# WESTERN HIMALAYAN SPECIES OF ASCOBOLUS

## S. C. KAUSHAL AND K. S. THIND

Department of Botany, Panjab University, Chandigarh

#### ABSTRACT

Three species viz. Ascobolus sub-alpinus Kaushal & Thind, A. furfuroceus Pers. per Hook., and A. immersus Pers. per Pers. are described in detail. Annotated notes are given for A. scatigenus (Berk. & Curt. apud Berk.) Brumm., A. carbonarius Karst., A. geophilus Seaver and A. denudatus Fr. A key to all the Indian species of the genus is provided.

#### INTRODUCTION

Ascobolus Pers. per Hook, is a coprophilous genus of Pezizales of Class Discomycetes and subdivision Ascomycotina. A A detailed study of the genus from Western Himalayas during the last decade has necessitated a re-evaluation of its species from this region. Consequently, A. sub-alpinus sp. nov., A. furfuraceus Pers. per Hook., a highly variable species, an A. immersus Pers. per Pers., a poorly understood species in India, are fully described. Relevant annotated notes are included for the othr four Western Himalayan species, viz. A. scatigenus (Berk. & Curt. apur Berk.) Brumm., A. carbonarius Karst., A. geophilus Seaver and A. denudatus Fr. There are five more good species of the genus known from India of which A. viridis Curr. was reported by Mahju (1933) and A. minutus Boud. by Ginai (1936). both from west Punjab, now in Pakistan. A. lignatilis Alb. & Schw. per Pers. has been described from Eastern Himalayas by Kar and Pal (1968). Redescribed cently Khare 1(1976)

species viz. A. brassicae Crouan from Varanasi and A. behnitziensis Kirschst from Pantnagar in Uttar Pradesh.

A. indicus Sanwal recorded by Sanwal (1953b) from Delhi is a nomen dubium (c. f. Brummelen, 1967). The type pespecimen of the species is not in existence in the herbarium of Delhi University and the fungus has not been recollected so far. A. gollani P. Henn., A. magnificus Dodge and Aleurina orientalis (Pat.) Sacc. & Syd. are synonyms of A. scatigenus and are to be sought under that species. Realizing the importance of regional floras, a much needed key to the accepted species Ascobolus recorded from India is rendered.

The genus, as understood here, is recognised by the following important features:

Apothecia usually small, 0.3-10 mm (rarely up to 30 mm) in diameter, superficial or immersed, sessile, rarely substipitate, subglobose, pyriform, obconical, cup or saucer-shaped, rarely lenticular; external suface smooth, furfuraceous or downy; hymenium yellowish, sometimes

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greenish. Asci 8-spored, clavate to cylindric-clavate, strongly protruding above the hymenium at maturity, apex rounded or slightly truncate, often amyloid. Ascospores biseriate or irregularly disposed, always free, ellipsoid to globose, episporial pigment violet, often becoming brownish before discharge. Paraphyses slender, not or slightly enlarged above, septate, hyaline, often embedded in yellowish or yellowishgreen muscus.

Anatomy: Excipulum mostly of textura angularis to globulosa throughout, rarely 2 or more layered.

Habitat: Predominantly coprophilous, sometimes terrestrial or pyrophilous, rarely lignicolous.

Types pecies: Ascobolus pezizoides Pers. in Gmelin, C. Linn. Syst. Nat. 2: 1461, 1791. (=A. furfuraceus Pers. per Hook., Fl. Scot. 2: 33, 1821; Fries, Syst. Myc. 2: 163, 1822.

Saccobolus Boud., a genus closely related to Ascobolus, differs from it essentially in having ascospores united in a group of more or less regular fashion.

#### KEY TO THE SPECIES

- 1. Ascospores ellipsoid with rounded or truncate ends, elliptic-fusoid to fusoid, ornamented with regular or irregular rounded warts longitudinal ridges or to more one coarse or fine striations which may or may not anastomose.
- 1'. Ascospores globose to spherical, ornamented with small isolated, round or angular warts.

  ...A. brassicae
- 2(1) Ascospores 12-15 × 7-9 μm, with regular longitudinal striations which rarely anastomose.

