

It's not important what you have. It's important what you do with what you have: **Amrut Deshmukh**

Amrut Deshmukh is known for reviving the reading habit through book summaries. Every week he reads a bestselling book and prepares a twenty minute book summary of it. He also records the summaries in his own voice and shares through *Booklet*, a free app, developed by him. More than five lakh Indians are now part of his initiative.

Amrut is a *chartered accountant, social entrepreneur and a TEDx speaker*. He openly shares how he failed in running three start-ups but never gave up. Now with *Booklet*, he is determined to achieve the mission 'Make India Read' and revolutionise reading in India. He strongly believes that books and reading habit can make us think differently and make us an empathetic human.



Open Interview brings you Amrut Deshmukh's interview with **Chinmayee Bhange**. The aim of the interview was to support any person or organisation that is putting sincere efforts in cultivating the reading habit. Thus, Open Interview is featuring the success story of Amrut who is on a meaningful mission to *make India read*.

● How are you so much in love with reading? When and how you did you build up such an interest in reading?

I was not an avid reader since childhood. My brother was a 'game spoiler' on my birthdays. He used to tell all my friends to bring only books as birthday gifts for me. If at all someone got a toy, he used to return it. I used to go mad on him. I remember once I had faked my birthday for toys! So, surrounded by stories of Akbar-Birbal, Sherlock Holmes, Chacha Chaudhary, I gradually fell in love with books. Today, I owe the success of my *Booklet* app to my brother who cultivated such a wonderful habit of reading.

- **What role your teachers played in your journey of reading books?**

Book is my teacher. A person can talk without thinking but he/she can't write without thinking.

- **How did the mission *Make India Read* conceptualise and become a success?**

It's a funny story. As I was struggling with start-up ideas, one day my chartered accountant friend invited me to a movie, *Bahubali*. We reached the movie theatre 15 minutes before the show-time. Just to kill time, I narrated him the key takeaways of the book I recently read, i.e., *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by *Stephen Covey*. My friend was so impressed that he said, "Amrut, I don't get enough time to read. You are an avid reader. If you can share short summary of whichever book you read, your reading habit can benefit me."

He said it casually and was engrossed into the movie but I could not. I saw a huge opportunity in this idea. During interval, under the pretext of attending nature's call, I escaped from the cinema hall. I spent sleepless nights and ultimately decided to execute the idea within a week.

Being a non-IT guy, I had no knowledge of developing a website or an app. The words of T T Rangarajan from the book, *Unposted Letter* poked me– it's not important what you have. It's important what you do with what you have. So I have [WhatsApp](#) and from then on, I started sharing a book summary every week with fifteen of my close friends on [WhatsApp](#) and asked them to share with their friends. Within two weeks, I got around thousand requests on [WhatsApp](#). I was thrilled by this massive response and that is when the mission, *Make India Read* actually conceptualised.

Within five months, the number increased to around fifty thousand. One day, I took a survey to check how many of them were actually reading the book summaries. To my disappointment, only 10% were reading! All were just boasting about joining the mission. The whole idea behind me sharing the book summary was to help people read bulky/fat book in just twenty minutes! But that was not happening. I was dejected.

That time I said myself, "Ok. Don't wanna read the summary too? Cool! I will read it for you! So, I bought a nice microphone and started recording the summaries in my own voice. Now, I Shared the summaries on [WhatsApp](#), in text and audio form. That was an instant hit! People started listening to my summaries while commuting in bus/train, while cooking, jogging the same way, they had been listening to music.

- **How was your experience with [WhatsApp](#) because you started sharing the summaries to a large number of people?**

One fine day, [WhatsApp](#) banned me for sending too many messages. They thought I am spamming. After repetitive requests, I could convince the [WhatsApp](#) team that it's being done with a noble intention to cultivate the habit of reading amongst the youth of India. Eventually, the ban was lifted.

On reaching one lakh readers, my [WhatsApp](#) started crashing very often. It was unable to handle the huge traffic. I asked my IT friends to help me develop an App. Finally, on World Book Day, i.e., 23rd April 2016, I launched the [Booklet](#) app.

• **Is there any specific reason that your mission has only India in its scope?**

Only reason is because I love my country but it does not mean non-Indians can't join the mission.

