

BOOK REVIEW

Valley of Hope: Moyar and Vultures

Byju, H.

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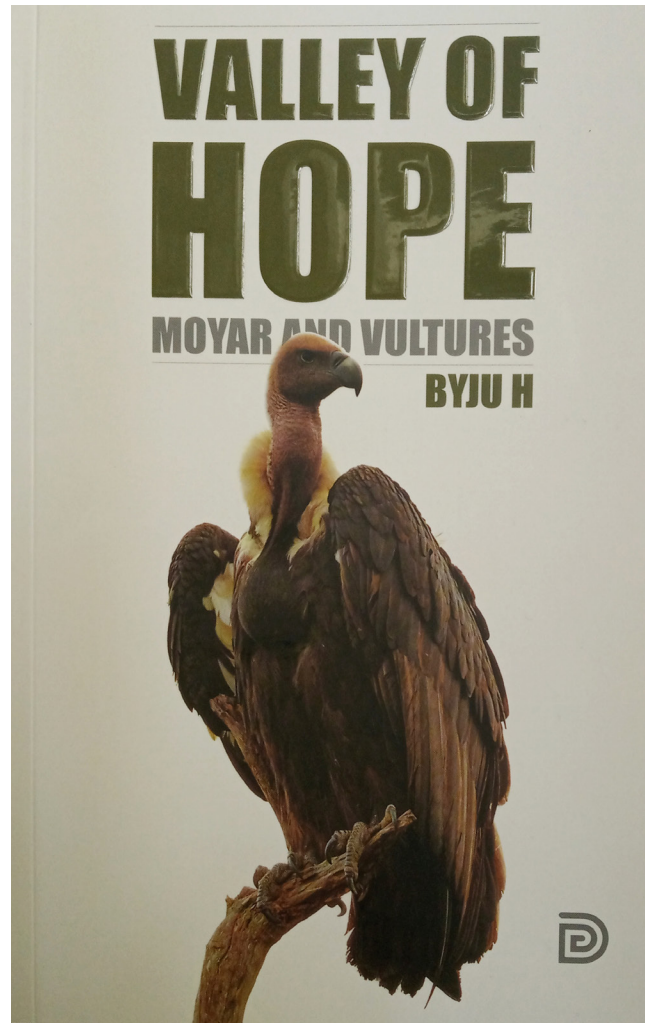
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The author has rightly warned us in his introduction that this is neither a book on vultures nor one on Moyar Valley. However, we find the entire narration is woven around these two basic threads.

Mysore Ditch or Moyar Ditch. How shocking to hear such a phrase for Moyar Gorge of the Nilgiri Biosphere. The British believed that this was responsible for the malarial infection (Hockings 1980). The 20-km Moyar Gorge and the surrounding valley is a unique landscape and terrain which every naturalist dreams to visit. The valley is also providing one breathing space for the magnificent vultures to hide, breed, and soar, especially in southern India.

The author narrates his experience in this 204-page, beautifully laid out, designed, and well-worded book. The black and white pictures placed at the start of every chapter blends well with the mood of the book; colour pictures instead would have spoiled it. It is an easy read, especially if you have been to this terrain as many of the names are familiar. For those who have not been there, the names and terrain may appear from a dreamy scape and eventually when they go, they will be happy to validate.

The author has taken the thread from the time he was introduced into the study project



until its meaningful completion. Although we may not find the results of the study in this book, we can easily infer the purpose of the study and the dedication the team has shown in their quest, in not so easy and welcome terrain, from the author's narrations. For an outsider, the field trips and studies inside a core forest may appear glamorous and charming, as they only see the end results, a mesmerising landscape, portraits of rare

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species and calibrated and filtered out stories; but the reality is different, as is evident in the author's narration of tough trekking paths, dark evenings, unknown mammal calls amidst familiar bird calls, unexpected (but always prepared) collision with mammals, heat and dust, leeches and reptiles on the floor and what not! One need to be careful with resources on hand and be alert physically and mentally. All these are evident as the author unfolds one story after another, in a way not instilling fear in the minds of the readers, as otherwise, many naturalists will stay away from real conservation efforts in the core area along with the forest managers.

Any narration about the Western Ghats is incomplete without referring to the megafauna, Asian Elephant. Whatever be the purpose for which we step into the forest, the gentle giant is omni present, and the valley is no different as we could notice from numerous references the author mentions, along with the poster boy, the Tiger. The author's excitement of seeing not just one, but as many as four in a frame would equally excite us.

The author has divided the book into 18 chapters, each focusing on a specific experience. But a reader need not go through in a sequence; one can randomly pick any chapter and it still makes a good independent read without getting disconnected from the previous chapter.

On an overall perspective, it is a good read about a naturalist's experience in a jungle. It sure indicates the author's passion for the

wildlife experience and some great memories with minute details. The author must be maintaining a well-chronicled diary of the events regularly. It is quite natural that we miss out many names we walk along, but he has a good account of many of these people.

The author has shared many interesting experiences throughout the book. These include a cattle herd standing against an elephant, failing to photograph a panther cub sighting, a forest officer trying to prove that vultures did exist when it was declared that there were none of them in the south of India, and many more.

The book also rightly touches upon issues related to ground level forest management, conservation needs, local people involvement, tribal role in the conservation and natural anger of a conservative-minded naturalist.

The author, H. Byju, deserves full appreciation in bringing out this book, which will be an interesting read, and will inspire many to write such books. Conservation does not confine itself to the ground level actions that are taken, but also taking and talking to the wider audience to understand the same. From that perspective, this book is a welcome addition.

Reference:
Hockings, P. (1980). *Ancient Hindu Refugees.* Mouton Publishers, 128pp.