



# Resonance of Modi's Clean and Literate India Campaign in the Rural Setting of Half-Girlfriend

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**Abstract**— “The value of any unit in this existence is its participation in the larger order of which it is a part” (10),” states a distinguished educationist, highlighting the significance of individuals and entities in contributing to a greater societal good. In Chetan Bhagat’s *Half Girlfriend*, Madhav Jha embodies this principle through his transformative efforts in Dumraon, a disadvantaged village in Bihar. Educated at St. Stephen’s College, New Delhi, Madhav rejects a lucrative position at HSBC to apply his expertise to uplift his hometown. His focus is revitalizing his mother’s struggling Dumraon Royal School and addressing the villagers’ challenges, aligning with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s vision for a clean and literate India, emphasized during the Lok Sabha elections. Madhav first tackles the lack of accessible water, which forces children, especially girls, to travel miles and miss school. By engaging the local MLA, he secures water pumps, contingent on hosting a Bill Gates Foundation event. The more pressing issue—lack of toilets, particularly for female students—is resolved when Madhav’s heartfelt speech impresses Bill Gates, earning a substantial donation. “I spent my whole college life with a complex” (183), he shares, vowing to spare his students similar humiliation. This grant funds toilets and infrastructure, advancing Modi’s sanitation and education goals. Madhav’s determination, inspired by national campaigns, transforms the school into a beacon of hope, inspiring others to serve their communities and reinforcing the educationist’s insight on purposeful contribution.



**Keywords**— Purposeful Contribution, Dumraon Royal School, Madhav Jha, Swachh Bharat, Sanitation, Toilets for Girls, Clean India, Literate India, Narendra Modi, Education Reform, Water Access, Rural Development, Community Progress

The novel *Half Girlfriend* by Chetan Bhagat integrates contemporary social and political themes, notably Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaigns for cleanliness and literacy in India, which serve as a backdrop to the story and influence its characters. These campaigns, particularly the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission) and efforts to improve education and infrastructure, resonate deeply with the novel's protagonist, Madhav Jha, who admires Modi's vision as a prime-ministerial candidate during the Lok Sabha elections. The narrative weaves these real-world initiatives into its fabric, reflecting their impact on Indian

society and individual aspirations. In his first Independence Day speech on January 26, 2015, Modi articulates a clear commitment to improving sanitation, stating, “There should be separate toilets for girls. Next year when we stand here, every school should have toilets for girls and boys.” This highlights his focus on addressing the lack of proper sanitation facilities, particularly for girls, which often hinders their education due to safety and privacy concerns. By setting a tangible goal for the following year, Modi underscores the urgency of this issue, aligning it with broader educational reforms. The emphasis on separate

toilets reflects an understanding of gender-specific needs, aiming to create safer and more inclusive school environments. Additionally, Modi's appeal to corporate entities to collaborate with the government as part of their social responsibility to build toilets across the country emphasizes a collective approach to national development. This call to action extends beyond government efforts, encouraging private sector participation in addressing systemic issues like sanitation, which affects millions of Indians, particularly in rural areas. By framing it as a shared responsibility, Modi seeks to foster a sense of national unity in tackling infrastructural challenges.

The speech also addresses the importance of personal and communal cleanliness, with Modi urging citizens to prioritize not only the cleanliness of their own homes but also that of their neighbors. He states that keeping homes clean "is only possible if they worry about the cleanliness of their neighbor." This reflects a broader ethos of community-driven change, where individual actions contribute to collective progress. The interconnectedness of personal and societal responsibility is a key theme, resonating with the Swachh Bharat campaign's aim to transform public behavior toward hygiene and sanitation. Modi's personal commitment to this cause is vividly illustrated by his symbolic act of holding a broom and sweeping the road himself. This gesture, widely publicized, serves as both a literal and metaphorical call to action, demonstrating leadership by example. It underscores his intention to lead a movement grounded in humility and direct engagement with the issues he champions. In *Half Girlfriend*, this act likely inspires Madhav, who is depicted as being impressed by Modi's leadership and vision, reflecting how such initiatives influence the younger generation and shape their aspirations for a better India. By embedding these real-world campaigns into the narrative, *Half Girlfriend* not only grounds its story in contemporary India but also highlights the transformative potential of political leadership in addressing social challenges. Modi's focus on sanitation and literacy, as depicted in the novel, mirrors the aspirations of a nation striving for progress, with Madhav embodying the youth inspired by such initiatives to contribute to societal change.

