

Book Review - A concern towards the mighty carrion feeders Author - S. Bharathidasan

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It's no secret that vultures are declining in India. But not many of us know about these magnificent birds, be it the different species of vultures, their ecology, and current status, particularly in the regional context. This is where the book by S. Bharathidasan 'In search of Vultures' sheds a bright light on. Many parts of the book reflect the author's experience with Arulagam, a Coimbatore-based NGO. It appears that Tamil Nadu's citizens were the intended audience for the book. The contents of the book are written in both English (left pages) and Tamil (right pages).

The author begins the piece with a note entitled "Let the vultures rule the skies again", in which he shares his memories of meeting vultures. Next, we get to know the etymological perspective of the vulture, and how the word "Paaru" suits perfectly the different aspects of a vulture. The author also gives us an account of the classification of vultures, a list of nine species that are found in India, and the ones that can be sighted in Tamil Nadu.

Throughout the book, on each page, we get to see high-quality images of different

vulture species. We also get to know the historical recording of vultures in Tamil Nadu, and vultures in culture where we get to know how these birds are an integral part of different cultures and religions. There is something noteworthy about the way the author describes the association between Thirukazhukundram, a village in Tamil Nadu located between Chennai and Thiruttani, and the Egyptian Vultures. The name Thirukazhukundram comes from the words 'Kazughu' meaning eagle and 'Tiru' meaning holy.

The Egyptian Vultures were perhaps thought to be eagles. The author also gives us the scientific facts that explain their decline in this region. Following this, we get to know the supreme adaptations of vultures. The author explains in a very simple manner what makes vultures such perfect carrion feeders. A major theme of the book is the dramatic decline in vultures throughout the world because of a number of factors, including vulture mortality, and the factors that led to this decline, along with the ways in which this decline was brought to light, and the conservation efforts that followed. Also revealed is Arulagam and their efforts to raise awareness and attitudes about vulture conservation.

Although this is a short book on vultures, it manages to cover their different aspects. In a time where our country is currently experiencing a dramatic decline in vulture populations, a book such as this can be

quite useful in raising awareness of vultures in a concise and sweet way. I would only suggest that the order of the contents be rearranged, for example, placing the historical, and cultural background, together in the beginning, followed by the scientific content.



Rock-habitat ©Shashikumar B

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