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1 **Seasonal variations in viral distribution, dynamics and viral mediated host mortality in the Arabian Sea.**

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19 **Running page head: Seasonal variations in viral activities in the Arabian Sea**

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29 **Abstract**

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31 Viruses are key players in the marine ecosystem. It is critical to study specific viral processes and their
32 interrelationship with various biotic and abiotic variables to quantify their impact on the marine environment. This
33 study investigates the influence of seasonality on viral distribution and their mediated processes in the coastal region
34 of the southeastern Arabian Sea (India) for two consecutive years (2014 and 2015). Water samples were collected
35 from four sampling stations, S1, S2, S3 and S4, in the southeastern Arabian Sea on a monthly basis. Samples were
36 analyzed for the variations in viral abundance, viral production, and viral-induced host mortality covering three
37 seasons namely, pre-monsoon, monsoon and post-monsoon. Viruses and bacteria were enumerated by
38 epifluorescence microscopy following staining with SYBR Green I and viral production was estimated using viral
39 dilution method. Seasonal variations in viral mediated mortality and microzooplankton grazing mortality of
40 phytoplankton hosts were estimated by modified dilution method. The results revealed a pronounced seasonal
41 pattern of viral abundance ($0.04\text{--}4.03 \times 10^7$ viruses mL^{-1}) and viral production ($0.71 \times 10^{10}\text{--}4.94 \times 10^{10}$ $\text{L}^{-1}\text{d}^{-1}$). The
42 observed high viral-induced mortality of prokaryotes (25.85%) and phytoplankton (7.98–28.9%) during the pre-
43 monsoon season was eventually linked to high viral abundance and production rates. Viral mediated processes were
44 essentially linked to host density and water temperature. Transmission electron microscopy analysis revealed that
45 myoviruses and non-tailed viruses were dominant in the study region with rod shaped bacteria being more
46 susceptible to viral infection. The results indicated the prevalence of seasonally induced active viral processes in this
47 tropical marine ecosystem which may significantly contribute to rapid recycling of nutrients in this region.

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50 **Keywords:** Marine virus, viral induced prokaryotic mortality, viral production, viral morphotypes, nutrient
51 recycling

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57 **Introduction**

58 Viruses are the most numerous (10^{10} viruses per litre of seawater) and smallest biological entities in the marine
59 environment which are capable of infecting almost all organisms. Viral mediated host lysis impacts marine
60 biogeochemical cycles, host community composition, diversity and host evolution (Breitbart et al. 2018).
61 Prokaryotes are the major hosts for marine viruses and phage numbers are highly correlated to prokaryote counts
62 (Wommack and Colwell 2000; Jasna et al. 2017; Parvathi et al. 2018). Viral abundance is highly variable with
63 respect to space and time. Short term to long term dynamics of viral abundance have been reported from different
64 geographic locations (Rodriguez et al. 2000; Taylor et al. 2003; Clokie et al. 2006; Thomas et al. 2010; Parvathi et
65 al. 2015; Jasna et al. 2017). Generally, viral abundance is highest in the euphotic zone and coastal environments
66 compared to deeper waters and oligotrophic environments (Wommack and Colwell 2000; Parsons et al. 2012;
67 Parvathi et al. 2018). However, subsurface peaks of viral abundance were observed in the mid latitude regions of the
68 North Pacific (Yang et al. 2010). Studies also show that viral abundance and distribution are greatly influenced by
69 the abundance and activities of their abundant hosts such as prokaryotes and phytoplankton (Taylor et al. 2003;
70 Parsons et al. 2012; Gainer et al. 2017). Apart from prokaryotic abundance and chlorophyll *a* concentration,
71 environmental variables like nutrients, temperature, salinity, sunlight, etc. are significant predictors of viral
72 abundance in varying marine environments (Finke et al. 2017). Viral mediated mortality is also largely variable and
73 have differential impacts on bacterial production in systems with different trophic status. Compared to grazer
74 mediated mortality, viral mediated host mortality at times can dominate depending on the environment (Bettarel et
75 al. 2004). Investigation across the North Atlantic Ocean reported viral mediated mortality as the major
76 phytoplankton loss factor in the low and mid latitudes. Whereas, grazer mediated mortality dominated at higher
77 latitudes (Mojica et al. 2016). Various studies have highlighted the importance of viral-mediated nutrient cycling
78 over direct effect of viral-induced mortality, for promoting the growth of non-infected phytoplankton and bacterial
79 populations (Weinbauer et al. 2011; Shelford et al. 2012).

80 The Arabian Sea has a unique hydrography influenced mainly by the seasonal reversal of monsoonal winds with
81 high biological productivity. High primary productivity and existence of intense oxygen minimum zones (OMZ) and
82 denitrification zones make the Arabian Sea a unique oceanic region (Naqvi et al. 1990; Olson et al. 1993; Gerson et
83 al. 2014). During spring inter monsoon, the water column remains warmer and highly stratified with nutrient
84 deficient surface waters, whereas, wind driven coastal upwelling during southwest monsoon and convective

85 overturning of surface waters due to winter cooling in the northeast monsoon render the water column well mixed
86 during both the monsoons (Prasanna Kumar and Prasad 1996; Gerson et al. 2014). Several studies have reported
87 seasonal variations in bacterial abundance and primary productivity associated with physical forcing in the Arabian
88 Sea (Campbell et al. 1998; Ramaiah et al. 2009). High primary productivity during the southwest monsoon was
89 found to be associated with high nutrient availability (Prasanna Kumar et al. 2000). The physical forcing in the
90 Arabian Sea arising from a unique combination of climate, wind, and circulation imparts seasonal variations in
91 trophic conditions and brings in huge diversity (Burkhill et al. 1993; Mantoura et al. 1993). Some of the
92 investigations conducted in the Arabian Sea concluded a close coupling of bacterial production with primary
93 production during summer and winter monsoons (Wiebinga et al. 1997). During high primary production, the labile
94 (rapidly degradable) dissolved organic carbon (DOC) produced by phytoplankton are rapidly used by the bacteria (in
95 hours or days). In contrast, at time of low primary production, high bacterial abundance and production may be
96 sustained by semi-labile DOC that can last from weeks to months in the water column (Calleja et al. 2019). Thus, at
97 both times (during high and low primary production) the DOC pool is sustaining bacterial growth. High bacterial
98 abundance and production at time of low primary production, especially during the spring and fall inter monsoons
99 suggests of predominance of microbial loop in the sustenance of the dissolved organic carbon (DOC) pool (Ducklow
100 1993; Ramaiah et al. 1996; Campbell et al. 1998). A recent report by Sabbagh et al. (2020) suggests that
101 heterotrophic bacteria are controlled by viruses most of the year in the coastal waters of the Red sea. This indicates
102 that viral-induced mortality is one of the major regulators that control bacterioplankton standing stocks.

103 To date, few reports are available on viruses in the Arabian Sea (Brum et al. 2013; Jain et al. 2014; Parvathi et
104 al. 2018). Parvathi et al. (2018) have studied the viral abundance, viral processes and viral life strategies in the
105 oxygen minimum zones of the Arabian Sea. The morphological diversity of the viruses and their characteristic
106 features were examined as a part of TARA Ocean expedition (Brum et al. 2013). Jain et al. (2014) reports on the
107 seasonal variations in viral abundance and virus-to prokaryote ratio. However, no information exists on the seasonal
108 variations in viral processes in the Arabian Sea to date. To better understand the impact of viruses in the marine
109 environment, it is critical to study specific viral processes and their interrelationship with various biotic and abiotic
110 variables. Moreover, estimation of parameters like viral production, turnover rates, and viral mediated mortality are
111 essential for the incorporation of viral processes into various ecosystem models. Recent studies by Jasna et al. (2017,
112 2019) from an estuarine region (Cochin estuary) in the southwest coast of India reports on the seasonal variations in

113 viral abundance, viral production and viral process. These studies reveal that distinct seasons such as monsoon, pre-
114 and post-monsoons have profound influence on viral abundance and production. The present study is one among the
115 few in the Arabian Sea, specifically the southeastern Arabian Sea, to investigate the seasonality in viral distribution
116 and viral processes. We hypothesize that there could be a significant seasonal variation in the viral distribution and
117 viral mediated mortality in the study region and viral lysis may play a significant role in the microbial loop in this
118 part of the southeastern Arabian Sea.

119 **Materials and methods**

120 **Sampling locations, physical and chemical parameters**

121 Water samples were collected from four sampling stations, S1, S2, S3 and S4, located in a transect perpendicular to
122 the coast of Kochi (south west coast of India), in the eastern Arabian Sea (Fig 1). Station S1, has a depth of ~30 m
123 whereas, S2, S3, and S5 have a depth of 22 m, 14 m and 6 m, respectively. Samples were collected during three
124 distinct seasons namely, pre-monsoon (PRM), monsoon (M) and post-monsoon (PM) from three depths (surface,
125 middle and bottom) of S1 (0.5 m, 15 m and 30 m), S2 (0.5 m, 11 m, and 22 m), and S3 (0.5 m, 7 m, and 14 m), and
126 from two depths of S4 (0.5 m and 6 m) on a monthly basis for two consecutive years, 2014 and 2015. Totally 253
127 samples were collected from all the four stations in the study. In June 2014 (M), sampling was not done due to
128 adverse climatic conditions. Water samples were collected using a 5L Niskin sampler (Hydro-Bios, Germany).
129 Samples were transferred to acid washed sterile glass bottles and were transported to the laboratory in an ice box
130 maintained at 4°C. Vertical profiles of temperature and salinity were recorded using a conductivity temperature
131 density (CTD) profiler (SBE Seabird 19, Sea-Bird Scientific, Bellevue, WA, USA) with accuracy $\pm 0.001^\circ\text{C}$ and \pm
132 0.001 S/m for temperature and conductivity, respectively. Samples for dissolved oxygen (DO) were withdrawn from
133 the niskin sampler into DO bottles (60 mL) without trapping air bubbles, allowing the bottles to overflow with at
134 least one liter to avoid exchange with atmospheric oxygen. The dissolved oxygen in the bottle was fixed with 0.5
135 mL each of Winkler reagents and estimated by Winkler's titration method (Grasshoff 1983). Inorganic nutrients
136 such as nitrate, nitrite and phosphate present in the water samples were estimated by spectrophotometric analysis
137 (Grasshoff 1983). To determine the Chl *a*, samples were first filtered through 0.7 μm GF/F (Whatman, USA),
138 treated with 90% acetone overnight in dark at 4°C, and the pigment was measured fluorometrically (Parsons et al.
139 1984).

