

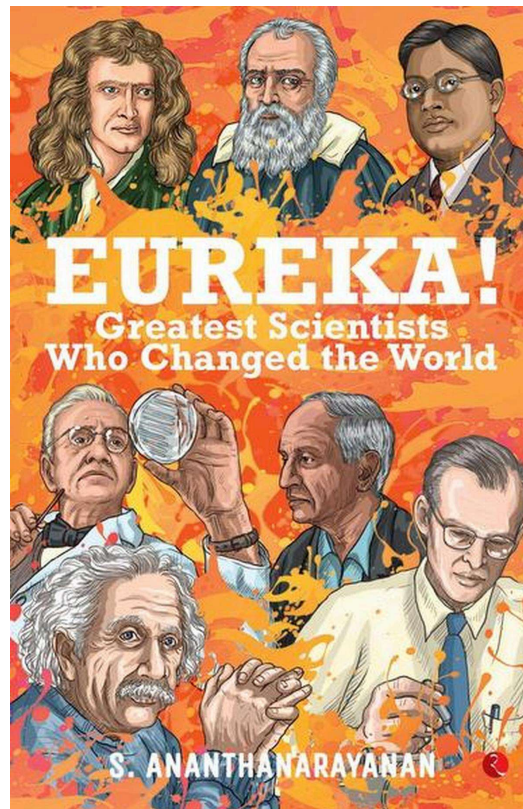
‘Eureka! Greatest Scientists who Changed the World’ review: Recreating great discoveries

A science writer fluently portrays the lives of 60 scientists, but includes only two women

Published – November 02, 2019 05:21 pm IST



ASWATHI PACHA



In the early 18th century, Joseph Priestley, an English preacher, was intrigued by the peculiar smells that came from the brewery near his residence and started studying them. He noted that the gas could put out glowing embers, dissolve in water and give it a tangy taste. He had discovered carbon dioxide.

In *Eureka! Greatest Scientists who Changed the World*, science writer S.

Ananthanarayanan tells us such stories behind famous discoveries and in the process offers short accounts of the lives of 60 scientists.

Eureka moments

Though the book's preface notes that the list is incomplete and that the choice can always be questioned, the author has done justice by highlighting the main torchbearers across different fields ranging from astronomy, mathematics, and physics to medicine and genetics.

The book starts with Greek mathematician Euclid who lived around 300 BCE, takes us through the tales of big names such as Galileo, Newton, Darwin and concludes with the story of 1968's Nobel Prize winners for Physiology or Medicine.

Each chapter, just two to three pages, contains a story of the challenges faced, sudden Eureka moments and how secrets of science were unravelled. The book is an easy read and a perfect gift for anyone interested in science. The book can give you a whole range of conversation starters that you can use in daily life. Over a cup of coffee, ask your colleague, "Hey, did you know that a physicist invented the drip-pot coffee percolator which gives you filter coffee?", or over a drink tell friends the story of how rum was used during surgeries. My personal favourites — Leeuwenhoek who called microbes 'animalcules', cleanliness freak Joseph Lister, Robert Hooke and his insect anatomy book *Micrographia* — have all made it to this curated list.

The chosen four

In 2004, the author had published *Icons from the World of Science* in which he highlighted the works of 10 Indian scientists. But unfortunately only four of them entered the new book of 60 scientists — S.N. Bose, Nobel Prize winners C.V. Raman, and the India-born Americans, S. Chandrasekhar and Har Gobind Khorana.

Published in 2019, one would expect the book to stretch to the lives of a few 21st century scientists too, but it fails to do so. The final chapter set in the 1960s is on Marshall W. Nirenberg, Robert W. Holley and Indian biochemist Khorana and tells their journey to

uncover the genetic sequence or code leading to the sensational outburst in the field of genetics.

Also, the book talks about only two female scientists, astronomer Henrietta Swan Leavitt and two-time Nobel winner Marie Curie. With WikiProject Women Scientists running strong and India's The Life of Science project working hard to bring women scientists to the limelight, the author could have, or rather should have, included a few more women scientists.

Unfortunately, the bright orange cover also carries a 'manel' clearly showcasing the lack of diversity. The book is, however, a good place to start for anyone wanting to know the history behind famous scientific discoveries.

Eureka! Greatest Scientists who Changed the World; **S. Ananthanarayanan, Rupa, ₹295.**

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