



# Catalytic asymmetric formal total syntheses of (+)- and (–)-cycloclavine†

Saikat Chaudhuri, Santanu Ghosh, Subhajit Bhunia and Alakesh Bisai \*Cite this: *Chem. Commun.*, 2018, 54, 940Received 24th November 2017,  
Accepted 2nd January 2018

DOI: 10.1039/c7cc09045e

rsc.li/chemcomm

We report an expeditious catalytic asymmetric approach to clavine alkaloids via a key Heck cyclization. This reaction sets the formation of vicinal stereocenters with excellent diastereoselectivity. Utilizing the aforementioned strategy, the formal total synthesis of cycloclavine (**1**) has been achieved via another key late-stage esteraminolysis of **6**.

Clavine alkaloids (**1** and **2**; Fig. 1) are a subclass of the ergot family of indole-containing alkaloids produced by several members of the *Clavicipitaceae* and *Trichocomaceae* families of filamentous fungi.<sup>1,2</sup> They have also been identified in plants of the families *Convolvulaceae*, *Poaceae* and *Polygalaceae*.<sup>3</sup> Ergot alkaloids (**1–4**; Fig. 1) primarily target serotonin (5-HT) receptors<sup>4a</sup> and  $\alpha$ -adrenergic and dopamine receptors. Reportedly, some natural or semisynthetic ergoline derivatives are used as

drugs, such as pergolide (**2d**) used as an anti-prolactin and anti-Parkinson's disease drug.<sup>4,5</sup>

Therefore, significant progress has been made in the identification and characterization of genes responsible for the biosynthesis of clavine alkaloids (Fig. 1).<sup>6</sup> Structurally, clavine alkaloids can exist in pentacyclic [such as cycloclavine (**1**)] and tetracyclic [such as festuclavine (**2a–c**)] forms.<sup>4b</sup> Lysergic acid (**3a**) (and its derivatives such as ergometrine **3b** and ergopeptam alkaloids **4a–b**) differs from clavine alkaloids **2a–c** only in the oxidation state [see, **3a**].<sup>7a,b</sup>

Cycloclavine (**1**) was isolated from the seeds of the African morning glory shrub *Ipomoea hildebrandtii*, and later from a species of filamentous fungus, *Aspergillus japonicus*.<sup>8a,b</sup> Although smaller in size, structurally cycloclavine (**1**) poses a formidable challenge because of its complex architecture with a pyrrolidine ring linked with a strained cyclopropane ring with three contiguous stereocenters, out of which two are vicinal all-carbon quaternary stereocenters.<sup>9</sup> Despite the encouraging medicinal value of select clavine congeners, a comprehensive biological evaluation for the majority of these naturally occurring alkaloids has yet to be undertaken. From 2008 till 2016, only racemic syntheses of cycloclavine (**1**) have been reported, out of which three total syntheses<sup>10–12</sup> and two formal total syntheses<sup>13,14</sup> are reported. Interestingly, two consecutive coupling reactions such as selective alkylation of a dienolate and an intramolecular Heck reaction are utilized by Opatz and Netz for a racemic formal synthesis of cycloclavine (**1**).<sup>14</sup>

Recently, the first catalytic enantioselective total synthesis of unnatural (–)-cycloclavine (*ent-1*) has been achieved by Wipf and McCabe<sup>15a</sup> via Rh-catalyzed enantioselective cyclopropanation (up to 74% ee) of an unsubstituted allene to access a methylene-cyclopropane derivative. Very recently, Cao and co-workers have reported an elegant formal total synthesis of naturally occurring (+)-cycloclavine (**1**)<sup>15b</sup> while our manuscript was under preparation. This synthesis features a Zn-mediated asymmetrical nucleophilic addition of *N*-tert-butanefulfinimine, an intramolecular esteraminolysis reaction followed by isomerization of an exocyclic double bond and a late-stage intramolecular Heck coupling reaction.<sup>15b</sup>

