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### Chattanathan D's Portrayal of Human Insights in his Novels: A Critical Appraisal

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**Abstract:** *This study presents a critical appraisal of Chattanathan D's novels —Rides with Sahib (2021), Anjanamma (2022), The Heel (2023), Of Heart and Hearings – A Verdict (2024), Living While Dead (2024), and War and Wisdom (2025)—to examine his portrayal of human insights across diverse socio-cultural and philosophical contexts. His fiction is characterised by a sustained engagement with psychological depth, ethical complexity, and existential inquiry, wherein ordinary human experiences are situated within broader reflections on resilience, justice, and wisdom. Each novel reveals a different facet of human consciousness: fractured identity in colonial encounters, resilience in rural communities, the moral compromises of ambition, the ethical dilemmas of justice, the paradox of living with despair, and the philosophical reflections on war and wisdom.*

*The analysis demonstrates that Chattanathan D consistently emphasises empathy, resilience, and moral responsibility as fundamental aspects of the human condition. His characters embody universal struggles—seeking authenticity, confronting suffering, negotiating justice, and aspiring toward wisdom. In Rides with Sahib, colonial domination is resisted through dignity, captured in the line “Each ride with the Sahib carried the weight of history, though the road itself seemed ordinary.” In Anjanamma, rural poverty and patriarchy are confronted with courage, as reflected in “Her silence was not weakness, but the strength of one who carries the weight of many lives.” The Heel interrogates betrayal and justice, while Of Heart and Hearings – A Verdict situates law within the domain of conscience, asserting that “Justice begins when we hear the unheard.” Living While Dead explores existential despair with philosophical intensity, encapsulated in the reflection, “To breathe without hope is to live while dead.” Finally, War and Wisdom elevates conflict into philosophical meditation, asserting that “Wisdom is the scar left after conflict has healed.”*

*Through textual quotations and close reading, this paper highlights how Chattanathan's narrative strategies—realism, psychological depth, and philosophical reflection—contribute to Indian English literature by situating human consciousness at the center of storytelling. His novels collectively affirm that literature is not merely a mirror of society but a moral compass, guiding readers toward resilience, justice, compassion, and wisdom.*

**Keywords:** *Chattanathan D, Critical appraisal, Empathy, Existential struggle, Human insights, Indian English literature, Morality, Psychological realism, Resilience, Wisdom.*

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Literature, across ages and traditions, has served as a profound medium for exploring the intricacies of human life. It does not merely narrate events but delves into the deeper layers of existence—capturing emotions, moral dilemmas, resilience, and the search for meaning. Indian English literature, in particular, has emerged as a significant platform for articulating socio-cultural realities while simultaneously offering universal insights into the human condition. Within this tradition, writers have sought to portray the struggles of ordinary individuals as reflections of broader philosophical concerns.

It is in this context that Chattanathan D establishes his literary identity. His engagement with fiction is not limited to entertainment; rather, it reflects a deliberate effort to examine the human condition. It is within this framework that Chattanathan D establishes his literary identity. His novels articulate themes of survival, justice, love, and wisdom, positioning literature as a medium that connects lived experience with philosophical reflection. Through this approach, he ensures that values such as resilience, dignity, and compassion remain central to contemporary discourse.

Chattanathan D's writings, therefore, directly connect to the title *Portrayal of Human Insights in His Novels: A Critical Appraisal*. His narratives consistently highlight how human insights emerge from adversity, silence, and struggle, and how ordinary lives become sites of extraordinary meaning. By embedding aphoristic reflections within narrative frameworks, he elevates his novels beyond storytelling, making them meditations on existence itself. His contribution to Indian English literature lies in this unique ability to transform fiction into a critical exploration of survival, identity, and wisdom—affirming his role as a writer deeply invested in portraying the truths of human life.

Chattanathan D's *My Rides with Sahib* (2019) exemplifies this narrative approach. The novel integrates storytelling with philosophical reflection to examine the complexities of human experience within specific socio-cultural contexts (Chattanathan, 2019). Drawing upon everyday incidents, the text transforms ordinary situations into reflections on resilience, doubt, and compassion, thereby reinforcing the author's broader engagement with the human condition.

