

# A quantitative analysis of book reviews published in *Current Science*: 2002–2005

Susanta Koley\* and B. K. Sen

*This article presents results of the analysis of 325 book reviews published in Current Science during 2002 to 2005. The analysis shows that around 60% books were original works produced by single, double or multiple authors. The rest were collected works including two journals, corporate works, and a translation. The documents reviewed comprised mostly monographs (90%) followed by annual reviews and others. The largest number of documents reviewed belong to pure sciences (73%), followed by applied sciences (24%), and others (3%). Of the documents reviewed, 52.62% were published abroad and the rest 47.38% in India. Books containing 151 to 350 pages accounted for about 53% of the books. It is noticed that the number of books reviewed per year in Current Science varies from 60 to more than 100. Of the books reviewed, 71 were published from Delhi, 27 from Hyderabad, 24 each from New Jersey and Basel, 21 from New York, and the rest from other places. Publishers responsible for bringing out 321 books (publishers not mentioned in four cases) total 124. Birkhauser Verlag and Princeton University accounted for 26 books each, University Press (India) Ltd 24, Annual Review Inc. 18, MIT Press 13, Springer Verlag 12 books, and others less than 10 books. Prices were not mentioned in about 33% book reviews, possibly because the books did not provide the information. About 47% books were above the price range of Rs 1000. The minimum price of a book was found to be Rs 35 and maximum Rs 14,850. A large number of scientists shouldered the responsibility of reviewing books, foremost amongst them being C. P. Rajendran, M. S. Swaminathan, T. J. Pandian, S. Arunachalam and K. R. Rao.*

**Keywords:** Bibliometric study, book reviews, *Current Science*, quantitative analysis.

## Introduction

A book review is a form of literary criticism in which the content, style and merit of a book is analysed. It is often published in periodicals and newspapers<sup>1</sup>. The length of a book review varies from a single paragraph to a lengthy essay. The main purposes of book reviews, among others, are to bring a new book to the notice of general public that ensures an indirect publicity to the book; to highlight its content, merits, and demerits if any; and to point out for which classes of readers the book will be useful. A book review by a renowned scholar obviously is valued more. If the scholar speaks well about a book, its sale obviously increases. The reverse is also true. Book reviews generally carry more weight than the regular advertisement of the book. There are periodicals like *Current Science* and *Nature* that devote a section for book reviews. Some periodicals are exclusively devoted to book reviews.

Publication of book reviews is a regular feature of *Current Science*. It is a multidisciplinary journal, and thus draws books pertaining to all fields of science and technology for review. The reviewers who are attached to the journal are well known in their respective fields. Thus, the reviews published in the journal are given enough weightage by scientists and librarians.

In the Book Review section of a periodical, sometimes reviews of new journals, special issues of journals, reports, conference proceedings, reports, etc. are also encountered. Here also, those types of documents have been encountered and included in the study.

The number of book reviews published in the country in newspapers and periodicals is quite substantial. That is not the case with the number of articles published on book reviews in India. We could locate only a few articles on the subject<sup>2-5</sup>. Guha<sup>2</sup>, in his highly informative article, discussed various aspects of book reviews. Biswas and Mohanta<sup>3</sup> discussed how book reviews can be effectively utilized in collection development in library and information science. Satarkar *et al.*<sup>4</sup> dwelt on the book reviews published in *The Hindu*. To our knowledge, no bibliometric study has so far been carried out with the book reviews published in *Current Science*. Hence, this study.

Susanta Koley is in the Durgapur Institute of Advanced Technology & Management, Rajbandh, Durgapur 713 212, India; B. K. Sen lives in 80 Shivalik Apartments, Alaknanda, New Delhi 110 019, India.

\*For correspondence. (e-mail: sushantakoley@yahoo.com)

## Objectives

The objectives of this study are to quantitatively analyse the following aspects of book reviews published in the journal.

