

## Four-year-old Dhanvi from Kozhikode helps discover subterranean eel loach

*This marks the third discovery of a subterranean eel loach species in Kerala in recent years.*



*Pangio juhuae*



Dhanvi Dheera (Juhu)

KOZHIKODE: In a remarkable blend of childhood curiosity and scientific curiosity, a four-year-old girl has become the unlikely face behind the discovery of a new subterranean fish species from Kerala. Dhanvi Dheera, fondly called Juhu, first noticed the unusual fish while playing with water collected from a well in their house during a visit to Naduvannur in Kozhikode district. Her observation prompted her mother Aswani Lalu to investigate further, which eventually led to a groundbreaking scientific revelation.

Aswani, who used to draw water from a dugout perennial well owned by Malol Karthiayani Amma, noticed the tiny eel-like fish and informed local experts. The well, situated at an elevation of 150 m above sea level, receives continuous underground water flow from the hilly terrains of Vallora Mala and drains through a natural subterranean channel, making it an ideal habitat for rare aquatic life.

Responding to the find, a scientific team led by Dr K R Sreenath, Director General of the Fisheries Survey of India, and Dr B Pradeep of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Kozhikode, collected specimens. Detailed morpho-meristic and genetic analysis confirmed that the fish represented an entirely new species. The eel loach was officially named *Pangio Juhu*, in honour of little Juhu who first spotted it.

Their research was published in the Indian Journal of Fisheries, under the title 'Discovery of a new species of troglobitic eel loach from Southern India'. The study was co-authored by scientists Dr K R Aju, Dr Sandhya Sukumaran, Dr Wilson Sebastian, Dr Alvin Anto and Dr Grinson George.

This marks the third discovery of a subterranean eel loach species in Kerala in recent years. *Pangio Bhujia* was first identified in 2019 from Cherinjal in Kozhikode, followed by *Pangio Pathala* from Tiruvalla in Pathanamthitta district in 2022. However, *Pangio Juhu* stands apart with its distinct dorsal fin and more pronounced eyes, suggesting it has retained more surface-dwelling traits than its cousins.