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Chromosomal distribution of constitutive heterochromatin in eight species of mahseers (Family: Cyprinidae) from India

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The chromosomal distributions of constitutive heterochromatin were analyzed in 8 species of mahseer, namely, *Tor chelynoides* (McClelland), *T. khudree* (Sykes), *T. mosal mahanadicus* (David), *T. mussullah* (Sykes), *T. putitora* (Hamilton), *T. progeneius* (McClelland), *T. tor* (Hamilton) and *Neolissochilus hexagonolepis* (McClelland) using C-banding technique. The constitutive heterochromatin bands were observed on several pairs of chromosomes with maximum numbers in *T. progeneius* (11 pairs), followed by *T. putitora* (7 pairs), *T. mosal mahanadicus* (4), *T. khudree* (3), *T. mussullah* (3), *N. hexagonolepis* (3), *T. chelynoides* (3) and *T. tor* (2). In all species, the C-bands were observed mainly on p arm with few on centromeric region of chromosomes. This seems to be the characteristic feature for characterization of these species. The presence of similar chromosome numbers (2n=100) with diverse karyotypes in the mahseer species suggests evolution among the species through pericentric inversions and/or heterochromatin processes. The number and location of the heterochromatic bands were found species-specific and thus useful for the cytotaxonomy of these species. The findings of the present study can also help to understand the evolutionary relationships among the mahseer species.

Keywords: Constitutive heterochromatin, karyoevolution, mahseer, *Neolissochilus* sp., *Tor* spp.

Introduction

Cyprinidae is the most abundant and globally widespread family of the freshwater fishes, comprises of 220 genera and approx 2420 species¹. Among the cyprinids, mahseer is the common name used for almost 50 species of freshwater fishes from genera *Tor*, *Neolissocheilus* and *Naziritor*. Currently, 46 mahseer species are recognized; of which 23 species belong to genus *Tor* Gray, 22 species to genus *Neolissochilus* Rainboth and 1 species to genus *Naziritor* Mirza². Mahseers are widely distributed along the Himalayan region of India, Pakistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Indonesia. In India, difference of opinion prevails regarding the number of species existing in genus *Tor*.

In global perspective, the mahseer group is well known as commercially important game fish and highly esteemed food fish. The species of mahseer are large-scaled barbels that live in upstream, clear and running waters. The natural status of some mahseer

species has been assigned as endangered³⁻⁵. Osteological and morphological characters, especially the proportion of head length to body depth, are the common criteria used to classify these species⁶. The plasticity in the morphological characters among mahseer species has been the source of taxonomic ambiguities leading to disagreement between researchers with respect to the validity of some species as well as subspecies. For example, taxonomic ambiguity prevails for *Tor mosal mahanadicus*⁷ and its valid name has been reported to be *T. khudree* (www.fishbase.org, version 4/2009). Another mahseer species *Neolissochilus hexagonolepis*, commonly known as chocolate mahseer in India, has similar morphology like *Tor* species. Therefore, morphometric as well as meristic characters sometime fail to resolve the proper identification among *Tor* species.

Earlier cytogenetic studies of mahseer species from India, undertaken using Giemsa and silver nitrate staining, have documented the diploid chromosome number (2n) as 100 and, in some studies, presence of species-specific variation in karyo-morphology has also been observed⁸⁻¹¹. The C-banding studies in

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teleost fishes have not only helped to correctly identify homologous chromosomes but also to visualize its role in evolution and speciation¹². However, the reports on C-banding studies in the mahseer species are scanty. Therefore, the objectives of the present study were to: (a) identify chromosomes with C-banding patterns, and (b) discuss the inter-specific relationships based on C-banding patterns in mahseer species.

Materials and Methods

Collection of Specimens

Live specimens of eight undertaken mahseer species were collected from different water bodies (Table 1) and locations (Fig. 1) in India with the help

