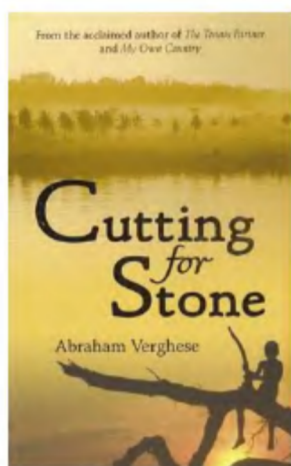


tion after the themes on Sensory and Motor systems, where the student could get a better grasp of the issues being discussed. The same could be said of the section on Plasticity. The third negative concerns the size and weight of the book that makes it a difficult read. This issue can be easily rectified in future editions by the authors and MIT press by allowing for at least two volumes. Fourth, the colour figures shown separately do not facilitate efficient reading. They need to be integrated within the appropriate text. I hope that MIT press can rectify this as well. As for the bigger picture, this book, while a valuable resource for the researcher, must necessarily be considered a work in progress reflecting the personal biases of the contributing authors. In this regard, I would caution academics from blindly treating this book as a text book of sorts. However, at the same time it could still serve as a template to organize courses and plan workshops in cognitive neuroscience, which was the original intention of this enterprise to begin with.

ADITYA MURTHY

Centre for Neuroscience,
Indian Institute of Science,
Bangalore 560 012, India
e-mail: aditya@cns.iisc.ernet.in



Cutting for Stone. Abraham Verghese. Random House, 2009. 541 pp. Price: Rs 595.

In *Cutting for Stone*, Abraham Verghese returns to what he terms his 'first love' –

writing fiction. It is, however, his first novel as his earlier ventures were non-fiction books. How then, does this novel fare in comparison to *My Own Country* and *The Tennis Partner*? *Cutting for Stone* is the story of the twin brothers Shiva and Marion Stone, their foster parents, Dr Kalpana Hemlatha (Hema) and Dr Abhi Ghosh (Ghosh). Their birth is the result of a most unexpected union of a surgeon, Dr Thomas Stone and a nun, Sister Mary Joseph Praise. The sister is from Kerala and meets Dr Stone on a ship from Madras to Africa. Their paths cross again and she is his assistant in 'Missing' hospital (native-speak for Mission hospital), Ethiopia. When the nun dies during delivery, Dr Stone flees the scene, unable to accept reality. Hema and Ghosh then bring up the children and instill life, wisdom and love for the practice of medicine. The twins are initially inseparable – indeed, they are conjoint twins who are separated after birth – until a deep rift develops between them. They become physicians – with a background of Missing hospital as home and with parents devoted to the practice of medicine, is there any other profession that they could embrace? The only thing missing in their lives, however, is their biological father; however, his presence fills the book in many ways. For instance, Stone has written a book *The Expedient Operator: A Short Practice of Tropical Medicine* – which is obviously inspired by Bailey and Love's *A Short Practice of Surgery*, as Verghese admits in the Acknowledgements Section of the book. Aphorisms from Stone's textbook – and references to his superb surgical skills – crop up repeatedly. Stone, we learn, 'was a real surgeon . . . passion for his craft . . . and skill, dexterity . . . he had no wasted movements, no dramatic gestures. . . '.

And yet, a crucial part of the plot after the exhilarating buildup of the story disappoints. Two unexpected twists in the plot towards the end are unconvincing but I shall not reveal more. I would accept one coincidence but two coincidences are perhaps too many, though. However, admittedly, they do link up all the events in the book and were perhaps unavoidable to complete the story. After all, as Verghese states in an interview to Tracie White on the Stanford School of Medicine website, 'To paraphrase Dorothy Allison, fiction is the great lie that tells the truth about how the world really

lives'. Would I recommend this book despite the surprising end? Undoubtedly. Verghese's turn of language is unparalleled as one has come to expect from his earlier works. His descriptions of Ethiopia of the 1950s – and his obvious love for his own country, if you will pardon my expression – are vivid and clear; I could easily picture the scenes in my mind's eye and indeed, suggest that the book would quite easily be made into a movie. Mira Nair has made a movie of *My Own Country* and certainly this one, if made, should be as interesting. (For those who are not aware of Verghese's background, he is of Indian origin but was born and raised in Ethiopia. He did his medical training at Madras Medical College in the 1970s and then went to the USA. In the USA, he worked in Tennessee and Texas (the sites of his first two books) and is currently an internist at Stanford University.)

The characters in the book – the twin brothers, Hema and the others seem like real people with flesh and blood and whims and fancies and likes and dislikes. As for Ghosh – what a man he is! In Ghosh, the physician-turned-surgeon, Verghese crafts a wonderful human being and compassionate doctor, one who should be a role model for all doctors. Indeed, Ghosh is strikingly Oslerian in his approach to life in general and medicine in particular. He is a wonderful, caring father and husband, a compassionate human being and a skilled diagnostician. His sense of fairplay and justice is seen in his letters to the editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine* arguing for the inclusion of an eponymous sign for relapsing fever: Ghosh's plea is that it should be named Adam's sign after the humble, one-eyed compounder in Missing hospital who first brought it to Ghosh's attention. ' . . . there is a Chvostek's sign, a Boas's sign, a Courvoisier's sign, a Quinckes sign – no limit it seems to white men naming things after themselves. Surely the world is ready for an eponym honoring a humble compounder who has seen more relapsing fever with one eye than you or I will ever see with two.'