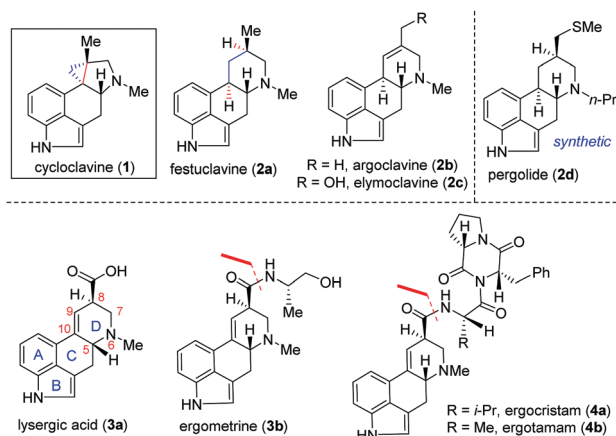
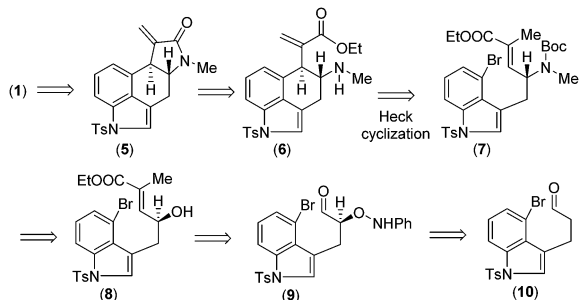


Fig. 1 Clavine alkaloids (**1** and **2**) and lysergic acid (**3** and **4**) family.

Department of Chemistry, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research  
Bhopal, Bhauli, Bhopal – 462 066, Madhya Pradesh, India.

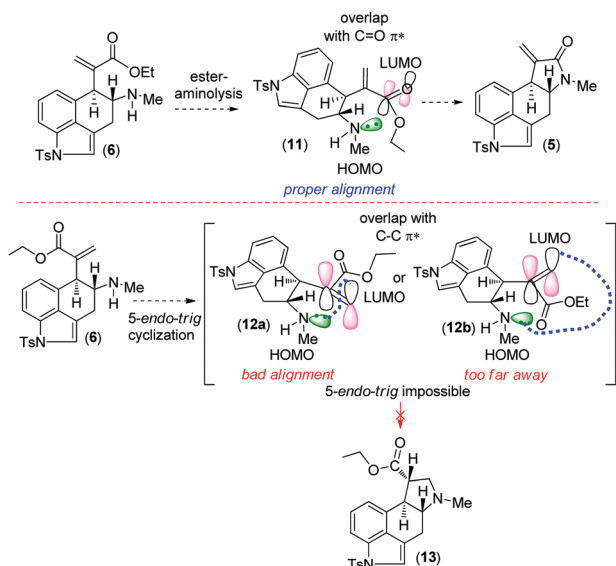
E-mail: alakesh@iiserb.ac.in

† Electronic supplementary information (ESI) available: Experimental procedures, additional reaction optimization, spectroscopic data for all new compounds. See DOI: 10.1039/c7cc09045e

Scheme 1 Retrosynthetic analysis of cycloclavine (**1**).

In this context, a unified strategy for the synthesis of **1** and **2** in enantioenriched form would present opportunities to provide access to significant quantities of the natural products and related analogues.

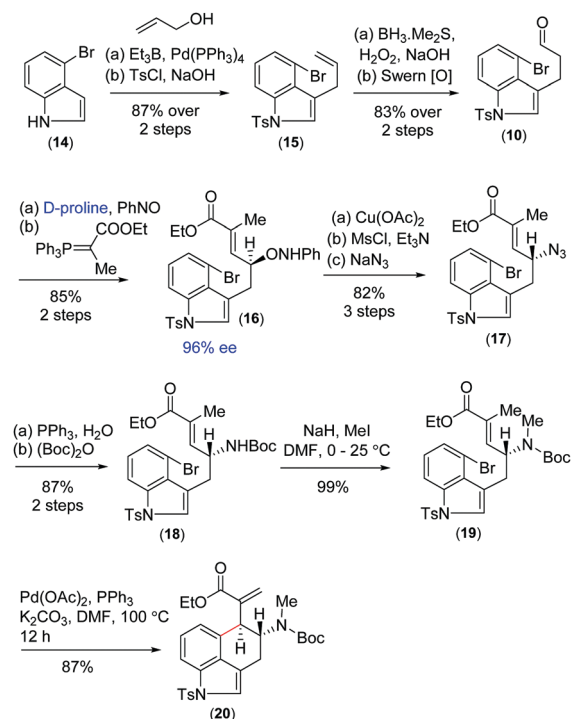
Retrosynthetically, we envisioned that cycloclavine (**1**) can be synthesized from an advanced enantiopure intermediate  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated amide **5** (Scheme 1) *via* isomerization followed by reduction of the amide functionality and cyclopropanation.<sup>10</sup> Compound **5** can be accessed from  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ester **6**, which could in fact be the advanced intermediate for clavine alkaloids **2a–d** sharing vicinal stereocenters (Fig. 1). We reasoned that ester **6** has the potential to afford two different tetracyclic intermediates such as **5** and **13** (Scheme 2). An ester-aminolysis of **6** can provide access to **5**, on the other hand **6** can also afford ester **13** following a 5-*endo-trig* cyclization (Scheme 2). We argued that as the secondary amine (HOMO) and C=O  $\pi^*$  (LUMO) are in proper alignment (see the orbital representation in **11**), an ester-aminolysis of **6** would be facile to afford tetracyclic amide **5**. However, a 5-*endo-trig* cyclization of **6** would not be possible because of bad alignment of the secondary amine (HOMO) and C=C  $\pi^*$  (LUMO) (see the orbital representation of intermediates **12a** and **12b**).

