoxyuridine, glycyl-L-leucine, isocytosine, cytidine, uridine, 4-aminobutanoate, glucose/fructose, D-glucuronic acid/D-glucuronolactone/D-galacturonic acid, 5' deoxyadenosine, and leucylproline. The prominent metabolites in the stay-green genotype compared to the non-stay-green genotype under heat stress treatment were ADP, cyclic ADP-ribose, L-2-phosphoglyceric acid, phosphocholine, glutathione, trigonelline, syringic acid, spermine, allantoin, and hydroquinone at time point 1; and glutathione, hexanesulfonic acid-sulfate, L-2-phosphoglyceric acid, phosphocholine, cyclic ADP-ribose, ADP, L-histidine, spermine, urate, and allantoin at time point 2 (Table 4.1, Figure 4.9).









## *Figure 4.9. The variations in the levels of metabolites accumulated in the leaves of stay-green (SG) compare to non-stay-green (NSG) genotype grown under control (C) and heat stress (HS) treatments at different time points (T1: Day 7 of heat stress and T2: day 14 of heat stress).*

The fold change analysis between the non-stay-green heat treated samples and the non-stay-green controlled samples revealed a variation in the accumulation of 75 and 85 metabolites at time point 1 and time point 2, respectively. The metabolites that increased in the non-stay-green genotype under heat stress treatment at time point 1 with log2 fold change greater than 2 included N-methyl-L-glutamate, 5-hydroxy-L-tryptophan, proline, tryptophan, source fragment TRP, S-carboxymethyl-L-cysteine, L-kynurenine, and Lpipecolic acid. The metabolites that showed a significant decline with log2 fold change less than -2 in the non-stay-green genotype under heat stress treatment at time point 1 were 6-phosphogluconic acid, quinate, L-2-phosphoglyceric acid, shikimate, L-carnitine, putrescine, 2,5-dihydroxybenzoate, hydroquinone, ADP, caffeate, glyceric acid, isocitric acid, and hexanesulfonic acid-sulfate. The metabolites accumulated in the non-stay-green genotype in heat stress treated sample at time point 2 with log2 fold change greater than 2 were N-methyl-L-glutamate, serotonin-NH3, proline, L-kynurenine, 4-oxoproline, nicotinamide, disaccharide-GLC-GLC/GLC-FRC/GAL-GLC, D-raffinose, valerylcarniti- -ne, L-pipecolic acid, xanthine, kynurenic acid, and N6-delta2-isopentenyl-adenine; whereas the metabolites that showed significant decline were L-methionine, hexanesulfonic acid-sulfate, carnosine, L-lysine, xanthurenic acid, adenine, L-2 phosphoglyceric acid, 5-hydroxyindoleacetate, glycyl-L-leucine, 1-methyladenosine, aspartate, Leu Pro, pyridoxine, diethyl 2-methyl-3-oxosuccinate, L-carnitine, shikimate,

orthophosphate, pyridoxal, L-arginine, CMP, glycine, C5-sugar alcohol, and riboflavin. The fold change analysis between the stay-green heat treated plants and stay-green controlled plants unraveled variable accumulation of 40 and 63 metabolites at time point 1 and time point 2, respectively. Tyramine, Tryptophan, Source Fragment TRP, and 5- Hydroxy-L-Tryptophan were accumulated in the stay-green genotype with log2 fold change greater than 2 under heat stress treatment at time point 1, whereas the levels of pyridoxine and xanthurenic acid reduced in the stay-green genotype under heat stress at time point 1. The metabolites that increased with log2 fold change greater than 2 in the stay-green genotype under heat stress treatment at time point 2 included tryptophan, agmatine sulfate, source fragment TRP, kynurenic acid, thiamine, tyramine, Lkynurenine, and urate; and the metabolites that declined in the stay-green genotype under heat stress treatment at time point 2 were shikimate and O-acetyl-L-serine (Table 4.1, Figure 4.10).









## *Figure 4.10. The variations in the levels of metabolites accumulated in the leaves of non-stay-green (NSG) and stay-green (SG) genotype grown under heat stress at different time points (T1: Day 7 of heat stress and T2: day 14 of heat stress).*

5-Hydroxy-L-tryptophan, tryptophan, source fragment TRP, L-kynurenine, Lpipecolic acid, L-histidine, 5'-deoxyadenosine, and N-alpha-acetyl-L-lysine were highly accumulated in both non-stay-green and stay-green heat stress treated samples at time point 1 and serotonin-NH3, proline, L-kynurenine, L-pipecolic acid, xanthine, kynurenic acid, and 5-hydroxy-L-tryptophan showed increase abundance in both the genotypes under heat stress at time point 2. The metabolites that declined in both non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes under heat stress were 6-phosphogluconic acid, quinate, L-2 phosphoglyceric acid, shikimate, isocitric acid, spermidine, 2-hydroxyhippuric acid, 3,4 dihydroxy-L-phenylalanine, and glycolate at time point 1, whereas xanthurenic acid, adenine, L-2-phosphoglyceric acid, aspartate, shikimate, sarcosine/beta-alanine,



spermidine, camphor, guanosine, phosphocholine, isocitric acid, 4-aminobutanoate, nicotinamide ribotide, and caffeate at time point 2 (Table 4.1, Figure 4.11).

























*Figure 4.11. The metabolites that showed significant variation under heat stress treatment at day 7 (T1) and day 14 (T2) of heat stress (Tukey's HSD; p <0.05). NSG: Non-stay-green, SG: Stay-green, C: Control, S: Stress. Error bars represent standard deviation (n=6) and different lowercase letters represent significant difference among genotypes and treatments.* 

#### *4.4.3.1. Metabolic pathway analysis*

Metabolic pathway analysis was performed in *Metaboanalyst 4.0* using *Oryza sativa* japonica (Japanese rice) (KEGG) library. Fifty five metabolic pathways were identified where the significant known metabolites were involved in different steps. Fifteen biosynthesis pathways identified were aminoacyl-tRNA biosynthesis, arginine biosynthesis, isoquinoline alkaloid biosynthesis, betalain biosynthesis, lysine biosynthesis, phenylalanine, tyrosine and tryptophan biosynthesis, biosynthesis of secondary metabolites – unclassified, valine, leucine and isoleucine biosynthesis, pantothenate and CoA biosynthesis, phenylpropanoid biosynthesis, zeatin biosynthesis, ubiquinone and other terpenoid-quinone biosynthesis, monobactam biosynthesis, tropane, piperidine and pyridine alkaloid biosynthesis, and fatty acid biosynthesis. Two degradation pathways detected were lysine degradation and valine, leucine, and isoleucine degradation. Other important metabolic pathways included porphyrin and chlorophyll metabolism, citrate cycle (TCA cycle), glyoxylate and dicarboxylate metabolism, carbon fixation in photosynthetic organisms, glycolysis/gluconeogenesis, and pyruvate metabolism (Table 4.2, Figure 4.12).