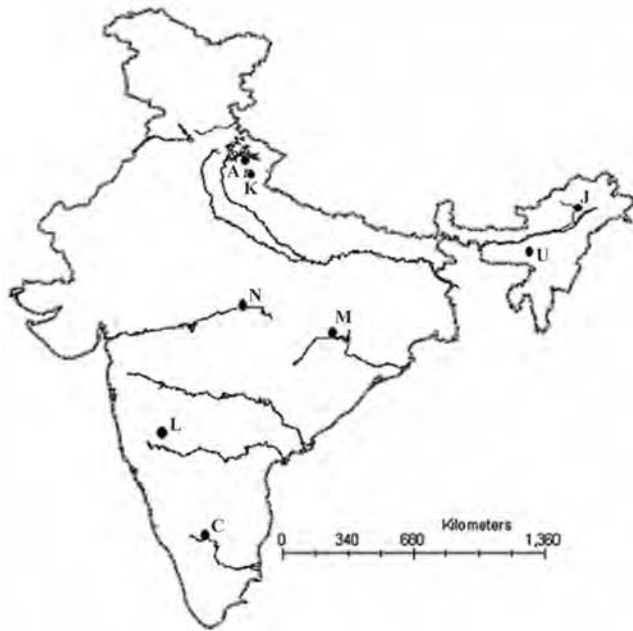


Fig. 1—Geographical locations of mahseer sampling from India: A. Alaknanda river, C. Cauvery river, M. Mahanadi river, L. Lonavala reservoir, K. Kosi river, J. Jia Boreli river, N. Narmada river & U. Tributaries of Uiam reservoir.

of local fishermen. All the specimens were in juvenile stage and the sex was unidentifiable by visual examination.

Chromosome Preparations

For chromosome preparations, the specimens were administered 0.05% colchicine (@ 1.0 mL/ 100 g body wt) intramuscularly and were sacrificed after 2 h for dissecting out the kidney tissue. The cells were processed for chromosome preparations using hypotonic treatment–methanol:acetic acid fixation–flame drying technique.

Fluorescence Staining

C-banding was done as per the technique described¹³, followed by chromosome staining with propidium iodide (5 µg/ mL in DDW) instead of Giemsa. Constitutive heterochromatin (CH) band pattern for a species was determined by studying a minimum of 25 metaphase spreads per specimen. For karyo-morphology, chromosomes were grouped into metacentric (m), submetacentric (sm), subtelocentric (st) and telocentric (t) as per the classification proposed¹⁴.

Results and Discussion

A marked chromosomal conservation of 100 diploid chromosomes has been observed in the eight undertaken mahseer species with different karyo-morphology. The C-banding patterns of these mahseer species are presented for comparison (Figs 2a-h). Differences in number and position of C-band on the chromosomes and location of C-heterochromatin chromosomes in the karyotype were observed among the species (Table 2). Enlarged view of the chromosomes bearing C-bands has been shown in Figs 3a-h.

