



## *de novo* transcriptome profile of two earthworms *Lampito mauritii* and *Drawida calebi* during regeneration

Ranjan Sahu<sup>a</sup>, Sanjat Kumar Sahu<sup>b</sup>, Sudhansu Sekhar Nishank<sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Post Graduate Department of Zoology, Utkal University, Vani Vihar, Bhubaneswar, 751004, Odisha, India

<sup>b</sup> Dept. of Environment Science, Sambalpur University, Jyoti Vihar, Burla, 768019, Odisha, India

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### ABSTRACT

Earthworms have remarkable ability to regenerate its tail and head region. However the list of genes expressed in this regeneration process has been less explored baring a few species. The current study involves the *de novo* transcriptome sequencing of intact tail and regenerating tail (15 day post amputation) of earthworms belonging to two different genera *Lampito mauritii* (Kinberg, 1867) and *Drawida calebi* (Gates, 1945). This study contains one *de-novo* and one reference based transcriptome analysis each from one genus of two earthworm genera. From a total of 119.92 million (150 × 2) reads, 112.95 million high quality adapter free reads were utilized in analysis. Assembly of high-quality reads was performed separately for *Lampito mauritii* (LM sample) and *Drawida calebi* (DC sample) that resulted in 66368 and 1,61,289 transcripts respectively. About 25.21% of transcripts were functionally annotated for DC sample and 38.27% for LM samples against Annelida sequences. A total of 239 genes were expressed exclusively in regenerated tissue compared to intact sample in DC whereas about 241 genes were exclusively expressed in regenerated tissue of LM compared to its intact sample. Majority of genes in *Drawida* and *Lampito* were dedicated to immune response, maintenance of cytoskeleton, resisting oxidative stress and promoting neuronal regeneration for cell-cell communication during tail regeneration.

### 1. Introduction

Earthworms are one of the most important soil animals that maintain soil fertility and sustainability. In addition to their role in soil formation, they contribute to the composition and functioning of soil ecosystem with varying species diversity because of which they are known as ecosystem engineers. These earthworms have rapid rate of regeneration of their body parts if lost. They show both whole body and structural regeneration [1]. The mechanism of regeneration has been well studied in many members of annelids such as some fresh water oligochaetes and polychaetes, including earthworm where these organisms can replace segments amputated along the body rapidly and become virtually indistinguishable from normal adults within a short period. During regeneration, dedifferentiation and reprogramming of cells at amputated site takes place, where cells in wounds are degraded by phagocytes that migrate to site of amputation. The undamaged cells in wounds dedifferentiate and lose specialization and proliferate to form a conical bud leading to final differentiation for formation of various tissues [2].

The molecular mechanism of regeneration in animals has enabled biologist to understand basic mechanism of body pattern formation,

maintenance of cell polarity, organ symmetry. Recent advances in sequencing techniques particularly transcriptome sequencing by next generation sequencer (NGS) and use of RNA interference techniques have revealed a vast information on these aspects in regenerating animals particularly planarians, hydra and earthworms [3,4]. The transcriptome profile of planarians during regeneration shows involvement of the *Wnt* signaling in tail regeneration and genes encoding predicted inhibitors of *Wnt* such as *FRP-1* and *notum* are involved in anterior body part regeneration. The dorsal ventral axis is regulated by *Bmp* signaling. The *bmp*, *admp* genes promote ventralization, *nog-1* gene promotes dorsalization [4,5].

In the earthworm *Eisenia fetida*, upregulation of three labial genes (Pex-lab01, Pex-lab02 and Pex-lab03), and distal-less gene induces head regeneration. During regeneration, dedifferentiation and reprogramming are found to be regulated by upregulation of five pluripotent factor genes (*Sox2*, *Oct4*, *Nanog*, *Lin28* and *Cmyc*) [2]. During entire period of regeneration, five super families of *Sox*, *Pax*, *Wnt*, *Klf*, *Hox* show higher expression of which *Pax* gene helps in bud/blastema formation and *Wnt* gene stimulates various signaling pathways in cell for formation of body axis. These six super families are thought to induce bud formation and

\* Corresponding author;

E-mail addresses: [sahusanjat@rediffmail.com](mailto:sahusanjat@rediffmail.com) (S.K. Sahu), [nishank25@gmail.com](mailto:nishank25@gmail.com), [nishankss.zool@utkaluniversity.ac.in](mailto:nishankss.zool@utkaluniversity.ac.in) (S.S. Nishank).

remodeling of blood vessels, fats, nerves and muscles during regeneration in *Eisenia fetida* [2,6].