*Figure 4.12. The metabolic pathways that varied in the non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes at different time points under heat stress treatment at day 7 and day 14 of heat stress. The red circle represents the metabolites that varied between genotypes at different time points under control and heat stress treatments.* 

# *Table 4.2. Metabolic pathway analysis using Oryza sativa japonica (Japanese rice) (KEGG) library*





### **4.5. Discussion**

Heat stress adversely affects plant growth, development, and productivity by alternating an array of biochemical, morpho-physiological, and anatomical processes (Akter and Islam, 2017). Terminal heat stress accelerates the deterioration of chlorophyll content, which results in decrease in photosynthetic activity and biological yield (Liu *et al*., 2017). The effects of heat stress can be managed by development of superior genotypes with specific tolerance mechanisms. Plants have evolved distinct tolerance mechanisms such as avoidance, escape, and stay-green to maintain productivity by acclimation to heat stress (Sharma *et al*., 2019). Of these mechanisms, a secondary staygreen trait enables plants to maintain chlorophyll content and photosynthetic capacity during the grain filling duration, which in turn results in maximum mass per grain. Staygreen genotypes retain its leaf photosynthetic activity for longer duration even under abiotic and biotic stresses. Thus, the stay-green trait can be used as a principal selection strategy for yield sustainability under rapid warming scenario (Kamal *et al*., 2019). The present study was conducted to unravel the variation in morpho-physiology responses and metabolic regulation among non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes under terminal heat stress.

Heat stress affects the notable complex physiological mechanisms, which eventually influences plant's green biomass and photosynthetic activity (Liu *et al*., 2017; Djanaguiraman *et al*., 2018). Photosynthesis is one of the most sensitive metabolic processes, having direct impact on cereal yields (Ristic *et al*., 2007). The estimation of chlorophyll content and chlorophyll fluorescence used to detect the damage cause to photosystem II, is an indirect measure of photosynthesis (Guidi *et al*., 2019). The current study demonstrated a significant decline in chlorophyll content in the non-stay-green genotype under heat stress treatment, whereas the stay-green genotype retained chlorophyll content under heat stress treatment. The photosynthetic efficiency (fv/fm and Phi II) showed significant decrease under heat stress in both non-stay-green and staygreen genotypes. However, the reduction in photosynthetic efficiency was more pronounced in non-stay-green genotype. Our results are in alignment with previous studies that reported a significant decline in chlorophyll content and photosynthetic

efficiency under heat stress, percentage decline in chlorophyll content and photosynthetic efficiency varied among genotypes, and stay-green genotypes retain chlorophyll content and photosynthetic efficiency for longer duration under stress (Talukder *et al*., 2014; Azam *et al*., 2015; Pinto *et al*., 2016; Bhusal *et al*., 2018; Sattar *et al*., 2020; Latif *et al*., 2020). The stay-green genotypes seems to protect the chloroplast and reduce damage cause to the photosynthetic apparatus by dissipating excess of the radiation energy through high levels of carotenes and xanthophylls in their leaves and vegetative parts [\(Zhao and Tan, 2005;](#page-203-0) Suzuki and Mittler, 2006). Carotenes and xanthophylls are the structural components of the photosynthetic machinery and contribute to the protection of the photosystems against oxidative stress generated by light, heat, chilling, drought, salinity, or senescence (Latowski *et al*., 2011; Pinto *et al*., 2017). The strong antioxidant defense system that includes increased superoxide dismutase and catalase activities may also protects the chlorophyll and maintains the photosynthetic efficiency (Luo *et al*., 2006).

The MSI commonly estimated by measuring the ion leakage from plants is an indicator of heat stress tolerance. Positive correlation between MSI and thousand kernel weight has been reported in wheat under heat stress treatment (Rehman *et al*., 2016). Wheat genotypes showing high MSI tend to yield high under abiotic stress conditions (Blum *et al*., 2001). In the present study, a decline was noted in the MSI of both the genotypes, but the decline was significantly higher in the non-stay-green genotype than in the stay-green genotype which is in agreement with previous findings by ElBasyoni *et al*., (2017) that reported an overall decline in MSI under heat stress treatment. The cultivar specific antioxidant defense mechanism explains its tolerance to oxidative stresses (Abid *et al*., 2018). The stay-green genotypes may protect membranes from oxidative damage by minimizing the accumulation of reactive oxygen species and preventing lipid peroxidation through enhanced antioxidant enzymes activities.

Heat stress induced reduction in yield has been studied extensively in cereal crops (Ferris *et al*[., 1998;](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpls.2017.01147/full#B61) Rahman *et al*., 2009; Shah *et al*., 2011; Liu et al., 2014; [Fahad](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpls.2017.01147/full#B48) *et al*., [2016;](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpls.2017.01147/full#B48) [Schittenhelm](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/action/doSearch?ContribAuthorStored=Schittenhelm%2C+Siegfried) *et al*., 2020). For instance, wheat production declined by 6% with one-degree celsius increase in temperature (Asseng *et al*., 2015). In the current study,

biological yield and grain yield declined in both non-stay green and stay-green genotypes under heat stress conditions, however the percentage decline was significantly higher in the non-stay-green genotype. Several previous studies revealed significant decline in biological yield and grain yield in wheat under heat stress conditions (Stone *et al*., 1995; [Modarresi](https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/M-Modarresi-2022809050) *et al*., 2010; Prasad and Djanaguiraman *et al*., 2014; Balla *et al*., 2019). The superior performance of stay-green genotype under heat stress is an indicator of higher assimilation of photosynthate; the potential reason can be extended or higher rate of photosynthesis (Haris *et al*., 2007).

The stay-green genotype showed less damage to chlorophyll content, photosynthetic efficiency, membrane stability index, biological yield, and grain yield under heat stress treatment, which is in agreement with previous findings by Reynolds *et al*., 2000; Kumari *et al*., 2013; Pinto *et al*., 2016). Luo *et al*., (2006) and Luo *et al*., (2013) reported that functional stay-green Chuannong17 wheat genotype yield 25.7% higher than the non-stay-green Minyan11 by delaying chlorophyll degradation by 14 days; they attributed the yield advantage of the stay-green genotype to greater superoxide dismutase and catalase activity, lower malondialdehyde content, higher soluble protein content, unsaturated to saturated fatty acids ratio, and chlorophyll content, extended and enhanced photosynthetic competence, retention of shape and arrangement of chlorophyll structure, and regeneration of the chloroplast structure during the grain filling stage. The stay-green trait has been found valuable under different abiotic and biotic stresses (Duncan *et al.*, 1981; Rosenow, 1983b; Evangelista and Tangonan, 1990; Joshi *et al*., 2007; Borrell *et al*., 2014; Cerrudo *et al*., 2017); however, biochemical, physiological, and genetic basis of the stay-green trait are not yet clear. The current study demonstrated the comprehensive metabolic network underlying the stay-green trait.

