

A Critical Study of Chetan Bhagat's Self-Help Book: 11 Rules for Life

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Abstract: *Self-help Literature has been a popular genre. The literature aims to guide individuals for life management. The self-help books offer practical suggestions to get success in various areas of life and help to achieve work-life balance. The books help readers to take control of their lives and build resilience. This research paper is an attempt to explore a self-help book by Chetan Bhagat -11 rules for life. The research is based on the close reading of book 11 Rules for Life and its critical and thematic analysis. It is an attempt to investigate Chetan Bhagat's writing style in this self-help book, where he induce readers by engaging in a story of a delivery boy he comes across. He prefers friendly and approachable narrative style using anecdotes, memories and makes the book more relatable to the readers. Usually self-help books are non-fiction books. This study demonstrates 11 Rules for Life is a self-help non-fiction book which is intertwined with a story and life changing advice by the writer to a young delivery boy to level up in the life thus leading personal transformation.*

Keywords: Self-Help Literature, Chetan Bhagat, Non-fiction, Life, Transformation

I. INTRODUCTION

Self-help Literature is a trending genre in today's times. The number of self-help books published and sold has been increasing every year.

There are various Self-help books in the form of philosophical books too. In India many books were written since ancient times. These books have proved themselves in different cultures as a guiding force for people to get meaningful and happy peaceful life. The ancient Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharat are the narratives telling people what to do and what not to do. Moreover, Bhagwat Gita is considered most followed influential book which teaches dharma (duty) that includes karma yoga, gyan yoga, bhakti Yoga. In short, the Bhagavad Gita which is a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjun tells about how to fulfil duty and responsibility, perform the duties without expectations and attachments, control mind and emotions and give importance to real knowledge for spiritual growth it is earliest spiritual self-help book in India.

In western world, "Meditations" written by Marcus Aurelius is about self-discipline, reflection and inner control. The popular term self-help literature is a modern concept. Samuel Smiles wrote self-help a book in the year 1855 which is considered as a truly first self-help book in the 20th century. Some writers like Napoleon Hill, Dale Carnegie popularised self-help literature. Later on psychological theories played important role in the development of self-help movement the literature gave rise to motivational talks and workshops

In the course of time, many writers emerged and self-help literature became widely popular genre. People started reading these non-fiction books for the personal growth. The books were also written from various perspectives including economical, neurological, professional, psychological and spiritual aspects'

To name a few examples Atomic Habits by James Clear (2018), The Secret by Rhonda Byrne (2006), The New Earth by Eckhart Tolle (2005), The 48 Laws of Power by Robert Greene, The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari by Robin Sharma (2000), How to Enjoy Your Life and Your Job by Dale Carnegie 1936.



The self-help books which are also known popularly as inspirational or motivational books are studied by various researcher to know their usefulness or effectiveness on youth. The books focus on various ideas including how to be happy, how the books might help to face the life positively or earn money etc.

This research focuses on Chetan Bhagat's book 11 Rules for Life. In the introduction of the book the writer proposes to share his understanding of life through this book. He states that he has ten years experience as a successful writer and he understands what works in life and what does not. The writer shares his experience, wisdom and knowledge with his readers. He claims that the book has power to transform life of readers if they wish to do it.

This research paper aims to explore, understand the concept of self-help literature and to study Chetan Bhagat's 11 Rules for Life as self-help book critically.

The research paper investigates importance of life changing truths shared by Chetan Bhagat in self-help book.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researcher has observed that a few researchers have researched about Chetan Bhagat's books. E. Anushree has studied his 'Vision of Life of The Modern Urban Youth Reflected in Selected Fiction'.

Dr.R Vadivelraja has researched on the topic 'a Critical Comment on Chetan Bhagat's Selected Novels'.

Dr. Sunil Gomaji Chaudhari studied Major Themes in Chetan Bhagat's 'The 3 Mistakes of My Life' and '2 States'.

Ravi Kumar has explored Urban Realities in the novels of Chetan Bhagat.

The researcher has investigated about the research work done focusing on Self-help literature and noticed many researchers have tried to investigate Self-help books from various perspectives.

A Research was undertaken to study how literature leads to heightened anxiety sometimes. In another research the researchers critically analyse selected Self-help books and point out how these books can lead readers to blame themselves for failing. They call it cruel optimism.

