First Record of Colonial Ascidian, *Polyclinum nudum* (Kott, 1992) from Palk Bay, Southeast Coast of India

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Abstract: The colonial ascidian, *Polyclinum nudum* (Kott, 1992) is recorded for the first time in the Indian waters. The species was found associated with the seaweed culture rope of Gopalapatinam coastal area, Palk Bay region Southeast coast of India in February 2008.

Key words: *Polyclinum nudum* • Gopalapatinam coast • Palk bay • Southeast coast of India

INTRODUCTION

The ascidians are marine invertebrate animals enclosed in tunic, belonging to subphylum Urochordata (Tunicata) of phylum Chordata. They may be fixed or free-living and swimming. In some free-living forms, the notochord is present in the adult, whereas in other swimming groups and sedentary tunicates the notochord is found only in the larval stages [1]. Ascidians are found mostly on hard surfaces such as rocks, jetty pilings and coral rubbles. They also grow on sea grasses and other vegetation in the sea grass lagoon. Adult ascidians (commonly called "sea squirts") are sessile inhabitants of the intertidal zone. Some species are known to be rapid colonizers on artificial substrates such as marina floats, pilings, buoys and boat bottoms in protected harbours, where there is reduced wave action and enhanced nutrients from anthropogenic activities [2-5].

The family contains aplousobranch genera with gonads in the posterior abdominal of thread-like zooids, which are arranged in common cloacal systems, the atrial apertures opening into an internal common cloacal cavity. The relatively long, narrow, vertical gut loop consists of a long oesophagus and duodenum and distinct sections of mid-intestine between the duodenum and posterior stomach and posterior stomach and rectum, respectively. The distal section of the mid-intestine is invariably in the pole of the gut loop and usually a rectal valve is at its junction with the long rectum that constitutes the ascending limb of the loop.

Earlier workers have been reported a new species of synascidian from Madras [6]. On *Polyclinum indicum*, a new synascidian from the Madras coast of India [7]. Dedifferentiation on the colony of *Policlinum indicum* [8]. The study of the larvae of *Policlinum indicum* [9], the Indian ascidians [10], some ascidians from Indian waters [11]. On an occurrence of a colonial ascidian, Symplegma brakenhielmi Michaelsen from tuticorin coast of India [12].

Hence the present study is aimed to identify and understand the presence and distribution of ascidian *Polyclinum nudum* species new record from Gopalapatinam Coast water, Palk Bay, Southeast Coast of Indian. The current survey is the first of its kind at Palk Bay in Gopalapatinam coast to assess the distribution of non indigenous ascidian in seaweed culture rope. This baseline data at regional level is of great importance since it will provide tools for estimating the invasion rates and possible effects on the natural fauna at the invaded site in the years to come.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area: The Palk Bay is very shallow flat basin and their depth hardly exceeds 12m. In Palk Bay the coral reef extends along the shore from Mandapam eastward along the shores of Rameshwaram Island, interrupted...
only at Pampan pass. Corals are found on reef rocks and no consolidated reef flat is seen. The tidal elevation is around 1.5m. The Palk Bay practically calms except during northeast monsoon when turbulent condition prevails [13]. The bottom sediments consist of silt and clay, clays silt and sand, fine to medium sand, coarse sand and coarse sand with gravel. Gopalapattinam is situated 45 km north of Thondi and it is a fishing hamlet (Lat. 09°57' N: Long. 79°11' E) in Ramanathapuram district, Tamil Nadu, India. Here herbivorous fishes and sea grasses are abundant. The average depth varies from 2 to 9.2 meters. The soil type has silty clay.

**Collection and Identification:** Ascidians were collected by SCUBA diving at intertidal areas during low tide from a depth 0.5 to 12m. Collections included the substrate when possible seaweed culture rope with razor-blades. In the some of the substratum was removed with the specimen to avoid damage to the adhering surface. Before removing the animal its colour, appearance of the living colony and its habitat were noted. Samples were placed in plastic bags or buckets with sufficient seawater to cover the collected specimens and anesthetized with menthol BS- Branchial siphon, AS- Atrial siphon, BR- Branchial silt, RE- Rectum, TX- Thorax, OE- Oesophagus, E- Eggs, ST- Stomach, GL- Gut lope, INT- Intestine, AP- Ampulla, AT- Atrial longuet; scales bar: fig. A, 6.5 cm; figs. B, C, & D. 200 µm

**Family Characters of Polyclinidae Milne-Edwards, 1842:**
The family originally was established for genera with the gonads in a posterior abdomen. In the family Polyclinidae, the branchial aperture has a regularly lobed rim, but the atrial aperture is not lobed. The latter opens into the common cloaca guided by an anterior lip that either is a projection from the body wall anterior to the opening, or is produced from the anterior border of the opening. Minute branchial papillae that may be relicts of internal longitudinal vessels are present. Gonads are in the posterior abdomen. These consist of a small ovary and numerous male follicles. The larvae are small and have an otolith and ocellus, 3 small median adhesive organs, ectodermal ampullae and vesicles. The six genera of the family Polyclinidae are Polyclinum, Aplidiopsis, Synoicum, Sidnieoides, Aplidium and Morchellium.

**The Important Generic Characters of the Polyclinum:**
The genus *Polyclinum* can be divided into two groups, those with zooids; arranged in circular common cloacal...
systems and those with zooids arranged in double rows radiating from the common cloacal opening other characteristics that aid in distinguishing the species are the overall shape of the colony, the distribution of sand within or on the test of the colony and characteristics associated with the branchial sac and the larvae.

Species Description of Polyclinum nudum (Kott, 1992): No longitudinal folds in stomach, branchial lobes six, ovary in post abdomen, abdomen and post abdomen separated by constriction, gut loop twisted. No sands on the either surface of the test or embedded within the colony. Colony is cushioning shaped dark black in preservative. Atrial languet originating from the upper rim of the atrial aperture. Long club shaped posterior abdomen is present. Cloacal apertures are protruded from the surface on conical elevations.

Colour: The colony greenish brown or brown in living condition.

Habitat: Colony attached with seaweed cage, seaweeds and seaweed culture rope. Distributed from 2 to 9m depth, where it is found on hard substrata in protected embayment’s and harbours.


Remarks: This species is reported for the first time in India. The present species agrees with the P. nudum Kott, 1992 in all respects. The characteristics of the species colony are cushioning shaped dark black in preservative. Cloacal apertures are protruded from the surface on conical elevations, no sands on the either surface of the test or embedded within the colony. Long club shaped posterior abdomen is present. Cloacal apertures are protruded from the surface on conical elevations.

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REFERENCES

