

Semiya Paasi is not seaweed but a bryozoan

Bryozoans found in marine environments are commonly called sea mats, moss animals or lace corals and are found from the intertidal zone to some of the deepest parts of the ocean. There are about 6,500 recognized living species worldwide and about 257 species have been documented from India forming 4 percent of the total global bryozoans' diversity. Thirty species of bryozoans belonging to 19 families have been documented from the Gulf of Mannar. They reproduce by budding new parts asexually and these new additions which contain functioning individuals called 'zoid' are attached to the parent but capable of feeding independently.

During the regular survey in July 2020 along the Palk Bay coast on shore seine landings at Dhargavalasai in Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu, a seaweed like entangled mass was collected from the fishing nets. Local fishermen called it '*Semiya Paasi*'



Entangled biomass of *Semiya Paasi* and a close-up view of *A. verticillata*

means a vermicelli like seaweed. The sample were brought to the laboratory and identified as bryozoan *Amathia verticillata* (della Chiaje, 1822). Formerly known as *Zoobotryon verticillatum*, it is typical of many ctenosome bryozoa on account of colony size and colour. It has irregular tripartite branching and a propensity to tangle once removed from the water. *A. verticillata* attaches to a wide range of substrata apart from natural surfaces including quay walls and boat hulls. In the present case, *A. verticillata*

was discarded by fishermen in heaps from the shoreseine operations and its invasive nature needs further study in this region. Globally, some potentially exciting pharmaceutical applications of bryozoans have been reported, in particular the bioactive compounds such as bryostatin-1 and janolusimide B which have a range of anti-cancer, anti-fouling and anti-fungal properties.

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