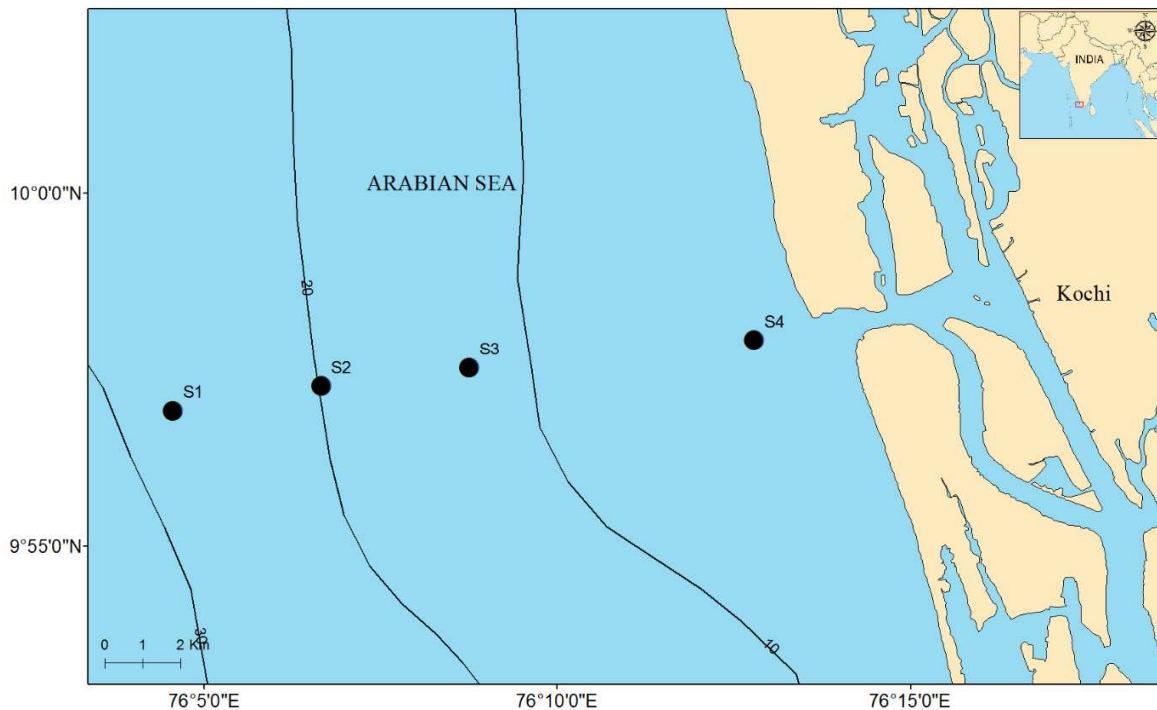


Fig. 1 Sampling locations in the Arabian Sea. Water samples were collected from four stations of a transect perpendicular to the coast of Kochi on monthly basis during 2014 and 2015. Sampling locations are marked as S1, S2, S3 and S4

141 **Abundance of viruses and prokaryotes**

142 Viruses and bacteria in the sample were enumerated by epifluorescence microscopy following the SYBR Green I
 143 staining method (Patel et al. 2007). Immediately after collection, 1 mL each of the samples were fixed with formalin
 144 (37% (w/v) formaldehyde, 0.02 μm filtered) to a final concentration of 2% (v/v). The samples were then kept on ice
 145 for 10 min in dark and subsequently filtered (< 20 KPa vacuum) through 0.02 μm Anodisc filters (Whatman). The
 146 filters were dried completely and stained with 100 μL each of 1:40 diluted SYBR Green I commercial stock for 20
 147 min. Excess stain was removed and the filters were mounted on glass slides with 30 μL of 0.1% (v/v) anti-fade
 148 mounting medium (*p*-phenylenediamine). The slides were observed under an epifluorescence microscope (Olympus
 149 BX 41, Olympus, USA) for the enumeration of viruses and prokaryotes. Prokaryotes and viruses could be
 150 distinguished from each other based on their relative sizes. Viruses appeared as numerous green pinpricks, whereas,

151 bacteria were larger and possessed definite shapes. A blank was routinely examined as a control for contamination
152 of equipment and reagents.

153 **Viral Production and turnover rates**

154 Viral production rates in the surface water samples of stations S1 and S4 during the three seasons (pre monsoon,
155 PRM; monsoon, M; post monsoon, PM) in the year 2014 were estimated by diluting the water sample (100 mL) in
156 triplicates with three volumes of ultra-filtered (using CDUF001LT, Millipore, USA, with a membrane having
157 molecular weight cut-off or MWCO of 100 kDa) virus-free seawater and subsequently incubating them at room
158 temperature (30°C) in the dark for 24 h. Subsamples (1 mL) were collected every 3 h to enumerate viruses and
159 prokaryotes (Wilhelm et al. 2002). Viral production rates were estimated from the first order regression of increase
160 in viral abundance over time, after correcting for the dilution of prokaryotes in the experimental sample, using the
161 formula, Viral production, $VP = m \times (P/p)$, where 'm' is the slope of the regression line, 'p' is the concentration of
162 prokaryotes after dilution, and 'P' is the concentration of prokaryotes prior to dilution. Viral turnover rates (VTR)
163 were estimated from the ratio of viral production to viral abundance in the undiluted sample.

164 **Viral induced prokaryotic mortality (VIPM) and phenotypic diversity of viruses**

165 In order to determine the prokaryotic mortality due to viral lysis, surface water samples from S1 and S4 during the
166 three seasons (PRM, M and PM) were collected and fixed with formalin (final concentration of 2% v/v). Prokaryotic
167 cells in the sample were gathered on a 400-mesh formvar grid by ultracentrifugation (Beckman Coulter SW40 Ti
168 Swing-Out-Rotor, 70,000 × g, 20 min at 4°C). The grids were stained with uranyl acetate (2% w/w) for 30 s and
169 washed twice with 0.02-µm filtered distilled water and dried completely (Pradeep Ram et al. 2010). The stained
170 grids were observed using a JEOL 1200EX transmission electron microscope (20,000-60,000 X magnification).
171 Frequency of visibly infected cells (FVIC) were determined by examining 600-800 prokaryotic cells per grid. A
172 minimum of 15 infected cells were examined to determine the average burst size (BS). Frequency of infected cells
173 (FIC) and viral induced prokaryotic mortality (VIPM) were estimated using the following formulae: $FIC =$
174 $9.524 FVIC - 3.256$ (Weinbauer et al. 2002) and $VIPM = (FIC + 0.6 \times FIC^2)/(1 - 1.2 \times FIC)$ (Binder 1999).
175 During the transmission electron microscopy analysis, visualization of viruses was performed at a magnification of
176 65,000-1,00,000. Viruses were classified as myoviruses, podoviruses, siphoviruses, and non-tailed viruses based on
177 their morphology (Borrel et al. 2012)

178 **Viral mediated mortality (VMM) and microzooplankton grazing mortality (MGM) of phytoplankton hosts**

179 Seasonal variations in viral mediated mortality (VMM) and microzooplankton grazing mortality (MGM) of
180 phytoplankton hosts in the surface waters of S1 and S4 were estimated by modified dilution method (Evans et al.
181 2003). Samples were collected during the three seasons: PRM, M and PM. Two parallel dilution series (20%, 40%,
182 70% and 100%) of the whole seawater, one with grazer-free diluent (0.2- μm filtered) and the other with virus-free
183 diluent (100 kDa filtered), were prepared after removing the mesoplankton size fraction through a 200 μm nylon
184 mesh (1L final volume). The bottles were incubated under *in situ* conditions of temperature (28-30 °C) and light for
185 a period of 24 h. Subsamples were collected at 0 h and 24 h for the enumeration of phytoplankton host populations.
186 Apparent growth rate (k , d^{-1}) of phytoplankton in each bottle were calculated using the equation,

187
$$k = \ln(P_t/P_0)/t$$

188 where ' P_0 ' and ' P_t ', respectively, are the plankton abundance before and after incubation and ' t ' is the time interval
189 for the incubation.

190 A first order regression of apparent growth rate against fraction of seawater (for both 0.2 μm and 100 kDa) was
191 used for the estimation of mortality due to grazing (m_g) and combined mortality due to grazing and viral lysis (m_{g+v})
192 for those incubations that produced significantly different regression slopes for the two dilution series as determined
193 from an F-test. Regression coefficients of the 0.2 μm series and the 100 kDa series represent the microzooplankton
194 grazing rates (m_g) and the combined mortality rates of microzooplankton grazing and viral lysis (m_{g+v}), respectively
195 (Evans et al. 2003; Ortmann et al. 2011; Cram et al. 2016). Viral mediated mortality (m_v) can be estimated using the
196 formula,

197
$$m_v = m_{g+v} - m_g$$

198 Percentage of viral mediated mortality and microzooplankton grazing mortality were estimated using the
199 equations,

200
$$\% VMM = (1 - e^{-m_v}) \times 100$$

201
$$\% MGM = (1 - e^{-m_g}) \times 100$$

202 **Statistical analysis**

203 Potential relationship among different biological, physical and chemical variables were tested by Pearson correlation
204 analysis. Principal component analysis (PCA) using PAST software version 3 (Hammer et al. 2001) was also

205 employed for analyzing the major variables influencing viral abundance and dynamics during the three distinct
206 seasons. To discern the biotic and abiotic predictor variables which drive the seasonal variations in viral abundance,
207 a distance based linear modeling analysis (distLM) was performed using Primer 7 software (McArdle and Anderson
208 2001). Significant inter-annual, seasonal and spatial variability in different biotic and abiotic variables were tested
209 by three-way ANOVA using the trial version of SPSS software.

210 **Results**

211 **Spatial and vertical variability in physical and chemical parameters**

212 Temperature varied vertically along the water column. Surface waters had an average temperature of $29.25 \pm 1.34^\circ\text{C}$
213 in 2014 and $29.25 \pm 1.87^\circ\text{C}$ in 2015 (Average values of all stations combined). Middle and bottom waters were
214 cooler than surface waters. In all the three seasons, highest temperature was recorded in the surface waters at all the
215 four stations (Online Resource 3). DO exhibited significant spatial variability ($p < 0.001$) and varied between depths
216 in all the stations with the surface having the highest value compared to middle and bottom (Tables 2 & 3). The
217 lowest values of DO were estimated from the bottom waters of all the stations during M except for station 4 in 2014
218 which had the highest DO concentration in bottom waters during monsoon (7.11 mL L^{-1}). Salinity of the four
219 stations varied significantly ($p < 0.001$) with the offshore stations (S1 and S2) having higher salinities when
220 compared to near-shore stations (S3 and S4). The average salinity at S1 was recorded as 34 ± 2.45 in 2014 and 34.02
221 ± 1.26 in 2015. Whereas, at S4, the salinity was 30.8 ± 0.74 and 32.7 ± 2.4 in the years 2014 and 2015, respectively.
222 The salinity of near-shore stations was influenced by the freshwater input from the Cochin estuary with maximum
223 influx during south west monsoon and least during PRM periods. The seasonal values of salinity varied significantly
224 ($p < 0.05$) between the two years. Chl *a* also exhibited significant spatial variations ($p < 0.001$) with highest
225 concentrations at the near-shore stations as compared to offshore stations (Tables 2& 3). Concentrations of dissolved
226 inorganic nutrients like NO_3 and PO_4 were higher in bottom waters as compared to surface waters (Tables 2& 3).
227 NO_3 concentration of the water column ranged from $0.05\text{-}24.47 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ in 2014 and $0.1\text{-}22.41 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ in 2015.
228 Nitrogen to Phosphorous (NP) ratio of the study region ranged from $0.33\text{-}18.21$ in 2014 and $0.52\text{-}19.67$ in 2015.