• **Our readers must be curious to know- how do you select the books, prepare summaries, record and share them in an appealing way. Please share with us the entire process.**

I mostly pick up bestsellers- typically books that have sold at least a million copies. For me, the books need to have some action value. This means that the books should be such that after reading it, the reader is inspired to implement the values learnt from it in his/her life. That means, the books cannot be fictional. Therefore, I prefer self-help books, autobiographies, books on leadership, human behavior and management principles etc. Once I decide the book for writing and recording summary, I e-mail the author/ publisher and request their permission.

• **Do you buy books or receive complimentary copies from publishers and authors?**

Sometimes I buy but mostly I get books from authors and publishers.

• **You have great voice and presentation skills. How did you develop such an art that makes one feel like reading the book you are talking about?**

Doing is learning. There is no different phase like first learn and then do. I learned this skill by doing. [Strive for excellence and not perfection](#). Perfection is flawlessness which comes with ego whereas excellence involves exposing yourself with all your flaws (which is scary and ego hurting). Take feedback and improve till you achieve a perfect level.

• **Your visual book summaries are located beautifully. Do you search for the correct and the perfect location?**

No, it's not like that. Whenever I learn something new or I am excited, I start video recording using my mobile camera.

• **You must be having a huge personal library? Any plans to start a library in future giving access to all your collection?**

As of now, I don't have any plan to open a library but if anyone wants to read books, they can access [Booklet](#).

• **As a reader, what reading of books has given you in return?**

Yes, books have given me health, wealth, love and happiness by making me a more empathetic human.

• **On your LinkedIn page, you have listed the names of your start-ups and you have also mentioned openly there that you could not succeed. Today, you are a successful social entrepreneur with Booklet. What is your advice to those who failed to put up a start-up?**

It's okay to fail. Failure is a part of success not the opposite of success. If you are not failing that means you are not trying something new. My only advice to the young entrepreneurs is- if you want to increase the chances of your success, increase your failure rate.

• **You have read hundreds of books written by different authors. Any particular author/s-whose books you love to read?**

Yes, I really like the books by *Simon Sinek*, *Stephen Covey* and *Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam*.

• **Amrut Deshmukh has become almost synonym for book summaries. Now, you have a great fan following on social media and offline? How do you feel about such recognition?**

Fame, fan following and recognition, in fact, these are not achievements. They are just the by-product of achievements. Achievement is when, when I get an email from someone who says "Amrut, I have started reading books because of you." We celebrate this achievement. Felicitations, awards, *TED Talks*, applause, etc. are just an acknowledgement of the achievements not an achievement in itself.

• **Many of your readers may not know that you are a chartered accountant. How do you balance your practice and reading?**

I am an outdated chartered accountant. The day I found the purpose of my life to *Make India Read*, I quit my chartered accountant practice.

• **No doubt, you are a voracious reader. Have you kept a count of books that you have read so far?**

Yes, I have read 1250 books till now.

• **If anyone wishes to join you to support your mission, is there any avenue for them to volunteer?**

Yes, if anyone wants to make meaningful contribution for this mission they can mail me at bookletguy@gmail.com.

• **What are your future plans?**

My future plan is- I have hundreds of summaries ready with me but if I get all of them at once in the app, people are bound to lose the motivation to read any of them. Hence I would say, "You can pull a new summary from me if you read/listen to the existing summary. Read more, get more!" In the next app update, reading habit will be gamified. I promise to create a positive addiction for books.

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Note • All the answers/ opinions expressed in this interview/document are of the interviewee.



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Credits • Amrut Deshmukh's photograph- <http://bookletapp.blogspot.com/> • Assistance for framing questions and designing interview document- Santosh C Hulagabali, PhD • Technical assistance- Chintan Makwana and Sneha Rathod

Interviewee • To know more about Amrut Deshmukh, his mission and works, visit <http://bookletapp.blogspot.com/>



Chinmayee Bhangе heads the library of St. Francis Institute of Technology, Mumbai. She has a decade long experience working in an academic library. At her institute, she has taken many innovative initiatives to promote reading habit among the students and academicians. She writes regularly on such activities on her blog: <http://sfitlibrary.blogspot.com/>. Email: chinmayeebhange@gmail.com



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