Dr. L. Komathi and Mrs. Archana G.M have researched on the topic 'Self-Help Books and their importance in Today's World: The Key to Success'

As all the information shows that there is ample research about Chetan Bhagat's various novels is done but no research work is done about his self-help book. So this research will address the unexplored area of the writing of Chetan Bhagat. The researcher also tried to investigate about research work done regarding self-help literature and noticed many researchers have tried to investigate Self-help books from various perspectives. More recent studies argue for theory of practise, how readers actively use and interpret text

.They judge usefulness of self-help books for self-control orientation using sampling method or reader response theories.

Methodology

Researcher studies Chetan Bhagat's self-help book in a critical way. Researcher uses thematic and textual analysis method for critical interpretation.

Discussion

Chetan Bhagat's 11 Rules of Life (2024) is a non-fiction. He is the author of total 15 books. 11 novels and 4 non-fiction. His non-fiction writing mainly deal with the topic related to youth, social issues and personal development. He has successfully scripted an engaging and relatable narrative.

Narrative style

Self-help book is a non-fiction literature. Chetan Bhagat uses a different style of narration for his 11 Rules for Life to make it easier for readers to connect with the content.

He designs a framework of fictitious story for 'The Secrets to Level Up' he wish to share. The story is about a character named Viraj Shukla who is a delivery boy and Bhagat himself. Bhagat uses a communicative approach in the narration. The creation of the fictitious situation and writer's decision in the story to help the delivery boy hooks the readers with



the plot. The conversation among them which continues for several days as a planned routine, where writer schedules to advice Viraj to level up in life. It begins with different types of food. During the advice sessions use of references of real world companies' names, places and brands make it more real for the readers and they can connect with the content. The way the character Viraj struggles in his life similarly many readers of the book might struggle actually to overcome the problems in their life, thus they may connect with the content and the advice or the truth writer shares. This self-help book is intertwined with a story and a life changing advice to level up in life for a transformation.

Structure

Chetan Bhagat has written this self-help book in a novel way .Unlike other self-help books he does not write only series of chapters sharing a new point to instruct readers or to give them suggestions but his fictitious framework makes this self-help book more interesting.

Situation presented in the introduction develops in every chapter, the advice to Viraj is like an informal session, where writer uses quotations, explains the ideas in detail, use bullet points, diagrams. He labels the chapters with the term "Rule" and the number even the title is printed in UPPERCASE and ultimately by the end of chapter he clearly states the goal for reader (in the story the goal is meant for Viraj).Every chapter concludes with key takeaways followed by discussion with Viraj. In the entire book whenever the writer is presenting the informal, fictitious frame story, he has used italic font where as he shares the knowledge he uses normal font style. This use of uppercase, bullets, different font style makes the book easier to read and understand. It serves the focusing principle. This format makes the book more comprehensive for readers. It is quite easier for readers to observe and to check how the concepts are applicable to them. Writer uses the format of sharing memories to points out the mistakes in the life instead of giving random examples. He makes the readers feel it is quite normal to make mistakes and it is perfectly right to know and correct them.

III. CHAPTERS AND SECRETS

Chetan Bhagat has simpler format to design the chapters. The core ideas which he wished to share come under the title Rule i.e. rule number one to eleven. There are eleven chapters. But before those chapters he begins with Introduction where he shares his desire to present his knowledge, understanding about life and ways to deal with life using his writing skill. The supporting framework to weave the story and the rules in entertaining way, he begins the chapter 'The Zomato Delivery Guy and I' then he presents the chapter 'Pre-Rules Warm Up: How the World Actually Works' which is to uncover 'A distorted and false view of the world.' The writer wants to clue in his readers with the three class model of the world and how the hierarchy forbids someone to jump class, Even though as a rare event it is possible. He wants his readers to cross the barriers and jump class he reminds them what readers should try for.

"To achieve success is to jump class and cross your aukaat. You too can cross your aukaat and advance to levels that are unexpected, perhaps even unimaginable, even for you. You may or may not finally reach the absolute top. But adopting this mind-set of crossing your aukaat will ensure one thing- you will reach your potential and become the best version of yourself. You will get to a better place, even if not the best place. You will leave a more worthwhile life" (Bhagat, 13)

Then he informs if his readers are ready to move ahead he is ready to guide them.