229 **Seasonal variability in physical and chemical parameters**

230 Each year was divided into three seasons, PRM, M and PM for comparison. Seasonal variations were prominent for
231 most of the parameters studied. In both the years, temperature was maximum during PRM ($29.81 \pm 0.8^\circ\text{C}$ in 2014

232 and $30.14 \pm 0.72^\circ\text{C}$ in 2015), followed by PM ($28.93 \pm 0.6^\circ\text{C}$ in 2014 and $28.67 \pm 0.44^\circ\text{C}$ in 2015) and the lowest
233 during M ($26.41 \pm 1.59^\circ\text{C}$ in 2014 and $24.98 \pm 1.13^\circ\text{C}$ in 2015) (Online Resource 1). Salinity was highest during
234 PRM and averaged 33.95 ± 1.09 in 2014 and 33.62 ± 1.96 in 2015 (Online Resource 1). The lowest salinity was
235 observed during M with average values of 30.23 ± 1.76 in 2014 and 29.98 ± 2.11 in 2015. However, the seasonal
236 variations in salinity was not significant statistically. Dissolved oxygen (DO) concentrations exhibited significant
237 seasonal variability ($p < 0.001$) (Table 1). The PM season had the highest DO concentrations ($6.19 \pm 1.87 \text{ mL L}^{-1}$ in
238 2014 and $7.89 \pm 1.54 \text{ mL L}^{-1}$ in 2015), whereas, PRM was estimated to have the lowest DO in both the years ($4.82 \pm$
239 1.48 mL L^{-1} in 2014 and $4.83 \pm 2.97 \text{ mL L}^{-1}$ in 2015). Concentrations of nutrients like NO_3 , SiO_4 and PO_4 had
240 significant seasonal variations ($p < 0.001$) with highest values during M and the least during PRM. NO_3
241 concentration in the water column ranged $0.45\text{-}24.47 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ (in 2014) and $0.17\text{-}22.41 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ (in 2015) during
242 M and $0.05\text{-}2.42 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ (in 2014) and $0.30\text{-}3.97 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$ (in 2015) during PRM. Chl *a* concentration was
243 significantly high during M ($4.45 \pm 0.8 \text{ mg m}^{-3}$) and low during the other two seasons ($0.68 \pm 0.74 \text{ mg m}^{-3}$ and $0.61 \pm$
244 0.50 mg m^{-3} during PRM and PM, respectively) (Online Resource 1). The Chl *a* concentration increased by 2 to 5-
245 fold from PRM to M (Online Resource 1). At the nearshore stations, Chl *a* was comparatively high during all the
246 seasons indicating the influence of nutrient input from the estuary.

247 **Inter-annual variability in physical and chemical parameters**

248 The average values (calculated for each depth of the four stations) of physical, chemical and biological-variables in
249 the three seasons of the two years are listed in Tables 2 and 3. Dissolved oxygen, NH_4 , SiO_4 and PO_4 showed
250 significant inter-annual variations ($p < 0.001$) (Table 1). DO concentrations (of all depths and stations) ranged from
251 $0.21\text{-}11.90 \text{ mL L}^{-1}$ in 2014, and $0.58\text{-}10.92 \text{ mL L}^{-1}$ in 2015 in the study area. The average dissolved inorganic
252 nutrient concentration (of all depths and stations) was highest in 2014 (NH_4 , $5.58 \pm 7.81 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$; PO_4 , 0.86 ± 0.84
253 $\mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$; SiO_4 , $11.76 \pm 8.49 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$) as compared to 2015 (NH_4 , $3.20 \pm 2.88 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$; PO_4 , $0.40 \pm 0.38 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$;
254 SiO_4 , $8.74 \pm 9.05 \mu\text{mol L}^{-1}$). Temperature, salinity and Chl *a* exhibited no significant inter-annual variations.
255 Temperature ranged from $23.05\text{-}31.57^\circ\text{C}$ in 2014 and $23.09\text{-}31.87^\circ\text{C}$ in 2015 (of all depths and stations). Seasonal
256 variation in temperature between the two years was prominent in the study area ($p < 0.05$). The average salinity was
257 33.08 ± 3.75 in 2014 and 33.56 ± 1.89 in 2015 (Average value of all depths, and stations). Chl *a* concentration in the
258 study region ranged $0.03\text{-}30.60 \text{ mg m}^{-3}$ in 2014 and $0.01\text{-}30.60 \text{ mg m}^{-3}$ in 2015.

259 **Variations in viral and prokaryotic abundance**

260 Seasonal variations in viral and prokaryotic abundances were significant in all the stations with PRM having the
261 highest abundance followed by PM and M (Fig 2). Viral abundance (VA) (represented as viral like particles or
262 VLPs) showed significant ($p < 0.001$) inter-annual variations (Table 1) ranging from $0.07\text{-}2.08 \times 10^7$ VLP mL⁻¹ in
263 2014 and $0.04\text{-}4.03 \times 10^7$ VLPs mL⁻¹ in 2015 (values from all depths and stations). Viral and prokaryotic
264 abundances varied significantly among stations ($p < 0.05$ and $p < 0.001$, respectively). The average VA (all depths
265 combined for each station) was significantly greater at the near-shore stations ($0.46 \pm 0.37 \times 10^7$ VLPs mL⁻¹ in 2014
266 and $0.72 \pm 0.8 \times 10^7$ VLPs mL⁻¹ in 2015) as compared to the offshore stations ($0.34 \pm 0.22 \times 10^7$ VLPs mL⁻¹ in 2014
267 and $0.74 \pm 0.63 \times 10^7$ VLPs mL⁻¹ in 2015). In general, highest abundances were estimated in the surface waters
268 followed by middle and bottom waters (Tables 2 & 3). However, there was no statistically significant variations in
269 VA between these three depths. Prokaryotic abundance (PA) ranged from $0.17\text{-}3.3 \times 10^6$ cells mL⁻¹ during 2014 and
270 $0.01\text{-}4.71 \times 10^6$ cells mL⁻¹ during 2015. Although there was a similar vertical pattern of PA as that of VA, the
271 variations were not statistically significant. PA also exhibited seasonal and spatial variations (Tables 2 & 3). VA was
272 positively correlated to PA ($p < 0.001$) and Chl *a* ($p < 0.005$), whereas, PA showed significant positive correlations
273 with temperature ($p < 0.001$) and DO ($p < 0.001$).

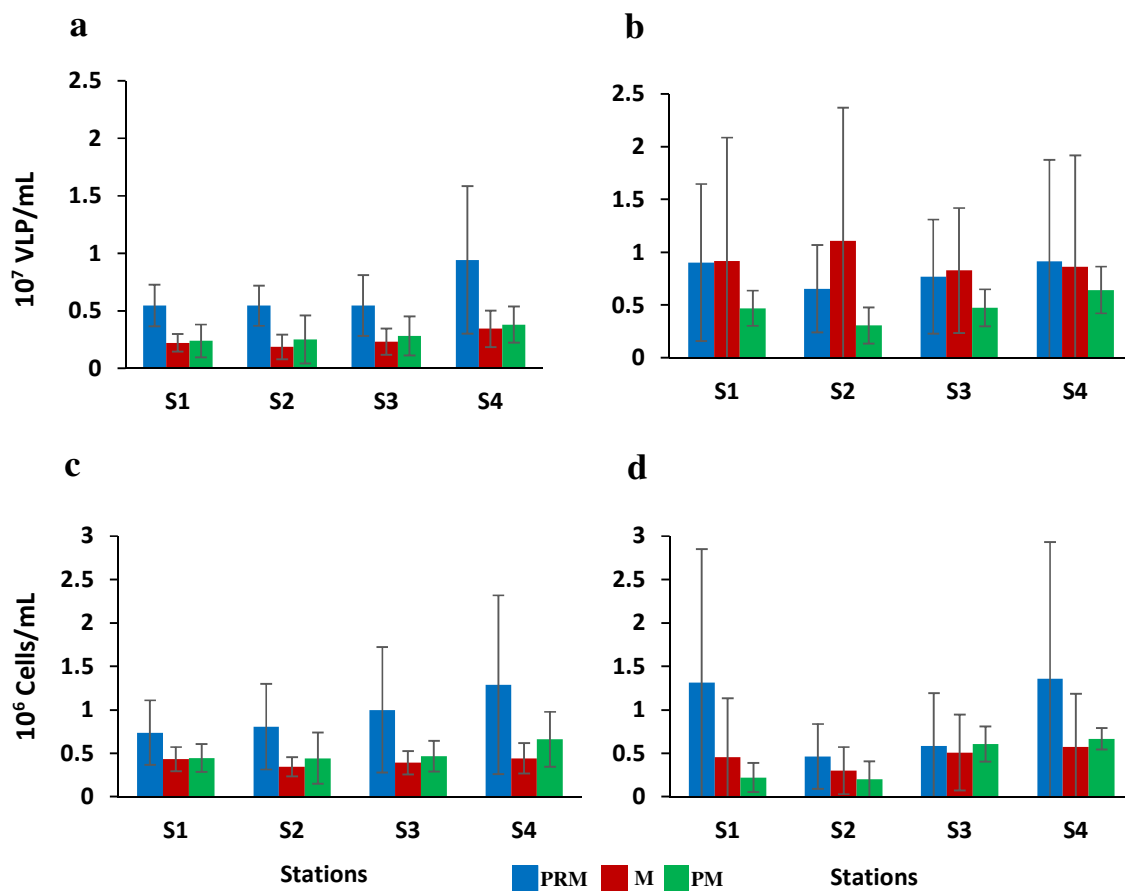


Fig. 2 Variations in viral and prokaryotic abundance (VA & PA) during pre-monsoon (PRM, blue), monsoon (M, red) and post monsoon (PM, green) seasons. (a) VA in 2014, (b) VA in 2015, (c) PA in 2014 and (d) PA in 2015

275

276 **Viral production (VP) and viral turnover rates (VTR) in surface waters**

277 VP and VTR from surface waters during the three seasons of 2014 are presented in Fig. 3. Viral production rates
 278 were higher during PRM ($4.48 \pm 0.83 \times 10^{10} \text{ L}^{-1}\text{d}^{-1}$ at S1 and $4.94 \pm 1.6 \times 10^{10} \text{ L}^{-1}\text{d}^{-1}$ at S4), followed by PM ($1.93 \pm$
 279 $0.86 \times 10^{10} \text{ L}^{-1}\text{d}^{-1}$ at S1 and $3.16 \pm 0.63 \times 10^{10} \text{ L}^{-1}\text{d}^{-1}$ at S4) and lowest during M ($0.71 \pm 0.63 \times 10^{10} \text{ L}^{-1}\text{d}^{-1}$ at S1 and
 280 $1.45 \pm 0.87 \times 10^{10} \text{ L}^{-1}\text{d}^{-1}$ at S4). Viral turnover rates (VTR) ranged from 9.04-46.39 d^{-1} and followed the same
 281 pattern as VP except that S1 had the highest turnover rates compared to S4.