There have been many studies on the transcriptome profile of few earthworms such as *Eisenia fetida* and *Dendrobaena octaedra* [6,7]. Although, in Indian circumstances, transcription profile of *Eisenia fetida*, an exotic species has been reported during regeneration, there is lack of studies on transcriptome profile of many indigenous earthworms such as *Drawida calebi* (Gates, 1945) and *Lampito mauritii* (Kinberg, 1867) abundantly found in both cultivated and uncultivated land [8].

The present study is the first report (*de novo* transcriptome sequencing) to give information on transcriptome profiles of two indigenous earthworms *Drawida calebi* (Gates, 1945) and *Lampito mauritii* (Kinberg, 1867) during regeneration at stage of intact tissue and regenerated tissue at fifteen days post amputation (15dpa) so as to find out list of genes involved during regeneration in both genera of earthworms.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Sample preparation

Adult earthworms *Lampito mauritii* and *Drawida calebi* were collected from campus of Utkal University, Bhubaneswar after identification of these species using key features [8]. They were cultured separately in earthen pot containing cow dung, chopped dried leaves, vegetable scrapings and soil for one month. Five earthworms of equal lengths from each genus were taken out and placed in ice containing water kept in Petri dish and cut at seven segments posterior to clitellum. These amputated earthworms were kept in their respective soil pots for regeneration of tissue (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). After fifteen days the regenerated tissue of all five earthworms from each genus at amputated site (designated as test sample) were collected, pooled together for RNA isolation and sequencing. Similarly in another group of five individuals from other genus, posterior portion of earthworms was amputated at seven segments posterior to clitellum and was collected (designated as control), pooled together for RNA sequencing. All pooled samples were collected in RNA Later solution (Qiagen) as per its prescribed protocol (Fig. 1 and 2).

### 2.2. cDNA library preparation and sequencing

RNA sequencing libraries were prepared with Illumina-compatible

NEBNext® Ultra™ II Directional RNA Library Prep Kit (New England BioLabs, MA, USA) following its protocol. About 25.21% of transcripts were functionally annotated for *Drawida calebi* (DC) sample and 38.27% for *Lampito mauritii* (LM) samples against Annelida sequences. Reference based analysis was done for *Drawida calebi* regenerated (DC\_RE) and *Lampito mauritii* regenerated (LM\_RE) samples using Master Unigenes as reference. Sequencing for 150 bp length paired-end (PE) reads was performed in an Illumina HiSeq sequencer to produce on an average of 29.98 million raw sequencing reads at Genotypic Technology's Genomics facility, Bangalore (India) [9] (Fig. 3) (as supplementary file).

### 2.3. De-novo assembly and sequence clustering

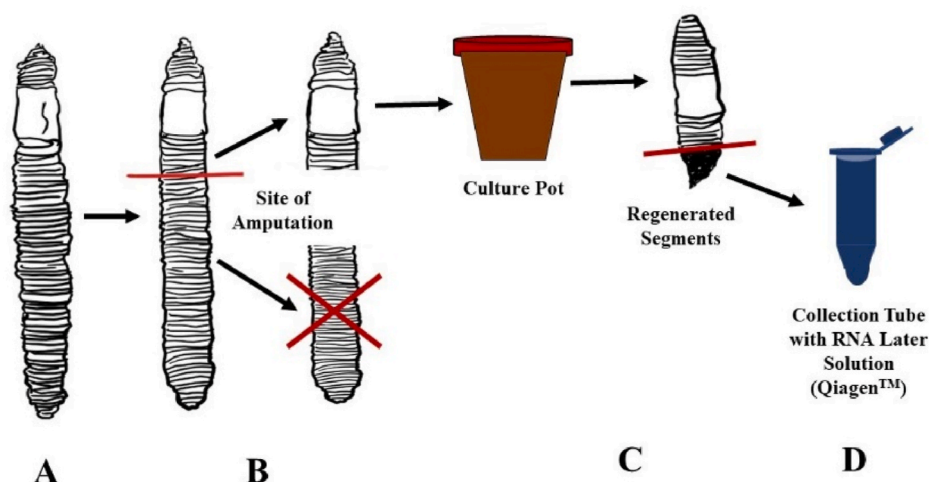
Processed reads were assembled using graph based approach by rnaSPAdes [10] and clustering of assembled transcripts was performed by CD-HIT-EST [11]. Processed reads from all four libraries were aligned back to the final assembly using Bowtie2 [12] with end to end parameters.