....A. minutus

- 2'. Ascospores always larger than above, with irregular rounded warts or longitudinal ridges or one to more coarse or fine striations which often anastomose. 3
- 3(2'). Apothecia usually more than 1 cm (-3cm) across; ascospores with a single fine fissure (rarely with two), or finely reticulate in over ripe or old ascospores.
  ...A. scaligenus

3'. Apothecia less than 1 cm across; ascospores with more than one fissure, warts or ridges. 4

4(3'). Apotheica on soil, ....5

- 4'. Apothecia on dung, manured soil or rotten wood, branches, leaves. 8
- 5(4). Ascospores elliptic-fusoid to fusoid, ornamented with long or short longitudinal ridges, 28-38 × 11-14 μm. .... A. viridus
- 5'. Ascospores ellipsoid with rounded or truncate ends, ornamented with irregular or rounded, isolated warts, a pattern of short fine fissures in all directions, finally often reticulate, 17-27 ×9.5—13 (—15) μm.
- 6. Apothecia on burnt soil or charcoal or other burnt vegetable debris, rarely on humid soil; ascospores marked with irregular or rounded, isolated warts, ellipsoid with truncate ends.

....A. carbonarius

- 6'. Apothecia on humid soil, ascospores with fine fissures or a network of crevices from the beginning or at maturity, ellipsoid with rounded ends.
- 7(6'). Apothecia up to 5 mm in diameter; ascospores at first smooth or finely granular, at maturity developing fine fissures forming

reticulations or warts.

.... A. geophilous

- 7'. Apothecia up to 10 mm in diameter; ascospores ornamented with network of erevices from the beginning. .... A. behnitziensis
- 8(4'). Apothecia 0.5-1 (-1.5) mm in diameter; ascospores (35-) 58-71 (-81) x 24-38 μm, oblong ellipsoid; asci 490-720 (-770) × 100-130 μm. ....Λ. immersus
- 8'. Apothecia (0.5-) 1.5-10 (-12) mm in diameter; ascospores (13-) 16-24 (-29) ×8.5-11(-15) μm, ellipsoid to fusiform-ellipsoid; asci 130-250×(16-) 20-30 μm .... 9
- 9(8'). Apothecia externally glabrous or covered with groups of subglobular, brownish, thick-walled cells. 10
- 9'. Apothecia externally furfuraceous with hyaline cells, brownish cells absent.
- 10(9). Apothecia externally glabrous; asci  $135-180 \times 18-25 \mu m$ .

....A. sub-alpinus

- 10'. Apothecia externally covered with subglobular rusty brown cells; asci (120-) 170-230 × (13-) 16-23 μm. ... A. denudatus
- 11(9'). Apothecia distinctly stalked, 5-12 mm in diameter, ascospores ellipsoid to fusiform-ellipsoid, 16-19.5 ×8.5-10 μm ....Λ. lignatilis
- 11'. Apothecia sessile or with a very short stalk, 0.5-5 mm in diameter; ascospores (17.5)-19.5 -28 (-32) ×10-5-14 μm.

.... A. furfuraceus

#### SYSTEMATIC ACCOUNT

Ascobolus sub-alpinus Kaushal & Thind, sp. nov. Figs. 1-2, 7

Apothecia ad 3 mm diam. dense gregaria, singula vel parvis acervis con-

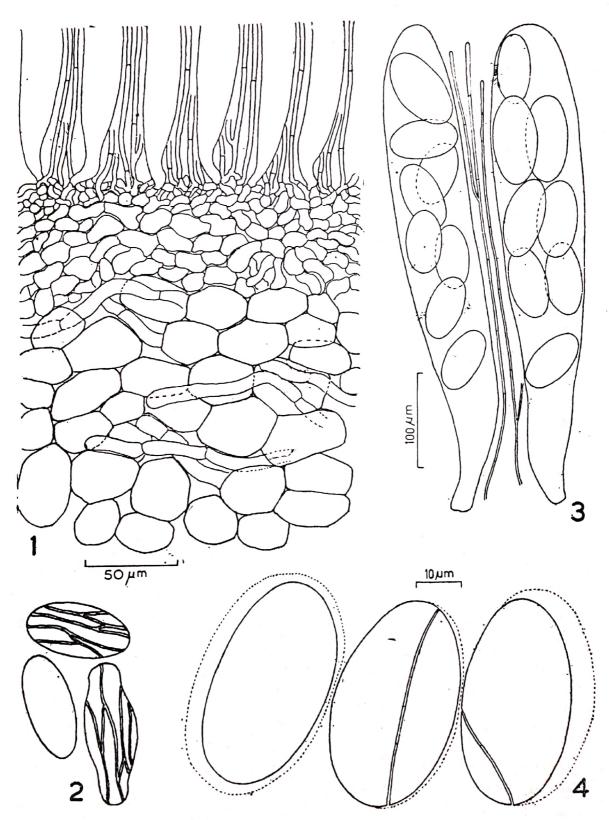
gesta, sessilia, subglobularia cum sunt tenera, postea tenuicupulata vel subscutellata, ordinata, mollia, carnosa; superficies externa fuscopallida; margo integer; hymenium fulvoaurantiacum cum recens, fuscoviolaceum cum maturum, asperum propter eminentes apices ascorum. Asci  $135-180 \times 18-25$  µm, coctosporei, cylindrico-clavati, apex obtusus vel subtruncatus, J+ve. Ascosporae 18-22.5 (-23.5)  $\times$ 9-10. .75 µm, ellipsoideae, uniseriatae vel inaequaliter bisscriatas, primum hyalinaeet lenes, fulvopallidae et ornamentatae, ornamentum constans longis striationibus (fere 2-4) anastomosantibus, plerumque tumefactis mucilaginosa substantia in uno duobus polid. Paraphyses ad 3  $\mu m$  latae infra, amplae supra ad 5 μm, tenuitunicatae, simplices vel ramosae, rectae, in flavo muco iacentes.

