

Their senses have been numbed by a wide variety of formulae and theorems, which they are encouraged to commit to memory by teachers. Most teachers lay emphasis on accuracy and rote learning rather than laying emphasis on the conceptual aspects of the subject.

The use of gamification and everyday problem statements to make the concepts clear can make the learning process more enjoyable. It also helps in bridging the theory to application divide. In this context, the two books under review are useful to make maths more interesting for young students.

*Being a Mathematician* by Gayatri Kalra Sehgal is a book where the author through a wide variety of activities brings out key mathematics concepts whether it is measurement concepts, or tracking of time, addition or multiplication. It will be useful to children in the primary school, who are being introduced to the basic mathematical concepts. In particular, parents/teachers will find the introduction to the book very useful to help them make the early learning of maths for their kids/students both interesting and rewarding.

The second book under review is *Math Problems with Dinosaurs*, by Rakesh Khanna, aimed at mid to senior school students, and introduces a number of mathematical concepts using problems around dinosaurs. As the author states, it is not a regular math text-book. The concepts are nicely brought out by creating a wide variety of situations in which the readers have to exercise their mind as to which mathematical concept is most appropriate.

Both books are written in simple style and it is really the content and the activities that make them good reference material for young students.

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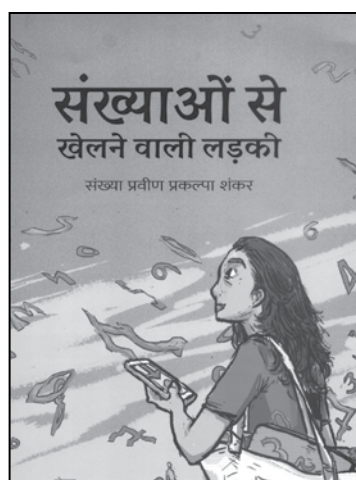
## Deepali Shukla

### SANKHYAON SE KHELNE WALI LADKI: SANKHYA PRAVEEN PRAKALPA SHANKAR (*THE GIRL WHO PLAYED WITH NUMBERS*)

By Shreyasi Singh. Illustrations by Ray/Roy. Translated from the English into Hindi by Puja Omveer Rawat  
Pratham Books, 2019, pp.16, ₹50.00

After reading the second line of the title of the book, I wondered about the meaning of Sankhya Praveen. Is Prakalpa so well acquainted with numerals and numeric functions that she was conferred with this title? But as soon as you read the story, the mystery unfolds. The story isn't about Prakalpa, but about the initiative she has led; Social Caps, a company that extensively deals with quantitative data analysis. Now, the adjective *Sankhya Praveen* seems somewhat out of place.

This book explains how Prakalpa's company works and collects data at the ground level through different tools. It explores the how and why of government processes like the selection of beneficiaries from data sourced at the



community level, analysis of the number of children who fell ill after eating mid-day meals at school, and so on. The book is divided in two parts. The first part explains Prakalpa's interest in numbers and figures and the second part narrates the story of transforming this interest into a company. I feel interest and expertise are two different things and should not be confused with each other. But this confusion is evident in the title.

The Hindi translation of this book could have been better. At some places the sentence structure is complex, thus affecting the flow of the story, making it difficult to understand what is intended to be conveyed. The title and cover page create an impression that it's an illustrated biography, but the text reveals that it's an information book.

There are finely detailed descriptions in the pictures portraying social diversity but even here, the nuances are missing in some places, for example, in the facial expressions.

For children who are fluent in reading, this book will be more meaningful only when they are given some space to think. At present, the book offers no such scope.

**Deepali Shukla** loves reading, especially children's books. An enthusiastic photographer and storyteller, she is associated with the publication programme of Eklavya Foundation for more than ten years.