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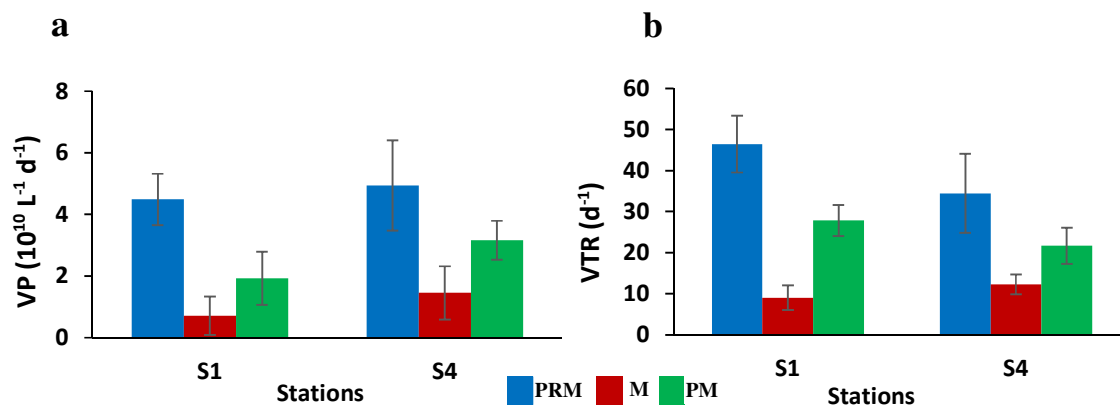


Fig. 3. Variations in (a) viral production (VP) and (b) viral turnover rates (VTR) at stations S1 and S4 during pre-monsoon (PRM, blue), monsoon (M, red) and post monsoon (PM, green) in 2014

284 **Viral induced prokaryotic mortality (VIPM) as determined by TEM analysis**

285 FIC averaged $17.7 \pm 2.33\%$, $7.3 \pm 1.86\%$ and $10.79 \pm 2.87\%$ for PRM, M and PM, respectively (Fig. 4). VIPM,
 286 which was estimated from FIC and it ranged from 5.86-28.64% with an average of $13.63 \pm 7.19\%$. The annual
 287 average of VIPM at S1 and S4 were $15.16 \pm 6.63\%$ and $12.09 \pm 7.75\%$, respectively. PRM was marked with the
 288 highest VIPM ($24.15 \pm 6.35\%$ at S1 and $25.85 \pm 3.95\%$ at S4) compared to other seasons (Fig. 4).

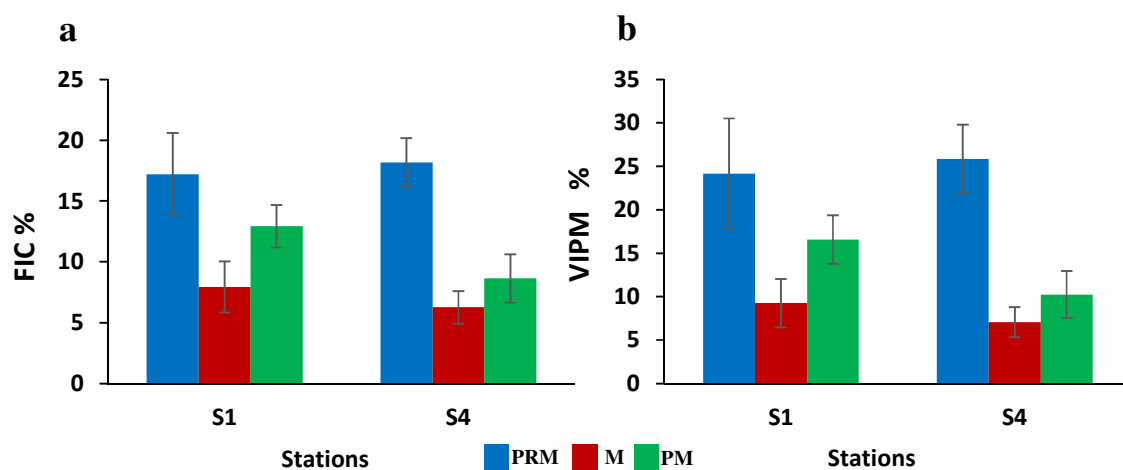


Fig. 4 Seasonal variations in (a) frequency of infected cells (FIC) and (b) viral induced prokaryotic mortality (VIPM) at S1 and S4 in 2014. Pre-monsoon (PRM): blue; monsoon (M): red; post monsoon (PM): green

290 **Viral mediated mortality (VMM) of phytoplankton by the modified dilution method**

291 The modified dilution experiment was carried out to estimate the viral mediated mortality (VMM) and
292 microzooplankton grazing mortality (MGM) of phytoplankton during PRM, M and PM in 2014 for water samples
293 collected from S1 and S4 (Fig. 5). VMM was greater during PRM ($28.9 \pm 11.35\%$ and 26.24% at S1 and S4,
294 respectively), followed by PM ($10.78 \pm 12.71\%$ at S1 and $13.7 \pm 6.67\%$ at S4). Lowest mortality was observed
295 during M ($7.98 \pm 2.65\%$ and $9.83 \pm 1.36\%$ at S1 and S4, respectively). MGM followed the same pattern at S1 (14.91
296 $\pm 4.97\%$, $6.47 \pm 0.65\%$ and $10.21 \pm 5.4\%$ during PRM, M and PM, respectively). However, at S4, MGM was greater
297 during PM ($19.12 \pm 3.82\%$), followed by PRM ($15.21 \pm 9.56\%$) and M ($10.9 \pm 0.47\%$). VMM was greater compared
298 to MGM at both stations during PRM and M.

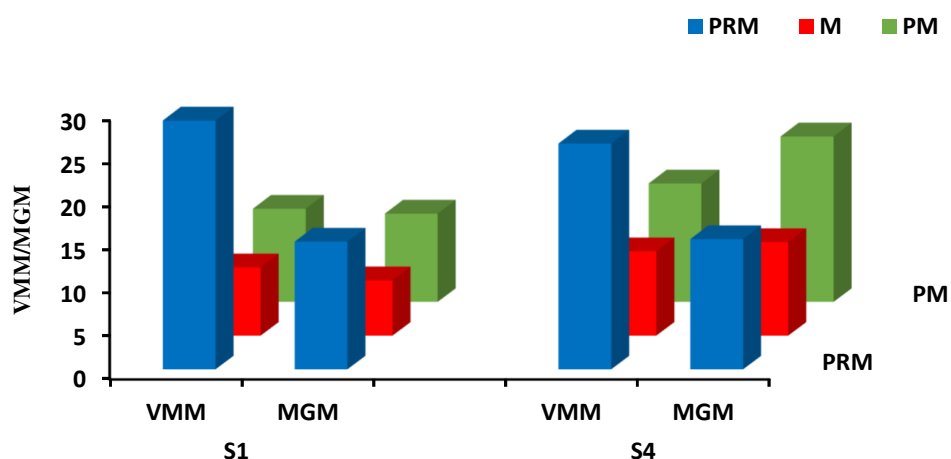


Fig. 5 Seasonal variations in viral mediated mortality (VMM) and microzooplankton grazing mortality (MGM) at S1 and S4 in 2014. pre monsoon (PRM): blue; monsoon (M): red; post monsoon (PM): green

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308 **Seasonal variations in viral morphotypes and virally infected prokaryotic morphotypes**

309 TEM analysis of viruses from the study area revealed the dominance of four morphotypes: myoviruses (long
310 contractile tails), siphoviruses (long non-contractile tails), podoviruses (short non-contractile tails) and non-tailed
311 viruses (Fig. 6). Myoviruses were dominant during PRM and PM seasons (48% and 40%, respectively), whereas,
312 non-tailed viruses were the major group during M (38%) (Fig. 7). Non-tailed viruses were the second major group
313 after myoviruses forming 22%, 38% and 28% during PRM, M and PM seasons, respectively. Siphoviruses and
314 podoviruses represented the next most abundant morphotypes.

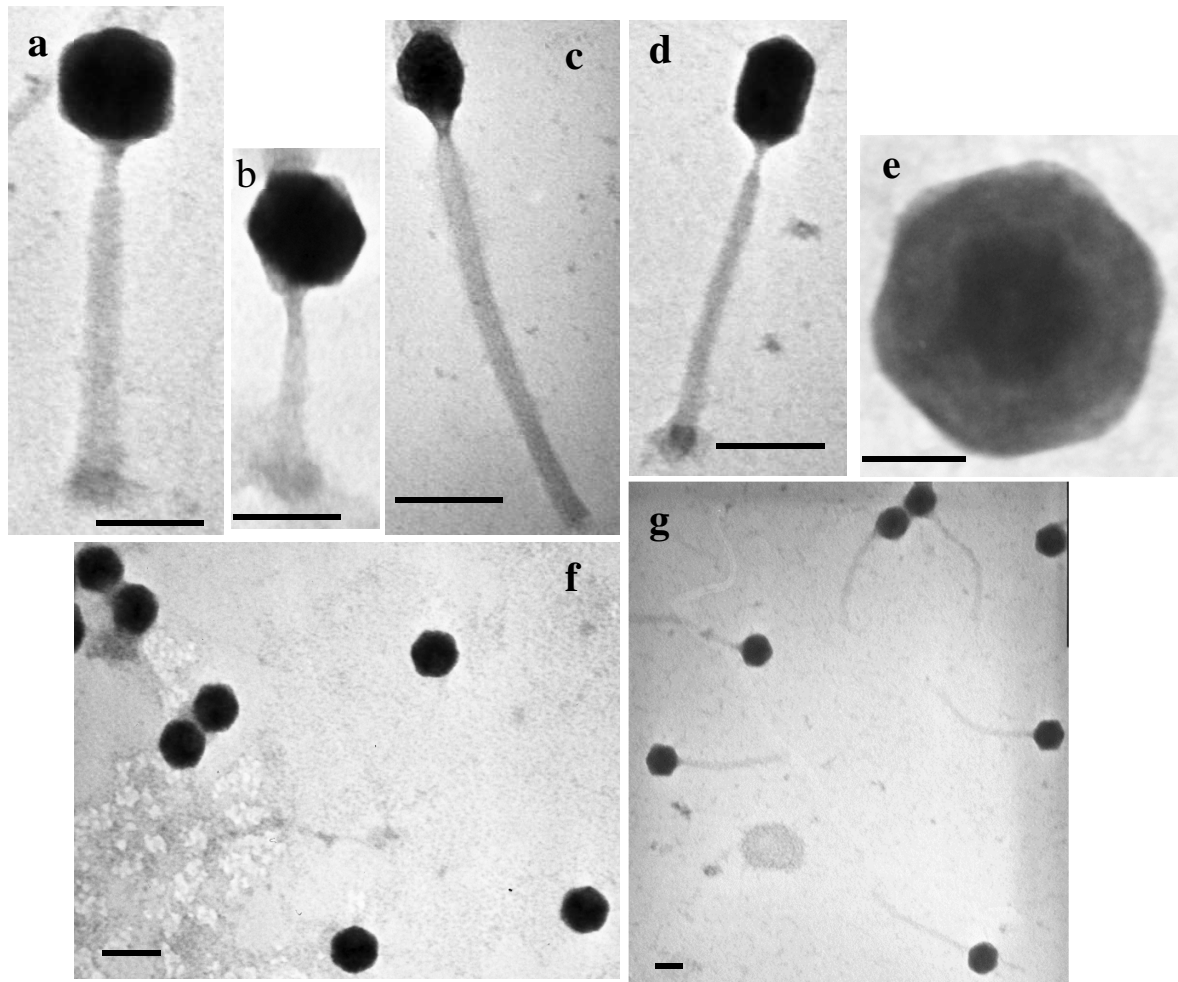


Fig. 6 Viral morphotypes from the Arabian Sea (a, b, c, d) myoviruses, (e, f) non-tailed viruses and (g) siphoviruses. Scale bar = 50 nm

316 The prokaryotic morphotypes as revealed by TEM analysis belonged to five groups, short rods, elongated rods,
 317 fat rods, cocci and filamentous rods (Fig. 8). Overall, the rods represented the major fraction of virally infected cells
 318 in the study region. Among rods, elongated rods were the most infected ones during PRM (32%), followed by short
 319 rods and fat rods (each representing 22%) (Fig. 7). During M and PM, short rods were the major targets of viruses,
 320 representing 32% and 31%, respectively. Cocci were the next target group after rods being 15%, 25% and 17% of
 321 the infected cells during PRM, M and PM, respectively. Filamentous forms represented the smallest fraction of
 322 virally infected cells consistently in all the seasons (9%, 2% and 5% during PRM, M and PM, respectively).