Types of works  
 Authorship pattern  
 Forms of documents  
 Subject-wise distribution of books reviewed  
 Nationality of books  
 Books according to pages  
 Chronological distribution of reviews  
 Places of publication  
 Publishers  
 Prices  
 Reviewers

## Scope

This study is confined to 325 book reviews published in *Current Science* during 2002–2005. The reviews included among others monographs, journals, handbooks, manuals, annual reviews, and conference proceedings.

## Methodology

The necessary data for this study collected from 95 issues of the journal published during January 2002 to December 2005 was recorded on cards. For generating various information from the data, cards were handled manually.

## Analysis and results

### *Types of works*

In this case, books have been categorized as original works, collected works, translation and works of corporate bodies.

- (i) An original work is a book that has been singly or jointly written, revised, enlarged or updated by personal authors.
- (ii) Collected works are basically books produced under editorial direction and contain among others articles contributed by different authors or bodies.
- (iii) Translation is a work rendered from one language into another, or from an older form of a language into the modern form, more or less closely following the original works.
- (iv) Corporate works are books produced by corporate bodies.

Table 1 indicates that of the books reviewed, 193 (59.38%) are original works, 120 (36.92%) collected works, and 10 (3.08%) corporate works.

### *Authorship pattern*

Authorship pattern indicates the number of books produced by single, double or multiple authors. Collected works, translations, and corporate works have not been considered in this case. Table 2 reveals that of the original books reviewed, more than 70 per cent were single-authored, around 22 per cent were two-authored, and the rest were by three or more authors.

### *Forms of documents*

Table 3 reflects the forms of documents reviewed. Monographs topped the list accounting for 293 reviews; followed by annual reviews (20); reference books (3); journals, handbooks and reports (2 each); manual and atlas (1 each). The reference books reviewed comprised one encyclopaedia and two biographical works.

### *Subject-wise distribution*

The subjects of the documents reviewed have been arranged according to Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC)

**Table 1.** Types of books reviewed

Types of works	No. of books	Percentage
Original work	193	59.38
Collected work	120	36.92
Translation	1	0.31
Corporate work	10	3.08
Others	1	0.31
Total	325	100.00

**Table 2.** Authorship pattern of original books

No. of authors	No. of books	Percentage
Single	136	70.47
Double	42	21.76
Multiple	15	7.77
Total	193	100.00

**Table 3.** Forms of documents reviewed

Forms of documents	Number	Percentage
Monograph	293	90.14
Annual review	20	6.14
Reference book	03	0.93
Journal	02	0.62
Handbook	02	0.62
Report	02	0.62
Manual	01	0.31
Atlas	01	0.31
Conference proceedings	01	0.31
Total	325	100.00

## GENERAL ARTICLES

**Table 4.** Subject-wise distribution of documents

DDC nos	Subjects	No. of books	Percentage
000-099	Computer Science, Information Science, General works (Generalia class)	05	1.54
300-399	Social sciences	05	1.54
400-499	Languages	01	0.31
Total		11	3.38
500-509	Natural sciences	09	2.77
510-519	Mathematics	28	8.62
520-529	Astronomy and allied sciences	12	5.69
530-539	Physics	41	12.62
540-549	Chemistry	13	4.00
550-559	Earth sciences	40	12.31
560-569	Palaeontology	01	0.31
570-579	Biology	73	22.45
580-589	Botany	04	1.23
590-599	Zoology	16	4.92
Total	Pure sciences	237	72.92
610-619	Medical and health	22	6.76
620-629	Engineering and allied operations	15	4.62
630-639	Agriculture and related technologies	18	5.54
640-649	Home and family management	01	0.31
650-659	Management and auxiliary services	05	1.54
660-669	Chemical engineering	12	3.69
670-679	Manufacturing	03	0.92
680-689	Manufacture for specific users	01	0.31
Total	Applied sciences	77	23.69
Grand total		325	100.00