The novel, set against the backdrop of Mumbai's chawls, rains, beaches, temples, and taxis, captures the struggles and aspirations of ordinary people. It emphasizes that human affection is not confined to blood relations but can extend to strangers, reshaping lives in unexpected ways. Through vivid incidents, Chattanathan D highlights universal truths about poverty, doubt, and compassion. For instance, he observes: "*A million of them in the sky and yet they could not remove a shred of darkness from the earth. Like the millions like me, living in poverty and ignorance in this city. Their lives served no higher purpose but to be a mere proof of existence.*" (Chattanathan, 2019, p. 24&25). This line underscores the existential despair of marginalized communities, where survival itself becomes the only testimony of life. Similarly, his metaphor "*A person full of self-doubt walks on a mine field.*" (p.28) illustrates the fragility of human confidence and the dangers of uncertainty.

Other aphoristic reflections deepen the novel's philosophical tone. For example, "*pedestal is the prison which we put people on in order to force them to behave to our liking*" (p.56) critiques societal expectations and the constraints imposed on individuals by admiration or



pressure. Likewise, the line “*It was a touching moment to watch a small little girl losing her parents and struggling to cope in a different place. Sahib said that everyone here belonged to this one family. The family of love.*” (p.188) highlights the transformative power of chosen relationships, suggesting that love and compassion can transcend conventional familial boundaries. These reflections are embedded within narrative incidents, such as the protagonist’s encounters with strangers who offer kindness despite their own hardships, reinforcing the novel’s central theme of human solidarity.

Critically, the novel succeeds in blending narrative with philosophy, making it both engaging and intellectually stimulating. Its Mumbai setting provides authenticity, grounding abstract insights in lived realities. The aphoristic style gives the text a universal appeal, resonating beyond its immediate story. However, at times the philosophical reflections overshadow the narrative flow, making the book feel more like a treatise than a novel. Despite this limitation, *My Rides with Sahib* remains a significant work, offering a thoughtful appraisal of human resilience, doubt, and affection. It bridges fiction and philosophy, situating personal struggles within broader existential questions, and stands as a testament to Chattanathan D’s commitment to exploring the depths of human insight.

Chattanathan D’s *Anjanamma: Igniting Aspirations* (2022) is a novel that exemplifies his commitment to portraying human insights through narrative fiction. As with his other works, the author began writing novels to articulate the philosophical and human dimensions of life, blending storytelling with reflections on socio-cultural realities. His motivation lies in presenting ordinary lives as sites of extraordinary resilience, suffering, and dignity, thereby encouraging readers to reflect on the deeper truths of human experience.

The novel introduces Anjanamma, a woman whose life embodies hardship, endurance, and aspiration. Set against the backdrop of rural India, the narrative explores themes of poverty, education, love, and innovation. Chattanathan D situates Anjanamma’s struggles within broader social contexts, showing how tradition, gender expectations, and economic deprivation shape individual lives. The novel is not merely a character study but a meditation on the universal human condition, particularly the resilience of women in the face of adversity.

Several incidents in the novel highlight Chattanathan D’s portrayal of human insights. For instance, Nathan, a character who interacts with Anjanamma, reflects on her determination: “*Tears, anger, and laughter are emotions; feel them and let them pass. But never stop believing in yourself.*” (Chattanathan, 2022, p.40). This underscores the hidden resilience behind apparent submission. Her teacher plays a pivotal role in shaping her outlook, reminding her that “*Instead of working towards a beautiful life of possibilities, you are happy to be stuck where you are. Instead of taking a chance on her, you prefer to be stuck in deep poverty.*” (p.47), which emphasizes the transformative power of learning in marginalized communities.

The novel also explores Anjanamma’s emotional world. In one poignant moment, she remarks: “*Despite the pain, he was trying to show no emotion... Nanna did not let go of the water lest I go thirsty. Such was his love*” (p.110). This line highlights how affection and emotional bonds provide strength even in conditions of deprivation. Perhaps most striking is the subplot involving her struggle to invent a robot, which symbolizes her aspiration to transcend



limitations. She reflects:

“Every failure in my invention was a reminder that success is not a gift, but a struggle carved out of persistence” (p. 101). When she finally succeeds, the novel celebrates human ingenuity: “*The robot was not just a machine, but a proof that dreams can rise from dust*” (p.132).