Most of all, what comes from Ghosh is Verghese's love for medicine. That medicine is a field which is intellectually satisfying and offers the physician to express his compassion and do something about it is obvious as ' . . . if you had an innate interest in the welfare of

your fellow human beings, and if you went through that door, a strange thing happened: you left your petty troubles on the threshold. It could be addictive'. While *Cutting for Stone* will indisputably be enjoyed by all readers, those in the healing profession will derive much more pleasure out of it as they will be able to identify with many of the incidents and characters in the book.

SANJAY A. PAI

Columbia Asia Referral Hospital,
Malleswaram,
Bangalore 560 055, India
e-mail: sanjayapai@gmail.com



Spiders of India. P. A. Sebastian and K. V. Peter (eds). Universities Press, Hyderabad 500 029, India. 2009. xxiv + 614 pp. Price: Rs 135.

After the diminutive book on Indian spiders by K. Vijayalakshmi and Preston Ahimaz, published in 1993, which served essentially as a tantalizing appetizer, this massive tome edited by Sebastian and Peter is a welcome main course. This is a delightful work and clearly a labour of love, because the interest and dedication of the contributors comes through on every page. This is particularly important in this high-tech age when the science of conventional systematics is being eroded and when systematists, like the authors, are themselves an endangered species. The clear line drawings, the excellent colour plates of photographs of representative species (albeit largely from southern India), a detailed glossary,

a bibliography, an updated checklist of spider species in India and the easy-to-follow keys all make for a valuable and user-friendly book. What I liked particularly about the book was its introductory chapters which give plenty of information to suit the appetites of both the amateur as well as the serious professional. However, there were some important issues that the authors may want to consider in their next edition. In the section on spider communication, while the authors mention that spiders can communicate by visual, chemical and tactile methods, they only deal with stridulatory communication in any detail and say nothing further about visual and chemical modalities. Many groups of spiders are extremely visual in their hunting and feeding strategies¹ and are also known, for example, to even use ultraviolet fluorescent markings in mating displays². Furthermore, many male spiders track females by the scent of their silk which is an important component of species recognition³. In the section on Natural History and Bioecology, by M. J. Mathew *et al.*, it was not clear what 'bioecology' referred to that is different from 'ecology'. This was confusing. In the section on the Ecological Role of Spiders, it was surprising that not much emphasis was given to the role of spiders in agriculture as potential pest control agents⁴. Many studies are now demonstrating that ecosystems with habitats suitable for spiders can be important in integrated pest management and can help to reduce the use of pesticides.

Another aspect that the authors may want to consider in a future edition is adding phylogenetic trees of what is known about the relationships of spiders with other invertebrate groups and of the spider groups themselves. These trees could be those generated using morphological characters or those combining

morphological and molecular data. While phylogenetic trees generated using nuclear and mitochondrial genes are fast becoming the norm, it is an undeniable fact that the 'molecular' taxonomists are often handicapped by their lack of knowledge of basic morphological taxonomy and basic natural history. This is admitted in weak moments (and often *sotto voce*) by the molecular taxonomists while they furiously wave the banner of DNA bar-coding and other molecular approaches. Thus, molecular taxonomists and morphological taxonomists must necessarily work together to produce better trees of life. In this regard, it is interesting that several spider taxa have been found to be extremely amenable to DNA bar-coding and the recorded molecular variation has been found to relate well with knowledge of species boundaries obtained from natural history and morphological taxonomy⁵; however, in more speciose groups, a combination of morphological and molecular data was needed to correctly resolve inter-taxon relationships⁶. It is clear that the fields of morphological and molecular taxonomy must form healthy anastomoses, and what better taxon to take this approach forward than spiders in India, especially with this timely book on spider taxonomy using morphological characters. It would, therefore, also be useful for the authors to mention, in their next edition, that in order to collect spiders for DNA-based taxonomy, it is necessary to preserve them in 90% ethanol, while they have already mentioned that for spider preservation for morphological identification, 70% ethanol is the method of choice.

In summary, I would strongly recommend this book from one of the few remaining bastions of traditional spider taxonomy in India, particularly in Kerala, and look forward in the years to come to many useful collaborations between morphology, molecules and men.



Nephila kuhlii (female).

1. Bhaskara, R. M., Brijesh, C. M., Ahmed, S. and Borges, R. M., *J. Comp. Physiol. A*, 2009, **195**, 409–417.
2. Lim, M. L. M., Land, M. F. and Li, D., *Science*, 2007, **315**, 481.
3. Borges, R. M., Ahmed, S. and Prabhu, V., *J. Insect Behav.*, 2007, **20**, 389–402.
4. Chatterjee, S., Isaia, M. and Venturino, E., *J. Theor. Biol.*, 2009, **258**, 352–362.
5. Barrett, R. D. H. and Hebert, P. D. N., *Can. J. Zool.*, 2005, **83**, 481–491.