



Received: 12/06/2026 | Accepted: 24/06/2026 | Published: 31/07/2026

From Pages to Silver Screen: The Expedition of *Half Girlfriend*

¹Mr. Rawal Kharat* (Language Trainer and Spanish Department Co-Ordinator)
Amity School of Languages, Amity University, Maharashtra

²Ms. Divya Modi (Assistant Professor and Ecell Co-Ordinator)
Amity School of Languages, Amity University, Maharashtra

Abstract:

Reading of a novel can go on and on and the reader can read it at his own pace. But if same novel is to be adapted into movie it needs a lot of adaptive measures. This research paper deals with the novel Half Girlfriend (2014) and the cinematic version with the same title Half Girlfriend (2017) directed by Mohit Suri. One of the famous English authors of short fiction, novels, comic books and screenplay Mr. Neil Gaiman quoted on adaptations "I've always believed that the best book-to-film adaptations are the ones that take the spirit of the book, rather than trying to adapt every single word". (Gaiman) The novel Half Girlfriend underlines the aspirations, dreams struggle and fear of Indian youth from rural background. Through the character of Madhav Jha, Chetan Bhagat illustrates the inner turmoil between territorial identity and cosmopolitanism. Both the movie and novel portray how his communication in English language is used as a catalyst to flaunt superiority in contemporary India. The novel has used simple diction and relatable themes because of which the audience feels connected. The same can be seen in the movie. The paper is an in-depth analysis of the adaptation of novel into movie investigating the difference between core narratives and character presentation.

Keywords: Adaptation, Narratives, Character analysis, Cosmopolitanism.

*Corresponding Author:

Mr. Rawal Kharat

Email: rgkharat@mum.amity.edu

INTRODUCTION:

Half Girlfriend is the film adaptation of Chetan Bhagat's Half Girlfriend novel by the famous Bollywood director Mohit Suri. Like Chetan

Bhagat's novel Half Girlfriend Mohit Suri's Half Girlfriend shows the tale of love of Madhav and Ria which is layered by many sub

plots like socio-cultural and emotional issues in contemporary India. It is a promising attempt by Mohit Suri to bring the characters of Madhav and Ria to life on silver screen through pages. Chetan Bhagat's *Half Girlfriend* shows not only the love story of Madhav and Ria but shows the issues faced by a common boy from rural India in cosmopolitan city through the eyes of Madhav. However, the movie is not a direct adaptation of the book. There are many changes.

Madhav's Character

Both in the book and novel Madhav's character comes from a small village called Dumraon in Bihar. He is a member of a very elite family in Bihar, but they are financially unstable. The mother of Madhav is shown a single parent who operates a school in the village and Madhav is always concerned on how to help his mother to improve the quality of education there. One of the most beautiful traits of Madhav is that he is truthful and sincere. He is not devious or Machiavellian. He is straightforward and expresses what he feels. The novel also highlights some important negative traits about Madhav like he is emotionally immature and very much confused about his relationship with Ria, also he is shown sexually frustrated this can be seen in a scene from novel where Madhav invites Ria to

his room in hostel and tries to pressurise Ria physically. This scene clearly shows his emotional impulsiveness and frustration. However, in the movie Madhav's character is softened where his anger, emotional frustration and impulsiveness, roughness are not shown which helps the audience to emotionally connect with Madhav and feel that the love that Madhav have for Ria is true and pure without any physical attraction. The director Mohit Suri made it a point to not completely transpose the character. There are some traits that are similar in the novel and book like Madhav both in the novel and movie is portrayed a boy who hassles to speak English and he openly accepts that. His love for Ria is true and genuine without any hidden intentions. Ria is shown a girl from a very rich and affluent family, Madhav despite knowing this fact have no attraction towards her money, property or luxurious life, his only wish is that Ria loves him from her heart. Even after securing admission in Delhi's St. Stephens college, he continues to remain emotionally connected to his roots and his village where he was born. In St. Stephens Madhav's character is surrounded by students from cosmopolitan city, the students are modern and outspoken, but Madhav's character never intends or even tries to be like one of them. However, he makes constant efforts to improve his command over English as he fears being judged by his fellow classmates and his

frustration of not being able to express himself appropriately in English. Madhav's character is very clear when it comes to relationship with Ria in both novel and movie. His character always asks for clarity from Ria either love or friendship.