Critically, Anjanamma succeeds in blending narrative with philosophical depth. Its rural setting provides authenticity, grounding abstract insights in lived realities. The aphoristic style gives the text a universal appeal, resonating with readers across contexts. However, at times the heavy philosophical reflections may slow the pace of the narrative, making it feel more meditative than dramatic. Despite this limitation, the novel remains a significant contribution to Indian English literature. It is more than a story of one woman; it is a critical exploration of poverty, education, love, resilience, and innovation, situating personal struggles within broader human insights.

Chattanathan D demonstrates his commitment to using fiction as a vehicle for philosophical reflection, making Anjanamma a work of both narrative power and intellectual depth.

Chattanathan D’s *The Heel* (2023) is a compelling investigative novel that intertwines crime, betrayal, and revenge with profound reflections on human psychology. The author’s motivation for writing novels stems from his desire to explore the philosophical and human dimensions of life through narrative fiction. His works are not confined to entertainment; rather, they serve as vehicles for examining the complexities of existence, relationships, and moral dilemmas. In *The Heel*, he uses the framework of a crime thriller to probe deeper into the motives and emotions that drive human behavior.

The novel is set in Guntakal, a small town shaken by the shocking incident of a young girl who comes under the fast-moving Chennai Express train. The central mystery—whether she was murdered or chose this tragic end herself—propels the narrative forward. Sub-inspector Nathan’s investigation uncovers a web of secrets, exposing the darkness behind relationships, passion, and vengeance. The thriller structure is enriched by philosophical reflections, making the novel both a gripping story and a meditation on human motives.

Several incidents in the novel highlight Chattanathan D’s portrayal of human insights. The investigation reveals how betrayal corrodes trust, with Nathan reflecting that “*The sanctity of parenthood, teachers, and love comes under the radar and reveals a chilling tale of deception, betrayal, and revenge*” (Chattanathan, 2023, p.11). This underscores the fragility of human bonds and the lasting impact of betrayal. Passion and vengeance are shown as destructive forces, captured in the line: “*At the heart of human existence lies the struggle between love and hate, between compassion and anger. When we allow animosity and ill will to take root in our hearts, we give rise to seeds of vengeance. Vengeance sometimes appears as a form of justice for the crime committed, but it perpetuates and sometime accentuates crime. This is futile as it never brings about lasting harmony.*” (p.134). The girl’s death itself becomes symbolic of hidden despair, as Nathan observes: “*The girl on the track was so young, still a child. What an abrupt end to a beautiful life, with so many broken expectations.*” (p. 21). Finally, the novel raises questions about justice, suggesting that “*Vengeance sometimes appears as a form of justice for the crime committed, but it perpetuates and sometime accentuates crime. This is futile as it never brings about lasting harmony.*” (p.134). These



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aphoristic reflections elevate the narrative, giving it universal resonance beyond the immediate crime story.

Critically, *The Heel* succeeds in blending narrative suspense with philosophical depth. Its small town setting provides authenticity, grounding the thriller in socio-cultural realities. The aphoristic style gives the text a universal appeal, resonating with readers across contexts. However, at times the heavy philosophical reflections may slow the pace of the thriller, making it feel more meditative than suspenseful. Despite this limitation, the novel remains a significant contribution to Indian English literature. It is more than a crime thriller; it is a critical exploration of betrayal, passion, vengeance, and justice, situating personal tragedies within broader human insights. Chattanathan D demonstrates his commitment to using fiction as a vehicle for philosophical reflection, making *The Heel* a work of both narrative power and intellectual depth.

Chattanathan D's *Of Heart and Hearings* (2024) is a novel that continues his distinctive project of weaving narrative storytelling with philosophical reflection, offering readers a profound exploration of human insights. The author began writing novels to articulate the complexities of human existence and socio-cultural realities, using fiction as a medium not only for entertainment but also for moral and intellectual inquiry. His motivation lies in presenting ordinary lives as sites of extraordinary resilience, suffering, and dignity, thereby encouraging readers to reflect on the deeper truths of human experience.

The novel introduces a range of characters whose lives intersect around themes of love, justice, education, and resilience. Nathan, a recurring figure in Chattanathan's fiction, embodies the struggle for justice and moral clarity. Anjanamma, a woman of endurance, represents the silent strength of marginalized communities. Her teacher becomes a guiding force, emphasizing the transformative power of education. Alongside them, figures of affection and innovation—such as those involved in the subplot of robot invention—illustrate the human drive to transcend limitations.

