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## A psychoanalytical study of Madhav Jha in Chetan Bhagat's novel '*Half Girlfriend*'

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### Abstract

"The heart of man is very much like the sea, it has its storms, it has its tides and it has its pearls too" — Vincent van Gogh, The Letters of Vincent van Gogh

Chetan Bhagat's novel "Half Girlfriend" presents an intriguing character named Madhav Jha, whose emotional journey provides rich material for psychoanalytic analysis. This essay aims to explore Madhav's personality through a psychoanalytic lens, employing Sigmund Freud's theories of the conscious and unconscious mind, and defense mechanisms. By delving into Madhav's psyche, we will gain a deeper understanding of his motivations, conflicts, and the dynamics that shape his relationships with others. Through this analysis, we will uncover the complexities of Madhav's character and the underlying psychological factors that drive his actions.

**Keywords:** psychoanalysis, conscious and unconscious mind, love, coping mechanism, growth, individuality

### Introduction:

Chetan Bhagat's novel "Half Girlfriend" revolves around the life of Madhav Jha, who comes from a humble and less privileged background. He belongs to a rural area in Bihar and is the son of a farmer. Despite the challenges he faces due to his lack of fluency in English and urban exposure, he is an earnest and hardworking young man. Madhav is a talented basketball player and secures admission to the prestigious St. Stephen's College in Delhi through a sports quota. It is at this college where he meets Riya Somani, the other central character in the novel. He is captivated by Riya's beauty, charm, and sophisticated mannerisms. Riya, on the other hand, enjoys Madhav's company but is not interested in committing to a serious relationship. She suggests they become "half girlfriend and boyfriend," a term Madhav finds unusual but agrees to, hoping it will bring them closer. Madhav's struggles are not limited to his financial background but also extend to fitting into the elite world of Delhi's college life. The language barrier and cultural differences between him and his peers create challenges, making him feel like an outsider. He is deeply in love with Riya and tries his best to make her happy. He goes to great lengths to be with her, despite her reluctance to

commit fully to their relationship. Madhav's relentless pursuit of Riya forms a significant part of the novel's plot.

Throughout the story, Madhav goes through a roller-coaster of emotions, from the euphoria of being with Riya to the heartache of unrequited love. His journey involves self-discovery and growth as he learns to navigate the complexities of love and life. Madhav's upbringing in a village and his limited exposure to English-speaking environments lead to significant communication challenges when he arrives in Delhi. His difficulty in expressing himself and being understood by others contributes to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. For instance, when he attempts to initiate a conversation with Riya Somani, his love interest, he stammers and struggles to find the right words:

"I have been trying to talk to her, but my vocal cords turn dysfunctional whenever I see her." (Chapter 6)

This difficulty in verbal communication creates cognitive dissonance within Madhav, as he perceives himself as being below Riya's social and economic status. This cognitive dissonance shapes his self-esteem and self-perception throughout the novel. The absence of paternal love and care leads to a sense of abandonment, which resurfaces when he perceives Riya's withdrawal from their relationship. Madhav's fear of abandonment intensifies his possessive behaviour, making it difficult for him to trust Riya completely:

"Madhav Jha, if he loves someone, wants to possess that person completely. The problem comes when the other person wants a bit of love but not complete possession." (Chapter 17)

This emotional struggle manifests in his inability to comprehend Riya's need for personal space and independence. Madhav's dependency on Riya to fill the emotional void left by his father becomes a central theme in the novel. His concept of a "half girlfriend" emerges from the belief that having half of Riya in his life is better than having nothing at all:

"Because there are so many things that Riya is not. She is not my girlfriend, but she is more than a friend." (Chapter 5)

This psychological dependence on Riya compromises his ability to develop healthy relationships and maintain emotional autonomy.

As the novel progresses, Madhav undergoes a transformation as he begins to confront his insecurities and acknowledge the need for self-discovery. He starts to work on improving his English communication and develops a deeper understanding of his emotions:

"...I realized I had been wrong in making her my emotional crutch." (Chapter 32)

"Whenever I'm nervous or don't know what to say, I try to crack a joke." (Chapter 6)

This shift in mindset signifies his willingness to overcome his limitations and grow as an individual.

On the conscious level, Madhav is portrayed as a determined and persistent individual. He hails from a

small village in Bihar and secures admission to St. Stephen's College in Delhi, a significant achievement in itself. He sets his sights on winning over Riya, a sophisticated and urban girl, despite the evident differences in their social backgrounds. This determination is evident when he says, "I could not let Riya go. I had to try harder" (Bhagat, 2014). The affection he has for her is immense and never-ending. He appears to be willing to go every mile for Riya and to win her hand in marriage.

"You really are going to look for her?"

'Yes, sir.'

'Even though you never find her and end up in more pain?'

He nodded.