Anatomia: Excipulum non clare differentiatum ab exipulo ectale et medullare; textura angularis, ad  $142~\mu m$  crassa, cellae ad  $36 \times 28.5~\mu m$ , fere horizontaliter clongatae; hypothecium ad  $50~\mu m$  crassum, textura intricata ex hyphis compaginatis, tenuitunicatis, simulantibus testuram angularem, cellae ad  $12~\mu m$  latae.

Substratum: in stercore vaccarum.

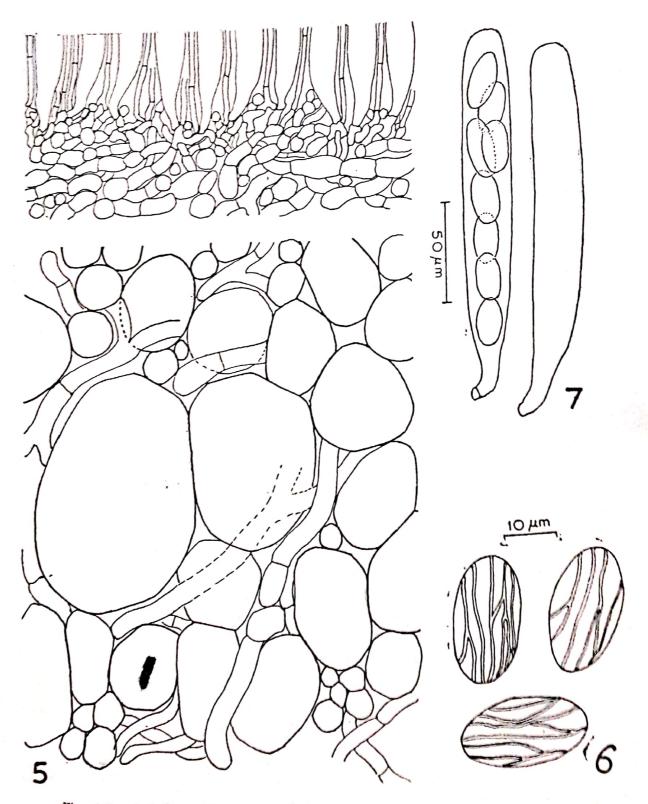
Holotypus: S. Chander 2488 (PAN), in stercore vaccarum, Chandanwari, Pahalgam, J & K, Aug. 1972; S. Chander 2591 (PAN) in stercore vaccarum in itinere in Khillanmarg, Gulmarg, J & K, Aug. 18, 1974.

Apothecia up to 3 mm in diameter, densely gregarious, singly or crowded in small patches, sessile, subglobular when young, later shallow cupulate to somewhat scutcllate, regular, soft, fleshy; external surface pale brown, smooth; margin entire; hymenium orange-yellow when young becoming violet-brown at maturity, roughened by protruding out ascal tips. Asci  $135-180 \times 18-25 \ \mu\text{m}$ , 8-spored, cylindric-clavate, apex obtuse to subtruncate,



Figs. 1-2. Accobolus sub-alpinus Kaushal & Thind.