### 2.4. Differential expression analysis and annotation

DESeq [13], a R package was used for differential expression calculation. Multiple databases (Uniprot, NCBI and KEGG pathway) were used for functional annotation of the transcripts. Clustered transcripts were annotated using homology approach to assign functional annotation using BLAST tool against "Annelida" data from the Uniprot database containing 80052 protein sequences. Transcripts were assigned with a homolog protein from other organisms, if the match was found at e-value less than  $e^{-5}$  and minimum similarity greater than 30%. Pathway analysis was done by using KAAS Server [14]. An annelid *Helobdella robusta* was considered as reference organisms for pathway identification. Simple Sequence Repeats (SSR) were identified in each transcript sequence using MISA [15] perl script. Simple repeat of motif length ranging from monomer to hexamer were identified with recommended default parameters of MISA.

### 2.5. Validation of RNA -Seq data by quantitative realtime PCR (qRT-PCR)

About 16 unigenes were selected for confirmation of RNA-Seq (quantification) data by qRT-PCR using SYBR Green chemistry (TB Green Premix Ex Taq II (Tli RNaseH Plus) (TAKARA #RR820A) in



**Fig. 1.** Regeneration analysis scheme for *Lampito mauritii* and *Drawida calebi*. A. intact earthworm, B. site of amputation and selection of segments for culture, C. collection of regenerated part, D. preservation of regenerated tissue.



**Table 1**  
Assembly statistics of transcripts.

	DC	LM
Number of transcripts identified	1,61,289	66368
Maximum Contig Length	16400	28141
Minimum Contig Length	300	300
Average Contig Length	839.8	1225
Median Contig Length	323	907
Total Contigs Length	13,54,57,948	8,13,03,167
Total Number of Non-ATGC Characters	1,04,101	46741
Contigs $\geq$ 500 bp	85783	40527
Contigs $\geq$ 1 Kbp	37867	24008
Contigs $\geq$ 10 Kbp	30	79
N50 value	1126	2143
<b>Master_Unigene<sup>a</sup></b>		
Number of transcripts identified	2,26,895	
Maximum Contig Length	28141	
Minimum Contig Length	300	
Average Contig Length	953.7 $\pm$ 1023.6	
Median Contig Length	2878	
Total Contigs Length	21,63,82,458	
Total Number of Non-ATGC Characters	1,50,842	
Contigs $\geq$ 500 bp	1,26,091	
Contigs $\geq$ 1 Kbp	61838	
Contigs $\geq$ 10 Kbp	109	
N50 value	1430	

<sup>a</sup> Unigenes are de-duplicated transcripts by clustering.