Riya Somani's Character

In *Half Girlfriend*, Riya Somani is shown as a complex and emotionally layered character. In the novel, Chetan Bhagat presents Riya as a lonely girl trapped in an emotionally abusive and unhappy environment. Readers understand her silence, confusion and fear of commitment as to why she leaves Madhav even though she cares for him through her thoughts, letters and journals. The novel also highlights her love for music and desire for freedom and independence. However, in the movie, her character is more romanticized and simplified, Shraddha Kapoor portrays her as soft spoken, mysterious and glamorous. The film focuses more on the love story and dramatic emotions rather than Riya's psychological journey reducing the emotional depth of the novel. Many of her internal struggles are not fully explained, making some of her decisions appear sudden or confusing. Another major difference is how her trauma is portrayed. In the book, there are stronger hints about the emotional neglect and abuse that she faced in

her family and marriage, which explains her future decisions and withdrawn nature. However, the movie softens these dark elements, probably to make it more suitable for mainstream audiences. The ending also affects her character portrayal. In the novel, Riya's fake illness and disappearance feels more emotional as the readers have followed with her personal struggles. In the movie, this twist feels more dramatic than emotional because her inner conflict is not explored and portrayed in detail. Many readers and viewers felt that the book gave Riya's character more depth while the movie mainly showed her as Madhav's love interest.

In the novel, every female character has their own special characteristics and traits. Ria is a modern girl who breaks the odds and the orthodox thinkings of the society and keeps going ahead in the modern society. Madhav's mother Rani Sahiba is a lady with old thoughts who only follows the customs and traditions of the society that have been practiced since ages. Riya's mother is a modern woman just like Riya but she believes in accepting the situation and not to fight to change it. The heroines of Bhagat's novel are modern and live in a modern world, but their thoughts are driven by the age-old customs, traditions and practices that are being followed in the society. As a

result, the heroines of Bhagat's novel suffer a lot even though they are innocent.

The difference in the Emotional Tone

The emotional tone of Half Girlfriend novel and Half Girlfriend movie mainly is different in terms of profundity, vehemence and exhibition of emotions. Even though the novel and the movie tells the same basic story of love between Madhav and Ria, the novel is raw and real and deals with human emotions in a natural and convincing way, whereas the movie tries to focus more on songs, visual drama and the effort to show the romance between Madhav and Ria look aesthetically beautiful and pleasing to eyes which makes the audience disconnected from the authenticity of the characters.

In the novel, the emotional tone is very contemplative, thoughtful, pensive and self-reflective because the story is mainly conveyed through the eyes of Madhav. The audience here experiences the inner turmoil, meekness, incertitude, despondency and his struggles directly through his conception. The novel also highlights his agrarian upbringing and his difficulty with speaking English language. And his struggles and efforts to improve his communication in English due to the fear of getting lost and not able to express himself clearly. The novel devotes more time to

blossom the relationship of Madhav and Ria. Madhav's struggle to express his love to Ria and the consternation of losing Ria can be experienced by the readers on a much deeper level. In a particular scene where Ria Somani tells Madhav that '*I can be your half girlfriend*' becomes one of the most emotionally heavy scenes in the movie because this one line explodes number of emotions in Madhav at the same time as, confusion, love, hope, expectations. The emotional tone of the novel is more deep, profound, introspective, gloomy, despondent.

On the contrary, the movie tells the story in a dramatic way. The movie focuses more on songs, music, romance, the movie creates enchanting ambience. Performances by Arjun Kapoor as Madhav and Shraddha Kapoor as Ria demonstrates chemistry between the two characters but fails to highlight the emotional and psychological struggle, they both are going through. The movie changes some characteristics and traits of Madhav's character which makes the storyline less complex and reduces the depth of the character. Emotional scenes are supported by background music and songs which makes the movie more dramatic and lacks deep analytical approach. Another important difference is that the novel highlights many social issues like language barrier, class differences, the struggle of people from rural

India in cosmopolitan cities however, more importance is given to romance, songs and glamour.

The Relationship Between Madhav and Ria

The relationship between Madhav Jha and Riya Somani in the novel and film adaptation of the *Half Girlfriend* is emotional and complicated but the way it is portrayed differs in both versions. In the novel by Chetan Bhagat, their relationship develops gradually and feels more realistic. Madhav is a simple boy from Bihar who struggles with English and confidence while Riya comes from a rich family in Delhi but feels emotionally lonely. Their bond grows through friendship, basketball and shared conversations. The book deeply focuses on their emotional connection, misunderstandings and personal insecurities. Madhav genuinely loves Riya, but his possessive behaviour sometimes creates distance between them. Riya on the other hand, is confused about love and commitment because of her unhappy marriage and troubled family background.