To understand the metabolic regulation behind the stay-green trait under control and heat stress treatments the global metabolic profiling was carried out in the two contrasting genotypes (stay-green genotype and non-stay-green genotype) at different time points by UHPLC-HRMS. The differential accumulation of metabolites in staygreen genotype and non-stay-green genotype can provide precise information of the regulation of complex traits. The study revealed significant differences in the metabolic

phenotypes of the two selected genotypes. Approximately, 87% of the known metabolites showed variable accumulation between different groups (stay-green/non-stay-green under control, stay-green/non-stay-green under heat stress, non-stay-green under heat stress/non-stay-green under control, and stay-green under heat stress/stay-green under control).

The dominant metabolites that showed high accumulation in non-stay-green genotype were deoxyuridine, deoxycytidine, carnosine, 5'-deoxyadenosine, glycyl-Lleucine, leucyl proline, uridine, cytidine, isocytosine, adenine, nicotinate, 4 aminobutanoate, glucose/fructose, D-glucuronic acid/D-glucuronolactone/D-galacturonic acid, picolinic acid, choline, LL-2,6-diaminoheptanedioate, methionine sulfoxide, guanosine, and 3-ureidopropionate. The high levels of nucleotides and nucleobases after anthesis can be the indication of programmed cell death in non-stay-green genotype. Programmed cell death leads to cessation of nucleic acids into nucleotides and nucleobases [\(pyrimidines](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/pyrimidine) and [purines\)](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/purine), which are mobilized and transported from source to sink organs. These nucleotides and nucleobases serve as a source of nitrogen and phosphorus. However, little is known of the nucleic acid degradation in plants [\(Sakamoto](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S017616171730233X#bib0165)  [and Takami, 2014\)](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S017616171730233X#bib0165). The role of carnosine, glycyl-L-leucine, and leucyl proline have not been identified in plants, in the present study the high accumulation of these metabolites in the non-stay-green genotype showed its association with early senescence. High accumulation of leucyl proline has been reported previously in drought tolerant genotype under control conditions (Khan *et al*., 2019b). Nicotinate over-accumulation has been reported to cause toxicity in plants (Zheng *et al*[., 2005;](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpls.2019.01164/full#B23) Li *et al*[., 2017\)](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpls.2019.01164/full#B11). Nicotinate high accumulation can trigger premature leaf senescence by DNA fragmentation, hydrogen peroxide accumulation, increase histone H3K9 acetylation, disruption of NAD salvage pathway, and up-regulation of senescence associated genes (Wu *et al*., 2016). 4- Aminobutanoate (GABA) is a non-protein amino acid exhibiting several physiological roles. It is involved in stress tolerance by maintaining cytoplasmic pH and osmoregulation (Barbosa *et al*., 2010; Li *et al*., 2016a). GABA has also been reported to have positive correlation with plant senescence (Masclaux *et al*., 2000; Diaz *et al*., 2005). Leaf senescence induced by sugar starvation or sugar accumulation is still under debate. Some experiments supported the sugar starvation hypothesis and other studies reported

high sugar level induced senescence. Few studies demonstrated that exogenous supply of sugar induces leaf senescence; however the role of sugar during senescence is not clear [\(van Doorn,](javascript:;) 2008). During senescence, the accumulation of glucose and fructose has been reported in *Arabidopsis*, barley, and tobacco [\(Krapp](javascript:;) *et al.*, 1991; [Parrott](javascript:;) *et al.*, 2005; [Pourtau](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=Pourtau+N&cauthor_id=16514542) *et al*., 2006; Li *et al*., 2016b). It has also been conceived that sugar accumulation may not be the cause but result of leaf senescence [\(van Doorn,](javascript:;) 2008). Metabolic analysis of tobacco mid leaves at S5 developmental stage (when the lower leaves turned yellow) using liquid chromatography, capillary electrophoresis, and gas chromatography coupled with mass spectrometry revealed an increase accumulation of glucose and fructose during early senescence (Li *et al*., 2016b). Glucuronic acid involved in the biosynthesis of arabinose, xylose, galacturonic acid, and apiose (Reboul *et al*., 2011), has been reported to increase under heat, drought, and combined heat and drought conditions (Safronov *et al*., 2017). The role of glucuronic acid has not been investigated under environmental stresses. In the present study, high levels of glucuronic acid in non-stay-green genotype under control and heat stress treatments also need to be explored to unravel its relation with early senescence. Picolinic acid, a catabolite of tryptophan via kynurenine pathway, is a non-host specific toxin used for disease control. The spray of picolinic acid on rice leaves can inhibit growth of *P. oryzae* by the production of reactive oxygen species (Pasechnik *et al*., 1993; Zhang *et al*., 2004). The concentration of picolinic acid greater than 0.1 mg/L has been reported to cause foliar lesion, dramatic decrease in photosynthetic performance, and increase accumulation of hydrogen peroxide and superoxide anion radical in wheat [\(Aucique](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/action/doSearch?ContribAuthorStored=Aucique-P%C3%A9rez%2C+Carlos+Eduardo)‐Pérez *et al*., 2019). High accumulation of picolinic acid in non-stay-genotype might attribute to early senescence. Choline is a precursor of glycine betaine; an osmo-protectant confers tolerance to drought, salinity, and other environmental stresses (Rhodes and Hanson, 1993; Kent, 1995; Sakamoto and Murata, 2000). The role of choline in relation to stay-green trait has not been reported previously. In the present study, high accumulation of choline in non-stay-green genotype compared to stay-green genotype under control and heat stress treatments suggests its role in early senescence. Methionine is highly susceptible to oxidation by reactive oxygen species and reactive nitrogen species (Vogt, 1995; Chao *et al*., 1997; Tien *et al*., 1999). The major product of methionine oxidation is methionine sulfoxide. Methionine

sulfoxide accumulation is a common form of damage during aging that has been observed in all organisms [\(Châtelain](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=Ch%C3%A2telain+E&cauthor_id=23401556) *et al*., 2013). Methionine oxidation to methionine sulfoxide alters confirmation and function of protein [\(Dos Santos](javascript:;) *et al*., 2005). Among the metabolites that highly accumulated in non-stay-green genotype nicotinate, methionine sulfoxide, and picolinic acid are probably the key contributors to early senescence, GABA and choline seems to be associated with defense responses, and high levels of nucleotides, nucleobases, and sugars (glucose and fructose) are possibly the senescence indicator.