Scheme 2 An ester-aminolysis versus 5-*endo-trig* cyclization of  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ester **6**.

Further, we thought that  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ester **6** with an *exo*-double bond can be synthesized *via* a key intramolecular Heck cyclization of allylamine **7** (Scheme 1). Enantioenriched allylic amine **7** can be synthesized from allylic alcohol **8** *via* Mitsunobu type inversion using an azide nucleophile followed by synthetic manipulations. Non-racemic allyl alcohol **8** can be accessed from aldehyde **10** *via* a D-proline catalysed  $\alpha$ -aminoxylation reaction with nitrosobenzene through the intermediate aldehyde **9** (Scheme 1). Importantly, since both enantiomers of proline are commercially available, one can synthesize both antipodes of allylic alcohols, *i.e.* **8** and *ent*-**8**.

On the basis of previous studies on the proline catalysed  $\alpha$ -aminoxylation reaction of aliphatic aldehydes with nitrosobenzene,<sup>16</sup> we decided to investigate the potential of this process in the catalytic asymmetric total synthesis of clavine alkaloids (Fig. 1). Towards this direction, we synthesized 3-allyl-4-bromoindole **15** from the Pd(0)-catalyzed reaction of 4-bromoindole **14** with allyl alcohol in the presence of triethylborane using Tamaru's report.<sup>17</sup> This was then reacted with borane followed by oxidation with H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> in the presence of NaOH to afford a primary alcohol, which was then oxidized to obtain aldehyde **10** under Swern oxidation (Scheme 3). Having aldehyde **10** in hand, we then conducted a catalytic enantioselective  $\alpha$ -aminoxylation reaction with nitrosobenzene in the presence of 10 mol% D-proline (Scheme 3). This reaction afforded an  $\alpha$ -aminoxylation aldehyde, which was immediately reacted with a stabilized Wittig reagent prepared from 2-bromo ethylpropionate to afford compound *E*-ester **16** as the sole isomer in 85% yield over 2 steps with 96% enantioselectivity.<sup>18</sup>

With compound **16** in hand, our effort was thereafter to elaborate to allylic amine **19** for key Heck cyclization

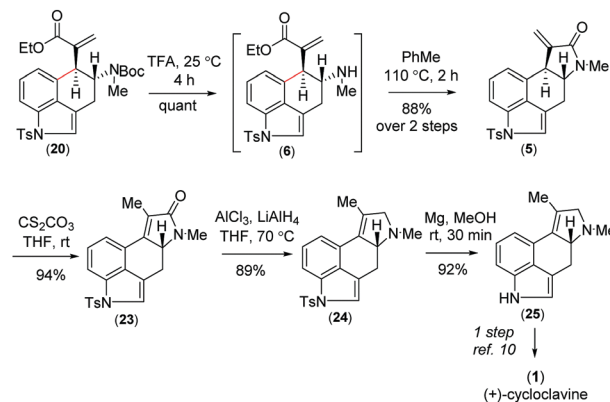
Scheme 3 Asymmetric synthesis of key  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ester **20**.