**Table 5.** Distribution of books according to pages

Ranges	No. of books	Percentage
1-50	05	1.53
51-100	03	0.92
101-150	16	4.92
151-200	35	10.77
201-250	41	12.62
251-300	52	16.00
301-350	44	13.54
351-400	28	8.62
401-450	15	4.62
451-500	22	6.77
501-550	15	4.62
551-600	09	2.77
601-650	06	1.85
651-700	03	0.92
701-750	01	0.31
751-800	03	0.92
801-850	04	1.23
851-900	03	0.92
901-950	02	0.62
951-1000	01	0.31
> 1000	07	2.15
Not mentioned	10	3.07
Total	325	100.00

numbers in Table 4. The largest number of documents reviewed belong to pure sciences (73%) comprising, among others, biology (22%), physics (13%), earth sciences (12%), and mathematics (9%). Applied sciences accounted for 24%.

### *Nationality of books*

Of the documents reviewed, 171 (52.62%) were published abroad and the rest 154 (47.38%) in India.

### *Books according to pages*

The number of pages comprising a book varies greatly. Books containing 48 pages or less are considered pamphlets. Book reviews analysed indicate that in the sample there are books containing from less than 50 pages to more than 1000 pages (Table 5). Books containing 151 to 400 pages accounted for about 62% of the books. Books containing below 50 pages or above 1000 pages are not rare.

**Table 6.** Chronological distribution of book reviews

Year/month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total	%
2002	06	07	06	05	05	07	08	10	10	11	14	11	100	30.77
2003	12	09	10	09	09	07	13	06	09	07	07	05	103	31.69
2004	05	04	04	06	05	07	05	04	06	05	02	07	60	18.46
2005	04	04	04	06	05	06	07	05	07	04	04	06	62	19.08
Total	27	24	24	26	24	27	33	25	32	27	27	29	325	100.0

**Table 7.** Places of publication

Places of publication	No. of books published	Percentage
New Delhi	71	21.85
Hyderabad	27	8.31
New Jersey	24	7.38
Basel	24	7.38
New York	21	6.46
Bangalore	17	5.23
Cambridge	17	5.23
Palo Alto	13	4.00
London	09	2.77
Heidelberg	08	2.46
Chennai	06	1.85
Kolkata	04	1.23
Mumbai	04	1.23
Jodhpur	03	0.92
Dehradun	03	0.92
Pondicherry	02	0.62
Shimla	02	0.62
Others places	59	18.15
Place not mentioned	11	3.39
Total	325	100.00

**Table 8.** Ranking of publishers

Sr. no.	Publishers' name	No. of books	Percentage
1	Birkhauser Verlag	26	8.00
2	Princeton University	26	8.00
3	University Press (India) Ltd.	24	7.38
4	Annual Review Inc.	18	5.54
5	MIT Press	13	4.00
6	Springer Verlag	12	3.69
7	Oxford University Press	09	2.77
8	Sage Publication	08	2.46
9	Geological Society of India	07	2.15
10	Oxford & IBH	06	1.85
11	Food Products Press	05	1.54
12	Daya Publishing House	05	1.54
13-19	4 Books each of 7 publishers	28	8.62
20-33	3 Books each of 14 publishers	42	12.92
34	2 Books of 1 publisher	02	0.62
35-124	1 Book each of 90 publishers	90	27.69
	Publishers not mentioned	04	1.23
Total		325	100.00

### *Chronological distribution of book reviews*

The number of books reviewed per year in *Current Science* varies from 60 to more than 100 (Table 6). The large-

**Table 9.** Publication year of books

Year	No. of publications	Percentage
1997	01	0.31
1999	02	0.62
2000	11	3.38
2001	66	20.31
2002	86	26.46
2003	66	20.31
2004	45	13.85
2005	25	7.68
No year	23	7.08
Total	325	100.00