Stay-green genotype showed significantly high accumulation of phosphocholine, ADP, trigonelline, allantoin, glutathione, asparagine, syringic acid, cyclic ADP-ribose, Lhistidine, L-lactic acid, L-2-phosphoglyceric acid, D-raffinose, L-glutamic acid, disaccharide-6C/6C GLC-GLC/GLC-FRC/GAL-GLC, spermine, and hydroquinone. Phosphocholine, the most abundant primary organic phosphate is an intermediate in synthesis of phosphotidylcholine and choline. Both phosphotidylcholine and choline are involved in defense response under stress (Gout *et al*., 1990; Pical *et al*., 1999; Sakamoto and Murata, 2000; Tasseva *et al*., 2004; Zhang *et al*., 2015). Trigonelline serves as an inducer of defense metabolism by signal transmission under oxidative stress and accumulation of secondary compounds associated with defense mechanisms like glutathione metabolism (Berglund, 1994; Minorsky, 2002). Trigonelline like proline and glycinebetaine accumulates as compatible solute under salt and water stress (Tramontano and Jouve, 1997; Minorsky, 2002; Ashihara, 2008). Trigonelline increases the thermal stability of pyruvate kinase (Shomerilan *et al*., 1991). It has also been associated with detoxification of excessive nicotinic acid and nicotinamide produced in the pyridine nucleotide cycle (Nishitani *et al*., 1995; Zheng *et al*., 2005; Ashihara, 2008). Allantoin is a major intermediate in purine metabolism (Takagi *et al*., 2016). Allantoin has been studied in *Arabidopsis*, rice, and other species under drought, high salinity, cold, nutrient constraint, extended darkness, and pathogen invasion [\(Montalbini, 1991;](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4809300/#CIT0034) [Kaplan](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4809300/#CIT0021) *et al.*, [2004;](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4809300/#CIT0021) [Brychkova](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4809300/#CIT0004) *et al.*, 2008; [Kanani](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4809300/#CIT0020) *et al.*, 2010; Yobi *et al.*[, 2013;](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4809300/#CIT0076) [Coneva](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4809300/#CIT0009) *et al.*, 2014; Wang *et al.*[, 2016\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4809300/#CIT0066). Allantoin involvement in stress protection has been suggested after the study of Xanthine dehydrogenase knockout mutants of *Arabidopsis*. The knockout mutants have defected xanthine oxidation, resulted in diminished stress tolerance and

early senescence [\(Nakagawa](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4809300/#CIT0037) *et al.*, 2007; [Brychkova](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4809300/#CIT0004) *et al.*, 2008; [Watanabe](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4809300/#CIT0070) *et al.*, 201[4\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4809300/#CIT0070). Allantoin plays a significant role in metabolism, signaling, and bioenergetics in plants. It functions in stress tolerance by reducing reactive oxygen species (Brychkova *et al*., 2008). Glutathione is one of a robust antioxidant system, which protects plants from oxidative damages caused by reactive oxygen species (Gill and Tuteja, 2010a; Das and [Roychoudhury,](http://www.frontiersin.org/people/u/164260) 2014; Hasanuzzaman *et al*., 2017). Glutathione acts as an active electron donor during detoxification of reactive oxygen species (Asada, 1994). It is an integral part of the glutathione-ascorbate cycle that scavenges hydrogen peroxide. It has been reported previously that an inhibition of glutathione biosynthesis under stress resulted in overproduction of reactive oxygen species (Jin *et al*., 2008). Several studies reported that glutathione exogenous application provides protection against oxidative stress (Asada, 1994). Glutathione is also involved in the methylglyoxal detoxification; an organic cytotoxic α-oxoaldehyde compound that develops oxidative stress and disrupts the activities of antioxidant enzymes (Wang *et al*., [2009;](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5391355/#CR128) Desai *et al*., [2010\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5391355/#CR21). Methylglyoxal detoxification is an important stress tolerance strategy under abiotic stress conditions. Glutathione is not only associated with defense responses but also modulates other antioxidant enzymes (Yadav *et al*., [2008\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5391355/#CR134). Lactic acid augments growth and production (quality and quantity) of plants by increasing net leaf area and plastid pigment, improving nutrient availability and assimilation, and alleviating abiotic and biotic stresses. The plant with high lactic acid levels displayed better tolerance to temperature, pH, and disease (Böhme *et al*., 1998; Lamont *et al*., 2017). Histidine reduces the oxidative damage caused by abiotic and biotic stresses. The 10 fold higher histidine accumulation was observed in the tolerant genotype of *Arabidopsis* under cadmium stress. Histidine metabolism is integrated with numerous metabolic pathways including tryptophan metabolism. Tryptophan also plays a major role in development and defense responses in plants (Zemanová *et al*., 2014). ADP-ribose free molecules maintain NAD and ATP levels by recycling nucleotides under oxidative stress, thus enhancing plant tolerance [\(Ogawa](javascript:;) *et al.*, 2009). Syringic acid is a phenolic compound, which attenuates the growth defects induced by stresses (Adams *et al*., 2020). Syringic acid application alleviates oxidative stress by increasing antioxidant levels and preventing lipid and protein peroxidation (Cotoras *et al*., 2014). L-2-phosphoglyceric acid, an intermediate of glycolysis, has been reported to significantly increase in the tolerant genotype under stress treatment (Matsunami *et al*., 2020). In the current study, the high accumulation of L-2-phosphoglyceric acid can be an attribute of stay-green trait and stress tolerance. Raffinose belonging to raffinose family oligosaccharide has been reported as an osmoprotectant under abiotic stresses (ElSayed *et al*., 2014; Sengupta *et al*., 2015). Raffinose accumulation showed positive correlation with drought stress tolerance (Downie *et al*., 2003; Egert *et al*., 2015). Raffinose acts as a protective agent by scavenging reactive oxygen species (Nishizawa *et al*., 2008). It is involved in membrane stability by preventing cellular contents leakage during dehydration and membrane infusion after rehydration (Cacela and Hincha, 2006). Raffinose is transported to chloroplast, where it protects thylakoids and photosystem II (Schneider and Keller, 2009). Raffinose plays many other significant roles in plant that included protection of embryo during maturity, prevention of seed desiccation, long-distance sugar transport, carbon storage, mRNA export, act as signaling molecule during wound and pathogen infection, stabilizing sensitive macromolecules under stress, and source of energy during germination and recovery from abiotic stresses (Vinson *et al*., 2020; Nishizawa *et al*., 2008; Hernandez-Marin and Martínez *et al*., 2012). Glutamic acid takes part in root architecture, seed germination, pollen germination, pollen tube growth, response and adaptation to abiotic (salt, cold, heat, and drought) and biotic stresses, and signal transduction [\(Qiu](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Qiu%20XM%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=32063909) *et al*., 2020). Application of glutamic acid elevates percentage survival of maize seedlings under heat stress. Glutamic acid enhances heat stress tolerance by activating glutamate receptors calcium signaling. However, the detail mechanism needs to be explored (Li *et al*[., 2019\).](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6999156/#B35) Metabolic profiling of creeping bentgrass plants sprayed with carbonyldiamide (Nitrogen source), aminoethoxyvinylglycine (ethylene inhibitor), and zeatin riboside (cytokinin) to suppress heat induced senescence revealed an increase accumulation of disaccharides (sucrose) and decrease accumulation of monosaccharides (glucose and fructose). Increased disaccharides levels represent active supply of carbohydrates by photosynthesis, which could protect plants during prolonged heat stress (Jespersen *et al*., 2015). Spermine has been reported to increase linearly under heat stress (Sagor *et al*., 2013). Spermine application significantly increases thiol-containing compounds like glutathione under control and heat stress conditions, which are involved