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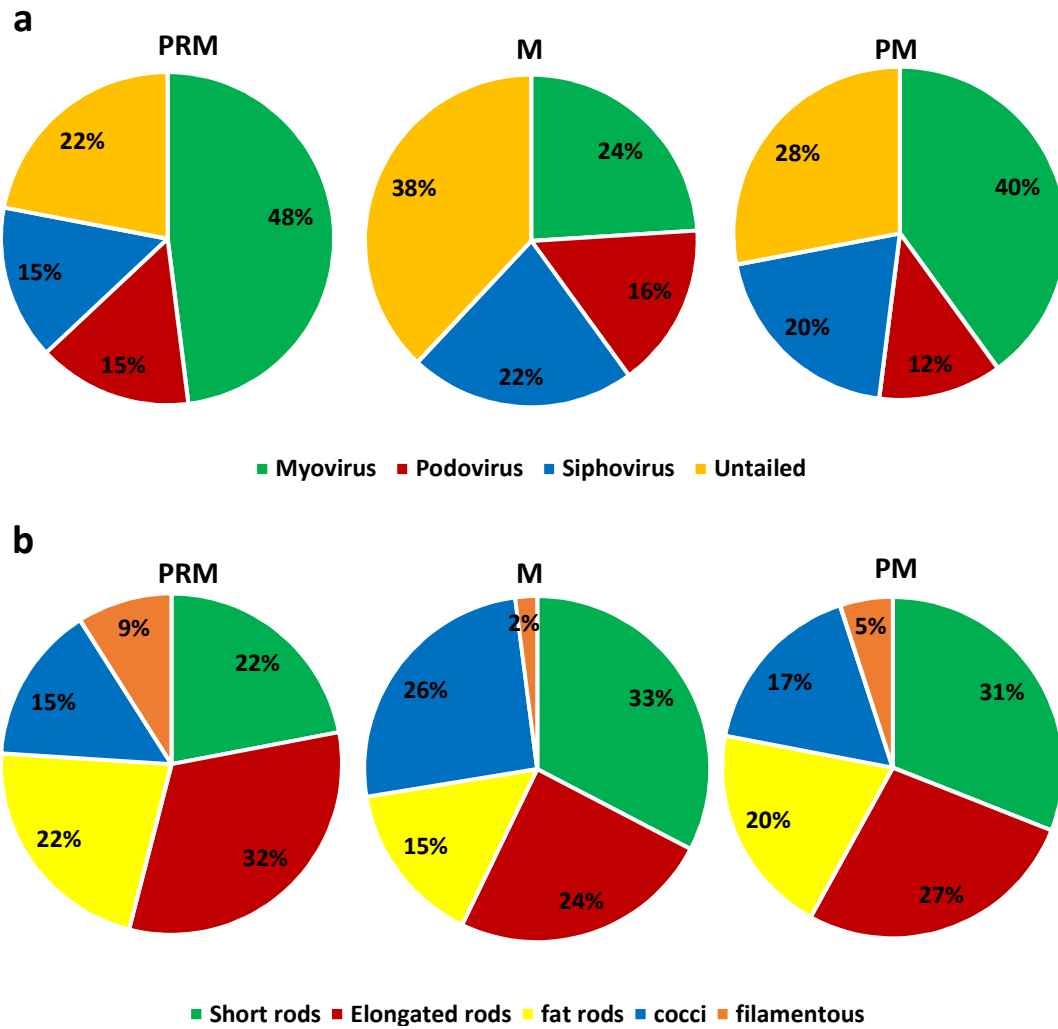


Fig. 7 Seasonal variations in (a) viral morphotypes and (b) infected prokaryotic morphotypes in the study region. PRM: pre-monsoon; M: monsoon; PM: post-monsoon

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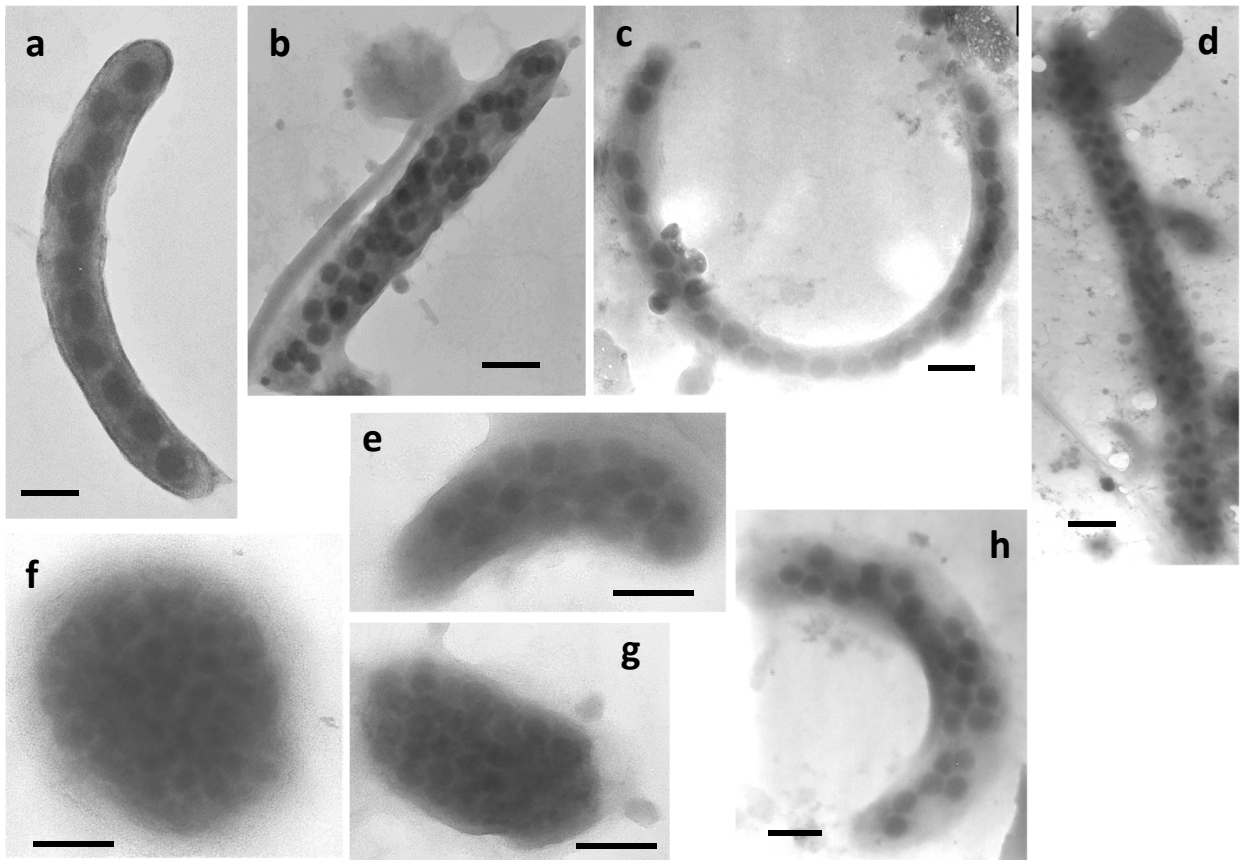


Fig. 8 Viral infected prokaryotic morphotypes in the collected water sample. (a, b, h) long rods, (c, d) filamentous, (f) coccus, (e) short rod and (g) fat rod. Scale bar = 100 nm

333 Viral burst sizes varied among different prokaryotic morphotypes with filamentous forms having the highest average
 334 burst size (81), followed by elongated rods (42), fat rods (36), cocci (30) and short rods (25) (Online Resource 2).
 335 Burst sizes of filamentous cells varied greatly with values ranging from 39-122. During PRM, the major fraction of
 336 virally infected prokaryotic morphotypes were elongated rods. Percentage of infected filamentous cells were also
 337 highest during PRM when compared to the other two seasons (9%, BS: 81). The PCA analysis performed for the
 338 two years presents an overview of the seasonal and spatial distribution patterns of VA and PA in relation to other
 339 environmental parameters. A clear distinction between the seasonal patterns of different biotic and abiotic variables
 340 are obvious in the PCA biplot (Fig. 9). PCA clearly demonstrates that the host abundance (Prokaryotic abundance
 341 and Chl *a*) is the major factor influencing the viral abundance and distribution, followed by temperature, salinity and
 342 dissolved oxygen. The PC1 axis effectively separated the sampling stations according to the seasonal variation.

343 Factor 1 (PC1) explained 42.63% of the total data variability and was positively correlated with salinity, Chl *a* and
344 inorganic nutrients, but negatively correlated with temperature and dissolved oxygen. Factor 2 (PC2) explained
345 32.83% of total data variability and was positively correlated with DO and chlorophyll *a* in 2014. In 2015, Factor 1
346 (PC1) explained 60.82% of the total data variability and Factor 2 (PC2) explained 18.30% of total data variability.
347 The nature of correlation parameters with physico-chemical parameters in 2015 were similar to 2014. The inter-
348 relationship of various physico-chemical and biological variables during PRM, M and PM was visualized in distance
349 based redundancy analysis (dbRDA) biplots (Fig 10), highlighting the strong correlations between VA and PA, and
350 the weak correlations with PO₄, SiO₄ and NH₄ in both 2014 and 2015

