

Porunai River as Legal Person

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Why in News?

Recently, the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court declared the Tamirabharani (Porunai) River in southern Tamil Nadu as a legal person / juristic entity.

Case Background

- The ruling aims to provide the river with legal rights and standing to curb severe environmental degradation and pollution.
- A recent petition highlighted alarming levels of pollution caused by obsequies (funeral/ritual rites) performed along the riverbanks.
- **Pollution Data** - Evidence submitted to the court showed that within a span of just 3 weeks, authorities collected:
 - 90 tonnes of discarded clothes
 - 2 tonnes of ash
 - 3 tonnes of other waste materials from the riverbed.
- The High Court imposed strict protective conditions on state officials and authorities to enforce **bans on dumping ritual/funeral waste into the river.**

Strategic Legal Innovation

- **Overcoming Supreme Court Limits** - In 2023, the Supreme Court of India ruled against conferring "legal personhood" directly on natural, non-living entities.
- **The "Deity" Route** - To work within Supreme Court precedents while achieving an eco-centric outcome, the Madurai Bench declared the river a **deity**, a long-established legal category in Indian law that inherently possesses juristic personality and legal standing.
- **Revival of Eco-Centrism**- This judgement revives India's eco-centric legal tradition (shifting from human-centred "anthropocentric" law to nature-centred "eco-centric" rights).



Reference

[Down to Earth | Tamil Nadu's Porunai river is now a 'legal person'](#)