in defense responses (Todorova *et al*., 2016). Spermine application can alleviate the adverse effects of heat stress by decreasing lipid peroxidation, stabilizing cell biomembranes, delaying leaf pigment damage, and maintaining photosynthesis and antioxidant activities (Groppa and Benavides, 2008; Gill and Tuteja, 2010b; Amooaghaie and Moghym, 2011; Tian *et al*., 2012; Todorova *et al*., 2016). Spermine may protect plants from heat stress by activating various heat shock transcription factors (Kuzmin *et al*., 2004). High spermine level promotes grain filling and increases grain weight (Yang *et al*., 2008). Exogenous application of spermine in wheat has been reported to increase grain yield of heat tolerant genotype by 19% and heat sensitive genotype by 31% (Jing *et al*., 2020). Hydroquinone improves plant growth at lower concentration [\(Kamran](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=Kamran%20M%5BAuthor%5D&cauthor=true&cauthor_uid=28553632) *et al*., 2017). The application of hydroquinone (20mM) not only enhances seed germination but inhibits growth of seed borne fungi (Elwakil, [2003\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5427145/#B14). Hydroquinone application has been reported to increase wheat seedling growth (Li *et al*., [2009\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5427145/#B21). In the present study, the high levels of trigonelline, glutathione, L-histidine, L-lactic acid, D-raffinose, L-glutamic acid, and spermine in stay-green genotype compare to non-stay-green genotype suggests association of these metabolites with the stay-green trait. The stay-green genotype seems to maintain cellular homeostasis under heat stress by attenuating the damage caused by reactive oxygen species through its strong antioxidant system.

In the present study, both non-stay-green and stay-green genotypes showed high accumulation of 5-hydroxy-L-tryptophan, L-kynurenine, and L-pipecolic acid at both the time points under heat stress. 5-hydroxy-L-tryptophan is an intermediate of *N*-acetyl-5 methoxytryptamine biosynthesis (Kang *et al*., 2011). *N*-acetyl-5-methoxytryptamine is a multi-regulatory molecule involved in seed growth, root development, circadian rhythm, senescence, fruit ripening, yield, and response to abiotic and biotic stresses (Hernández *et al*., 2015; Sun *et al*., 2015; Hardeland, 2016). *N*-acetyl-5-methoxytryptamine scavenges the ROS generated during abiotic and biotic stresses (Manchester *et al*., 2015; Reiter *et al*., 2018). L-kynurenine is an end product of tryptophan oxidation (Ronsein *et al*., [2008\)](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/tpj.13299#tpj13299-bib-0088). Pipecolate, a non-proteinaceous product of lysine catabolism (Wang *et al*., 2018), had negative correlation with yield. High accumulation of pipecolate has been previously reported in wheat under heat stress (Thomason *et al*., 2018). Though, L-kynurenine and pipecolate accumulated in both the genotypes but their levels were relatively higher in

non-stay-green genotype at both the time points. The levels of L-2-phosphoglyceric acid, shikimate, isocitric acid, and spermidine dropped in both the genotypes under heat stress; however the decline was more evident in the non-stay-green genotype. Several previous studies reported decline in the levels of phosphoglyceric acid (Weis 1981; Law and Crafts-Brandner 1999; Schrader *et al*., 2004), shikimate (Singh *et al*., 2016) and spermidine (Upadhyay *et al*., 2020) during heat stress.

### **4.6. Conclusion**

The Ultra-High‐Performance Liquid Chromatography High‐Resolution Mass Spectrometry based untargeted global metabolic profiling of leaf tissues of the control and heat treated plants at two different time points unraveled variable accumulation of metabolites in stay-green and non-stay-green genotypes. The dominant metabolites that showed significant high accumulation in non-stay-green genotype were deoxyuridine, deoxycytidine, carnosine, 5'-deoxyadenosine, glycyl-L-leucine, leucyl proline, uridine, cytidine, isocytosine, adenine, nicotinate, 4-aminobutanoate, glucose/fructose, Dglucuronic acid/D-glucuronolactone/D-galacturonic acid, picolinic acid, choline, LL-2,6 diaminoheptanedioate, methionine sulfoxide, guanosine, and 3-ureidopropionate. Among the metabolites that showed high accumulation in non-stay-green genotype nicotinate, methionine sulfoxide, and picolinic acid can be considered as key contributor to early senescence by producing reactive oxygen species and 4-aminobutanoate and choline seems to be associated with defense responses. Stay-green genotype showed significantly high accumulation of phosphocholine, ADP, trigonelline, allantoin, glutathione, asparagine, syringic acid, cyclic ADP-ribose, L-histidine, L-lactic acid, L-2 phosphoglyceric acid, D-raffinose, L-glutamic acid, disaccharide-6C/6C GLC-GLC/GLC-FRC/GAL-GLC, spermine, and hydroquinone. The high levels of trigonelline, glutathione, L-histidine, L-lactic acid, D-raffinose, L-glutamic acid, and spermine in staygreen genotype compare to non-stay-green genotype suggests association of these metabolites with the stay-green trait and may be used as metabolic markers for screening of climate resilient stay-green genotypes.

*Chapter #5* 

# *Conclusion*

### **Conclusion**

Advances in plant-omics in the last two decades have demonstrated an unprecedent power to dissect the genetic basis of important agronomic traits. Advent of next generation sequencing platforms and their utilization in breeding have helped breeders to jump from QTL mapping to association mapping, from marker trait selection to genomic selection, from years to days, small region sequencing to complete genome sequencing and most importantly from millions of dollars to hundreds of dollars. Transcriptomics of plants using next generation platforms have also helped to understand not only complete transcriptional responses of plant but also post transcriptional responses. Proteomics and metabolomics using advance mass spectrophotometry have also enabled to unravel the mysteries of plant metabolisms and responses to both abiotic and biotic stresses. With escalating temperature, intense and frequent heat waves, water scarcity, and salinity together on top soaring population rates, breeders needs to utilize plant-omics tools to tailor cultivars to ensure future food security and safety.

Geographic historians have documented constant change in climate of planet earth since its inception. Evolution of life on planet earth has been driven by these climatic changes. However, recent fluctuation is unprecedented with extreme high temperature and disrupted rainfall. It is quite evident that we —the humans" cause these changes by burning fossil fuels, cutting forest trees, and utilizing nonrenewable resources. These causes have helped in accumulation of heat trapping gasses (Greenhouse gasses) in planet's atmosphere. Since the creation of planet earth, ~800,000 years ago green-house gasses concentration is at the highest. These gasses and their swift increase are changing our climate at a rapid rate too fast for proper adaptation of life. Safety and prosperity are the key elements of every human civilization. We must act now, as the impact of climate changes are leaving unrepairable damages.

Agriculture is the most affected by climate change. Pre- and post-harvest losses are increasing due to climate changes. To cope with yield losses due to climatic extremes and to meet future food demand of increasing population, there is an urgent need for

exploring sustainable strategies for yield improvement. Terminal heat, prolong drought, and rainfall during grain filling are significantly reducing crop yields. Stay-green trait has received considerable attention from breeders owing to the potential of increasing and stabilizing productivity under altering environment. Stay-green trait needs to be explored at greater depth to be employed in future breeding programs.