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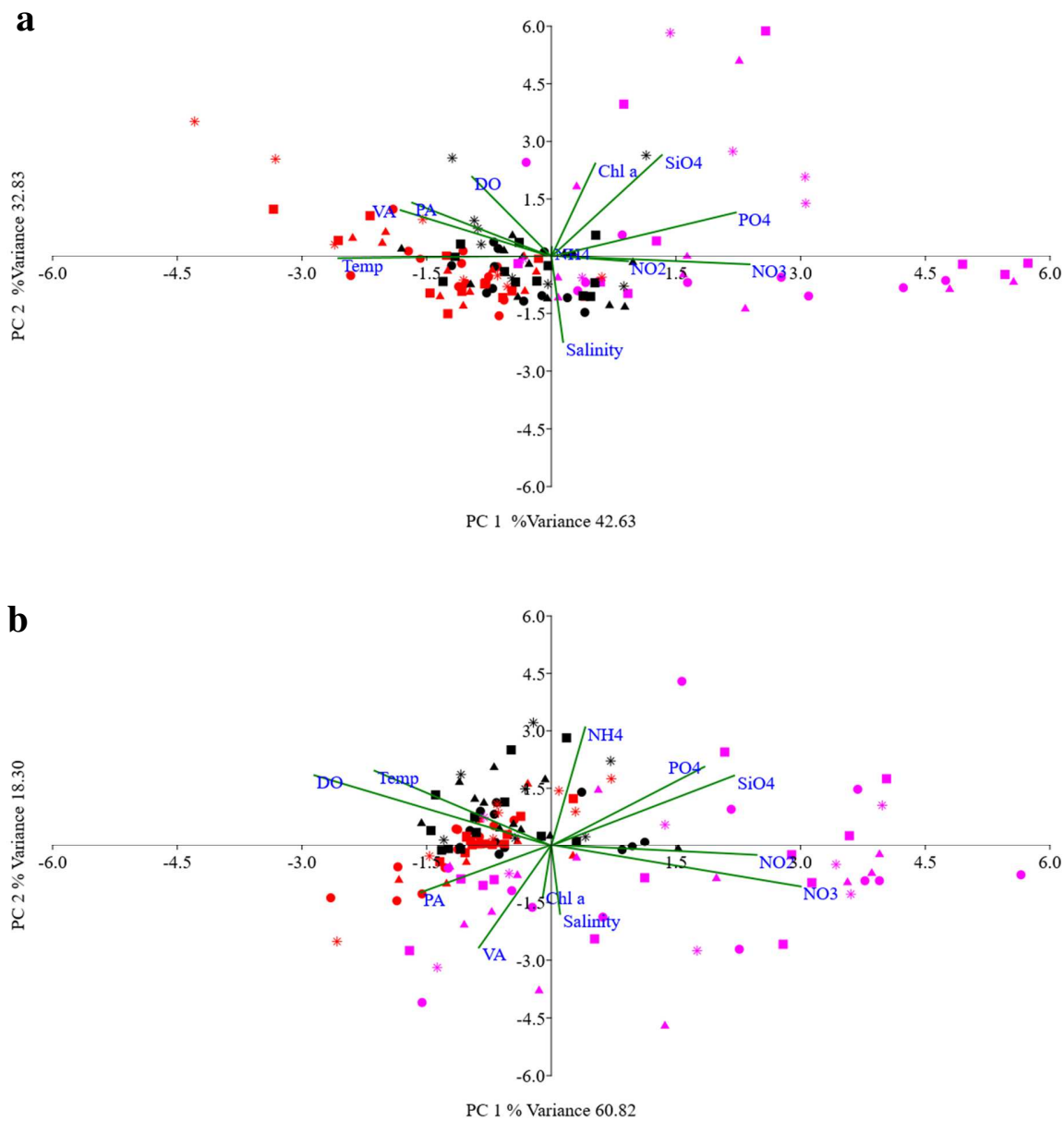
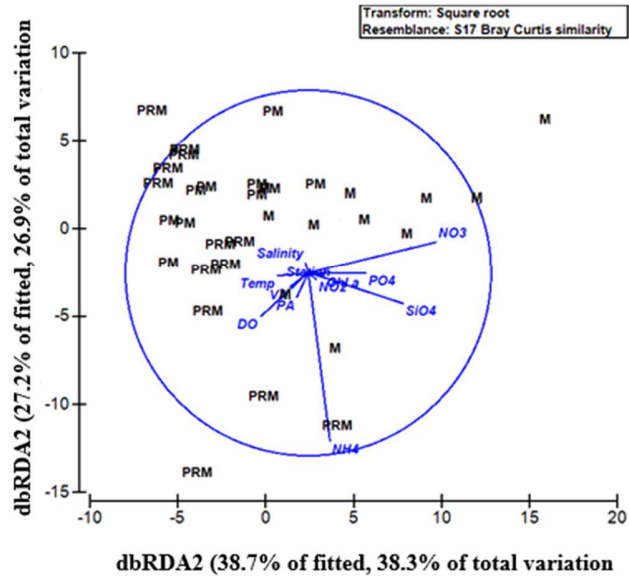


Fig. 9 Principal component analysis (PCA) representing the inter-relationship between various biological and physico-chemical parameters during (a) 2014 and (b) 2015. Observations during pre- monsoon (PRM, red), monsoon (M, pink) and post monsoon (PM, black) from stations, S1 (round), S2 (triangle), S3 (square) and S4 (star). Abbreviations: viral abundance (VA), prokaryotic abundance (PA), chlorophyll *a* (Chl *a*), temperature (Temp), dissolved oxygen (DO), nitrate (NO₃), nitrite (NO₂), ammonium (NH₄), phosphate (PO₄) and silicate (SiO₄)

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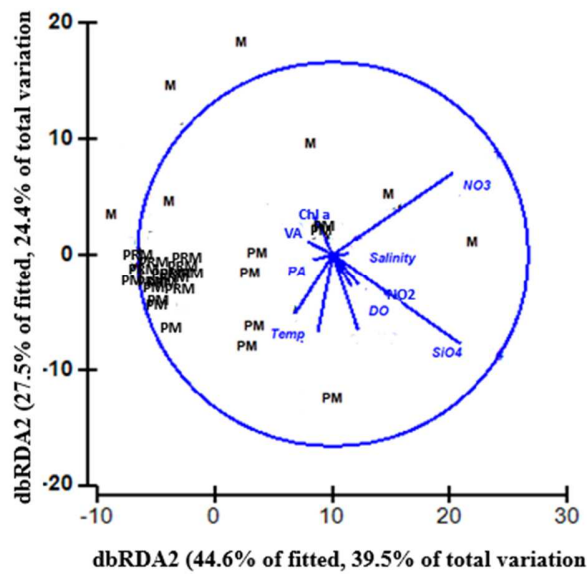
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Fig. 10 Distance based linear model (DistLM) or distance based redundancy analysis (dbRDA) showing the inter-relationship of various physico-chemical and biological variables during pre monsoon (PRM), monsoon (M) and post monsoon (PM) in (a) 2014 and (b) 2015. Abbreviations: viral abundance (VA), prokaryotic abundance (PA), chlorophyll *a* (Chl *a*), dissolved oxygen (DO), nitrate (NO₃), nitrite (NO₂), ammonium (NH₄), phosphate (PO₄) and silicate (SiO₄)

378 **Discussion**

379 The present study represents the first description of the influence of seasonality on viral mediated processes in the
380 eastern Arabian Sea (India). The data sets acquired from two consecutive years confirm the existence of a seasonal
381 pattern for most of the studied environmental (biotic and abiotic) variables. A clear seasonality in terms of
382 hydrography prevailed in the studied region. The water column was characterized by high temperature and salinity
383 (Online Resource 3) but with low DO and nutrient concentrations during PRM. During monsoon period (June-Sep),
384 coastal upwelling which brings nutrient rich waters towards the coast. In addition, there are strong cyclonic eddies in
385 the sub-surface waters over the SE Arabian Sea during monsoon (Rao et al., 2008). In the present study, prominent
386 upwelling features like surfacing of cool, less-oxygenated subsurface water mass towards the coast was evident
387 during monsoon. The estuarine and freshwater influx was more in the coastal stations (S3 and S4), which plays a
388 significant role in the distribution of plankton and prokaryotic community. The southwest monsoon period (M) was
389 hence characterized by high nutrient concentrations of NO_3 , PO_4 and SiO_4 . The N:P ratios were comparatively high
390 during M than PRM and PM. Nutrient enrichment favours the growth of phytoplankton and bacteria, which in turn
391 supports the viral proliferation. A recent study by Sabbagh et al. (2020) reported that heterotrophic bacterial
392 abundance is controlled by viruses throughout the year in the Red Sea as evident from the negative correlation
393 between bacterial and viral abundances and positive correlation between bacterial mortality rates and viral
394 abundance. Apart from the indirect effect of nutrient enrichment (such as increased host abundance and
395 metabolism), a number of studies have reported on direct influence of nutrient concentrations, especially, phosphate
396 and nitrate (which positively influence viral nucleic acid and protein syntheses), on viral abundance and viral
397 production (Maat et al. 2014; Motegi et al. 2015).

398 The abundance of viruses and prokaryotes obtained from this study are comparable to other tropical oceanic
399 regions (Winter et al. 2008; Gainer et al. 2017; Lara et al. 2017). Significant seasonal and spatial variations in the
400 abundance of viruses and prokaryotes were explained from their interaction with various biotic and abiotic
401 components of the system. The dbRDA biplot indicated that prokaryotic abundance was the most important
402 predictor of viral abundance similar to reports from diverse oceanic regions (Middelboe 2000; Taylor et al. 2003;
403 Parsons et al. 2012; Parvathi et al. 2015; De Corte et al. 2016). Another important determinant of viral abundance
404 was temperature. An Artificial Neural Network-based model by Winter et al. (2012) has predicted temperature as
405 the major factor determining prokaryotic and viral abundances. Seasonal variations in environmental parameters,

406 especially temperature and salinity, have been reported to affect the dynamics of host community structure (Suh et
407 al. 2015). Temperature have been reported as one of the key factors influencing variation in viral and prokaryotic
408 distribution and their interactions over broad spatial and temporal scales (Finke et al. 2017). Increasing temperature
409 was shown to increase bacterial respiration and bacterial production with adequate nutrient supply (Sarmiento et al.
410 2010). The coupling between bacteria and phytoplankton enhanced with an increase in temperature by 2-6°C
411 (Hoppe et al. 2008). The carbon demand by bacteria also increase by $\approx 20\%$ with increase in temperature without
412 any effect on their growth efficiency (Vazquez-Dominguez et al. 2007). Increase in viral abundance could also be
413 due to switching over of viruses from lytic from lysogenic mode under favorable temperatures (Williamson and Paul
414 2006). A decrease in latent period, increase in burst size and an increase in viral infectivity were observed with
415 increasing temperature in *Micromonas* viral populations (Maat et al. 2017). In our study, temperature may have
416 affected viral proliferation and activities directly or indirectly by controlling their host abundance and metabolism.

417 Viral-mediated processes such as host mortality and viral production followed the same seasonal pattern as that
418 of VA and PA with highest values in PRM (Online Resource 4). The existence of a strong and robust relationship
419 between viral production and both viral and prokaryote abundance has been reported from many marine regions
420 (Rowe et al. 2008). Several studies have demonstrated that increasing temperature had a positive influence on host
421 growth rate and subsequently resulted in increased viral production rates (Williamson and Paul 2006; Rowe et al.
422 2012; Demory et al. 2017). Viral induced mortality of prokaryote and phytoplankton hosts in the present study were
423 greatly influenced by viral production and temperature. Viral mediated mortality of phytoplankton communities has
424 been reported to increase at lower latitudes when compared to higher latitudes where grazer mediated mortality
425 predominated. This shift was associated with an increase in temperature and salinity at lower latitudes (Mojica et al.
426 2016). Viral lysis has been recognized as a significant means of mortality to the phytoplankton *Phaeocystis globosa*
427 in the North Sea. Viral lysis accounted for 5-66% of the total mortality of *P. globosa* during blooms (Baudoux et al.
428 2006). Viruses were also found to cause significant mortality to specific picophytoplankton groups in various coastal
429 and oligotrophic marine habitats (Baudoux et al. 2007; Baudoux et al. 2008). In the oligotrophic northeastern
430 Atlantic, viral lysis accounted for the release of 21% of the total carbon produced by picophytoplankton. In the
431 present study, viral lysis accounted for 7.98–28.9% of phytoplankton mortality with highest rates during PRM. High
432 viral production and turnover rates during PRM have been backed by the high burst sizes (42) of elongated rods.