'I can't quit, sir. It's not in genes to do so' (Bhagat 208)

However, Madhav's unconscious mind plays a profound role in shaping his actions. His deep-rooted inferiority complex and lack of self-esteem, instilled during his upbringing, influence his behaviour towards Riya. He often feels unworthy of her and doubts whether he belongs in her world. This becomes apparent when he muses, "How could I expect a high-society English-speaking girl to love me?" (Bhagat, 2014). These insecurities lead to misunderstandings and complications in their relationship. Madhav's unconscious mind is also evident in his struggle to express himself emotionally. Growing up in a society that values stoicism, he finds it challenging to articulate his feelings,

especially to Riya. He prefers suppressing his emotions rather than confronting them, saying, "I was upset, but I didn't want to express my feelings. I had learned to swallow sadness" (Bhagat, 2014). This internal conflict affects their bond, making it difficult for Riya to understand his true emotions.

Throughout the novel, Madhav's conscious and unconscious minds clash, leading to moments of growth and introspection. He acknowledges his shortcomings and strives to improve himself. While he may not always comprehend the root causes of his actions, he learns from his experiences and endeavors to become a better person.

Riya and Madhav's Relationship: Riya and Madhav meet at St. Stephen's College in Delhi, where Madhav is an undergraduate student from a small town, while Riya is a sophisticated, modern, and affluent girl. Their contrasting backgrounds initially create a divide, but they are drawn together by their shared love for basketball. This common interest serves as a foundation for their relationship, fostering trust and camaraderie. On his urging, she finds a new term and agrees to be his half-girlfriend.

'You don't want to be with me?'

'I didn't say that.'

'Well, are you, my girlfriend?'

'No.'

'What are we then?'

'Friends?'

'You allow friends to hold you like this?'

I had not let her go. She gently moved away.

‘Okay, I’m your half-girlfriend.’ (Bhagat 67)

As their bond deepens, Riya coins the term "Half Girlfriend" to define their relationship. This label symbolizes the grey area between friendship and romantic involvement, highlighting the uncertainty that defines their association. Madhav, who falls deeply in love with Riya, grapples with the ambiguity, while Riya struggles to commit fully due to her past experiences and fear of societal judgment. A significant hurdle in Riya and Madhav's relationship is their communication gap. Madhav's limited proficiency in English and Riya's reluctance to express her true emotions lead to misunderstandings and unspoken feelings. This lack of clarity becomes a recurring theme throughout the narrative, contributing to the emotional tension between the characters. Riya's past experiences deeply influence her perspective on love and relationships. Her troubled family life and the burden of expectations from her parents shape her emotional detachment and fear of commitment. As a result, she maintains a distance from Madhav despite caring for him deeply. Throughout the novel, Madhav's unwavering devotion to Riya is evident. He is willing to go to great lengths to make her happy and be there for her in times of need. Madhav's unconditional love serves as a contrast to Riya's guarded emotions, further highlighting the complexities of their relationship.

Societal norms and expectations play a significant role in shaping Riya and Madhav's choices and actions. Riya's fear of being judged and labeled by society affects her ability to embrace her true feelings for Madhav. On the other hand, Madhav's struggle to bridge the gap between his rural background and Riya's urban lifestyle adds an additional layer of complexity to their relationship. A turning point in their relationship occurs when Riya's past trauma resurfaces, and she decides to take a step back from their bond. This leads to a temporary separation, leaving Madhav heartbroken and lost. The period of separation serves as a catalyst for both characters to reflect on their emotions and priorities.

During their time apart, both Riya and Madhav experience personal growth. Riya confronts her fears and learns to be independent, while Madhav focuses on his studies and becomes more confident in his abilities. This growth ultimately paves the way for them to reconnect and redefine their relationship. In the later stages of the novel, Riya and Madhav come back into each other's lives with newfound maturity and understanding. They embrace their feelings for one another and overcome the obstacles that previously hindered their relationship. The conclusion of the story leaves the readers with a sense of hope and closure as they find solace in their love for each other.

In conclusion, Half Girlfriend's Madhav Jha is a character shaped by the interplay between his conscious and unconscious mind. His conscious

determination to win Riya's love is often overshadowed by deep-seated insecurities and difficulties in expressing his emotions. As the story progresses, Madhav confronts these internal conflicts, leading to personal growth and development. Chetan Bhagat's portrayal of Madhav's psyche serves as a reminder of the complexity of human nature and the significance of understanding one's conscious and unconscious motivations. Madhav Jha's psychological journey in the novel showcases a character deeply affected by his upbringing, insecurities, and experiences. His struggles with self-esteem, coping mechanisms, and interpersonal relationships reveal a

multidimensional personality, making him a relatable and complex protagonist. By understanding the psychological aspects of his character, readers gain deeper insights into the themes of self-identity, acceptance, and emotional growth that underpin Chetan Bhagat's novel.

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