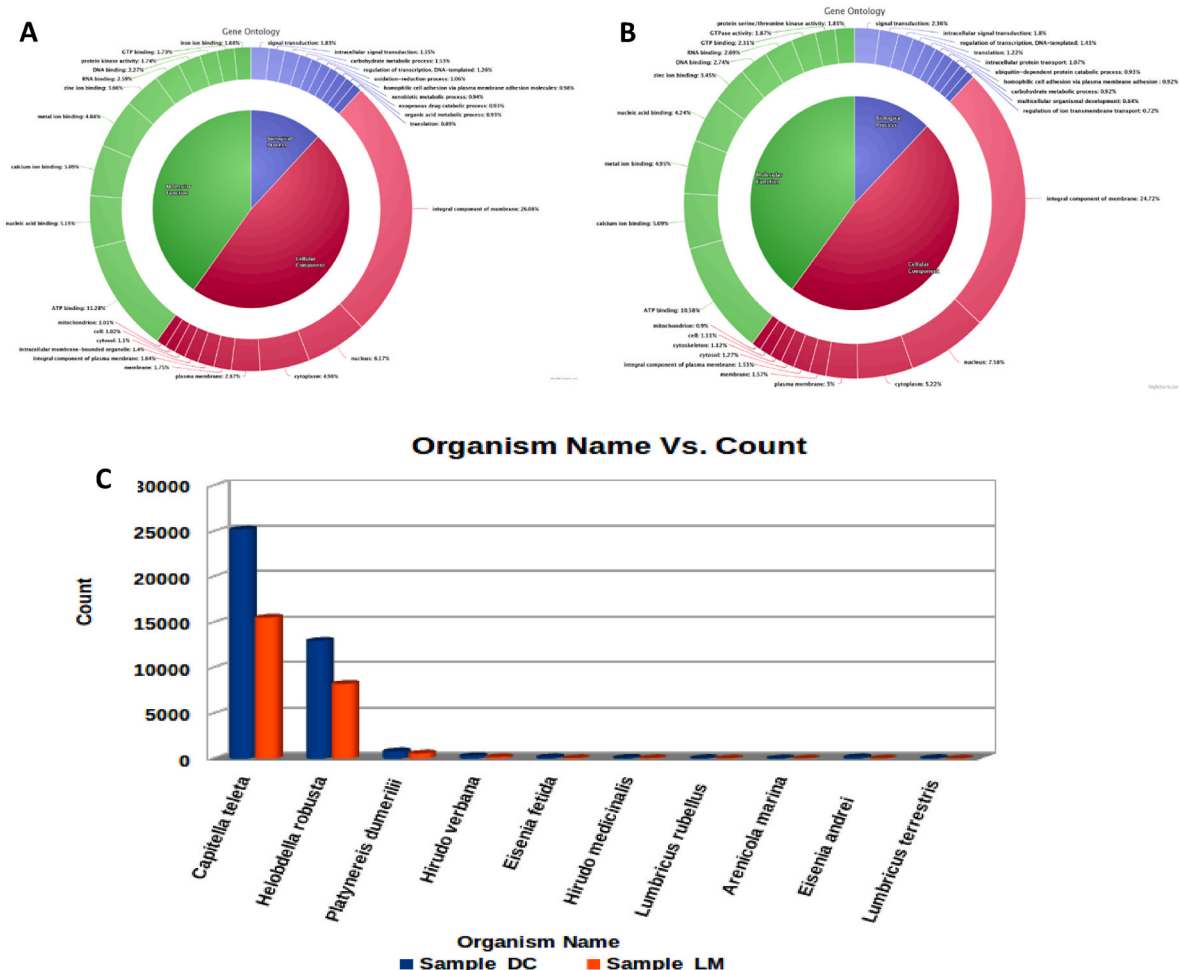
**3.4. Validation of differential gene expression through quantitative RT-PCR analyses**

About five up-regulated genes and five down regulated genes of DC, DC\_RE along with three up-regulated genes and three down-regulated genes of LM, LM\_RE were randomly selected for validation by qRT-PCR. It was found that expression level of these up-regulated and down-regulated genes by qRT-PCR showed concordance with that of genes obtained from RNA sequence data generated by next generation sequencer (NGS) supporting the RNA-Seq results (Table 7) (Supplementary table). In the present study, the house keeping gene was Afadin in LM, LM\_RE samples and EF-1- $\alpha$  (elongation factor 1 alfa) in DC, DC\_RE samples.

**3.5. Annotation**

About 25.21% of transcripts were functionally annotated for DC sample and 38.27% for LM samples against Annelida sequences. Most abundant 10 terms from each category are represented as donut chart for DC and LM (Fig. 3, A-B).

Analysis of top hit species distribution data (similarity with other organisms based on sequence homology) for the transcriptome datasets of earthworm LM and DC samples identified the marine polychaete annelid worm, *Capitella teleta* (62.3% in LM and 62.9% in DC), *Helobdella robusta* (33% in LM and 32% in DC) a freshwater leech, *Platyneris dumerilii*, a polychaete ragworm (2.4% in LM and 2% in DC), followed by *Hirudo verbena*, a marine leech (0.76% in LM and 0.77% in DC) although similarity with *Eisenia fetida* is 0.34% in LM sample but



**Fig. 3.** A–B Gene Ontology (GO) chart of earthworms. **A** *Drawida calebi* (DC), **B** *Lampito mauritii* (LM). **C** Organism similarity chart of both (DC), and (LM) samples.



0.43% in DC sample (Fig. 3, C). Gene ontology (GO) enrichment analysis of differential gene expression (DGE) with respect to functional categories reveal several upregulated and down regulated genes in intact tissue and regenerated tissue of two earthworms *Drawida calebi* (DC) and *Lampito mauritii* (LM). With respect to comparison of molecular function category of gene ontology (GO) between DC and LM, the predominant pathways are occupied by ATP binding (11.28% vs. 10.58%), calcium binding (5.09% in both cases), metal ion binding (4.88% vs. 4.95%), nucleic acid binding (4.88% vs. 4.24%).