Fig. 1. V. S. of the apothecium, passing through its middle. Fig. 2. Ascospores. Figs. 3-4. A. immersus Pers. per Pers. Fig. 3. Asci and paraphyses. Fig. 4. Ascospore.



Figs. 5-6. A. furfuraceus Pers. per Hook. Fig. 5. V. S. of the apothecium, passing through its middle. Fig. 6. Ascospores. Fig 7. A. subalpinus. Asci.

J+. Ascospores 18-22.5 (-23.5)  $\times$ 9-10.75  $\mu$ m, ellipsoid, uniseriate to irregularly biseriate, hyaline and smooth when young, pale-brown and ornamented at maturity, ornamentations of longitudinal (usually 2-4) anastomosing striations, mostly swollen at one or both the poles with mucilaginous substance. Paraphyses up to 3  $\mu$ m wide below, enlarged up to 5  $\mu$ m at their apices, thin-walled, simple or branched, straight, embedded in yellow muscus.

Anatomy: Exipulum one layered (not clearly differentiated into ectal and medu llary excipulum), textura angularis, up to 142  $\mu$ m thick, decreasing towards margin, cells up to 36  $\times$ 28.5  $\mu$ m, usually stretched horizontally; hypothecium up to 50  $\mu$ m thick, textura intricata of compactly packed, thin walled hyphae, simulating textura angularis, cells up to 12 um broad.

Substratum: On cow dung.

Collections examined: S. Chander 4888 (PAN) on cow dung, Chandanwari, Pahal gam, J & K, August 30, 1972; S. Chander 2591 (PAN). on cow dung, on way to Khillanmarg, Gulmarg, L & K, August 18, 1974.

Distribution : India.

Comments: A. subalpinus is close to A. scatigenus from which it can be differen tiated by its smaller apothecia, shorter asci and the ascospores, with 2-4 anastomos ing striations, A. denudatus, another species allied to A. sub alpinus can be separated and recognised by presence of sub globu lar rusty brown cells on the external sur face of the apothecia and larger asci  $(120-, 170-230\times13-16-23 \mu m)$ .

Ascobolus furfuraceus Pers. per Hook., Fl. Scot. 2: 33, 1821, Fries, Syst. Myc. 2(1): 163. 1822.

Figs. 5-6.

Apothecia up to 5 cm in diameter, densely gregarious to crowded together,

sessile, subglobular when young, later shallow cupulate to saucer shaped, re gular, soft, fleshy; external surface light yellow, minutely furfura ceousto smooth; margin denticuleta; hymenium yellow to yellow green, later becoming brown to brownish black, roughened due to darkbrown protruding out ascal tips. Asci  $190-232\times17-25~\mu\text{m}$ , 8-spored, clavate to cylindric clavate, apices obtuse to subt runcate, J+. Ascospores  $17.5-27\times10.5-$ 31 µm, uniseriate to irregularly biseriate, ellipsoid, hyaline whenyoung, brown to purplish brown at maturity, ornamented, ornamentations consisting of longitudi nal, occasionally anastomosing striations. Paraphyses up to 3.5  $\mu$ m wide below, slightly or not enlarged above., rarely swollen up to 5  $\mu$ m, thinwalled, simple or branched bleow, subhyaline, straight, embedded in yellowish to yellowish-green muscus.

Anatomy: Excipulum one layered, not differentiated into ectal and medulary exipulum, up to 520  $\mu$ m thick, textura globulosa-angularis throughout, with several interspersed hyphae which are up to 12  $\mu$ m broad, cells upto  $115 \times 65 \mu$ m, becoming smaller towards hymenium, covered on the outside at places by subglobular cells, upto 14  $\mu$ m across, pale brown, there are many anchoring hyphae towards centre which sometimes form a thin mat on the outside; hypothecium up to 30  $\mu$ m thick, textura intricata of closely septate hyphae, hyphae up to 5  $\mu$ m across.

Substratum: On dung.

Collections examined: S. Chander 2631 (PAN), on cow dung, Jandri That, Dalhousie, H. P., August 29, 1974; Garaitch 2513 (PAN), on dung heap in open place, Dhanas village, Chandigarh, January 12, 1964; Waraitch 2006 (PAN), on buffalo dung inc coniferous forest, Jakho hills, Simla, H. P., July 23, 1965; Waraitch 2084 (PAN), on buffalo dung in mixed

forest, Bakrota, Dalhousie, H. P., July 26, 1966; Waraitch 2096 (PAN), on buffalo dung in mixed forest, Bakrota, Dalhousie, H. P., July 26, 1966; Dissing s. n. (C), Draved Skov, 10 Km north of Tonder with Lasiobolus ciliatus, September 29, 1967.