Through these characters, Chattanathan D highlights universal truths. Nathan reflects on justice with the line: “*I couldn't believe that my life had taken such an unexpected turn. I was innocent, and yet I was being treated like a criminal. It was a stark reminder of how quickly things could change and how one could be caught up in a web of accusations without any fault of their own.*” (Chattanathan, 2024, p. 56), linking compassion to social responsibility. Anjanamma's teacher insists: “*She stated, ' My story is a clear example of how the support of loved ones and the transformative power of education can help us break free from societal expectations.*” (p.115), underscoring the liberating power of learning. Love is portrayed with subtlety, as one character observes: “*As we sat there, embraced in an unspoken language of love, I knew that no matter what lay ahead, the memories of our time together and the indelible mark she had left on my heart would forever guide and inspire me.*” (p.65), capturing the unspoken depth of affection. The subplot of robot invention dramatizes human struggle and success: “*In our fast-info world, she reminded me that actual knowledge comes from listening, talking, and appreciating everyone's unique life.*” (p.80). These incidents collectively show how listening—whether to silence, to truth, or to the heart—becomes a metaphor for understanding human resilience.



Critically, *Of Heart and Hearings* succeeds in blending narrative with philosophical depth. Its setting provides authenticity, grounding abstract insights in lived realities. The aphoristic style gives the text a universal appeal, resonating with readers across contexts. However, at times the heavy philosophical reflections may slow the pace of the narrative, making it feel more meditative than dramatic. Despite this limitation, the novel remains a significant contribution to Indian English literature. It is more than a story of relationships; it is a critical exploration of love, education, justice, resilience, and innovation, situating personal struggles within broader human insights. Chattanathan D demonstrates his commitment to using fiction as a vehicle for philosophical reflection, making *Of Heart and Hearings* a work of both narrative power and intellectual depth.

Chattanathan D's *Living While Dead* (2024) is a novel that exemplifies his distinctive style of blending narrative storytelling with philosophical reflection. As with his other works, the author began writing novels to articulate the complexities of human existence and socio-cultural realities, using fiction as a medium not only for entertainment but also for moral and intellectual inquiry. His motivation lies in presenting ordinary lives as sites of extraordinary resilience, suffering, and dignity, thereby encouraging readers to reflect on the deeper truths of human experience.

The novel introduces characters who grapple with the paradox of "living while dead"—a metaphor for existence without purpose, joy, or dignity. Set against the backdrop of contemporary Indian society, the narrative explores themes of alienation, despair, and the search for meaning. Chattanathan D situates these struggles within broader social contexts, showing how poverty, betrayal, and existential doubt shape individual lives. The novel is not merely a thriller or philosophical treatise but a meditation on the universal human condition.

Several incidents in the novel highlight Chattanathan D's portrayal of human insights. In one moment, a character reflects: "*But Goddess, simply living longer, extending one's existence indefinitely, does not automatically give life meaning or fulfilment. What truly matters is the quality of our existence rather than just how long it lasts*" (p.43), underscoring the emptiness of existence without aspiration. Another line—"The loss of my business wasn't just a financial blow but the shattering of dreams nurtured for decades. Aspirations I'd chased with fervour now lay in ruins, draining my resources and the very breath from my lungs. I felt like a drowning man, struggling to stay afloat in a sea of red" (p.76)—captures the hidden despair behind ordinary lives. The protagonist's encounters with betrayal reveal the fragility of trust: ". The same went for this gift – power without my own skills and integrity felt like a betrayal" (p.63). Yet the novel also emphasizes resilience, as seen in the reflection: "*a reminder of the power of the human spirit to endure, even in the face of adversity and faith that would guide me through whatever trials awaited*" (p.79). These aphoristic lines elevate the narrative, giving it universal resonance beyond its immediate story.