433 High burst sizes along with higher host densities might have possibly contributed to the high infection frequencies
434 and the increased host mortality during this season.

435 In this study, we evaluated viral morphological characteristics (viral morphotype), and virus-host interactions
436 (infection pattern of viruses on different bacterial morphotypes) using a transmission electron microscopy (TEM)
437 method during three seasons. Myoviridae was the dominant group in both PRM and PM, followed by untailed
438 viruses. However, during monsoon untailed viruses were the most dominant viral morphotype. Myoviridae form the
439 most dominant group in most marine environments as most viruses are phages, the viruses that infect bacteria
440 (Wommack and Colwell 2000). Myoviruses have a broader host range than other phages, and are capable of
441 infecting different species of bacteria. Few studies have also reported high abundance of non-tailed viruses (August
442 et al. 2006; Stopar et al. 2003; Bratbak et al. 1990). Various environmental parameters such as temperature
443 influences the viral morphological characteristics of myoviridae, and temperature and salinity for untailed viruses
444 and podoviridae (Brum et al. 2013). Several studies suggest that morphological characteristics are linked with
445 seasons and environmental factors are important points to consider when assessing viral persistence (Espinosa et
446 al. 2009). Based on TARA Ocean expedition, myovirus tails were longer in the Arabian Sea than Mediterranean
447 Sea, Red Sea and Atlantic Ocean and capsid diameters of viruses were significantly larger in the Arabian Sea than
448 those in the Indian, Atlantic and Pacific Oceans (Brum et al. 2013). The current study indicates that among different
449 bacterial morphotypes (short rods, elongated rods, fat rods and cocci) rods were the most dominant forms
450 representing about ~75% of the entire bacterial community throughout the study period and were more susceptible
451 to viral infection. When compared to other morphotypes, the elongated rods had highest burst size (42 viruses
452 bacterium⁻¹) probably due to the larger surface area of rods compared to other morphotypes. The present study
453 should guide future work towards understanding the functional roles of the viruses in the southeastern Arabian Sea.

454 **Conclusion**

455 A clear seasonality in viral abundance and various viral processes in the southeastern Arabian Sea is apparent from
456 the present study. Our observations on the seasonal drivers of viral dynamics were similar to those predicted for
457 other oceanic regions such as the North Pacific and the Arctic Ocean. The seasonal variations in host abundance and
458 temperature were the major driving factors of viral processes in the study region. Viral lysis is a significant means of
459 host mortality in the coastal waters of the Arabian Sea especially during premonsoon season. By causing significant

460 percentage of host mortality, viruses may greatly contribute to the dissolved organic matter (DOM) pool. The
461 elevated viral activities during PRM indicated the highly active microbial loop in the oligotrophic premonsoon
462 season. Viral activities along with temperature play crucial role in controlling the host abundance and shaping the
463 host community structure in the Arabian Sea.

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472 **Availability of data and material**

473 The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author
474 on reasonable request.

475 **Compliance with ethical standards**

476 **Conflict of interest**

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

478 **Ethics approval**

479 Not applicable

480 **Consent to participate**

481 All authors give their consent to participate in this publication.

482 **Consent for publication**

483 All authors agree with the content and give consent to publish this manuscript.

484 **Code availability**

485 Not applicable

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Table 1 F values based on three way ANOVA performed for various biotic and abiotic variables in the four stations (S1, S2, S3 and S4) during the three seasons (PRM, M and PM) of 2014 and 2015

	Variables	Year	Season	Station	Year × Season	Year × Station	Season × Station	Year × Season × Station	651
df		1	2	10	2	10	20	20	
	VA	25.246**	8.667**	2.020*	5.544**	0.615	0.442	0.346	
	PA	0.169	18.406**	3.154**	0.206	0.712	0.765	0.755	
	DO	18.192**	27.056**	5.826**	7.433**	0.788	2.009**	0.760	
	NO ₂	0.945	0.888	0.899	0.903	0.898	0.918	0.917	
	NO ₃	1.038	60.656**	3.274**	0.407	0.777	3.301**	0.655	
	NH ₄	14.098**	1.300	1.315	2.168	1.312	0.869	0.658	
	SiO ₄	11.173**	19.990**	2.673**	1.937	0.279	0.563	0.336	
	PO ₄	69.661**	34.948**	1.851	33.605**	0.204	0.374	0.246	
	Chl <i>a</i>	1.043	11.902**	2.414**	0.282	0.778	2.004	0.726	
	Temperature	0.351	293.285**	7.193**	3.960*	0.966	1.045	0.159	
	Salinity	2.743	0.769	5.075**	4.067*	1.156	1.250	0.962	

VA: viral abundance, PA: prokaryotic abundance, Chl *a*: chlorophyll *a*, DO: dissolved oxygen, NO₃⁻: nitrate, NO₂⁻: nitrite, NH₄⁺: ammonium, PO₄³⁻: phosphate and SiO₄²⁻: silicate. Significant F values at p<0.05 and p<0.001 are represented with * and **, respectively

Table 2 Seasonal and vertical variations in physico-chemical and biological parameters at the four stations (S1-S4) in 2014

Season	Parameters	S1			S2			S3			S4	
		0.5	15	30	0.5	11	22	0.5	7	14	0.5	6
PRM	Depth (m)											
	VA (10 ⁷ VLP/mL)	0.70±0.17	0.41±0.00	0.53±0.19	0.71±0.12	0.50±0.13	0.42±0.15	0.75±0.38	0.44±0.15	0.45±0.09	1.17±0.71	0.72±0.57
	PA (10 ⁶ cells/mL)	0.91±0.41	0.53±0.18	0.78±0.46	1.00±0.57	0.86±0.60	0.55±0.24	1.06±0.74	0.93±0.90	1.02±0.74	1.55±1.25	1.03±0.86
	Chl a	0.36±0.35	0.37±0.17	0.51±0.16	0.79±0.68	0.44±0.41	1.10±0.62	0.62±0.20	0.52±0.31	0.68±0.40	2.04±2.15	1.81±2.18
	DO (mL L ⁻¹)	5.35±1.00	6.02±1.15	4.75±0.78	4.65±1.70	4.70±1.54	3.85±1.75	5.10±2.15	4.52±1.64	4.82±2.35	4.95±1.22	4.27±1.33
	Temperature (°C)	30.55±0.57	29.28±0.37	29.10±0.25	30.40±0.76	29.56±0.50	29.15±0.35	30.39±0.84	29.84±1.23	29.40±0.59	30.60±0.4	29.66±0.66
	Salinity (PSU)	34.07±0.26	34.32±0.15	34.73±0.60	34.05±0.10	34.2±0.05	34.56±0.32	33.83±0.25	34.23±0.46	33.56±0.74	32.67±2.13	33.24±2.49
	Nutrients(μ mol L ⁻¹)											
	NO ₃	0.46±0.32	0.36±0.20	0.80±0.77	0.43±0.35	0.64±0.40	1.02±0.52	0.52±0.50	0.66±0.35	0.79±0.61	0.75±0.44	1.33±0.76
	PO ₄	0.30±0.11	0.35±0.16	0.33±0.38	0.59±0.57	0.62±0.65	0.62±0.70	0.50±0.14	0.3±0.18	0.45±0.37	0.69±0.38	0.72±0.42
M	VA (10 ⁷ VLP/mL)	0.28±0.10	0.21±0.05	0.17±0.03	0.24±0.12	0.23±0.09	0.09±0.03	0.29±0.09	0.22±0.13	0.18±0.13	0.45±0.13	0.24±0.11
	PA (10 ⁶ cells/mL)	0.55±0.12	0.37±0.00	0.39±0.19	0.39±0.09	0.39±0.03	0.26±0.15	0.53±0.08	0.33±0.12	0.31±0.09	0.57±0.13	0.32±0.13
	Chl a	1.50±2.23	0.76±0.61	0.65±0.75	9.34±13.53	0.98±0.76	1.03±1.11	11.42±16.7	0.84±0.85	1.08±0.90	1.86±0.91	2.33±1.24
	DO (mL L ⁻¹)	6.14±2.86	3.68±1.91	2.71±2.87	7.78±4.17	6.23±1.01	2.02±2.24	8.59±2.51	4.06±3.00	1.95±1.49	5.69±1.31	7.11±4.15
	Temperature (°C)	27.74±0.32	25.89±1.79	24.74±2.44	27.52±0.71	26.71±1.05	24.51±1.78	27.51±0.56	26.72±1.68	25.47±1.80	27.09±0.82	26.61±0.98
	Salinity (PSU)	29.83±7.23	34.78±0.59	35.16±0.32	31.57±3.62	34.80±0.38	35.22±0.33	29.53±6.83	33.84±1.55	34.56±0.87	31.52±3.64	28.16±11.50
	Nutrients(μ mol L ⁻¹)											
		NO ₃	0.89±0.21	7.04±2.39	12.91±3.73	1.16±0.14	3.95±1.59	14.30±2.27	0.81±0.33	8.27±5.26	14.05±1.4	2.09±1.81
	PO ₄	1.27±0.69	1.68±0.85	1.90±0.84	1.47±1.29	1.37±0.74	1.93±1.27	1.71±1.53	1.83±1.52	2.27±1.63	2.2±1.66	1.54±1.00
PM	VA (10 ⁷ VLP/mL)	0.31±0.15	0.19±0.11	0.20±0.17	0.40±0.26	0.22±0.19	0.12±0.05	0.35±0.22	0.31±0.18	0.19±0.08	0.50±0.11	0.26±0.09
	PA (10 ⁶ cells/mL)	0.57±0.17	0.41±0.17	0.36±0.08	0.66±0.45	0.37±0.13	0.30±0.09	0.55±0.23	0.43±0.13	0.41±0.17	0.87±0.33	0.45±0.08
	Chl a	0.27±0.28	0.32±0.25	0.43±0.26	0.58±0.36	0.37±0.29	0.58±0.33	0.59±0.46	0.65±0.49	0.60±0.34	1.33±1.01	1.08±0.71
	DO (mL L ⁻¹)	7.44±1.44	6.59±2.11	5.26±2.01	6.77±1.26	5.76±2.43	4.97±1.75	6.75±1.10	5.76±1.3	5.38±1.39	7.72±3.27	5.73±1.53
	Temperature (°C)	29.06±0.44	28.81±0.31	28.27±0.41	29.27±0.45	28.71±0.39	28.57±0.26	29.53±0.61	28.9±0.31	28.61±0.31	29.57±0.89	28.90±0.88
	Salinity (PSU)	32.98±1.35	34.54±0.88	35.08±0.72	31.60±2.14	34.29±1.12	34.86±0.63	30.88±3.76	33.98±0.52	34.57±0.71	29.48±2.06	34.23±1.62
	Nutrients(μ mol L ⁻¹)											
		NO ₃	1.45±1.23	1.00±0.46	1.07±0.55	1.00±1.12	1.73±1.30	1.43±0.60	1.79±1.86	1.43±1.11	1.14±0.61	2.40±1.18
	PO ₄	0.39±0.29	0.32±0.13	0.42±0.13	0.46±0.19	0.50±0.33	0.54±0.26	0.58±0.50	0.44±0.45	0.83±0.19	0.91±0.76	0.67±0.39