- $\checkmark$  The present study demonstrated significant positive association of the stay-green attribute with crop yield and detected forty eight quantitative trait loci for stay-green and related traits. The identified loci were associated with putative genes involved in flowering time control, chloroplast development, and damage tissues regeneration. The genes identified can be subjected to expression profiling in future to validate their role in the appearance of the stay-green trait. Further, exploration of these loci will contribute towards our understanding of the stay-green trait and can be effectively utilized to develop high yielding stress tolerant stay-green cultivars.
- $\checkmark$  Current study also suggested an integrated way to classify a large set of genotypes into different stay-green types. The genotypes characterized into the stay-green type displayed high yield under control and heat stress conditions. Gene sequencing and expression profiling of selected chlorophyll related and photosynthetic responsive genes revealed significant variations between functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and nonstay-green genotypes. Collectively, it is concluded that the stay-green phenotype can significantly mitigate the harmful aspects of the terminal heat stress by sustaining grain yield and biological yield. Moreover, the stay-green trait is a complex trait that needs to be explored at greater depth using high throughput phenomics and genomics tools.
- $\checkmark$  The untargeted global metabolic profiling detected a variable accumulation of metabolites in stay-green and non-stay-green genotypes. Among the metabolites that showed high accumulated in non-stay-green genotype nicotinate, methionine sulfoxide, and picolinic acid can be considered as key contributor to early senescence by producing reactive oxygen species and 4-aminobutanoate and choline seems to be associated with defense responses. The high levels of trigonelline, glutathione, L-histidine, L-lactic acid, D-raffinose, L-glutamic acid, and spermine in stay-green genotype compare to non-staygreen genotype suggests association of these metabolites with the stay-green trait and may be used as metabolic markers for screening of climate resilient stay-green genotypes.

Since, only approximately 3% of the metabolites are known metabolites, poses a major challenge towards thorough understanding of the biochemical mechanisms linked with the stay-green trait. Further investigation using nuclear magnetic resonance to identify approximately 97% of the unknown metabolites will help to understand the comprehensive array of biochemical pathways underlying the stay-green trait as a mechanism of tolerance to heat stress.

The current thesis reports fundamental knowledge of molecular basis of staygreen trait in bread wheat. Moreover, we demonstrated that utilization of multiple plantomics approaches will allow the identification of robust candidates for agronomical quantitative traits in bread wheat. The identified genes/loci can be functionally validated using transgenic as well as non-transgenic approaches and can be consider as molecular markers for genomics/marker selection breeding programs.

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## **ANNEXURE**

## **Annexure**



## *Annexure 2.1. Pedigree of the association panel used for phenotyping*





,我们也不会有什么。""我们的人,我们也不会有什么?""我们的人,我们也不会有什么?""我们的人,我们也不会有什么?""我们的人,我们也不会有什么?""我们的人



e e

Trait	Method	Marker	Chrom	Position	Effect	p Value	$-log10(p)$
PI 21DAA	FarmCPU	RAC875 rep_c110533_92	1A	1339580	0.0182	0.00099	3
$\ensuremath{\mathsf{CSFL}}\xspace$	FarmCPU	tplb0025b13 2687	1A	3386986	4.4836	0.00014	3.86
$\ensuremath{\mathsf{CSFL}}\xspace$	$\operatorname{GLM}$	tplb0025b13_2687	1A	3386986	4.6581	0.00021	3.69
PI_21DAA	FarmCPU	tplb0025b13_2687	1A	3386986	0.0303	0.00093	3.03
$\operatorname{CSFL}$	$MLM$	tplb0025b13_2687	1A	3386986	4.5585	0.00052	3.28
NDVI_A	FarmCPU	Tdurum_contig11679_319	1A	6570191	0.116	0.00014	3.84
NDVI_A	<b>GLM</b>	Tdurum_contig11679_319	1A	6570191	0.114	7.11E-05	4.15
NDVI_A	<b>MLM</b>	Tdurum_contig11679_319	1A	6570191	0.1181	0.00019	3.72
SPS	FarmCPU	wsnp_Ex_c29914_38896441	1A	76031015	1.1701	0.00092	3.04
<b>SPS</b>	$\operatorname{GLM}$	wsnp Ex c14733 22819350	1A	100292629	0.5381	0.00077	3.11
<b>SPS</b>	$\operatorname{GLM}$	IAAV7414	1A	100292829	0.5381	0.00077	3.11
$\rm SL$	FarmCPU	wsnp Ex c14733 22819625	1A	100292904	0.4048	0.00029	3.54
$\rm SL$	$\operatorname{GLM}$	wsnp Ex c14733 22819625	1A	100292904	0.419	0.00019	3.72
<b>SPS</b>	FarmCPU	wsnp Ex c14733 22819625	1A	100292904	0.5467	0.00063	$3.2\,$
SPS	$\operatorname{GLM}$	wsnp Ex c14733 22819625	1A	100292904	0.5829	0.00026	3.59
$\operatorname{SL}$	<b>MLM</b>	wsnp Ex c14733 22819625	1A	100292904	0.4048	0.0007	3.16
$\operatorname{SL}$	$\operatorname{GLM}$	wsnp_Ex_c49829_54319220	1A	101764563	0.3612	0.00079	3.1
SPS	<b>GLM</b>	wsnp Ex c49829_54319220	1A	101764563	0.5384	0.0004	$3.4\,$
$\rm SL$	$\operatorname{GLM}$	wsnp_RFL_Contig1736_858448	1A	101764713	0.3612	0.00079	3.1
SPS	<b>GLM</b>	wsnp RFL Contig1736 858448	1A	101764713	0.5384	0.0004	$3.4\,$
$\operatorname{SL}$	FarmCPU	wsnp_Ex_c26098_35349418	1A	107227745	0.5039	0.00063	$3.2\,$
$\rm SL$	<b>GLM</b>	wsnp_Ex_c26098_35349418	1A	107227745	0.5259	0.00042	3.38
$\operatorname{SL}$	FarmCPU	Kukri rep_c101218_200	1A	108760658	0.418	0.00069	3.16
$\rm SL$	<b>GLM</b>	Kukri rep_c101218_200	1A	108760658	0.4344	0.00048	3.32
<b>SPS</b>	$\operatorname{GLM}$	Kukri_rep_c101218_200	1A	108760658	0.5948	0.00077	3.12
$\operatorname{SL}$	FarmCPU	BS00028874 51	1A	117808227	0.418	0.00069	3.16
$\rm SL$	$\operatorname{GLM}$	BS00028874_51	1A	117808227	0.4344	0.00048	3.32
<b>SPS</b>	$\operatorname{GLM}$	BS00028874_51	1A	117808227	0.5948	0.00077	3.12
<b>SL</b>	FarmCPU	BS00066308_51	1A	147908325	0.418	0.00069	3.16
SL	<b>GLM</b>	BS00066308_51	1A	147908325	0.4344	0.00048	3.32
<b>SPS</b>	$\operatorname{GLM}$	BS00066308_51	1A	147908325	0.5948	0.00077	3.12
$\operatorname{SL}$	FarmCPU	wsnp_Ex_c2389_4479047	1A	155080158	0.418	0.00069	3.16
$\rm SL$	$\operatorname{GLM}$	wsnp Ex c2389 4479047	1A	155080158	0.4344	0.00048	3.32
SPS	<b>GLM</b>	wsnp Ex c2389 4479047	1A	155080158	0.5948	0.00077	3.12
$\operatorname{SL}$	$\operatorname{GLM}$	wsnp_Ex_c2389_4477880	1A	155081443	0.4514	0.0008	3.1
$\operatorname{SL}$	FarmCPU	BS00033760_51	1A	157831818	0.418	0.00069	3.16
$\rm SL$	$\operatorname{GLM}$	BS00033760_51	1A	157831818	0.4344	0.00048	3.32
SPS	<b>GLM</b>	BS00033760_51	1A	157831818	0.5948	0.00077	3.12
$\operatorname{SL}$	FarmCPU	wsnp_Ex_c41237_48104282	1A	176457891	0.418	0.00069	3.16