Distribution: World-wide.

Gomments: There is a wide range of variation in this species and consequently many forms, varieties and even species have been described for this fungus, mainly on the bases of lack or presence of furfuraceous hairs on the external surface of the apothecia, its size and colour. Such variations are common in the Indian collections as well.

Brummelen (1967) has studied hundreds of collections and has established that various forms (A. furfuraceus var. fuscus Pers.; A. furfuraceus var. coronatus Boud.,; A. stercorarius var. pusillus Vel.; A. furfuraceus var. nudus Kickx.; Peziza stercoria var. lutea Bull.; A. furfuraceus var. flavo-virens Pers.; A. aergineus Fc.; A. marginatus Schum.; A. furfuraceus var. fallons Heim.&; A. minor Vel.) of this fungus are linked by transitional stages. However, the distantly placed episporial striations help in separating this species from the related species.

Brummelen (1967) has described ectal excipulum (excipulum sensu Brummelen) and medullary exoepulum (flesh sensu Brummelen) as two separate zones, both made up of globular, slightly ellipsoid, oblong cells. Observations on anatomical details of the excipulum in the present study are similar except that we do not find any clear distinction between ectal excipulum and medullary excipulum.

Ascobolus immersus per Pers., Mycol. Eur. 1:341. 1822 Figs. 3-4.

Apothecia minute, 0.5-1.0 mm in diameter, scattered to gregarious, sessile, at first semi-immersed and subglobose, later superficial and short cylindric, soft,

fleshy; external surface greenish yellow, becoming pale brown at maturity, with copius attaching hyphae, specially near the base; margin indistinct; hymenium concolorous with external surface when young, later becoming dark brown due to deposition of shot off ascospores, roughned by prominently, protruding out ascal tips. Asci 350-600 (-700) ×50-85 (-100) μm, 8 spored, thick-walled, clavate to cylindric-clavate, tapering below into a short stem-like base, tips obtuse, J+ve, at maturity projecting out more than half their length and visible as black spikelike protuberances. Ascospores 30-50  $(-60) \times 16-33 \mu m$ , oblong-ellipsoid to broadly ellipsoid, uniseriate to biseriate or irregularly disposed, surrounded by a hyaline muscilaginous envelope, at first hyaline, then pale violet, finally violaceous brown, smooth or marked with single longitudinal, obliquely placed striation. Paraphyses up to 3 µm wide below, not or slightly enlarged above at their tips, simple or branched, septate, straight, hyaline, embedded in greenish yellow mus-

Anatomy: Ectal excipulum up to 60 (-85)  $\mu$ m thick, textura angularis, cells up to  $30 \times 22~\mu$ m, thick-walled, pale brown to brown, outer few cells giving rise to anchoring hyphae; medullary excipulum up to 200 (-225)  $\mu$ m thick in the middle, becoming thinner towards margin, textura angularis, cells up to  $42 \times 32~\mu$ m; hypothecium up to 35  $\mu$ m thick, textura globulosa angularis, cells upto 15 (-18)  $\mu$ m across.

Collections examined: Waraitch 2008 (PAN), on buffalodung, Jakoohill, Simla H. P., July 23, 1965; Waraitch 2085 (PAN), on buffalo dung, Bakrota, Dalhousie, H. P., July 19, 1966. Collections from moist chamber at 20°C, 7885 (PAN), on camel dung from village Purchh, Chandigarh, March 23, 1980; 7886

(PAN), on mixed dung from village Purchh, April 20, 1980; 7887 (PAN), on mixed dung from Khuda Lahora, Chandigarh, May 28, 1980; 7888 (PAN), on buffalo dung from Khuda Lahora, Chandigarh, June 2, 1980.

Comments: A. immersus was enlisted from India by Sanwal (1953a) from Delhi and by Batra and Batra (1963) from Mussoorie, Dalhousie and Srinagar, but we have failed to find their collections from herbaria where these are reported to be deposited. However, we have examined the other collections of this fungus from Simla and Dalhousie hills as well as collections which appeared on dung in moist chamber at 20°C in laboratory.