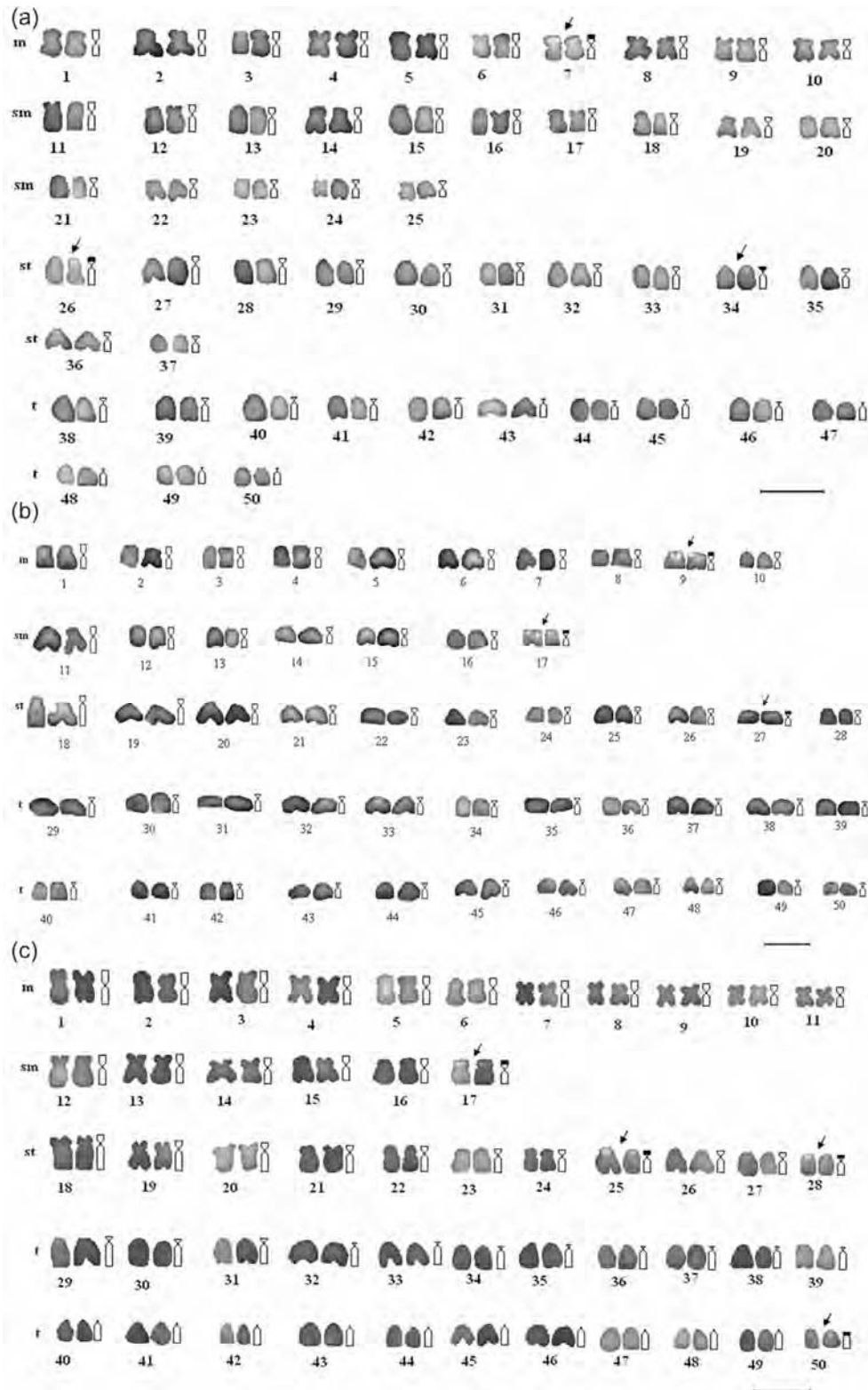
To date, the cytogenetic investigations in family Cyprinidae have been undertaken in approx 416

Table 1—Collection sites of live specimens of different mahseer species

No.	Name of the species	n*	Site of collection
1	<i>Tor chelynooides</i> (McClelland)	8	Tributaries of river Alaknanda, Garhwal, Uttarakhand
2	<i>T. khudree</i> (Sykes)	12	River Cauvery, Karnataka
3	<i>T. mosal mahanadicus</i> (David)	23	River Mahanadi, Sonapur, Orissa
4	<i>T. mussullah</i> (Sykes)	6	TATA Electric Company Reservoir, Lonavala, Maharashtra
5	<i>T. progeneius</i> (McClelland)	6	River Jia Boreli, near Bhalukpong, Assam
6	<i>T. putitora</i> (Hamilton)	7	River Kosi, Manan, Almora, Uttarakhand
7	<i>T. tor</i> (Hamilton)	6	River Narmada near Hosangabad, Madhya Pradesh
8	<i>Neolissochilus hexagonolepis</i> (McClelland)	8	Tributaries of Uiam Reservoir, Shillong, Meghalaya