(Scheme 3). Towards this, N–O bond cleavage was performed with anhydrous  $\text{Cu}(\text{OAc})_2$ ,<sup>19,20</sup> followed by mesylation and azide formation, affording **17** in 82% yield over 3 steps. The azide functionality was reduced under Staudinger conditions, followed by Boc-protection leading to intermediate **18** in 87% yield over 2 steps. The latter was *N*-methylated using methyl iodide to afford allyl amine **19** (Scheme 3). The intramolecular Heck cyclization of **19** was performed with 5 mol%  $\text{Pd}(\text{OAc})_2$  and 10 mol%  $\text{PPh}_3$ . Gratifyingly, this reaction afforded a single diastereomer of **20** in 87% yield (Scheme 3).<sup>21</sup>

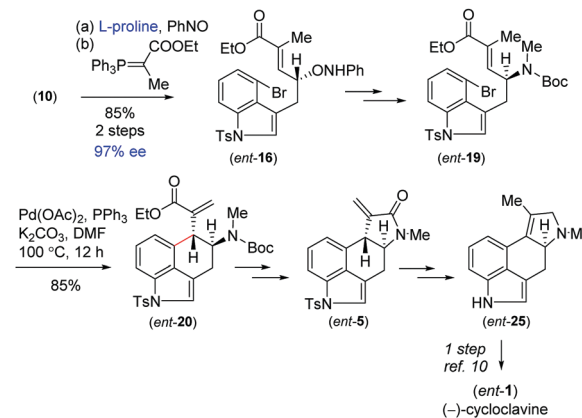
We urged that the Heck cyclization of **19** can proceed through the intermediate  $\text{Pd}(\text{II})$ -species **21a** (Scheme 4). However, in order to minimize the steric clash, **21a** could immediately form **21b** via a C–C bond rotation. The formation of the tetra-substituted  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ester **22** from this intermediate is not possible since  $\text{Pd}(\text{II})$  and  $\beta$ -hydride are *anti*-position to each other (Scheme 4). At this situation, a  $\beta$ -hydride transfer from an adjacent methyl group in **21c** could afford **20** having vicinal stereogenic centers (Scheme 4).

Further, compound **20** was elaborated under a key cyclization in order to get the tetracyclic core of cycloclavine (**1**). Towards this, we deprotected the Boc group in the presence of trifluoroacetic acid at 25 °C to afford **6**, which under refluxing toluene afforded the ester-aminolysis product **5** with an exocyclic double bond in 88% isolated yield over 2 steps (Scheme 5).<sup>22</sup> To our delight, no trace of the 5-*endo-trig* cyclization (aza-Michael reaction) product was observed, as confirmed from <sup>1</sup>H-NMR analysis of the crude reaction mixture.

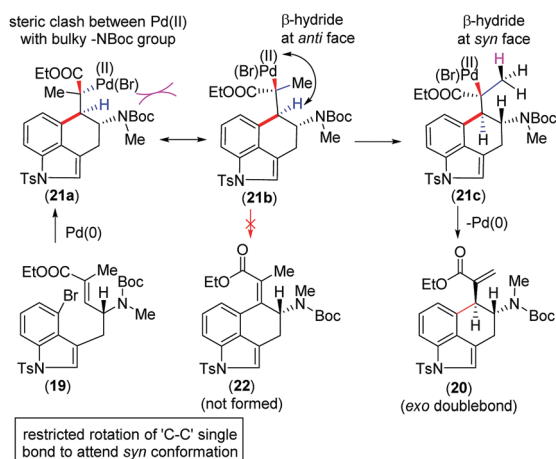
With the enantioenriched tetracyclic **5** in hand, we then isomerized to  $\gamma$ -lactam using cesium carbonate in THF to afford **23** in 94% yield (Scheme 5).<sup>23</sup> The latter was reduced using  $\text{LiAlH}_4$  in the presence of  $\text{AlCl}_3$  to furnish the electron-rich tetrasubstituted double bonded product **24** in 89% yield.<sup>24</sup> Further, in order to access the antipode of **25**, we performed the catalytic enantioselective  $\alpha$ -aminoxylation reaction of **10** with nitrosobenzene in the presence of 10 mol% *L*-proline, which afforded the product *ent*-**16** in 97% ee after a Wittig reaction (Scheme 6). This enantioenriched material was elaborated to *ent*-**25** via a similar reaction sequence as shown in



Scheme 5 Asymmetric synthesis of (+)-cycloclavine (**1**).