Similarly comparison of biological processes category of GO between DC and LM reveals predominance of signal transduction (1.83% vs. 2.36%), intracellular signal transduction (1.55% vs. 1.8%), carbohydrate metabolic process (1.53% vs. 0.92%), regulation of transcription (1.26% vs. 1.43%). On the other hand, comparison of cellular component of GO between DC and LM shows predominantly integral component of membrane (26.08% vs. 24.72%), nucleus (6.17% vs. 7.58%), cytoplasm (4.98% vs. 5.22%), plasma membrane (2.87% vs. 3%) (Fig. 3 A and B).

It was observed that both intact and regenerated tissue had several unique genes in earthworms, *Drawida calebi* and *Lampito mauritii*. Total number of uncharacterized proteins were 2859 in DC and 1149 in DC\_RE whereas these values were 1729 in LM and 1165 in LM\_RE samples.

### 3.6. KEGG pathway analysis

KEGG pathway of annotated genes between regenerated and intact tissue were almost found to be similar in DC and LM samples. In regenerated tissue of DC and LM samples, genes involved in pathway of membrane trafficking, protein kinases, endocytosis, TGF- $\beta$  signaling, mTOR signaling, FoxO signaling, glycine, serine and threonine metabolism, autophagy and ABC transporters were found to be upregulated. On the contrary, some genes particularly involved in pathways such as *wnt* signaling, *notch* signaling in DC regenerated sample were down regulated. Genes for spliceosomes, ubiquitin mediated proteolysis, cytoskeleton proteins, exosome pathways in regenerated LM samples were found to be down regulated whereas these pathways were found to be upregulated in DC regenerated samples (Fig. 7 and 8)(supplementary file).

## 4. Discussion

Earthworms exhibits remarkable regeneration of lost body parts that is exhibited by dedifferentiation and cell activation similar to regeneration of vertebrates, making earthworms more suitable than hydra or planarians as an experimental material [16]. The present study is the first study of transcriptome profile of regenerating tail in two different genera of earthworms, *Drawida calebi* (Gates, 1945) and *Lampito mauritii* (Kinberg, 1867), where about 2859 transcripts in DC, 1149 transcripts in DC\_RE samples, 1729 transcripts in LM and 1165 transcripts in LM\_RE samples were found to be uncharacterized, without having any homologs with any known species, which is quite high compared to uncharacterized 315 transcripts observed in earthworm, *Eisenia foetida* during regeneration [6]. This implies involvement of more number of uniquely expressed genes in *Lampito* and *Drawida* during regeneration process.

During regeneration of tail, up-regulation of genes such as *beta catenin*, *Sox*, *notch*, *FGF* along with *frizzled*, *early growth response (EGR) protein*, *PI-3 kinase* genes that induce tail formation were observed in both DC\_RE and LM\_RE samples. In fact wound created at the site of tail amputation during study of regeneration, activates *wnt* and *beta catenin-1* genes which inhibits the gene, *notum* to promote tail regeneration and stop regeneration of head. This was evidenced by down regulation of genes, *labial* and *notum* that promote head formation in planarians, and earthworms [4]. The differential expression of these genes were also observed during regeneration of earthworm *Eisenia foetida* and planaria *Dugesia japonica* observed by various workers [6,17–19]. These genes were found to be involved in synthesis of extracellular matrix,

suppression of immune response, activation of genes required for differentiation and mitogenesis, acceleration of cell growth, proliferation and differentiation of stem cells. However expression of many up-regulated genes such as *Oct4*, *nanog*, *Lin28*, *myc*, *MCM*, *Rap1*, *fascin*, *BMP*, *even skipped*, *brachyury* during regeneration of *Eisenia* and *Dugesia* reported by different workers were not observed in the present study indicating that either species specific gene expression was playing an important role in regenerating the lost tissue or other alternative genes may be playing role in regeneration of tail which need to be verified by different confirmatory molecular experimental approaches [4,6,18]. During regeneration of tail in both DE\_RE and LM\_RE samples, Wnt-signaling components encoding *Wnt1*, *Dishevelled*, transcription factors *hox4*, *lox2*, *post2* were up-regulated along with induction of transcription of early growth response genes. Besides, expression of genes such as *slit* known for ventral surface formation, *netrin* gene for axon guidance and cell migration during development of regenerated tissue observed in planarians and earthworm *Eisenia andrei* were also found to be similarly upregulated in both DE\_RE and LM\_RE samples [4, 20]. In both DC\_RE and LM\_RE samples, up-regulation of gene *run* was observed which promotes gut formation in *Caenorhabditis elegans* and heterogeneity in neoblasts near wounds in planarians and earthworm, *Eisenia andrei* [4,20,21].