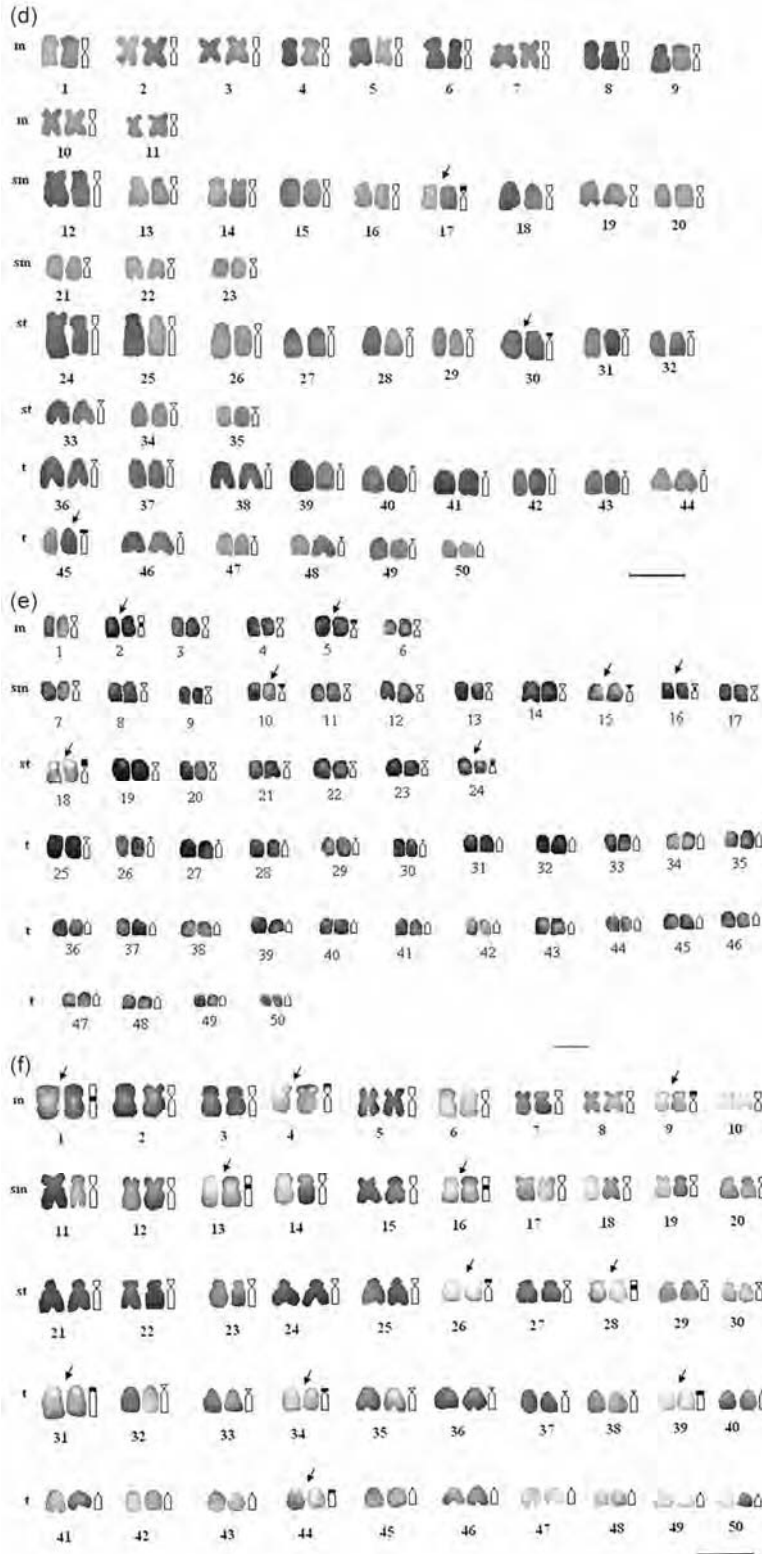
*n= number of live specimens collected.

Fig. 2



(Contd.)

Fig. 2– *Contd.*



(*Contd.*)

Fig. 2– Contd.



Fig. 2 (a-h)—The karyotype of C-banded chromosomes and ideogram in: a. *Tor chelynooides*, b. *T. khudree*, c. *T. mosal mahanadicus*, d. *T. mussullah*, e. *T. putitora*, f. *T. progeneius*, g. *T. tor* & h. *Neolissochilus hexagonolepis*. (Arrows indicates C-bands positive chromosomes; m, metacentric; sm, submetacentric; st, subtelocentric; t, telocentric; Bar=5 μm)

species belonging to 152 genera (www.fishbase.org, version 2/2012). In the preliminary karyotypic analyses, the mahseer group can be considered conservative in maintaining the same 100 diploid

chromosome number with different karyotype formulae/ karyo-morphology. In fish, several studies have shown that CH (identified by C-banding technique) is an important element in chromosome

Table 2—Comparative chromosomal distributions of C-bands in different mahseer species