Scheme 6 Asymmetric synthesis of (–)-cycloclavine (*ent*-**1**).



Scheme 4 Rationale of highly diastereoselective Heck cyclization.

Schemes 3 and 5. As the total synthesis of cycloclavine (**1**) from **25** is known, our effort culminated in the formal total synthesis of this alkaloid.

In summary, the catalytic enantioselective formal total synthesis of both antipodes of cycloclavine (**1**) has been achieved *via* a late stage ester-aminolysis of an  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ester intermediate **6**. The vicinal stereocenters of this advanced intermediate were established following an intramolecular Heck cyclization of an enantioenriched  $\alpha,\beta$ -unsaturated ester having allylamine **19**. Since both enantiomers of proline are inexpensive and commercially available, our strategy offers an expeditious approach to either enantiomer of cycloclavine (**1**). Further efforts for a rational extension of the strategy to other congeners of clavine alkaloids are underway and will be reported in due course.<sup>25</sup>

Financial support from the SERB, DST [EMR/2016/000214] and CSIR [02(0295)/17/EMR-II], Govt. of India, is gratefully acknowledged. S. C. and S. B. thank the UGC and CSIR, respectively, for predoctoral fellowships. S. G. thanks IISER Bhopal for a post-doctoral fellowship.

## Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

## Notes and references

- (a) L. V. Hofmann, in *Plants in the developments of modern medicine*, ed. T. Swain, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1972, pp. 235–260; (b) Review: S. R. McCabe and P. Wipf, *Org. Biomol. Chem.*, 2016, **14**, 5894.
- (a) L. V. Boichenko, D. M. Boichenko, N. G. Vinokurova, T. A. Reshetilova and M. U. Arinbasarov, *Microbiology*, 2001, **71**, 306; (b) P. L. Schiff, *Am. J. Pharm. Educ.*, 2006, **70**, 98.
- (a) D. Gröger and H. G. Floss, *Alkaloids: Chem. Biol.*, 1998, **50**, 171. Review; (b) C. Wallwey and S.-M. Li, *Nat. Prod. Rep.*, 2011, **28**, 496.
- (a) A. Sinz, *Pharm. Unserer Zeit*, 2008, **37**, 306. Review; (b) H. Liu and Y. Jia, *Nat. Prod. Rep.*, 2017, **34**, 411.
- (a) I. Ninomiya and T. Kiguchi, in *The Alkaloids*, ed. A. Brossi, Academic Press, San Diego, CA, 1990, vol. 38, pp. 1–156; (b) M. Somei, Y. Yokoyama, Y. Murakami, I. Ninomiya, T. Kiguchi and T. Naito, in *The Alkaloids*, ed. G. A. Cordell, Academic Press, San Diego, CA, 2000, vol. 54, pp. 191–257.
- (a) D. Jakubczyk, J. Z. Cheng and S. E. O'Connor, *Nat. Prod. Rep.*, 2014, **31**, 1328; (b) C. A. Young, C. L. Schardl, D. G. Panaccione, S. Florea, J. E. Takach, N. D. Charlton, N. Moore, J. S. Webb and J. Jaromczyk, *Toxins*, 2015, **7**, 1273.
- (a) C. L. Schardl, D. G. Panaccione and P. Tudzynski, *Alkaloids: Chem. Biol.*, 2006, **63**, 45; (b) T. Haarmann, *et al.*, *Mol. Plant Pathol.*, 2009, **10**, 563 and references cited therein.
- (a) D. Stauffacher, P. Niklaus, H. Tschertter, H. P. Weber and A. Hofmann, *Tetrahedron*, 1969, **25**, 5879; (b) T. Furuta, M. Koike and M. Abe, *Agric. Biol. Chem.*, 1982, **46**, 1921.
- Biosynthesis of cycloclavine (**1**), see; (a) D. Jakubczyk, L. Caputi, A. Hatsch, C. A. F. Nielson, M. Diefenbacher, J. Klein, A. Molt, H. Schröder, J. Z. Cheng, M. Naesby and S. E. O'Connor, *Angew. Chem., Int. Ed.*, 2015, **54**, 5117; (b) D. Jakubczyk, L. Caputi, C. E. M. Stevenson, D. M. Lawson and S. E. O'Connor, *Chem. Commun.*, 2016, **52**, 14306.