PRM: pre monsoon, M: monsoon, PM: post monsoon, VA: viral abundance, PA: prokaryotic abundance, DO: dissolved oxygen, NO₃: nitrate, PO₄: phosphate

Table 3 Seasonal and vertical variations in physico—chemical and biological parameters at the four stations (S1-S4) in 2015

Season	Parameters	S1			S2			S3			S4	
		0.5	15	30	0.5	11	22	0.5	7	14	0.5	6
PRM	VA (10 ⁶ VLP/mL)	1.47±0.65	0.65±0.39	0.59±0.90	0.92±0.42	0.50±0.44	0.54±0.33	0.89±0.38	0.76±0.91	0.65±0.24	1.12±1.29	0.70±0.63
	PA (10 ⁶ cells/mL)	2.34±1.64	0.63±0.54	0.97±1.87	0.39±0.39	0.48±0.41	0.53±0.42	0.59±0.28	0.69±1.02	0.49±0.46	1.98±2.13	0.73±0.44
	Chl a	0.2±0.30	0.10±0.12	0.53±0.17	0.27±0.24	0.32±0.21	0.64±0.20	0.49±0.36	0.40±0.29	0.57±0.16	1.01±0.66	1.30±0.49
	DO (mL L ⁻¹)	7.05±0.19	6.92±0.34	6.77±0.82	6.98±0.56	6.69±0.39	6.29±1.08	6.39±0.25	6.39±0.25	6.05±0.26	6.14±0.53	5.59±1.04
	Temperature (°C)	30.37±0.78	29.87±0.68	29.4±0.46	30.49±0.62	30.08±0.69	29.54±0.54	30.47±0.39	29.88±0.60	29.81±0.58	31.10±0.82	30.44±0.38
	Salinity (PSU)	34.04±0.34	34.19±0.33	33.04±2.1	33.41±1.38	34.22±0.23	32.51±2.73	32.51±1.56	34.02±0.18	34.05±0.20	32.85±0.88	32.96±1.42
	Nutrients(μmol L ⁻¹)	2.07±1.08	1.19±0.24	1.23±0.57	1.44±0.50	1.21±0.26	2.56±0.76	2.00±1.08	1.78±1.52	1.36±0.72	1.80±0.58	2.34±0.75
	NO ₃											
	PO ₄	0.23±0.10	0.36±0.23	0.28±0.15	0.20±0.03	0.33±0.30	0.32±0.24	0.50±0.23	0.41±0.28	0.37±0.09	0.79±0.43	0.79±0.60
M	VA (10 ⁶ VLP/mL)	1.60±1.62	0.78±0.59	0.13±0.08	0.85±0.62	1.21±1.64	1.26±1.62	0.74±0.31	0.76±0.43	0.99±0.98	1.26±1.42	0.46±0.36
	PA (10 ⁶ cells/mL)	0.78±0.98	0.39±0.46	0.10±0.16	0.28±0.38	0.33±0.30	0.30±0.18	0.61±0.66	0.53±0.37	0.39±0.29	0.76±0.77	0.39±0.43
	Chl a	1.97±1.23	1.75±0.88	0.69±0.53	2.07±1.89	2.55±0.75	2.34±1.02	1.83±1.21	4.13±0.85	2.82±1.22	2.98±1.35	2.29±0.88
	DO (mL L ⁻¹)	7.57±1.11	3.48±2.57	1.69±1.76	7.38±1.25	4.48±3.51	3.25±3.73	6.58±1.8	5.01±3.47	3.34±3.79	6.32±0.65	2.88±2.54
	Temperature (°C)	25.70±0.51	24.22±0.53	23.09±0.35	26.2±0.75	25.42±0.83	24.01±0.75	26.52±1.68	24.86±0.93	24.12±0.85	26.35±1.2	24.22±0.56
	Salinity (PSU)	34.73±0.46	34.81±0.56	34.88±1.23	33.94±5.81	34.48±1.35	34.90±4.68	29.18±8.60	34.84±0.53	30.66±0.73	32.78±7.3	34.58±2.06
	Nutrients(μmol L ⁻¹)	2.38±2.15	7.33±9.01	17.94±3.81	2.41±2.11	4.93±3.20	12.06±6.86	7.67±9.12	5.01±3.31	9.82±9.97	6.91±10.41	7.08±7.09
	NO ₃											
	PO ₄	0.15±0.18	0.23±0.21	0.5±0.48	0.13±0.13	0.32±0.30	0.57±0.56	0.44±0.55	0.35±0.31	0.54±0.67	0.41±0.46	0.45±0.43
PM	VA (10 ⁶ VLP/mL)	0.61±0.14	0.46±0.15	0.34±0.11	0.46±0.17	0.27±0.15	0.19±0.04	0.58±0.22	0.42±0.13	0.42±0.16	0.70±0.24	0.58±0.22
	PA (10 ⁶ cells/mL)	0.28±0.21	0.23±0.14	0.16±0.17	0.28±0.31	0.17±0.16	0.16±0.16	0.75±0.20	0.55±0.23	0.52±0.12	0.76±0.10	0.58±0.06
	Chl a	0.33±0.44	0.27±0.36	0.29±0.08	0.78±0.98	0.54±0.07	0.37±0.16	0.55±0.45	0.63±0.02	0.43±0.24	0.97±0.07	1.21±0.96
	DO (mL L ⁻¹)	8.06±1.23	6.85±2.19	7.39±1.37	9.95±0.73	7.81±0.97	6.77±2.56	8.72±1.43	8.38±1.39	7.56±0.60	7.93±1.36	7.41±1.00
	Temperature (°C)	28.68±0.61	28.59±0.44	28.16±0.20	28.73±0.58	28.47±0.20	28.42±0.14	29.32±0.83	28.60±0.22	28.41±0.06	29.22±0.18	28.82±0.04
	Salinity (PSU)	32.73±2.05	34.80±0.83	34.94±1.01	32.78±2.04	34.59±0.39	34.81±0.71	30.14±6.04	34.17±0.25	34.75±0.57	29.92±4.94	33.86±0.14
	Nutrients(μmol L ⁻¹)	2.59±1.72	1.73±2.13	1.99±2.23	1.71±1.67	0.30±0.20	2.08±3.43	1.58±1.92	0.25±0.07	0.62±0.24	2.63±2.48	1.26±1.63
	NO ₃											
	PO ₄	0.35±0.28	0.20±0.14	0.38±0.07	0.31±0.12	0.30±0.25	0.41±0.22	0.36±0.29	0.33±0.15	0.4±0.31	0.49±0.31	0.38±0.30

PRM: pre monsoon, M: monsoon, PM: post monsoon, VA: viral abundance, PA: prokaryotic abundance, DO: dissolved oxygen, NO₃: nitrate and PO₄: phosphate

664 **Figure Legends**

665 **Fig 1** Sampling locations in the Arabian Sea. Water samples were collected from four stations of a transect
666 perpendicular to the coast of Kochi on monthly basis during 2014 and 2015. Sampling locations are marked as S1,
667 S2, S3 and S4

668 **Fig. 2** Variations in viral and prokaryotic abundance (VA & PA) during pre-monsoon (PRM, blue), monsoon (M,
669 red) and post-monsoon (PM, green) seasons. (a) VA in 2014, (b) VA in 2015, (c) PA in 2014 and (d) PA in 2015

670 **Fig. 3** Variations in (a) viral production (VP) and (b) viral turnover rates (VTR) at stations S1 and S4 during pre-
671 monsoon (PRM, blue), monsoon (M, red) and post-monsoon (PM, green) in 2014

672 **Fig. 4** Seasonal variations in (a) frequency of infected cells (FIC) and (b) viral induced prokaryotic mortality
673 (VIPM) at S1 and S4 in 2014. Pre-monsoon (PRM): blue; monsoon (M): red; post-monsoon (PM): green

674 **Fig. 5** Seasonal variations in viral mediated mortality (VMM) and microzooplankton grazing mortality (MGM) at
675 S1 and S4 in 2014. pre-monsoon (PRM): blue; monsoon (M): red; post-monsoon (PM): green

676 **Fig. 6** Viral morphotypes from the Arabian Sea (a, b, c, d) myoviruses, (e, f) non-tailed viruses and (g) siphoviruses.
677 Scale bar = 50 nm

678 **Fig. 7** Seasonal variations in (a) viral morphotypes and (b) infected prokaryotic morphotypes in the study region.
679 PRM: pre-monsoon; M: monsoon; PM: post-monsoon

680 **Fig. 8** Viral infected prokaryotic morphotypes in the collected water sample. (a, b, h) long rods, (c, d) filamentous,
681 (f) coccus, (e) short rod and (g) fat rod. Scale bar = 100 nm

682 **Fig. 9** Principal component analysis (PCA) representing the inter-relationship between various biological, physical
683 and chemical parameters during (a) 2014 and (b) 2015. Observations during pre-monsoon (PRM, red), monsoon (M,
684 pink) and post-monsoon (PM, black) from stations, S1 (round), S2 (triangle), S3 (square) and S4 (star).

685 Abbreviations: viral abundance (VA), prokaryotic abundance (PA), chlorophyll *a* (Chl *a*), temperature (Temp),
686 dissolved oxygen (DO), nitrate (NO₃), nitrite (NO₂), ammonium (NH₄), phosphate (PO₄) and silicate (SiO₄)

687 **Fig. 10** Distance based linear model (DistLM) showing the inter-relationship of various physical, chemical and
688 biological variables during pre-monsoon (PRM), monsoon (M) and post-monsoon (PM) in (a) 2014 and (b) 2015.
689 Abbreviations: viral abundance (VA), prokaryotic abundance (PA), chlorophyll *a* (Chl *a*), dissolved oxygen (DO),
690 nitrate (NO₃), nitrite (NO₂), ammonium (NH₄), phosphate (PO₄) and silicate (SiO₄)

691 **Online Resource 1** Variations in (a & b) temperature, (c & d) salinity and (e & f) Chl *a* at the four stations, S1-S4
692 during pre-monsoon (PRM, blue), monsoon (M, red) and post-monsoon (PM, green)

693 **Online Resource 2** Variations in the number of average progenies produced per infected cells (burst size) of
694 different prokaryotic morphotypes

695 **Online Resource 3** Vertical profiles of temperature and salinity illustrating the seasonal changes in hydrography. (a-
696 c) PRM (pre monsoon), M (monsoon) & PM (post monsoon) seasons in 2014, (d-f) PRM, M & PM seasons in 2015

697 **Online Resource 4** Principal component analysis (PCA) representing different biological, physical and chemical
698 factors influencing viral processes in the study region during 2014. Premonsoon (PRM, green), monsoon (M, black),
699 and post monsoon (PM, red). Abbreviations: viral abundance (VA), prokaryotic abundance (PA), viral production
700 (VP), viral turnover rate (VTR), frequency of visibly infected cells (FVIC), frequency of infected cells (FIC), viral
701 induced prokaryotic mortality (VIPM), viral mediated mortality of phytoplankton (VMM), microzooplankton
702 grazing mortality (MGM), chlorophyll *a* (Chl *a*), temperature (Temp), dissolved oxygen (DO), nitrate (NO₃), nitrite
703 (NO₂), ammonium (NH₄), phosphate (PO₄) and silicate (SiO₄)