Comparison of differential expression of genes between intact and regenerated samples show up-regulation of specific genes meant for promoting regeneration and immunity. In DC\_RE samples, there was up-regulation of Na,K-ATPase activity that plays an important role in regulating both the structure and function of polarized epithelial cells during regeneration in newts, planarians [13,20]. There was up-regulation of *notch* protein expression to carry out cell-cell signaling needed for self renewal in regenerated tissue [22]. The up-regulation of gene for *glycine cleavage system* for catabolism of glycine was meant for controlling the stem cell pluripotency needed for repair of injured tissue during regeneration [23]. There was higher expression of *caudal protein* for formation of posterior portion during segmentation of body [24].

Many genes are found to be exclusively expressed in particular genus during regeneration of animals. For instance, based on the study of mouse and zebrafish models during regeneration, up-regulation of *Katanin p80 subunit B1* gene (promote neurogenesis), *Dynamitin* gene (neuron transmission), *Adaptor Protein 2* (formation of contact between neurons in newly regenerating tissue), *Neurexin* gene (cell adhesion between neurons), *Rer1* (regulating neural stem cell maintenance) were observed during regeneration in LM\_RE sample, [25–29]. Similar to unique genes up-regulated in LM\_RE sample, many genes were exclusively up-regulated in DC\_RE. In DC\_RE, there were up-regulation of genes *semaphorin* (promote neuronal regeneration and immune response) [30], *magi* (regulate somite segmentation and neurogenesis) [31], *Rho GTPase* (promotes wound enclosure through oxidative signaling) [32]. The functions of these genes were observed in zebrafish, *Drosophila* and mice models.

Thus majority of genes in DC\_RE and LM\_RE samples were dedicated to immune response, maintenance of cytoskeleton, resisting oxidative stress and neuron regeneration for cell cell communication.

The findings of KEGG pathway analysis of annotated differential gene expression (DGE) in the present study were similar to that observed in earthworm, *Eisenia foetida* during regeneration experiment conducted by Yang and coworkers (2019) [33], indicating that these pathways were essential to begin cellular and metabolic processes, signal transduction for regeneration. The peculiar observation on down regulation instead of upregulation of expression of spliceosomes, ubiquitin mediated proteolysis, cytoskeleton proteins, exosome pathways in regenerated LM samples, could be due to lack of inclusion of at least triplicate samples for analysis of DGE in LM sample. However this problem has not arisen in DC regenerated tissue and the different KEGG pathways of DC are similarly observed during regeneration of planarians and earthworm, *Eisenia*. Injury stress during regeneration has created proapoptotic as well as activation of antioxidant pathways via FoxO

signaling; promotion of cell cell adhesion, differentiation of cells via TGF- $\beta$  signaling; transport of morphogens for body pattern formation via active formation of exosome [35–37].

The report on organism similarity in present study show significant differences from earlier studies on earthworms, *Eisenia fetida* and *Dendrobaena octaedra* [34], which may be due to different lineages between current studied samples DC, LM and *Eisenia* or *Dendrobaena* that contributed to differences in transcripts.

## 5. Conclusion

Both earthworms, *Drawida calebi* and *Lampito mauritii* were found to show up regulation of genes such as *beta catenin*, *Sox*, *notch*, *FGF*, *frizzled*, *early growth response (EGR)* during tail regeneration. However, many genes involved in tail regeneration of earthworm *Eisenia fetida* and planarians were not observed in the present study which indicates species specific expression. Majority of genes in *Drawida* and *Lampito* were dedicated to immune response, maintenance of cytoskeleton, resisting oxidative stress and promoting neuronal regeneration for cell-cell communication during tail regeneration. These two earthworm genera were having less similarity with the transcripts of well studied earthworms, *Eisenia fetida* and *Dendrobaena octaedra*. Analysis of annotated differentially expressed genes reveal that these genes were enormously concentrated in metabolism, cellular process and environmental information processing.

## Contribution

Concept design, analysis, paper writing by SSN, experiment set up by RS, identification of species, paper writing, proofreading by SKS.

## Declaration of competing interest

We the authors declare that we have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Conflicts of interest

We do not have any conflicts of interest.

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## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbrep.2021.101092>.

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