"If progress is what you choose, Congratulations! You are with me. I will now prepare you to fight this tough battle, win. I will tell you how to get a life filled with success joy and happiness. In the coming chapters I will give you my 11 secret rules of success and life. You must follow them if you want to win" (Bhagat, 13)

The writer then proceeds with 11 rules for his readers. He share them in next 11th chapters

Rule# 1 never ignore your fitness

As the writer wants to begin here, he prefers most important concept –fitness. He gives a proper reasoning to focus on the importance of fitness and points out three different reason; aesthetics, mental strength and physical strength .He



highlights why it is important to be fit aesthetically and how it may help in the life. When he shares his advice about fitness he gives a clear plan stating what ought to be done to be fit, in detail discusses about exercise and diet, Do's and don'ts. In straightforward way specifies the tendency of people who does not like or never take fitness seriously, gives simple and effective suggestions to follow. In short he exhort his readers to follow the advice to excel.

Rule# 2 master your emotions

Writer wants his readers to master emotions. He enlightens them by briefing about types of brain parts rational and emotional and how does the dominance of specific brain part influences human behaviour and decisions. He suggests his reader to be rationally dominant person. The writer also knows the importance of reading other people's emotions well.

Rule# 3 put yourself first

The writer has good understanding of life as he identifies most people don't live for themselves in fact most people don't even understand what it means to be leave for themselves giving different examples he convinced his readers that it is right to put yourself first it is self-care he exemplifies and ensures his readers to be yourself the world will adjust and not to be people pleaser because it is just leaving your life for other people and ultimately to leave for yourself and the rich new level of happiness

Rule #4 master simple english

This rule is quite common and everyone knows. This is just a reminder to the known fact that it cannot be ignored he gives a target to master simple English using apps courses videos to his readers to achieve the goal.

Rule 5# no cheap dopamine

It is quite interesting for readers who may know about dopamine but unaware about what is cheap dopamine. He explains in a simple language the easier way to identify cheap dopamine is 'wanting more' thought in the brain. Risk factor is the pleasure reduces with the time. The writer alarms about managing addiction. This can be really eye opening for readers who waste their time or energy in the pursuit of cheap dopamine over the dopamine that makes a person want to truly work hard.

"The dopamine in your brain motivates you to seek more of whatever gives you pleasure"(93)

This information can truly help readers as in today's time watching mobile screen is easier way to pass the time, being busy on Instagram, on X, checking WhatsApp 50 times a day. The writer not only informes readers about what mistakes they might be committing but he also gives a better solution as a way to handle the situation. Here Chetan Bhagat provides a solution 'Purpose Driven Life as a Counter to Cheap Dopamine'

"The beauty of Living a purpose- goals driven Life is the most of your day will be spent in pursuing these goals. You will automatically start to withdraw from sources of cheap dopamine" (98)

Rule 6 #chase the hard things

This chapter begins with an example and then writer discusses what truly happy life is?

"Happy fulfilled and motivated life isn't about chasing pleasure and comfort it is instead about chasing the right effort and discomfort. to get ahead and to be happy in life you must actively chase hard things real achievement is a hard."

Writer reminds his readers life is a struggle, it's an uphill journey. Life is beautiful a huge green hill, which is ought to be climbed. Everyone has to make efforts. In the chapter, the writer also admits the importance of fun in life but he believes, it should be occasional pleasure. He alarms readers that the focus cannot be just enjoying and chasing the pleasure in the life. He wants his readers to realise the chasing hard making efforts is good in the life.



Rule 7 #eat the elephant

Bhagat has selected a metaphorical title to denote an attitude to deal with big problems in the life. He also suggests 'a method to Eat the Elephant'.

"The most difficult, insurmountable tasks in life can be dealt with effectively by breaking them down or cutting them up into small pieces. How you cut your big problems into tiny pieces, and work on eating or finishing up those tiny pieces one at a time determines your success in life."(116)

To tackle difficult things in life one should have determination, focus and be ready to side own pleasure sometimes. He is aware that this task can be monotonous and boring, so to persuade readers, he shares his own experience of eating 'a few elephants' in detail, including how to cut it, eat it, using the method of one piece at a time. This method of achieving massive goal is practically useful to make the class jump. Writer has given a good solution to readers which can be handy in various situations.