No.	Name of species	Karyo-morphology	No. of C-band pairs	Position of C-band on chromosome number/in karyotype
1	<i>Tor chelynooides</i>	20 m+30 sm+24 st+26 t	3	p arm of 7 th (7 m), 26 th (1 st) and 34 th (9 st)
2	<i>T. khudree</i>	20 m+14 sm+22 st+44 t	3	telomeric regions of 9 th (9 m), 17 th (7 sm) and 27 th (10 st)
3	<i>T. mosal mahanadicus</i>	22 m+12 sm+22 st+44 t	4	telomeric regions of 17 th (6 sm), 25 th (8 st) and 28 th (11 st) and centromeric region of 50 th (22 t)
4	<i>T. mussullah</i>	22 m+24 sm+24 st+30 t	3	telomeric positions of 17 th (6 sm) and 30 th (7 st), and centromeric region of 45 th (10 t).
5	<i>T. progeneius</i>	20 m+20 sm+20 st+40 t	11	telomeric regions of 4 th (4 m), 9 th (9 m) and 26 th (6 st), and centromeric regions of 1 st (1 m), 13 th (3 sm), 16 th (6 sm), 28 th (8 st), 31 st (1 t), 34 th (4 t), 39 th (9 t) and 44 th (14 t)
6	<i>T. putitora</i>	12 m+22 sm+14 st+52 t	7	telomeric positions of 5 th (5 m), 10 th (4 sm), 15 th (9 sm) and 18 th (1 st), and centromeric positions of 2 nd (2 m), 16 th (10 sm) and 24 th (7 st)
7	<i>T. tor</i>	20 m+24 sm+24 st+32 t	2	telomeric regions of 20 th (10 sm) and 27 th (5 st).
8	<i>Neolissochilus hexagonolepis</i>	20 m+18 sm+14 st+48 t	3	telomeric regions of 15 th (5 sm) and 25 th (6 st), and centromeric region of 39 th (13 t)

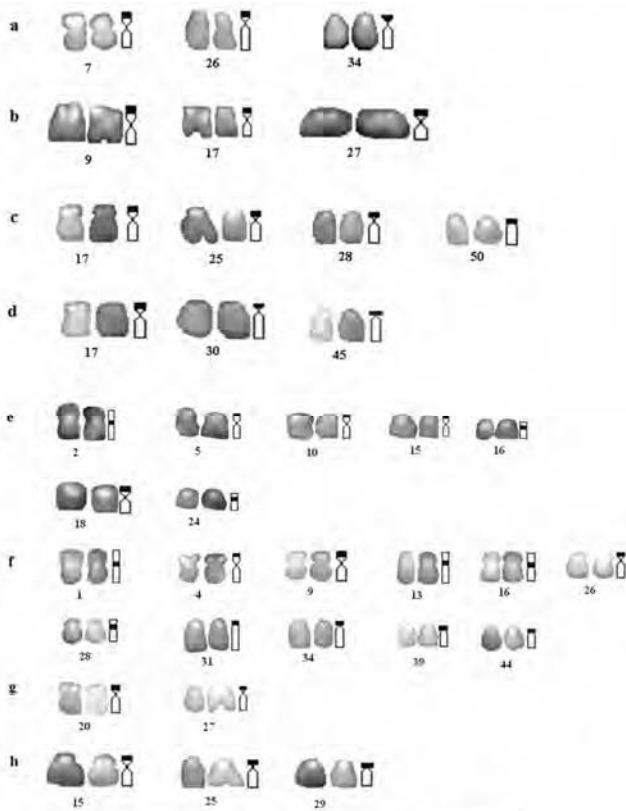


Fig. 3 (a-h)—Enlarge view of C-banded chromosomes in: a. *Tor chelynooides*, b. *T. khudree*, c. *T. mosal mahanadicus*, d. *T. mussullah*, e. *T. putitora*, f. *T. progeneius*, g. *T. tor* & h. *Neolissochilus hexagonolepis*.

differentiation¹². In the present study, CH patterns in eight mahseer species were analyzed.

The positive C-bands identify the regions of heterochromatin consisting of repetitive DNA

sequences. The C-bands were observed on several pairs of the chromosomes with maximum number in *T. progeneius* (11 pairs), followed by *T. putitora* (7 pairs), *T. mosal mahanadicus* (4), *T. khudree* (3), *T. mussullah* (3), *N. hexagonolepis* (3), *T. chelynooides* (3) and *T. tor* (2). It is interesting to note that the C-bands were localized only on telomeric positions in *T. chelynooides*, *T. khudree* and *T. tor*; whereas in *T. mosal mahanadicus*, *T. mussullah*, *T. putitora*, *T. progeneius* and *N. hexagonolepis*, the bands were localized on both telomeric and centromeric regions. The C-bands were also reported at telomeric and centromeric positions in six species of flatfishes¹⁵ and in *Labeo rohita* and *Cirrhinus mrigala*¹⁶. The centromeric C-bands were commonly observed in a number of fish species^{17,18}. In *Danio rerio*, the CH was located at the centromeric position in all chromosome pairs¹⁹. Similarly, in Brazilian marine fishes belonging to families Sciaenidae and Sparidae, the heterochromatin blocks were detected at the centromeric positions in most of chromosome pairs²⁰.

