New Distribution Record and Taxonomy of Two Cucullaeidae Species (Bivalvia: Arcacea) from Thermal Beach, Thoothukudi, South East Coast of India

Souji. S¹, Tresa Radhakrishnan²

Department of Aquatic Biology and Fisheries, University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram-695581, Kariyavattom, Kerala, India.

Abstract: Arcidae are predominantly marine bivalves. Cucullaeidae are a small family of Arcidae with four living species (Huber, 2010). Two species of Cucullaeidae; Cucullaea labiata (Lightfoot, 1786) and Cucullaea petita (Iredale, 1939) were collected from Thermal beach, Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu. The detailed systematic, taxonomy and marked difference between these species are dealt with in this paper. The occurrence of two Cucullaea species such as Cucullaea concamerata (Martini) and Cucullaea labiata (Lightfoot) from Tamil Nadu coast was reported by Dey and Ramkrishna (2007). However, the exact distribution record and taxonomical description of these species are not available from India. Like other clams there are also commercially valuable species used as food in many countries. In this paper these two species are newly reported from Gulf of Mannar region of Tamil Nadu. These species are believed to be nearly extinct. The study area from where species were collected was polluted with the effluents from thermal plants and saltpans. These species are highly disturbed due to climatic change and therefore strategies will be needed to conserve these species. The presences of these species indicate the rich marine bivalve diversity in the Gulf of Mannar region. The near extinction of these species should be viewed seriously and urgent steps should be initiated in order to conserve these species from further disappearance from the face of the earth for good.

Keywords: Bivalvia, Cucullaea labiata , Cucullaea petita, Gulf of Mannar region, Tamil Nadu

1. Introduction

The Arcacea are marine pelecypods which live most abundantly in shallow water. The order Arcoidae composed of Arcidae, Noetiidae, Cucullaeidae, Glycymerididae, Limopsidae and Pholobiidae (Oliver and Holmes, 2005). The family Cucullaea is also known as false ark shells or common cowl shell (www.inaturalist.org/taxa/368642-cucullaea-labiata). The bivalve family Cucullaeidae has persisted for the past 200 million years. At the time of Jurassic period, due to radiation arcoid bivalves especially Cucullaeidae, diverged morphologically from their ancestors through modification of their taxodont dentition into distinct set of central and lateral hinge teeth. After that origination in the Early Jurassic, the bivalve genus, Cucullaea spread tremendously. At the time of Late Cretaceous, Cucullaea occupied habitats ranging from equatorial to Polar Regions (Buick, 2009).

During this time of peak richness, the genus was composed of approximately fifty designated species representing a diverse array of shell morphologies. Individuals lived semi-infaunally with in sandy to muddy substrates of shallow marine environment. Following this period due to the elevated global temperature and sea-level, cucullaeid species richness declined. A number of taxa become extinct at various times throughout the Cenozoic, with elevated extinction rates potentially associated with major cooling events and sea lowstands (Finlay and Marwick, 1937). With the continual loss of species, both the geographic range and morphologic disparity of Cucullaea also declined, eventually leading to the near extinction of this once-prolific genus (Buick, 2009).

Authors gave different account about the valid species of Cucullaea genus. There are only a single species remains (Nicol, 1950), however, according to Lamy (1907), there are two valid species namely Cucullaea concamerata and Cucullaea granulosa Beside these, Iredale in 1939 gave the description of two more species namely Cucullaea vaga and Cucullaea petita from Eastern Australia. The other Cucullaea were first described by Chemnitz and in 1986 Abbot and Dance illustrated these two species. According to Huber (2010) four species were described namely Cucullaea granulosa, Cucullaea vaga, Cucullaea labiata and Cucullaea petita.

Nicol (1950) documented the geographic range for the species stretching from Eastern Africa, to South Eastern Australia, throughout Indonesia and north to southern Japan usually at depths ranging from 15-150 meters. Reeve (1869) well recognized these two specimens from the Indian Ocean locality, used the wrong name Cucullaea concamerata and Cucullaea auriculifera (Huber, 2010). The systematic position and valid name of the presently found Indian Cucullaea species are described in this paper.

2. Materials and Method

Specimens were collected from Thermal beach, Thoothukudi (8.81°N 78.14°E), Tamil Nadu (Fig.1). One fresh full specimen of Cucullaea labiata, two half of the old specimen of the same species and half valve of the Cucullaea petita were collected from the Thermal beach area on 10-09-2013. This is one of the accepted marine biodiversity rich area belongs to Gulf of Mannar region. The specimens were

Volume 4 Issue 2, February 2015

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identified using FAO identification keys and data collected from online data base. Systematics were done using A full-color Guide to 3,300 of the World’s Marine Bivalves; Compendium of Bivalves (Huber, 2010) and WoRMS. The specimens were deposited in the Marine Biodiversity Museum, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) Kochi. The accession numbers of the specimens are Cucullaea labiata (Lightfoot, 1786) DC. 2.1.2 and Cucullaea petita (Iredale, 1939) DC. 2.1.3.

**Family**: Cucullaeidae  
**Genus**: Cucullaea  
**Locality**: Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, India  
**Habitat**: sandy shore

**Synonym**: Arca concamera (Bruguiere, 1789); Arca concamera (Dillwyn, 1817); Arca cucullata (Roding, 1798); Arca cuculus (Gmelin, 1791); Arca labiata (Lightfoot, 1786); Cucullaea auriculifera (Lamarck, 1801); Cucullaea cucullata (Roding, 1798); Cucullaea plicata (Theobald, 1860).