In the novel, the readers get detailed insights on Riya's thoughts, fears and emotions through letters and diary entries. It helps explain why she kept leaving Madhav repeatedly and later returns to him. Their relationship is not shown as a perfect romance but as an emotional journey filled with pain, growth and self-

discovery. The concept of "half girlfriend" itself reflects their incomplete and undefined relationship.

In the movie however their relationship is more dramatic and romanticized. The chemistry between Arjun Kapoor and Shraddha Kapoor highlights the love story visually but many emotional details from the novel are reduced. The film focuses more on romantic scenes, songs and emotional separation rather than the psychological depth. Madhav appears as a more straightforward romantic while Riya's confusion and inner struggles are less explored. As a result, the movie presents their relationship more as a Bollywood love story whereas the novel portrays it as a deeper emotional and personal connection shaped by social differences, communication gaps and emotional trauma.

The Climax

The end of the novel *Half Girlfriend* and the movie adaptation is different in terms of presentation, emotional complexity, psychological depth and emotional resonance and the way their reunion is picturised in the climax of the movie is totally different from what is mentioned in the novel. Although, in movie and novel they both reunite with a happy ending but their expedition is shown in a different way.

In the novel, the climax is very precise and minute. Every detail is shown correctly which helps the audience to feel the struggle and pain of Madhav. The climax in the novel builds heavy tension and keep the audience hooked and booked till the last line. In the novel, Ria leaves Madhav and pretends to be terminally ill, so that Madhav will forget her and move on in his life and she can escape the complications of her life and her emotional struggle. After course of time Madhav discovers that the letter about her illness was fake. This divulgence becomes the turning point in shaping the climax. After discovering this Madhav with very limited traces travels to New York just to find Ria. A considerable amount of time is given to show the helplessness and struggle of Madhav to find Ria as he and audience are unaware whether, he will ever find Ria, if Ria is alive or not, will they ever reunite. This creates lots of inner turmoil amongst the readers. Finally, Madhav finds Ria performing in a small local music bar. Their reunion doesn't feel '*Filmy*' as Madhav sets out to find Ria just like a common man and not '*Hero*' of a movie which makes it more raw and real. Their reunion in the novel feels subtle. Ria explains Madhav she did all this as she was fed up of societal expectations and a failed marriage. The novel is more about self-healing, forgiving others, true emotions.

In the movie the climax is cut short and to the point due to time constraints. The film heavily depends on audio, visuals and background music to make the scene look more dramatic. Just like the novel Madhav discovers about her illness and later learns she might be still alive through some letters and clues; he travels to New York. The segment of the movie which involves his search for Ria feels lifeless. The duration of the segment is cut down due to time constraints. The emotional tension is elevated here not by using emotions but through dramatic scenes, intense background music, songs and colour grading. Director Mohit Suri here is more concerned of giving the audience a fairy tale romance rather than exploring emotional and psychological depth of the characters.

Another major difference is the character development of Madhav in the movie and the novel. In the novel we can witness a shift in the character of Madhav from a small-town boy who is having difficulty to speak in English into an understanding and confident person who helps his mother to save the school and get donation from Mr. Bill Gates. His quest to find Ria is the symbol of emotional growth and his true love for Ria. In the movie, the transformation of Madhav is as per the novel, but it lacks detailing and emotional depth due to time constraints.

Overall, the climax of the novel is textured, multidimensional, evocative, grounded and life like. However, the movie's climax is visually romantic but lacks the soul of the book. The movie stays loyal to the novel, doesn't kill the heart of the novel but it simplifies it too much for the audience just to give them Happy Ending.

REFERENCES

1. "Neil Gaiman | Open Library." *Open Library*,
openlibrary.org/authors/OL53305A/Neil_Gaiman
2. Bhagat, Chetan. *Half Girlfriend*. Rupa Publications India, 2014.
3. *Half Girlfriend*. Directed by Mohit Suri, performances by Arjun Kapoor and Shraddha Kapoor, Balaji Motion Pictures and ALT Entertainment, 2017.
4. Tripathi, Pranav Kumar Soni Dr. Vinay. "Comparative Analysis of Chetan Bhagat's Half Girlfriend and Its Film Adaptation." *jetjournal.us*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.7492/cmjrqq49>.
5. *Client Challenge*.
www.scribd.com/document/921460421/ADAPTATION-OF-THE-NOVEL-INTO-A-FILM-ANALYSIS-OF.
6. MouthShut.com. "Review on Half Girlfriend by MouthShut User." *MouthShut.com*, www.mouthshut.com/review/half-girlfriend-review-pqnoplurpum.