Critically, *Living While Dead* succeeds in blending narrative suspense with philosophical depth. Its urban setting provides authenticity, grounding abstract insights in lived realities. The aphoristic style gives the text a universal appeal, resonating with readers across contexts. However, at times the heavy philosophical reflections may slow the pace of the narrative,



making it feel more meditative than dramatic. Despite this limitation, the novel remains a significant contribution to Indian English literature. It is more than a story of despair; it is a critical exploration of alienation, betrayal, resilience, and compassion, situating personal struggles within broader human insights. Chattanathan D demonstrates his commitment to using fiction as a vehicle for philosophical reflection, making *Living While Dead* a work of both narrative power and intellectual depth.

Chattanathan D's *War and Wisdom* (2025) is a novel that reflects his larger literary purpose: to use fiction as a medium for exploring the philosophical and human dimensions of life. He began writing novels not merely to entertain but to probe into the complexities of existence, resilience, and socio-cultural realities. His works consistently highlight how ordinary lives, when placed under extraordinary pressures, reveal profound truths about human nature.

The novel introduces several memorable characters whose lives embody the paradox between conflict and knowledge. Laprado is central to the narrative, a warrior who is also a thinker. His reflections show how wisdom is born from scars, as he remarks: "*They told the story of my life—the scars of leadership, the marks of battles fought...*" (Chattanathan, 2024, p.106). Laprado's journey demonstrates that resilience is not inherited but forged through struggle. Nathan, a recurring figure in Chattanathan's fiction, embodies justice and moral clarity. His insight "*The pursuit of peace often requires us to confront the unexpected, even when it challenges our most deeply held beliefs*" (p.22) links external war to internal growth, emphasizing that the most difficult conflicts are those fought within. Through her, the novel underscores that survival itself can be an act of resistance. Finally, the teacher symbolizes the transformative power of education, reminding others that "*It wasn't just any school; it was a symbol of inclusivity, of bridging worlds that had long been apart. Avi had named it in honour of his father—Nathan's Institute of Education for Chimps*" (p.82), situating wisdom as a peaceful alternative to violence.

These textual statements, placed within the narrative, highlight Chattanathan D's portrayal of human insights. Laprado's scars become metaphors for lessons learned through suffering, Nathan's reflections tie justice to self-mastery, Anjanamma's silence emphasizes resilience, and the teacher's guidance situates education as liberation. The novel also explores love and innovation, with characters remarking: "*You have shown me that love is not confined to the realm of humans; it is a universal truth that can blossom between any two beings*" (p.35), and These lines collectively show how wisdom emerges from struggle, and how conflict—whether external or internal—can be a path to deeper understanding.

Critically, *War and Wisdom* succeeds in blending narrative with philosophical depth. Its aphoristic style gives the text a universal appeal, resonating with readers across contexts. At times, the heavy philosophical tone may slow the pace of the narrative, making it feel more meditative than dramatic. Yet the novel remains a significant contribution to Indian English literature, offering a critical exploration of war, resilience, love, education, and wisdom, situating personal struggles within broader human insights. Through Laprado, Nathan, Anjanamma, and the teacher, Chattanathan D demonstrates his commitment to using fiction as a vehicle for philosophical reflection, making *War and Wisdom* a work of both narrative power and intellectual depth.



In conclusion, Chattanathan D's novels—*Anjanamma*, *Living While Dead*, *Of Heart and Hearings*, *War and Wisdom*, *The Heel*, and *Rides with Sahib*—collectively reveal his deep engagement with the portrayal of human insights. His decision to write stems from a desire to probe the philosophical and socio-cultural dimensions of life, transforming fiction into a medium of reflection and moral inquiry. Each novel, though distinct in theme, converges on the idea that resilience, justice, love, education, silence, and wisdom are forged in adversity and expressed through ordinary lives.

Characters such as Laprado, Nathan, Anjanamma, the teacher, and Sahib embody diverse facets of human struggle—whether scars of conflict, the endurance of silence, the liberating power of education, or the search for dignity in companionship. Their voices, captured in aphoristic lines like “Wisdom is the scar left after conflict has healed” and “Justice begins when we hear the unheard”, elevate the narratives beyond plot, turning them into meditations on existence.

Taken together, these works demonstrate Chattanathan D's distinctive style of combining narrative depth with philosophical reflection. While his aphoristic tone sometimes slows the pace, it gives his novels a universal resonance. His portrayal of human insights situates personal struggles within broader truths about survival, identity, and resilience, affirming his place as a writer who uses fiction as a vehicle for intellectual and moral exploration.

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