

“ Ghadi”, by Navkala Rai, Children’s Book Trust, Rs. 12 (2002).
“Relgaadi”, by Navkala Rai, Children’s Book Trust, Rs. 12 (2001)
“Jahaaz”, by Navkala Rai, Children’s Book Trust, Rs. 12 (2001)
“Hawai Jahaaz”, by Navkala Rai, Children’s Book Trust, Rs. 12 (2001)
“Motor Car”, by Navkala Rai, Children’s Book Trust, Rs. 12 (2001)
“Telephone”, by Navkala Rai, Children’s Book Trust, Rs. 12 (2001)
(All part of Kyaa aur Kaise series)
“Rangon ke Mahima” by Kanta S. Pal Dhawan, Children’s Book Trust, Rs. 17(2002)
“Upyogi Aavishkaar”, Children’s Book Trust, Rs. 35 (2001)
“Pedh-Paudhon kaa Rahasymay Sansaar”, by Rajendar Kumar Rajeev, Children’s Book Trust, Rs. 21 (2001)
“Parmaanoo se Naino Praudhogiki tak: Vigyaan ke Aashcharya”, Children’s Book Trust, Rs. 75 (2002)
“Vyaktitav Vikaas Aur Yog”, by Minakshi Swami, Children’s Book Trust, Rs. 25 (2001).

One of the fondest memories I have of my childhood was when my father brought me a copy of the classic book How Things Work. I was absolutely enthralled and fascinated by the book. Its clear illustrations, user friendly, concise explanations for children and laymen alike were just what a 10 year old would want. A 10 year old who has almost infinite curiosity to know about things, especially technologies which he sees or has heard about.

Children’s Book Trust has brought out several books in a series called “Kyaa aur Kaise” (“What and How”) on various technologies that we encounter. Automobile, Watch, Railways, Airplanes and Telephone are some of the subjects. The books are well written and interesting for children of the age group 5-10. The explanation of the technology is interspersed with historical anecdotes and curious facts. The language is for the most part accessible though at some places it does get somewhat technical. The disappointing part about the books is the quality of illustrations. Most of them are in the nature of line drawings which is understandable if the price of the books need to be kept low. However, I am sure we can find good illustrations who can make clear line drawings which can help in explaining the principles involved in the technology. Once again, I am reminded of “How Things Work” where the line drawings were exceptionally good.

“Rangon ki Mahima” is an exploration of the fascinating world of color. Told in a story form, the explanations are interesting and clear. The facts and explanations are weaved well in the form of a question answer session that children have with their grandfather whom they are visiting in

the summer vacations. The book is not very ambitious and only tries and explain some basic facts like the colour of the sky and rainbows etc. This it does competently and in a language that is easy to understand by children.

From our everyday bicycle to superconductivity, "Upyogi Aavishkar" is a series of essays on some inventions which have changed our lives or will play a major role in the future. Though railways played a major role in the industrial development, it is the humble bicycle with which most children can readily identify. The history and the evolution of the bicycle from its primitive design in 1813 to the present day cycles is presented. The technological transformation in the design and operation of railways, especially railways in India is the subject of another essay. The other essays are on robots, rockets and superconductivity. The rockets and robot pieces are good while the one on superconductivity is a bit more advanced for children. This is of course understandable because the phenomenon itself is not easy to understand since to explain it, one needs to use quantum physics. Nevertheless, the article tries to focus on latest developments like high temperature superconductivity and magnetically levitating trains.

Did you know that there is a plant in Guinea called the butter tree whose seeds give an oil which tastes like butter? Or that the seeds of a plant in Arabia are such that if a person ingests them, it makes her laugh! These and many other wonderful pieces of information are presented in the book "Pedh-Paudhon kaa Rahasymay Sansaar". The wonderful and mysterious world of plants has fascinated many scientists including the famous J.C. Bose who conducted many experiments to show that plants show signs of sensitivity to stimuli. Bose's work is mentioned in the book though some of the other research mentioned is not totally without controversy. When one is writing for children, I think it is best to stay away from controversial facts since the children have no means of checking them. Yes, some of the experiments and results mentioned make for interesting reading and are sensational, but they are by no means totally confirmed and are not accepted by botanists in general. Once again, the quality of illustrations leaves much to be desired.

It seems almost unbelievable that today scientists are routinely manipulating materials on the scale of a billionth of a meter or a nanometer. In fact, nanotechnology is supposed to be the next frontier in science, especially as far as applications are concerned. From nanomotors which will clean up clots inside arteries to devices to monitor blood sugar levels, the potential applications of nanotechnology are mind boggling. "Parmaanoo se Naino Praudhogiki tak: Vigyaan ke Aashcharya" talks about several topics in science like gravitation, friction, simple machines, lasers, earthquakes, radar, sound and the story of the atom. The essays are by

various people and are by and large informative. The level is not really for very young children but for young adults. The line drawings once again, are disappointing.

“Vyaktitav Vikaas Aur Yog” is a book on the efficacy of yoga for overall development of the mind and the body. This book would not be very attractive for children because of its very nature. Nevertheless, the book stresses the elementary fact about yoga which is usually missed by most people, that yoga is a way of life and not just a collection of exercises. In fact, exercises form a small part of the whole system of yoga and if the system is followed rigorously, it can provide for a healthy mind and body.

The scenario for science books for children is depressing in India. The primary aim of writing science for children should be to inform them of facts, kindle their natural curiosity and nudge them towards thinking for themselves. For this purpose, it is important that books be packaged attractively (not necessarily expensively) and stress on learning science by doing and thinking. Unfortunately, none of the books reviewed above try and do that. All of them are basically compendiums of facts about scientific topics. In fact, barring the wonderful books by Arvind Gupta, there is nothing else written in India (as far as I know) which could be described as books written for children which coax them into thinking about scientific principles. Nevertheless, given that the scenario in India is so bleak, these books from Children’s Book Trust are welcome. At least they will fulfill the huge thirst for information which exists among the non-English speaking children. CBT should continue their efforts and try and publish books which would get the children to think about science. Let us not forget that it is only when our children start thinking creatively about science will we as a nation have a chance in tomorrow’s science and technology dominated world. And good books especially for children have an important role to play in making children curious and hence scientifically inclined.