

1. "The Ways of the Weather", by P.A. Menon, National Book Trust, Rs. 33/-, 1993.
2. " Robots and Robotics", by M.R. Chidambara, National Book Trust, Rs. 24/-, 1994.
3. " Wind Energy", by Suneel B. Athawale, National Book Trust, Rs. 26/-, 1994. ©
4. " Of Science and Scientists, An anthology of Anecdotes", by A.N. Kothare, S.S. Palsule, S.M. Parekh and M.P. Navalkar, National Book Trust, Rs. 43/-, 1994.
5. "Preservation of Art Objects and Library Materials", by O.P. Agrawal, National Book Trust, Rs. 40/-, 1993.

The near complete absence of indigenous popular science literature is shameful in a country which has a huge pool of trained scientific human resources. Fortunately, in the last few years, some efforts are being made to correct this anomaly. National Book Trust has been bringing out a series of books on popular science which promise to fill this gap.

"Ways of the Weather" is an introduction to the science of meteorology written for the lay audience. It attempts to make accessible not only the complex processes which give rise to the weather but also delves into the actual practice of forecasting. Apart from explaining in a simple way the concepts used by meteorologists to understand and predict weather, there is a whole section on the weather in India. The centrality of climatic conditions in our socioeconomic life is highlighted. Though the level of the book is somewhat uneven, it is well written with many illustrations and can serve as a good introduction to the amazingly complex phenomenon of weather which continues to baffle human kind even today.

Ever since recorded history, human beings have been fascinated by mechanical "men" who carried out simple tasks. Interesting contraptions like the doors which opened automatically when some "sacred" ash was sprinkled or birds which sang were devised but the first robots came into existence in the sixties. These were fairly primitive and simple devices which were used in industry for material transfer. The field of robotics has grown rapidly in the last two decades thanks to the revolutions in microelectronics and computer technology. In fact today, there are an estimated 250,000 industrial robots in Japan alone! "Robots and Robotics" is a very good introduction to this fascinating field. From the different types of robots to their varied applications, it covers a lot of ground. There is enough detail about various topics to satisfy the well informed reader though sometimes the style is somewhat terse.

The oil crisis of the seventies, disastrous in many ways certainly made the world aware for the first time of the need to develop alternative sources of energy. Solar energy, tidal power and wind energy were some of the areas which received a lot of attention by the scientific community not only because of their renewable nature but also because they are clean sources of energy. With the increasing danger of global warming, it is imperative that we

develop eco-friendly power sources which can sustain increasing standards of living. "Wind Energy" is a delightful small book which introduces us to this unusual source of energy. Starting with a brief history of the use of wind power, it lucidly explains the theory and construction of a variety of wind mills and their applications. The book has clear diagrams and illustrations to supplement the very easy to follow text. There is also a discussion of future prospects of wind energy. Surprisingly, the author is a medical practitioner who has been interested in wind energy and has done a substantial amount of work in the field. Incidentally, this is the only volume among the books under review that has a glossary of technical terms. For any book on a technical subject written for a layperson, a collection of technical terms is very useful and the editors of the series should try and incorporate this in their future publications.

In New York, a journalist once asked Sir Alexander Fleming (the discoverer of penicillin) just as he was about to have his breakfast, "Sir, what are you thinking about right now? We would like to know what a great scientist thinks while getting ready for breakfast." Fleming, after thinking for a while, replied, "I am thinking, whether to have one egg or two!" This is one of the many delightful anecdotes about scientists collected in "Of Science and Scientists". The book covers a wide range, both in time (from Euclid, the Greek mathematician who lived in the 4 century BC to Lynn Margulis, the contemporary American microbiologist famous for her Gaia hypothesis) and in the range of subjects (from microbiology to geology). For each scientist, there is a short biographical sketch followed by a few anecdotes from his/her life. Through these sketches, the authors succeed in bringing out the human side of these great scientists which is unfortunately usually ignored in the usual process of myth building about great men. Though there are many entries of Indian scientists, sometimes, as in the case of P.C. Mahalanobis and Birbal Sahni, we are left with a skeleton biography with no anecdotes. Surely if the authors could find anecdotes about Euclid, they could have found some interesting things about the life and work of great Indian scientists. ©

"Preservation of Art Objects and Library materials" is an introduction to the often neglected science of conservation of artefacts and books. Written by a renowned conservator, it is divided into two parts. In the first part, the author deals with the causes and agents which are responsible for damage to objects. Apart from the well-known agents of destruction like insects and fungus, there is also a discussion of how climate, light and even mishandling of objects causes damage. In the second part the actual conservation of a variety of objects and materials, from paintings to ceramics is covered. The style of writing is very reader friendly and the coverage is not only exhaustive but also self-contained. Though the actual techniques of conservation may not be too much use to the lay reader, they certainly highlight the fact that today, conservation is very much a science. The conservator today needs to have not only knowledge about the objects he/she deals with but also needs to know about techniques in chemistry and physics which are now an integral part of the discipline.

Though all the books are meant for the lay audience, they are not entirely accessible to children (however older high school children may find them comprehensible and exciting). The level of different books is uneven but then that is expected in a series. The books are well produced (the quality of illustrations needs some improvement though) and inexpensive. There is also an irritating absence of an index and even a suggestion for further reading. These need to be incorporated in future editions to enhance their usefulness. These points notwithstanding, National Book Trust needs to be congratulated for pioneering work in this much neglected field of popular science.

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