**Table 10.** Prices of books reviewed

Price ranges (in Rs)	Books	Percentage
1-50	01	0.31
51-100	11	3.38
101-150	06	1.85
151-200	15	4.62
201-250	13	4.00
251-300	11	3.38
301-350	08	2.46
351-400	08	2.46
401-450	06	1.85
451-500	09	2.77
501-550	02	0.62
551-600	06	1.85
601-650	05	1.53
651-700	01	0.31
701-750	04	1.23
751-800	-	-
801-850	02	0.62
851-900	04	1.23
901-950	03	0.92
951-1000	01	0.31
More than 1000	102	31.38
Price not mentioned	107	32.92
Total	325	100.00

est number of books, i.e. 103 were reviewed in 2003. Afterwards the number has declined to 60s. The reason for this decline is not known.

### *Places of publication*

The place of publication is also an important bibliometric indicator. Table 7 shows that New Delhi tops the list with

**Table 11.** Ranked list of reviewers

Rank	Reviewers	No. of books	Affiliation
1	Rajendran, C. P.	09	Centre for Earth Science Studies, Thiruvananthapuram
2	Swaminathan, M. S.	06	M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai
2	Pandian, T. J.	06	Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai
3	Rao, K. R.	05	Bangalore
3	Arunachalam, S.	05	M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai

a tally of 71 publications, followed by Hyderabad with 27, New Jersey and Switzerland 24 each, New York 21, Bangalore and Cambridge 17 each, Palo Alto 13, and other places less than 10 publications. It is interesting to note that the city of Hyderabad has registered itself as an important place of publication of science books. Other Indian cities that have figured in the list are Chennai, Kolkata, Mumbai, Jodhpur, Dehradun, Pondicherry, and Shimla. The place of publication was not mentioned in the case of 11 publications.

### Publishers

One hundred and twenty-four publishers have been responsible for the publication of 321 books. The publishers of four books were not mentioned. Table 8 presents the ranked list of publishers. Birkhauser Verlag and Princeton University top the list with 26 books each, followed by University Press (India) Ltd with 24, Annual Review Inc. 18, MIT Press 13, and Springer Verlag with 12 books. Other publishers accounted for less than 10 books.

### Publication year

As the data for the study has been gathered from *Current Science* 2002–2005, it was expected that the publication year of most books would be from 2001 to 2005. In reality, it was found to be so as 89% books were published during the period (Table 9). The percentage would have been higher in case the publication years of all the books were available. Fourteen books published during 1997 to 2000 have also been reviewed. It is surprising that the publication years were not mentioned in the case of 23 books. It is not known whether the reviewers forgot to mention the years or the publishers.

### Prices

Prices of books play a very important role in the case of book acquisition. Table 10 presents interesting facts as to the prices of books reviewed. In the reviews, prices were not mentioned in as many as 33% cases, possibly because

the prices were not mentioned in those books. Without being aware of the prices, it becomes very difficult for an individual to order a book or for the book selection committee to approve a book. The price of the books varied from Rs 35 and Rs 14,850. Of the 218 books whose prices were available, 102 books (46.8%) were above the price line of Rs 1000.00. This data possibly brings home the fact that most S&T books are priced beyond the purchasing capacity of individual scientists.

### Reviewers

A large number of reviewers (hundreds in number) shouldered the responsibility of reviewing books. Table 11 presents the ranked list of reviewers where C. P. Rajendran topped the list with nine book reviews. M. S. Swaminathan and T. J. Pandian figure next with six book reviews each. S. Arunachalam and K. R. Rao rank next with five books each. Other reviewers reviewed less number of books.

### Conclusion

This analysis has revealed a number of interesting facts as to the type of books reviewed, prolific publishers, prices, prominent reviewers and so on. It also brings forth the fact that prices are not printed in many books. New Delhi and Hyderabad have emerged as important centres of science book production, and M. S. Swaminathan, the renowned agricultural scientist is still one of the foremost book reviewers.

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