- M. Incze, G. Dörnyei, I. Moldvai, E. Temesvári-Major, O. Egyed and C. Szánty, *Tetrahedron*, 2008, **64**, 2924.
- F. R. Petronijevic and P. Wipf, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 2011, **133**, 7704.
- N. D. Jabre, T. Watanabe and M. Brewer, *Tetrahedron Lett.*, 2014, **55**, 197.
- W. Wang, J.-T. Lu, H.-L. Zhang, Z.-F. Shi, J. Wen and X.-P. Cao, *J. Org. Chem.*, 2014, **79**, 122.
- N. Netz and T. Opatz, *J. Org. Chem.*, 2016, **81**, 1723.
- (a) S. R. McCabe and P. Wipf, *Angew. Chem., Int. Ed.*, 2017, **56**, 324; (b) J.-Q. Chen, L.-L. Song, F.-X. Li, Z.-F. Shi and X.-P. Cao, *Chem. Commun.*, 2017, **53**, 12902.
- (a) L-Proline catalyzed  $\alpha$ -aminoxylation of aldehydes, see; G. Zhong, *Angew. Chem., Int. Ed.*, 2003, **42**, 4247; (b) L-proline catalyzed  $\alpha$ -amination of aldehydes, see; (c) B. List, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 2002, **124**, 5656; (d) A. Bøgevig, K. Juhl, N. Kumaragurubaran, W. Zhuang and K. A. Jørgensen, *Angew. Chem., Int. Ed.*, 2002, **41**, 1790.
- M. Kimura, M. Futamata, R. Mukai and Y. Tamaru, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 2005, **127**, 4592.
- For  $\alpha$ -aminoxylation and Horner–Wadsworth–Emmons olefination of aldehydes, see, N. B. Kondekar and P. Kumar, *Org. Lett.*, 2009, **11**, 2611.
- (a) Y. Hayashi, M. Shoji, H. Ishikawa, J. Yamaguchi, T. Tamura, H. Imai, Y. Nishigaya, K. Takabe, H. Kakeya and H. Osada, *Angew. Chem., Int. Ed.*, 2008, **47**, 6657; (b) J. S. Yadav, K. Ramesh, U. V. S. Reddy, B. V. S. Reddy and A. A. K. A. Ghamdi, *Tetrahedron Lett.*, 2011, **52**, 2943.
- N–O bond cleavage using Pd/C under 1 atm H<sub>2</sub> led to a complex mixture of products.
- For leading references for Pd-catalyzed intramolecular Heck cyclization for the synthesis of natural products, see; (a) M. Zhang, X. Huang, L. Shen and Y. Qin, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 2009, **131**, 6013; (b) J. Wu, J. Becerril, Y. Lian, H. L. M. Davies, J. A. Porco Jr. and J. S. Panek, *Angew. Chem., Int. Ed.*, 2011, **50**, 5938; (c) J.-Q. Chen, J.-H. Xie, D.-H. Bao, S. Liu and Q.-L. Zhou, *Org. Lett.*, 2012, **14**, 2714; (d) W. Ren, Q. Wang and J. Zhu, *Angew. Chem., Int. Ed.*, 2014, **53**, 1818; (e) L.-Y. Pu, J.-Q. Chen, M.-L. Li, Y. Li, J.-H. Xie and Q.-L. Zhou, *Adv. Synth. Catal.*, 2016, **358**, 1229.
- For references on intramolecular ester-aminolysis to form  $\alpha$ -methylene- $\gamma$ -lactam, see; (a) S. Bonazzi, B. Cheng, J. S. Wzorek and D. A. Evans, *J. Am. Chem. Soc.*, 2013, **135**, 9338; (b) J. A. Sirvent, F. Foubelo and M. Yus, *J. Org. Chem.*, 2014, **79**, 1356. Also, see ref. 14.
- Other bases such as K<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>, KHMDS, and DBU afforded isomerization products in 59–72% isolated yields along with some decomposition under heating.
- Reduction using LiAlH<sub>4</sub> or Red-Al afforded a mixture of products as seen from TLC.
- For a biomimetic approach to clavine alkaloids, see; S. Chaudhuri, S. Bhunia, A. Roy, M. K. Das and A. Bisai, *Org. Lett.*, 2018, **20**, 288.