*Annexure 2.2. Genome-wide association mapping showing marker trait association at – log10(p) ≥ 3* 









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Chromosome (CHROM), Chlorophyll content at tillering (CHL\_T), Chlorophyll content at booting (CHL\_B), Chlorophyll content at heading (CHL\_H), Chlorophyll content at anthesis (CHL\_A), Chlorophyll content at 10 days after anthesis (CHL\_10DAA), Chlorophyll content at 20 days after anthesis (CHL\_20DAA), Chlorophyll content at 30 days after anthesis (CHL\_30DAA), photosynthetic efficiency at heading (fv/fm\_H), photosynthetic efficiency at anthesis (fv/fm\_A), photosynthetic efficiency at 14 days after anthesis (fv/fm\_14DAA), photosynthetic efficiency at 21 days after anthesis (fv/fm\_21DAA), NDVI at heading (NDVI\_H), NDVI at anthesis (NDVI\_A), NDVI at 14 days after anthesis (NDVI\_14DAA), NDVI at 21 days after anthesis (NDVI\_21DAA), Plant height (PH), Tiller number (TN), Spike length (SL), Spikelet per spike (SPS), Thousand kernel weight (TKW), Grain yield (GY), Biological yield (BY).

Chr	<b>Start</b>	End	<b>Strand</b>	ID	<b>Gene description</b>
1B	14551564	14568041	$\! + \!\!\!\!$	TraesCS1B02G029600	
1B	14609435	14626525	$^{+}$	TraesCS1B02G029700	
1B	14634788	14656402	$\! + \!\!\!\!$	TraesCS1B02G029800	
1B	14691678	14692533	$\frac{1}{2}$	TraesCS1B02G029900	
1B	14843598	14847648	$^+$	TraesCS1B02G030000	
1B	14864455	14866465	$^{+}$	TraesCS1B02G030100	
1B	14929251	14931368	$\! + \!\!\!\!$	TraesCS1B02G030200	
1B	14950407	14952265	$\frac{1}{2}$	TraesCS1B02G030300	
1B	15038439	15042452	$\blacksquare$	TraesCS1B02G030400	Beta-galactosidase
1B	15097670	15100117	$\overline{a}$	TraesCS1B02G030500	
1B	15107810	15112122	$\overline{\phantom{0}}$	TraesCS1B02G030600	
1B	15141444	15142626		TraesCS1B02G030700	
1B	15165681	15176969	$\blacksquare$	TraesCS1B02G030800	
1B	15236935	15238182	$\frac{1}{2}$	TraesCS1B02G030900	
1B	15288136	15290367	$\! + \!\!\!\!$	TraesCS1B02G031000	
1B	15290430	15295770	$\frac{1}{2}$	TraesCS1B02G031100	
1B	15339921	15340166	$^+$	TraesCS1B02G031200	
1B	15421816	15422013	$\! + \!\!\!\!$	TraesCS1B02G031400	
1B	15438996	15441928	$\blacksquare$	TraesCS1B02G031500	
1B	15448355	15451124	$\overline{\phantom{a}}$	TraesCS1B02G031600	
1B	15517132	15519874	$\blacksquare$	TraesCS1B02G031700	
1B	15526043	15528357	$^{+}$	TraesCS1B02G031800	
1B	15530721	15530918	$\overline{\phantom{0}}$	TraesCS1B02G031900	
1B	15578829	15579449	$^+$	TraesCS1B02G032000	
1B	15638525	15641235	$\frac{1}{2}$	TraesCS1B02G032100	
1B	15655141	15661187	$^{+}$	TraesCS1B02G032200	
1B	15707939	15713937	$^{+}$	TraesCS1B02G032300	
1B	15742607	15743947	$\overline{a}$	TraesCS1B02G032400	
1B	15744865	15751148		TraesCS1B02G032500	Probable serine/threonine- protein kinase WNK3
1B	15869836	15875064		TraesCS1B02G032600	
1B	15875847	15879684	$^{+}$	TraesCS1B02G032700	
1B	15895667	15903558		TraesCS1B02G032800	
1B	631064445	631068250	$\overline{\phantom{0}}$	TraesCS1B02G400500	
1B	631199519	631204466		TraesCS1B02G400600	
1B	631218083	631219195		TraesCS1B02G400700	
1B	631219588	631221927		TraesCS1B02G400800	
1B	631224329	631227033	$\overline{\phantom{0}}$	TraesCS1B02G400900	
1B	631228409	631232363		TraesCS1B02G401000	
1B	631235094	631236013		TraesCS1B02G401100	

*Annexure 2.3. High confidence protein coding genes at 20 multi-method GWAS loci.* 



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## *Annexure 3.1. List of genotypes, pedigree, and grouping of germplasm used in the study*

**Molecular Mechanism behind Stay Green Trait in Bread Wheat (***Triticum aestivum* **L.) lxx**



**Molecular Mechanism behind Stay Green Trait in Bread Wheat (***Triticum aestivum* **L.) lxxi**


**Molecular Mechanism behind Stay Green Trait in Bread Wheat (***Triticum aestivum* **L.) lxxii**



**Molecular Mechanism behind Stay Green Trait in Bread Wheat (***Triticum aestivum* **L.) lxxiii**



**NSG Non-Stay Green, MNSG Moderately Non-Stay Green, MSG Moderately Stay Green, SG Stay Green** (Scale: NSG 0.40->0.495, MNSG 0.495->0.55, MSG 0.55->0.605, SG 0.605-0.66)

### *Annexure 3.2. Daily maximum and minimum temperature during the field experiments in November, 2014- May, 2015 and November, 2015- May, 2016 (Source: Pakistan Meteorological Department)*



