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ON THE OCCURRENCE OF PRIAPULIDS IN THE LITTORAL REGION OF BHIMILIPATNAM (VISAKHAPATNAM, BAY OF BENGAL)

VERY little is known about the eucoelomate phylum Priapulida, which are marine vermiform cylindrical organisms attaining a length of over 12 cm with a bulbous anterior end, destitute of appendages and with an eversible proboscis. Surface of the body is superficially segmented and covered with spines.

Priapulids are hitherto known to occur only in the high latitudes and it is agreed that they have bipolar distribution and are absent in the tropics and subtropics¹⁻³. Of late they have been reported from the Red Sea, Bermuda and Curacao as meiofaunal components⁴⁻⁶. It is interesting to note that these organisms wherever reported were based on a small number of specimens only, whilst Coul⁵ observed them as an important faunule constantly occurring in the meiobenthos forming 4.7% of the total proportion and ranked fourth in abundance accounting for 2% of all the meiobenthic animals collected. However, these animals were not known from Indian Ocean excepting for the Red Sea record. In the present communication the authors report on the occurrence of priapulids for the first time from the peninsular India and for the second time from Indian Ocean.

While engaged in the studies of littoral benthos of a backwater region at Bhimilipatnam about 35 km north of Visakhapatnam (70° 44' N and 83° 23' E) on the east coast of India, two priapulids (Fig. 1) were collected from a sediment comprising mud with sand, rock and shell pieces and rich in organic debris. The variation of ambient salinity ranged from 10‰ (during monsoon) to 37‰ (during summer) and temperature from 20° to 35° C.

Absence of tentacles, eversible proboscis with longitudinal rows of papillae, superficially segmented

body covered with spines, mouth associated with recurved spines are the salient features of the specimens collected.

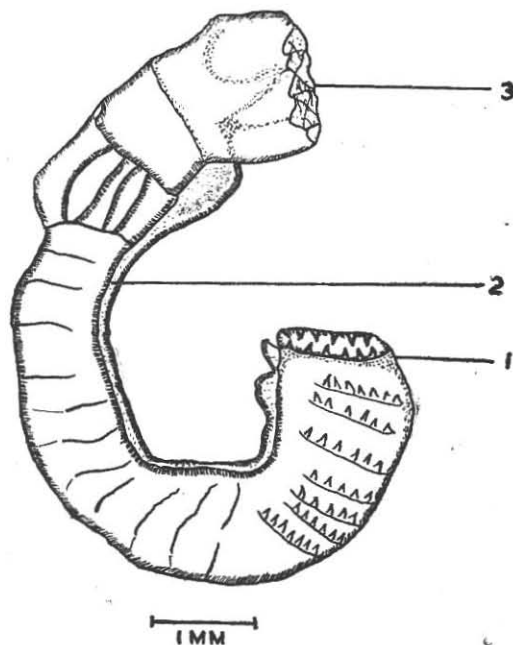


FIG. 1. 1, Introvert partially extruded showing the hooks; 2, Ventral fold; 3, Caudal region.

The present record of the occurrence of priapulids from a tropical location, further extends their traditional habit and distribution into the tropical Indian Ocean region. Thus the hitherto accepted bipolar distribution of these organisms appears to be no more valid.

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