**Description**

The three most obivious shell characters that define Cucullaea genus are the taxodont dentition, radially arranged hinge teeth and prominent, chevron-shaped grooves on the broad ligament area. The myophoric flanges are present and the posterior adductor muscle attaches to the shell. The shell is boxy shaped and highly inflated (Huber, 2010). The common identification character of the collected specimen is shown in Fig. 2.

![Fig.1. Study site](image1.jpg)

**Fig.1. Study site**

**Table 1**: Differences between two species of Cucullaea

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cucullaea labiata (Lightfoot, 1786)</th>
<th>Cucullaea petita (Iredale, 1939)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myophoric flanges more prominent and larger</td>
<td>Myophoric flanges narrower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periostracum is orange brown</td>
<td>Periostracum is whithish with brown scattered zigzag lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umbones are prominent dorsally higher</td>
<td>Umbones are prominent dorsally lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner part of the valve is dirty white or brownish white corresponding to the upper surface</td>
<td>Inner part of the valve is glossy white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radially arranged hinge teeth are thick</td>
<td>Radially arranged hinge teeth are thin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**1. Cucullaea labiata (Lightfoot, 1786)**  
**Parent**: Cucullaea Lamarck, 1801  
**Class**: Bivalvia  
**Subclass**: Pteriomorphia  
**Order**: Arcoida  
**Superfamily**: Arcoidea

**Family**: Cucullaeidae  
**Genus**: Cucullaea  
**Locality**: Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu, India  
**Habitat**: sandy shore

**Description**

The shell shape and size of the specimen are almost similar to Cucullaea labiata. The periostracum is yellow-whitish, with light orange-brown coloured dots and lines. The umbone is dorsally short compared to the Cucullaea labiata. The differences between the two Cucullaea species are presented in Table.1.

![Fig.2. Common identification characters of Cucullaea species](image2.jpg)

**Fig.2. Common identification characters of Cucullaea species**
Fig. 3 A-D. A- *Cucullaea petita* outer valve B- inner valve 
C- *Cucullaea labiata* outer valve D- inner valve

Fig. 3 E-J. Different positions of *Cucullaea labiata*
Views of outer and inner valve of older specimen
Distribution of Cucullaea species indicates that they have an affinity for warm water environments, fossil record also attests the fact that ocean temperature as a spatially limiting factor (Beu, 1990). In the case of Gulf of Mannar the atmospheric temperature is varied from 37° to 40°C. The atmospheric temperature of study region reflects sea water temperature in shallow seashore (Kumaraguru et al., 2006). The water temperature varied from 29° to 35°C. The air temperature recorded at the sites was higher when compared to that of surface water and sediment temperatures (30.2° to 37°C). This would indicate that the water and sediment temperatures are basically influenced by air temperature Kannan and Kannan (1996).

The fresh water input from rivers in Gulf of Mannar is only limited. High temperature may be one of the reasons for the presence of Cucullaea species in that region. From the west coast of India where the temperature is much lower than that of the east coast, the presence of Cucullaea species was not reported and hence the occurrence of these species along the east coast is justifiable. Individuals are found burried into fine sand and muddy substrates with the posterior margin located just above the sediment water interface for respiration and suspension feeding (Morton, 1981). In Thermal beach area of Thoothukudi the substrate is composed of 99% of fine sand. This may be another reason for the occurrence of Cucullaea species along this region.

Cucullaea species are economically very important. The meat of the Cucullaea species is economically and commercially valuable. This seafood is commonly known as butterfly-cut ark shell meat (Fig.4). The main markets are North America, South America, Southeast Asia, Africa, Mid East and Eastern Asia (www.21food.com).

The fossil as well as the live Cucullaea species are widely used for palaeontological study as they have growth rings as in trees, which shows the climatic condition of the earth in ancient times. The growth of clams mainly depended on the availability of food and heat. The change in the environmental conditions at that time is still reflected in the width of the growth rings (News released by Helmholtz Association of German Research Centers, 2011).

4. Conclusion

Gulf of Mannar, Tamil Nadu, on the south-east coast of India, is very rich in molluscan resources. The presence of these Cucullaea species which were once believed to be near extinction is seen in this area reveal the fact that the climatic condition are conducive for the survival of them. The habitat should be conserved for the survival of the remaining species because they are nearer to extinction. Urgent conservation measures are to be initiated in order to protect and conserve them from further disappearance from this part of India where they are still occur.

5. Acknowledgement

First author is indebted to Dr, K.K. Joshi, Principal Scientist and Ms. P.M. Geetha of Marine Biodiversity Museum of CMFRI, Kochi, Mr. Saivee Kumar for the timely help of the work and Kerala University for a JRF during the tenure of this research.

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Author Profile

**Souji. S.** completed BSc Zoology in NSS College, Neeramankara, University of Kerala, India in 2002, BEd Natural Science in University of Kerala, India in 2003 MSc Zoology in Mar Ivanios College, Nalanchira, University of Kerala, India in 2006. M. Phil from Aquatic Biology and Fisheries Department in University of Kerala, India in 2013. She is now doing Ph. D Programme in Aquatic Biology and Fisheries Department in University of Kerala, India

**Dr. Tresa Radhakrishnan** graduated with a Ph. D in Ecology/Aquatic Toxicology from the University of Hull, England in 1983 and MSc in Zoology in University of Kerala, India. She is currently a Professor at University of Kerala, India. She has diverse interest in Ecology, Limnology, Esturiane Biology, Mangrove Ecology, Molecular Biology, Aquatic Toxicology, Aquatic Pollution and Taxonomy