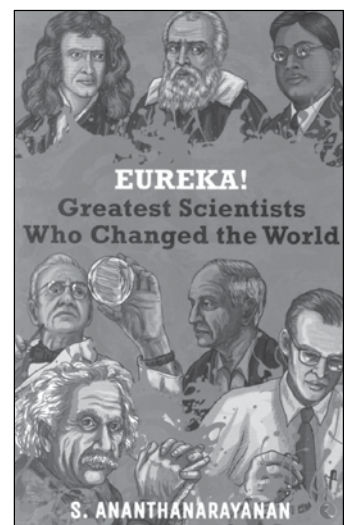
## Vinatha Viswanathan

### EUREKA! GREATEST SCIENTISTS WHO CHANGED THE WORLD

By S Ananthanarayanan  
Rupa, 2019, pp. 237, ₹295.00

The book is a quick run through scientists from the early Greeks to those in the twentieth-century as is. From Pythagoras to Har Gobind Khurana, this book is a chronological Who's Who of the giants in science from the 6th century BCE to just past the mid-twentieth century. Barring a few names, it is likely that you have heard of most of the names either in the news, in text-books or popular science articles on the history of science. The book talks about the greatest accomplishments of these scientists, the challenges they faced and how they fared, in a few pages for each. In 55 chapters it speaks of the contributions of 60 scientists. Each story is well-written and in the easygoing style that author is known for in his popular science articles. Various topics of science are represented in this tale of sciences—astronomy, physics, chemistry and the life sciences.

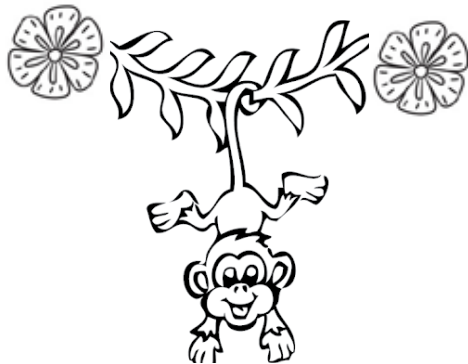
The book is not difficult to read, and can be read by a young or an older adult. The sections about the struggles and triumphs of scientists, the stories of their lives are particularly engaging. However, the book is unlikely to appeal to the uninitiated. It is likely to appeal to those already interested in science and the work of scientists. The



brevity makes for a superficial treatment of some of the discoveries that have changed the world we live in. This treatment may therefore leave some readers with a sense of dissatisfaction, but maybe it will make you reach out for in-depth treatises that will tell you more; some of these chapters may whet your appetite for science and the lives and times of scientists. All through the book, the author's grasp of a wide range of topics in science is apparent. Some statements are delightful, as is this one early on in the book—that the way Euclid laid out mathematics is essentially the way it is laid out in our text-books today!

On the whole, the book is what it claims to be—a glimpse into how some of the most important concepts and principles in science came to be.

**Vinatha** is an ecologist by training, works as an editor and science communicator at Eklavya Foundation, Bhopal. She enjoys spending time with her cat, her daughter, and watching TV serials.



## Susan Visvanathan

### 501 FACTS FACTORY: AMAZING BUILDINGS OF THE WORLD

By Sreelata Menon

Hachette India, Gurugram, 2019, pp.170, ₹299.00

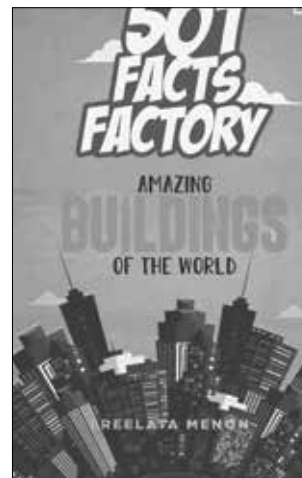
Sreelata Menon has engaged in a labour of love. The task she took on was huge, and yet, while discussing 501 architectural facts about buildings all over the world, she has succeeded in being lucid and interesting. Young people who have a skill for memory tests or general knowledge facts will find this a very interesting collection. The chapters are titled very clearly into Castles, Churches, Clock Towers, Forts, Homes, Libraries, Lighthouses, Mausoleums and Tombs and concludes with the sections on Temples, Towers and Unusual Buildings. There are 21 chapters and include Mausoleums and Tombs, Mosques, Museums, Nature Inspired Buildings, Opera Houses, Theatres and Concert Halls, Palaces, Residences of Heads of State, Skyscrapers, and Synagogues.