Rule 8 #be the cockroach

Here the focus is on the aspect of ability to adapt. Those who can adapt can continue to grow. Writer has presented this philosophy, in a little strange way, where he admire the cockroach like a role model and points out cockroaches are the most adaptive creatures on the Earth. Writer observes even though nobody likes cockroaches and usually everyone wants to kill them, the cockroaches survive on the planet, remain undefeated by humans. Thus he wants to highlight the ability to survive is to adapt. The attitude of adjusting and changing as per the situation can lead you far in life. He wants his readers to say, "Things are changing? Great, bring it on and I will adjust!" (154)

Rule 9 #learn to connect with people

This chapter is truly important for readers because we live in society. Writer knows the importance of being in a group, being in a society, importance of connection and how connections can assign you power or develop power relations. For this he wish his readers should understand that it is important to be part of social activities and being in a group actively. He suggests his readers that being in a group may not help them unless they are actively involved. He wants them to engage in conversation and let other people enjoy and feel good about you. He does not wish people should meet others just for the sake of maintaining business relations but actually the attitude of being good with others and having good conversation is important. He states career gains are a by-products of being a well networked person. He finally reminds to value your network and remember network is net worth.

Rule 10 # it's my fault

In this chapter writer highlights importance of taking accountability for your actions. He thinks it makes the things better. Giving his own example as a fat boy how he suffered till the age 40 and later when he accepted his responsibility for being fat, how could he handle and fix the problem. Even though he discusses the problem about his weight, he's not talking about the weight issue. He wants his readers to know if something is not working in life the default response should be it's my fault not to blame others or situation for it. Excuses and justification list does not solve the problem. He also claims that his this book can guide people to get on the right path of success but readers only can bring the change during the discussion He ask readers to be aware of the areas of your life that need to work on to fix. So that they can make a plan to act upon, and to change the situation.

Rule 11# earn, save and invest

This is the last rule writer shares with readers, which is simple practical but often ignored one. In this chapter, he presents an example of his friend named D and himself to exhibit how mere lifestyle habits can bring change in economic conditions. This is truly eye opening for the generation of readers who believe in YOLO! You only leave once.



Writer explains importance of saving and investing in life. The writer has many more things to share about investing so he has provided a QR code for his readers to watch his videos posted on You Tube channel. He wants his readers to learn about saving and investing habits. Even though he wants them to earn and save more for future, he wants his readers to enjoy life too. The only thing is the enjoyment should not be at the cost of future.

This chapter is followed another one entitled as Closing Note. In this chapter he directly addresses his readers and appreciates them for reading all 11 Rules and reaching to the present chapter.

“If you read until here, you have something in you. You possess that fire, the desire to live a life that’s beyond just the ordinary. You want to make it. You want a better life and you know you have the capability to better ... I can guarantee that you will surprise yourself and others with how far you will reach.”

This appreciation serves as morale booster for the readers who seek his guidance. The feel good factor may inspire them to practically utilize the rules in their life and get benefitted. He concludes this chapter once again by reminding his readers to have fun through his life he wants them to be happy make others happy work hard relax enjoy rest love yourself and others and repeat it.

The book does not end here, but there is one more chapter named Five Years Later. This is the concluding part for the fictitious story which provided a platform to narrate 11 Rules. This is a way to show how the rules can be helpful to readers. Writer meet at a ‘Level Up Café’ which looked like a 5 star hotel. He surprises readers by showing Viraj, the delivery boy is the owner of this café. Viraj could achieve the success in his life following the Eleven Rules of writer. This may tempt other readers and create confidence to follow and try to level up in their life.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The character of Viraj is an epitome of readers who seek help to overcome the difficult situations, to get emotional support and someone to discuss the complications in life. Like Viraj, readers can think about their life critically and may follow the suggestions or strategies shared by writer to face the world.

Chetan Bhagat’s 11 Rules for Life is useful for those who want to work on emotional aspects, identify and correct psychological traits. It helps to change the strategies to lead life and to get success. The book is full of examples, to know how one can cope up with the situation. The writer presents examples from routine life like habit of using mobile phone, spending time with family, facing entrance test or exams, etc. The book helps readers to compare, relate and consider their own life critically. It serves different purposes for emotional or psychological and professional growth. The book helps to reflect on life and career to take right decision and to step up by rectifying the follies. The book fosters new ways to think and to decide, how to overcome drawbacks? The writer highlights happiness as a key aspect in life. All the rules eventually lead to the idea of spending life meaningfully and happily in the materialistic world. So it is important to strive to level up and try to be best version of yourself.

In short, the researcher observes that the book is guide for personal improvement as well as acquire social aspirations. The book develops an accessible vision for success emerging from discipline, resilience, and self-belief.

This study opens further scope for examining the impact of the selected text on readers’ perceptions, readiness to follow the rules and to check the practicality.

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