Madhav Jha, a graduate from St. Stephen's College, New Delhi, declines an offer from HSBC, an international bank, and decides to return to his hometown, Dumraon, in Bihar. There, he starts a protest against basic problems, such as the lack of water and toilets for schoolchildren. Chetan Bhagat, described as "the biggest selling English language novelist in India's history," has produced bestsellers like *Five Point Someone* (2004), *One Night @ The Call Centre* (2005), *The 3 Mistakes of My Life* (2008), *2 States: The Story of My Marriage* (2009), *Revolution 2020* (2011), and one non-

fiction work, *What Young India Wants* (2012). The novelist beautifully highlights these issues in the novel *Half Girlfriend*. Madhav follows in the footsteps of Modi and takes the mission of a clean India forward. The novelist also expresses concern over sanitation and the poor education system in the country. In his newspaper column entitled "Indian Institute of Idiots," he expresses this concern: "The Indian education system is a problem that can be fixed. It affects the country's future, impacts almost every family, everyone knows about it and it is commercially viable to fix it. Still, nothing happens because of our great Indian culture of avoiding change at all costs." He further adds, "There are two main problems: one, the supply of good college seats and two, the actual course content and intent behind education." In the novel, Madhav focuses on innovative courses; therefore, with the help of his girlfriend, Riya, he starts a course on music. As he is a sportsperson and football player himself, he also starts a course on sports, particularly football. He invests significantly in building a football court and sets up a music studio for the schoolchildren. It is never mentioned that Madhav and his colleagues exert any kind of pressure on their students. They believe in the natural growth of their boys and girls. This reminds us of the final speech of Prof. Cherian in *Five Point Someone*: "One, believe in yourself, don't let a GPA, performance review or promotion in a job define you. There is more to life than these things – your family, your friends, your internal desires and goals" (261). The students of Dumraon Royal School grow up in a natural environment; they study sincerely and play under the trees in open fields. Bhagat firmly believes, "Sport recharges the body and entertainment feeds the mind and the heart as well." While playing, they learn many things from their surroundings, much like Lucy in Wordsworth's poems. This evokes the beautiful lines from *The Tables Turned*: "One impulse from a vernal wood, May teach you more of man, Of moral evil and of good, Than all the sages can" (38).

Despite the lack of proper facilities, with schoolchildren resorting to open fields for toilets, they find joy in playing together under the trees. Chetan Bhagat clarifies that this hardship stems not from administrative failure but from the school's dire lack of resources to build toilets. While it's unclear if Madhav explicitly follows Wordsworth's educational philosophy, he clearly prioritizes a natural, unforced learning environment. He opposes teachers compelling students to memorize lessons or using physical punishment, fostering a nurturing space for growth. This paper thus examines the critical needs for enhancing educational standards and improving the environment for schoolchildren at Dumraon Royal School. Dumraon, once a kingdom under the royal dynasty Madhav descends from, was integrated into democratic India around 1947. Yet, the

villagers continue their tradition, symbolically anointing Madhav Jha as their prince and pledging loyalty to him. As the Rajkumar of Dumraon, Madhav recalls his mother's wisdom: "Beyond a point, people want money to buy respect. Respect, however, can't be bought. You have to earn it" (96). This conviction underpins his decision to decline a lucrative HSBC job, as he reflects: "Live with dignity. Live for others, that is how one earns respect" (96). Bhagat reveals that Madhav's choice to leave banking was driven by his mother's values, emphasizing service and the love of the Dumraonians over personal gain. The narrator finds greater peace and fulfillment in this path than he would have at the bank, a sentiment reinforced by his mother's approving smile. For Madhav, her happiness is paramount, affirming his commitment to his village and its children.

The Dumraon Royal School, run by the narrator's mother, moves him with its deplorable condition. The school consists of two rooms with a verandah; the bricks of the walls are exposed to decay. The most shameful issue is the lack of toilets for the schoolchildren. The girls must go out to the open fields to relieve themselves. This is the most pressing issue the narrator strongly raises in his campaign against basic problems in the novel. To address this, Madhav visits MLA Vijay Ojha and stands in a long queue. However, he is called for a direct meeting with the MLA due to his connection to the dynasty. Madhav opposes such preferential treatment, reflecting his simplicity and honesty. When he presents his request for toilets for the schoolchildren and hand pumps for the villagers, the MLA raises his eyebrows in displeasure. He relents when the narrator convinces him: "The kids are not allowed to go to school. They have to walk two kilometers to fill water. More hand pumps in villages, more enrolment in my school" (110). The MLA then understands that this is not about politics but about increasing admissions. Ojha raises his hands, saying, "my MLA funds are limited. I have to repair roads, fix power and install hand pumps. In fact, I have already run out" (110). Indirectly, Ojha declines Madhav's request. He persuades Madhav to accept a donation if it doesn't hurt his royal prestige. The narrator refuses to accept alms. When Rani Sahiba, Madhav's mother, scolds him for visiting the arrogant MLA, he becomes certain that his refusal of the donation was right. His mother also recounts how Ojha wants the royal family to bow before him.