What is provided for ever curious teens, and literate preteens, with computer facilitation, is a map of the world, where time is presented not linearly, or chronologically, but in terms of dates, figures, descriptions of places as mnemonics, and some typically found, or commonplace, photographs of the place defined. It takes about 8 to 10 hours to read the book, though it is of only 170 pages. The line drawing facing the first chapter is peculiarly beautiful. Publishers have always depended on some image, it could be paragraph breakers which are aesthetically pretty, when they feel the book might not otherwise attract attention. Here, the one drawing to catch your attention is an image like a heart beat's rhythm on a cardiograph, but is actually a row of continuous buildings.

Menon's attempt is to show in brief paragraphs that the world is composed of a multiplicity, and that every war leads to a structural

transformation, representing the ideology of the conqueror or the surviving victim. As a result, monuments and city plans and gardens bring to us a statement of what rulers or presidents wanted us to observe. Children will find in this little handbook a delightful memoir of the armchair traveller, all the places and palaces that people want to see. Of course, most children have a 'palace complex' which novelists attempt to fulfill through their stories, because the metaphor of luxury and flagrant consumption still exists in the world. The net and Wikipedia would be encyclopedias, which provide easy access to the sites mentioned. Since tourism is no longer limited to the wealthy, but senior citizens and backpack students have also access to air and train travel, before the world subsides into a natural entropy, this beautifully produced book would be a good entry point into just how much there is in the world to see.

There is a problem with the ink though, as the starting lines of each para are in thick printers ink, (bold) and the rest of the para shifts to very pale ink. These are the detrimental features of believing that children underline their copies and text-books. It is irrelevant why Hachette's designer did this because it somehow hurts the ancient mariner's eyes. I think the world of design must move away from the Shakespearean notion of the four stages of life, and imagine that children's book are immensely of interest to old people, as they are expected to entertain their grandchildren, and reading aloud is one of their hobbies. This is called by Radcliffe Browne, 'the merging



of alternate generations' as grandchildren learn a lot from grandparents, who have time on their hands. Elders are expected to enjoy the time they spend looking after grandchildren, and one way is to share the same interests that children have. A love for journeys, short outings to museums and memorials is one way that bonding occurs.

While it has an international focus, and a cosmopolitan appeal, Sreelata Menon imagines that children will be intrigued by how many bricks go into making a building, where marble is sourced, and how different temples, and religious associations provide for tourist appeal. In this sense, it is a verbal and concise map, allowing us to go forward into the iconography of the net, where we may make virtual tours. For her, India is interspersed with the other countries of the world in such a way, that we are meshed with the world's histories in an interesting way. Item 333 in *501 Facts*, however, had me a little confused:

'The Grand Palace in Bangkok, Thailand houses the famous temple of the Emerald Buddha. The Emerald Buddha traces its roots to India around 500 hundred years ago from where it was brought after the Lord Buddha attained nirvana. It was enshrined in the Wat Phra Kaew temple within the palace grounds in 1782, when the palace was built during Rama's reign. This is a 26 in seated meditating Buddha made of green emerald stone and clothed in gold' (p. 113). The second sentence seems a little displaced chronologically. No other printers' devils were noted.

**Susan Visvanathan** is Professor of Sociology, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her latest collection of short stories is titled *Adi Sankara and Other Stories* (2017). She has edited with Vineetha Menon, a festschrift for Prof TK Oommen titled *Chronology and Events: The Sociological Landscape of Changing Concepts* (Winshield Press, 2019). Susan Visvanathan is also the Editor of *Structure, Innovation and Adaptation* (Winshield Press, 2019) and *Art, Politics, Symbols and Religion* (Winshield Press, 2019) which are essays, dedicated to the Founders of Centre for the Study of Social Systems, JNU.