**Molecular Mechanism behind Stay Green Trait in Bread Wheat (***Triticum aestivum* **L.) lxxv**

### **ANNEXURE**





*Annexure 3.3. Greenhouse experiment showing non-stay-green (I. Sonalika), functional stay-green (II. Nepal-38) and non-functional stay-green (III. SG-30) genoptyes after 14 days of heat stress treatment. C: Control and T: Heat treatment* 

*Annexure 3.4. Coding Sequence ID and Protein ID of CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR in Brachypodium distachyon, Hordeum vulgare, Sorghum bicolor, Oryza sativa, Zea mays, and Gene ID of Triticum aestivum* 







		<b>Primer Sequence</b>	
Gene	<b>Forward Primer</b>	<b>Reverse Primer</b>	<b>PRODUCT SIZE (bp)</b>
		<b>Primers for Gene Amplification</b>	
CaO	TACACCCACCATCCCTTCCT	GGCCAGTTCCAAACGTTAGC	956
Cab	<b>GGACACGCACGAGTCTTCTT</b>	ACCTAGCAGCTTACTTGCCG	837
<b>SGR</b>	ATTCCACTCGGCTGAACCTG	GAGCGAAGAAATTCGTGGCC	951
<b>RCCR</b>	GAAATTCACCACGGCTCGAC	TGTACCCCAAAGGCCTTACG	782
		<b>Primers for rt-qPCR</b>	
<b>SGR</b>	CACTTCCTGCTCGACCTCAT	AAGTTGGGGTTGTTGGAGTG	167
Cab	<b>CAGAGCATCCTCGCCATCTG</b>	<b>CGGCCGTTCTTGATCTCCTT</b>	191
CaO	ATCGAGAAGGGCCAGTACCT	<b>CCGTCAAGGTCTTTCCTCAG</b>	191
<b>RCCR</b>	GCGATCGACATCACGTCTCT	GAAGTTGGGCTGCCCTGTAT	92
Actin <sub>2</sub>	GACGCACAACAGGTATCGTGTTG	AGCGAGGTCAAGACGAAGGATG	[62]

*Annexure 3.5. List of oligonucleotide primer sequences used for the amplification and expression analysis of the CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR in Triticum aestivum* 





**Molecular Mechanism behind Stay Green Trait in Bread Wheat (***Triticum aestivum* **L.) lxxx** 



Stay Green (SG), Moderately Stay Green (MSG), Moderately Non-Stay Green (MNSG) and Non-Stay Green (NSG), C Control, S Stress, PH Plant Height, TN Tiller Number, SL Spike Length, SPS SPS Spikelet per Spike,CHL Chlorophyll, NDVI Normalized Difference Vegetative index, CT Canopy Temperature, DTM Days to Maturity, BY Biological Yield, GY Grain Yield, TKW Thousand Kernel weight, B Booting, H Heading, A Anthesis, DAA Days after Anthesis



*Annexure 3.7. Basic statistics for the phenotypic traits measured in the functional stay-green, non-functional stay-green, and non-stay-green genotypes under control and heat stress treatments in the greenhouse experiment* 



SD Standard deviation, C Control, S Stress, ØII Photosynthetic efficiency of photosystem II, FSG Functional stay green, NFSG Non-functional stay green, NSG Non-stay green

	<b>Accession Numbers</b>		
<b>GENES</b>	FSG	<b>NFSG</b>	NSG
CaO	MN566282	MN566284	MN566286
	MN566283	MN566285	MN566287
Cab	MN566263	MN566264	MN566262
	MN566266	MN566267	MN566265
SGR	MN566274	MN566278	MN566276
	MN566275	MN566279	MN566277
<b>RCCR</b>	MN566272	MN566270	MN566268
	MN566273	MN566271	MN566269

*Annexure 3.8. Gene bank accession number for the CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR genes* 

# *Annexure 3.9. Multiple sequence alignment of CaO, Cab, SGR, and RCCR*

# **1. Chlorophyllide a Oxygenase (CaO) Gene and Protein Sequence Alignment**

### **Multiple Sequence Alignment of Partial Coding Sequence of CaO**



• The partial sequence of CaO revealed a single nucleotide variation in non stay green (Sonalika) where  $-\mathcal{C}$ " in place of  $-\mathcal{G}$ " was present at position 292 of exon 8.

### **Multiple Sequence Alignment of Partial Protein Sequences of CaO**



**Protein sequence elucidated that Glutamic acid was replaced by Aspartic acid in non-stay** green genotype.

### **2. Light Harvesting Chlorophyll a/b Binding (Cab) Gene and Protein Sequence Alignment**

## **Multiple Sequence Alignment of Coding Sequence of Cab**



\*

AGCTACCTCACCGGCGAGTTCCCCGGCGACTACGGGTGGGACACCGCGGG \*



Cab\_SG30\_SABUF//ALTAR84/AE.SQ AGCTACCTCACCGGCGAGTTCCCCGGCGACTACGGGTGGACACCGCGGG Cab\_SONALIKA AGCTACCTCACCGGCGAGTTCCCCGGCGACTACGGGTGGGACACCGCGGG Cab\_TraesCS1D02G411300.1 <br>
Cab\_NEPAL38\_CHIRYA7/ANB AGCTACCTCACCGGCGAGTTCCCCGGCGACTACGGGTGGACACCGCGGG

**Molecular Mechanism behind Stay Green Trait in Bread Wheat (***Triticum aestivum* **L.) lxxxvii**



\*

### **Multiple Sequence Alignment of Protein Sequences of Cab**



No Sequence variation was found for Cab Gene

# **3. Stay Green (SGR) Gene and Protein Sequence Alignment**

# **Multiple Sequence Alignment of Partial Coding Sequence of SGR Gene**





No Sequence variation was found for SGR

## **4. Red Chlorophyll Catabolite Reductase (RCCR) Gene and Protein Sequence Alignment**

## **Multiple Sequence Alignment of Partial Coding Sequence of RCCR Gene**





# **Multiple Sequence Alignment of Partial Protein Sequences of RCCR**





- Great variation in the Coding Sequence of Red Chlorophyll Catabolite Reductase (RCCR) was observed.
- Variation in the Amino acid Sequence of Red Chlorophyll Catabolite Reductase (RCCR): At position 204 of RCCR Protein Valine is replaced by alanine; At position 264, Alanine is replaced by Glycine; At position 275, Valine is replaced by Glycine; At position 290, Lysine is replaced by Arginine in Stay green and Non-stay Green lines

# QUAID-I-AZAM UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD *DEPARTMENT OF PLANT SCIENCES*

#### Dated: March 4, 2022

#### PUBLICATION IN W-CATEGORY JOURNAL

It is certified that Sadia Latif, Registration No. 03041311003, has published an article entitled as "Deciphering the Role of Stay-Green Trait to Mitigate Terminal Heat Stress in Bread Wheat" in "Agronomy Basel" a W-Category Journal having an impact factor 2.603 from her dissertation entitled as "Molecular Mechanism behind stay green trait in Bread Wheat *(Triticum aestivum* L.)" .

**Supervisor** 

Dr. Umar Masood Quraishi Associate Professor Department of Plant Sciences Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad