

## Popular Science

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CSIR Golden Jubilee Series:

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2. Mining the Ocean by T.K.S.Murthy, 1991, Rs. 15/-©
3. His Master's Slave by T.Bhattacharya, 1991, Rs. 15/-©
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Even with the impressive progress in science and technology made by our country, one conspicuous failure of our science and technology establishment has been the gross neglect of popular science. There have hardly been any books on popular science or even a widely read science magazine; and this in a country with one of the largest scientific human resources. This has certainly contributed towards a lack of a genuine scientific culture among the people and has also led to a general ignorance about the research going on in our own scientific establishments.©

The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has made a good beginning towards promoting indigenous popular science writing. This set of books, brought out in its golden jubilee year by CSIR on a variety of scientific topics aims to ".whet the varied appetites of the target readership and spur them onto gathering further knowledge..."The books, on a variety of subjects are written by people who have been active in research in the various fields.©

The human body is a fascinating entity. The complexity, the specialization of functions and the robustness of the various parts makes it one of the most impressive of nature's creations. The body is however continually being attacked by a variety of microbes which the immune system fights against to maintain a healthy state. "Body's Battles" is an account of the human immune system which includes the description of the system, the various mechanisms for fighting infections and other fascinating topics like rejection of transplanted organs. It is well written, provides the lay reader with adequate details and weaves in history to make it very readable. Another book in the series on the human body is the "Mind Master". Written in an easy style, it strives to explain many interesting things related to the human brain; from the neurophysiology of the brain to more speculative ideas about memory, cognition etc., are discussed in an interesting and instructive fashion. ©

Even though the earlier optimism regarding intelligent machines seems to be belied, there is no doubt that the last few years have seen a tremendous growth in the power of computers. "His Master's Slave" and "Artificial Intelligence" are two of the books which explore the domain of computers. "His Master's Slave" is a good introduction to personal computers. It doesn't assume any familiarity with computers and explains all the concepts while simplifying the jargon. "Artificial Intelligence" is more ambitious in that it tries to make accessible a more challenging and specialized field. It succeeds admirably in this with the use of good examples and analogies.

Among the other books there is a noteworthy monograph on the physics of stars, "Inside Stars", which once again is very well written and informative. The rest of the books are in the broad area of the science of materials. "Plastic Feast" describes the properties, structure and applications of this ubiquitous material. "Ceramics are Forever" and "Hardy Composites" deal with advanced materials which are finding increasing application in everything, from carbon fiber tennis racquets to high temperature superconductors. ©

All the books are affordable, well produced and written in an easy readable style with a glossary of technical terms for reference. The quality of the many illustrations leaves much to be desired and they sometimes seem silly and irrelevant. A reference list would have been very helpful for the reader who wanted to follow up on the subject.

The purpose of good popular science writing is to simplify without trivializing, to inspire the reader to read more about the subject and to inform and excite students about frontline research. These books, even with their shortcomings make a very good beginning in achieving these objectives. One only hopes that CSIR keeps up this good work and more importantly translates these into Indian languages to be useful and accessible to a much wider audience. ©