The species is marked by immersed apothecia, very large asci and ascospores which are either smooth or more often with one longitudinal striation. The Indian collections have slightly smaller asci and ascospores than those reported by Brummelen (1967). A. bistisii (Gamundi & Ranalii, which also has immersed apothecia, large asci and ascospores, differs from A. immersus in spore ornamentation, consisting of papillate tubercles simulating a network in fully mature spores.

Ascobolus scaligenus (Berk. & Curt. apud Berk.) Brumm., Persoonia (Suppl.) 1:159.1967.

Although not collected very often, this cosmopolitan species appears to be fairly common in the hills and plains of India. It has perhaps the largest apothecia in the genus.

As discussed by Brummelen (1967) it has been published under several names from different parts of the world. In India, it is reported under three different names viz. A. gollani P. Henn. by Hennings (1901) on the basis of a collection made by W. Gollan from Saharanpur (U. P.), as Aleurina orientalis (Pat.) Sacc. & Syd. by Sydow, H & P. and Butler (1911) on the

basis of a collection made by Butler from Bihar, and as Ascobolus magnificus Dodge by Thind and Batra (1957) on the basis of a collection made by Batra from Mussoorie hills. Brummelen (1967) studied the holotypes of A. gollani Aleurina prientalis and A. magnificus and placed the three under synonymy of A. scatigenus.

The Indian collections examined by us are quite typical of the species, which is characterised by its larger apothecia, pruinose external surface, and the spores having usually a single fissure.

Collections examined: Batra 156 (PAN), on cow dung, Jamna Bridge, Mussoorie, U. P., August 3, 1952; S. Chander 2462 (PAN), on cow dung, Khijjiar, Dalhousie, H. P., August, 5, 1972; Waraitch 2516 (PAN), on dung heap in exposed place, village Lahora, Chandigarh, February 10, 1964; Waraitch 2547 (PAN), on dung heap in exposed place, Mangitar, Sikkim, October, 3, 1964.

Distribution: World-wide.

Ascobolus carbonarius Karst., Fungi Fenn. 463. 1866.

This is a rare species in India and was recorded by Thind and Batra (1957) on the basis of a single collection from Mussoorie hills. A second collection of the species was made from Darjeeling (West Bengal) by Waraitch, a student of the junior author. Both the collections are quite typical of the species. The ascospores are ornamented with closely placed, irregular, isolated warts which do not form a reticulum. Thind and Batra's (1957) diagrams showing reticulately marked spores is probably a misinterpretation of darker (warted) and lighter (without warts) areas. Also, the paraphyses in their collection are mostly undulating or slightly bent, and never as strongly hooked as illustrated by them.

Collections examined: Batra 157 (PAN), on charcoal preparation beds, The

Mussoorie Gardens, Mussoorie, U. P., July 26, 1952; Waraitch 2534 (PAN), on burnt soil and burnt wood pieces in open place, Tenzing Norkey road, Darjeeling, West Bengal, July 27, 1964.

Distribution. North America, Europe, Uganda, India.

Ascobolus geophilus Seaver, Mycologia 8: 196. 1916.

Batra and Batra (1963) included this species in their check list of Indian Discomycetes and remarked that the fungus was common in Mussorrie hills from August to September. However, they cited only one collection (LRB 963 = CUP-I 201). In subsequent years, many fungal forays have been undertaken by the junior author and several others but the species has not been collected again.

A. geophilus is restricted to humid soil covered with algae or on bark of trees covered with mud. The ascospores in this species are finely granular when young and later provided with fine fissures and finally often reticulated or warted.

Distribution: North America, Europe India.

Ascobolus denudalus Fr., Syst. Myc. 2: 162. 1822.

Thind and Waraicth (1971) reported this fungus from Himachal Pradesh. The species is distinguished by the presence of rusty brown powder on the external surface of its aptothecia and brownish hymenium. The outside of the cup is raised to small warts made up of brown, globose, thick-walled cells. The microfeatures of the Indian collections do not differ much from the description given by Brummelen (1967) except for the size of asci, which are

smaller  $(120-180\times13-19\mu\text{m})$  than that reported by Brummelen  $(170-230\times16-23\mu\text{m})$ .

Collections examined: Waraitch 2443 (PAN), on buffalo dung in Oak forest, Fagu, Simla, H. P., September 2, 1961; Waraitch 3037 (PAN), on dead decaying twigs of Impatiens balsemifera, Narkanda, Simla, H. P., August 22, 1965.

Distribution: North America. Europe, India, Pakistan.

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