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A NEW SPECIES OF *DICHOGASTER* (OLIGOCHAETA: OCTOCHEATIDAE) FROM VELLANIKKARA, THRISSUR DISTRICT, KERALA, INDIA

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ABSTRACT: A new species of *Dichogaster* is being reported from Vellanikkara of Thrissur District of Kerala State (India). The present worm shows distinct differences from the nearest related species, *D. affinis*, *D. bolau*i, *D. modiglianii* and *D. saliens*. The diagnostic features of the *D. vellanikkarae* sp. nov. include the presence of epitanylobous prostomium, blunt posterior end, tubular prostate, two pairs of spermathcae with single iridescent diverticula, two lobed gizzard, mid - ventrally 'H'shaped genital patch, male sexual system holandric, highly thickened septa 11/12/13 and slightly thickened in 16/17/18. Of the 200 species of *Dichogaster* were reported previously, only very few have been reported from Kerala.

Key words : *Earthworm, Epitanylobous prostomium, Morphology, Octochaetidae, Taxonomy*