SYSTEMATIC POSITION
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Family Sillaginidae include small to medium sized fishes (all below 50cm in total length) distributed in the shallow coastal waters of the Indian and Western Pacific Oceans. The Whiting or sand smelts, which are generally referred to, form the basis of small but commercially important fisheries throughout their distributional range. These generally inhabit sandy or muddy bottoms in shallow marine and estuarine waters.

Family characters:

Body elongated, only slightly compressed; head tapering with small terminal mouth; lower part of the preoperculum separated by a deep channel, directed horizontally, bent inwards to almost meet that of the other side. Opercle with a small, sharp spine. Body covered with small or moderate sized ctenoid scales, those of cheeks and opercle cycloid or ctenoid; lateral line scales simple. The cephalic, suborbital and preopercular sensory canal system is highly developed, which is characteristic of the family. Mouth with band of small villiform teeth, none on palatines.

Two dorsal fins, first with 9 to 13 slender spines, its origin above middle of pectoral fin; second dorsal of one slender spine and 16-27 rays; and with 2 small slender spines and 14-26 rays, caudal emerginate; unpaired fins with
membranes scaly, pectoral fin normal without scaly process at axil; pelvic fin origin slightly behind origin of pectoral fin; lateral line slightly arched.

Swimbladder absent, poorly developed or highly complex, with anterior and lateral extensions and tapered posteriorly to form 1 or 2 slender extensions that project well into the caudal region.

The family Sillaginidae is represented by 3 genera and 9 species in Indian waters.

Key to genera of Sillaginidae:

Snout and head not depressed; second dorsal spine not elongated; eyes normal; swimbladder present, lateral line scales 50 to 84 --------------- Sillago
Snout and head not depressed; second dorsal spine not elongated, eyes normal; swimbladder present, lateral line scales 129 to 147 --------------- Sillaginodes
Snout and head depressed; second dorsal spine elongated; eyes small and almost covered by fleshy orbit; swimbladder vestigial or absent --------------- Sillaginopsis

Synopsis of the genus Sillago:

Ventral fin spine normal; second dorsal spine not elongated, swimbladder divided posteriorly into two tapering
extensions, duct-like process present; modified caudal vertebrae present.

**Synopsis of species *Sillago sihama***:

Body elongate, snout pointed, upper head profile slightly convex; mouth small, terminal, villiform teeth present in jaws and on vomers; 2 or 3 (usually 2) series of scales on cheeks; a small, sharp spine on opercle; gill rakers on lower limb of first arch 7 to 9. Dorsal fins XI, I, 20-23; anal fin II, 21-23, lateral line scales 66-73; 5 to 6 scale rows above lateral line. First dorsal fin higher than second, swimbladder with 2 postcoelomic extensions.

**Colour in alcohol**:

Body light tan, silvery yellow-brown, sandy-brown, or honey coloured; pale brown to silvery white below; a midlateral silvery, longitudinal band generally present; dorsal fins dusky terminally with or without rows of dark brown spots on the second dorsal fin membrane; caudal fin dusky terminally; no dark blotch at the base of the pectoral fin; other fins hyaline. After long preservation the colour may become a uniform light brown.

**Synonyms**

*Atherina sihama* Forskal, 1775  
*Platycephalus sihama* Bloch and Schneider, 1801
Sciaena malabarica Bloch and Schneider, 1801
Sparus Sp. (Soring), Russel, 1803
Sillago acuta, Cuvier, 1817
Sillago aethena, Rupell, 1825
Sillago erythrea, Cuvier, 1829
Sillago malabarica, Cantor, 1849
Sillago thama (misprint), Fowler, 1928

Systematic position of the species up to genus

Phylum: Chordata
Sub-phylum: Vertebrata
Super-class: Gnathostomata
Class: Teleostomi
Sub-class: Actinopterygii
Order: Perciformes
Family: Sillaginidae
Genus: Sillago

The description of the family, genus and species is based on the accounts by Fisher and Whitehead (1974) and McKay (1985).