In the studies conducted in two cyprinids, *Acanthobrama marmid* and *Cyprinion macrostomus* from Turkey, CH bands were seen in the pericentromeric regions of all chromosomes²¹. However, inter-specific variation was observed in cyprinid genera *Rutilus* and *Scardinius* for the distribution of CH. In both genera, the heterochromatin differentiation appears to be directed to a centromere-telomere direction, particularly evident along the metacentric elements of their

karyotypes²². In the present study, no C-band was present on interstitial and/or q arm of the chromosomes in the undertaken species. On the other hand, in another study, a pair of C-band was found on long arm of a metacentric chromosome of three species of genus *Serrasalmus*²³.

A prominent heterochromatic block was observed on the largest st chromosome in *T. putitora*, which could have been formed by tandem duplication of heterochromatic DNA²⁴. Since similar type of prominent heterochromatic block was not observed in other species, it may be considered as a marker chromosome for identification of *T. putitora*. Earlier, the chromosomal distributions of CH in other fish species²⁵⁻²⁶ have been utilized in identification of marker chromosomes in the species. Moreover, an association may also be established between the C-positive heterochromatin, observed in the present study, and the NOR (nucleolar organizer region) reported on the terminal region of the short arms of 4th sm chromosome in *T. putitora*. Flanking of C-bands with NORs is a common feature as reported in other fish species²⁷⁻²⁸. Further, in *Brycon* sp.²⁹ and *Hypostomus* sp. B³⁰, the rDNA were found to be interspersed adjacent to heterochromatin segments.

In general, the distributions of C-bands on metacentric (7) and telocentric (7) chromosomes were less as compared to the submetacentric (10) and subtelocentric (12) chromosomes that allowed a more accurate, homologous pairing. The maximum (4) presence of C-bands on telocentric chromosomes was found in *T. progeneius*. It may be possible that these heterochromatic regions are involved in the non-homologous pairing of chromosomes during karyo-evolution of these mahseer groups. In the present study, the C-bands mostly exhibited telomeric distribution (22) rather than centromeric (14) as the chromosomes of *T. chelynooides*, *T. khudree* and *T. tor* exhibited C-bands only on telomeric regions.

The extensive variations in C-bands, in terms of number, chromosomal localization and position in the karyotype, could be used as species-specific marker for identification in these fishes. These variations in the heterochromatic blocks can be attributed to various types of chromosomal rearrangements, viz. addition of heterochromatin, robertsonian/tandem fusion, pericentric/paracentric inversions and reciprocal translocation³¹ during karyo-evolution of these mahseer species. These variations in CH may

also be utilized at initial stage to establish cytotoxic relationships among the species. Based on the number and position of C-bands on the chromosomes, the *T. khudree*, *T. mussullah* and *T. mosal mahanadicus* can be considered in one cytotype.

T. putitora and *T. progeneius* have primitive character due to the presence of maximum number of C-bands as compared to other species in the study. The higher CH diversity is an ancestral condition³². Further, the loss of heterochromatic blocks may also be responsible for a smaller number of C-bands during the course of evolution. The elimination of CH accompanies the phyletic evolution of fishes³³. The C-banding pattern were analyzed in 10 species of Chinese cyprinid fish and found extensive variation in the CH among the fishes. Some species possess considerable quantities of heterochromatin and some possess little heterochromatin³⁴. The mechanisms, such as, multiple replications, unequal exchanges, amplifications, accumulations and deletions, can lead to the quantitative variation of heterochromatin within and between species³⁵. These heterochromatin differentiations often suggest an evolutionary role in the process of species divergence³⁶.

The proposal for karyotypic evolution of mahseer species seems to reveal a general trend regarding the distribution of CH and each species showed a specific C-banding pattern useful in species identification. Similar species- and population-specific differentiations have also been reported in other studies^{37,38}. The data on distribution of CH are also helpful in understanding the genomic organization and differentiation in the cyprinidae, evidently showing structural variability of the chromosomes with a karyotypic diversity, since the variations in the amount and distribution of CH throughout the karyotype were most probably caused by heterochromatin-mediated chromosome rearrangements³⁹.

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