The MLA discerns why Madhav turns down the donation but still wishes to oblige the prince of Dumraon. He makes a deal with the narrator: if Madhav helps organize a programme for Bill Gates, the richest man in the world, at his school, the MLA could provide some hand pumps. Madhav sees an opportunity to meet Bill Gates and secure

funding for his struggling school. He agrees to Ojha's proposal, thus advancing one step toward his resolution. Earning approval for the programme is another challenge for the narrator. Now, Madhav must persuade a clerk at the Rural Ministry to shortlist his school for the event. The ministry reveals that they must select ten schools out of ninety proposals and are considering including some English-medium schools. Madhav takes a stand, explaining that Mr. Gates and his team want to see the real Bihar, analyze the condition of village schools, and understand the problems faced by children and their parents. They aim to uncover why parents deprive their children of education. Madhav suggests that the clerk pitch the programme at schools lacking basic amenities, as this aligns with the Bill Gates Foundation's goals for their reports. Madhav succeeds in convincing the clerk and wins acceptance.

The success of the programme hinges on effective English anchoring, a challenge given Madhav's struggles with the language. Initially, the clerk favored an English-medium school for its fluent teachers who could anchor the event. Despite his local dialect impacting his English, Madhav takes on the role himself. To overcome his pronunciation issues, he reconnects with Riya Somani, a St. Stephen's college mate, and enrolls in English coaching classes in Patna. Yet, he confesses in the novel, "I have a fear of speaking in English" (132), driven by a deeper fear: "my school will not manage itself and close down" (132). This fear propels him to push forward, as he resolves to "Go on" (132). Chetan Bhagat underscores that when retreat guarantees failure, the only option is to advance. Dumraon Royal School earns a spot among nine shortlisted venues for Bill Gates' visit. Samantha Myers from the Bill Gates Foundation visits to inspect the school, finding it "different in a charming sort of way" (121) despite its peeling plaster, noisy children, and students rushing to open fields for lack of toilets. She recognizes the poverty and lack of basic amenities, aligning with the foundation's mission. Bhagat reflects on Western perspectives: "I failed to understand the charm of a school with leaky roofs and furniture that falling apart. White people think differently" (121). Madhav tactfully addresses Samantha's observations, promising whitewashed walls and local government support when she notes the dampness. On the issue of toilets for dignitaries, he sidesteps negativity, assuring her they'll manage while admitting, "We're a little short on funds. But we will do our best to put up a good show" (122).

His honesty resonates with Samantha, as he candidly admits, "We are a poor school. We don't have the money to do many things. We are doing this to get noticed to some government officials might help us" (122). This transparency aligns with his belief that honesty works best, especially with Westerners. Impressed, Samantha suggests

the school apply for the foundation's grants, explaining they support deserving non-profit social projects. She advises Madhav to deliver a compelling speech to the delegation, including Bill Gates, noting that a strong impression could secure an on-the-spot grant (123). Motivated, Madhav prepares to deliver a heartfelt speech highlighting the school's genuine struggles, aiming to move the delegation and secure vital support.

Madhav faces the daunting task of persuading Bill Gates, Microsoft's founder, with his heartfelt speech. He opens up about his personal struggles, confessing his difficulty mastering English and the humiliation he endured due to his poor pronunciation: "I spent my whole college life with a complex" (183). With conviction, he declares his mission to ensure his schoolchildren—and all children—never face such shame. He pinpoints the core issue: a shortage of skilled teachers, hindered by the school's inability to pay competitive salaries. "For that I need resources. I need good teachers. However, good teachers won't come to a school without basic facilities" (183). He underscores the dire state of infrastructure, stating, "Students can't be taught without proper classrooms" (183), and stresses a fundamental need: "You can't have a real school without toilets" (183). Madhav firmly asserts that he isn't begging for government handouts; these are basic rights every citizen and child deserves. Emphasizing his selflessness, he notes he left "a job at a multinational bank to be here" (183), driven not by money but by a vision to uplift his community. His sincerity and clarity resonate, making a compelling case for support.

Madhav's speech resonates deeply with the delegates, emphasizing that every child deserves a platform to shine. He highlights the immense talent of Indian children, noting they often lack the opportunities Bill Gates had to rise from modest roots to Microsoft's helm. Madhav envisions his school's students astonishing the world with their potential. His passionate words earn a standing ovation from Bill Gates, the delegates, and the audience. Inspired by Madhav's authentic commitment to his village's children, Gates announces a substantial grant for Dumraon Royal School. This affirms Madhav's choice to leave HSBC to uplift his village, especially its youth. In Half Girlfriend, Madhav's journey reflects his dedication to fulfilling Modi's vision of a clean, literate India, establishing him as an inspiring figure for those educated at elite institutions who return to transform impoverished rural communities into thriving hubs.

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