

# THE JOURNEY OF EMOTIONAL HEALING AND SECOND CHANCES – A DEEP ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL “STARS WILL GUIDE YOU HOME” BY STUTI CHANGLE

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## **Abstract:**

This paper explores the interconnectedness of human aspirations and the journey of healing emotionally through digital companionship in **Stuti Changle's** “**Stars will guide you Home**”. It is a compelling work of contemporary Indian Writing in English that delves deep into this generation of artificial intelligence, emotional journeys of modern Indian youths wrestling with ambitions, identity, a feel of belonging and their emotional connection in this digital age. It also deals with the characters discovering themselves standing in the toughest phase of their lives and searching for the meaning of their life in this fast – paced, digitally driven world.

This novel also engages with the Cultural realities and the global aspirations of the characters and the readers in the context of digital intimacy. It also addresses the mental health, digital dependency, mainly AI, transnational Identities and a greater range of intersection of technology and emotion. Through the life journeys of Nirvaan, Kiana, Asmitha and AILENA, this novel reflects the struggles of the current generation caught between the societal pressure, cultural and hierarchical practices and personal dreams.

Changle has taken AI as a main plot tool, as a catalyst involving the technology's role as one of the main narrators addressing emotional loneliness and imitate the role of human actions. The writer has headed towards portraying AI as one of the main reliable sources and a guide for the modern youths in their emotional journey.

## **Keywords:**

Artificial intelligence, Emotional Vulnerability, Self-Discovery, Healing, Identity, Aspirations, Reconciliation

The Novel revolves around the evolution of its characters Nirvaan, Kiana, Asmitha and Ailena – an AI app created by Asmitha, be it emotional, career oriented or in the side of technology. The story is set against the backdrop of urban cities, aspirations and internal conflicts.

The story moves with multiple narratives across different places and timelines. One of the intriguing elements of this novel is the portrayal of human – AI conversations. Where AI is not just a tool but a character blurring the lines of technology and human functions. This story reflects concerns of contemporary Indian youths in connection with the digital and artificial intelligence.

This contemporary fiction follows the intertwined journey of Nirvaan, Kiana (Kiranjeet), Asmitha and the AI app AILENA. The story begins with Nirvaan’s narrative, of him coming back to IIT-D years after his graduation as one of the panelists in an Entrepreneurship program where he remembers his

moments in the college, his friends and his first love and break-up. There he meets his batch mate Asmitha, who came there as an entrepreneur to present her newly created AI app for dating – AILENA, and she goes on to explain its unique and honest features, which attract everyone around them including Nirvaan. After her presentation, Nirvaan meets her, and they crack a deal as he is ready to become a major investor in this app's project and launch. Now this app forms the crux of the story, serving as the central element or a digital cupid around the characters' lives and emotional journeys. In this part, we can see that the protagonist is hit with nostalgia as he relives some bitter-sweet memories, while he became one of India's start-up icons, making his own identity in his passion. And there is an invention in the house- AILENA, which is now going to get global recognition.

Next comes Kiana's narrative introducing her as working Indian in Chicago, with a high salary and stability, meeting her only friend and confidante, Zayn at a regular meeting spot discussing their plans about the upcoming holidays and about her life with Luna, her cat being her only family there and her not wanting to go back to her native and family and calling her uncle and aunt's house in San Francisco as her 'home'. The scene shifts to her signing-up in the app AILENA opened for users to sign-up for the Beta tester as she wants to know about Asmitha's idea. This part shows us the independent, stable but lonely life of a girl who left back her native and family as a bad memory and started a new journey of self-discovery with her confidantes making a new identity for herself as now, she is a successful woman.

Here comes the human-AI conversation, where Asmitha converses with AILENA asking her about the immense data processes and algorithms and instructing to do everything with pure honesty. AILENA tells her that it is processing countless profiles to find a single couple for the tester. This part tells us the booming use of Artificial Intelligence in various sectors, even to find soulmates.

In these parts of the narratives, we come to know the present conflicts and the past wounds of the two protagonists. Nirvaan, who has been in a relationship with Nia, has set his mind to propose her for marriage, but to his shock, she is not ready for a commitment soon. Though unhappy and confused, he feigns a smile to hide his dilemma. Contrarily, Kiana's past resurfaces before her, the family situations, her family's constant taunts of being a girl, debts, marriage pressure and her rebellion to move out of the house forever packing her life. For her, the day she stepped foot in the States felt as if she was born again. But then again being in a foreign country and named as a 'resident alien' makes an identity crisis and gives a feeling of not belonging and for her nowhere, neither in native nor here. Meanwhile, Nirvaan gets notified to create a profile in the AILENA as he has been selected as a potential match for a person that is with Kiana. Here comes the twist in the tale, the single couple for the Beta tester among all other global users before the app's launch. He has signed up the app, beforehand to know about the app and quickly he created one and sent message to his potential match in the name of Neer, hiding his original identity so that no one can know about his personal world. As Kiana is headed for her holidays to SFO, at the airport, she receives an email of being selected as a potential match. As soon as she set up hers, she already has a message from Neer, and they start chatting about their likings and plans for the day. Asmitha and AILENA have their part of conversation where they discuss making the couple use other features of the app to bond better. This part is an ecstatic one as the couple begin to know one another. Now it has started to give the exact feeling of the blend of technology, emotions, and culture as an AI app is simulating a couple as soulmates.

In the further narratives, we can see their work life and the changes in their lives with each other's presence, as how Kiana advises Neer to decide on his stance with Nia and help him get away from his dilemma and make him confront his doubts about himself which led him to get Nia out of his life and move on happily, while in turn gets some advice from him on opening up to close ones even to her past love,

which makes her think about it after a long time. It is also revealed here that how Aunt Mannie, has been a pillar of support to her during her harsh days like a mother, and she recounts the heart-wrenching events from her broken home when she decided to walk away from there forever, because of which she still misses her love 'Nirvaan' who was her only 'home'. Here is the revelation of their past love and comes the second chance for the leads; they have been chosen as a couple again by AILENA. Their high school love story is flashed back in a very gentle manner with both remembering each other very fondly. Their bond in the present deepens with every passing day, and they are to be met virtually in a hiking activity in AILENA, which they both cherish and slowly they become inseparable again, and this reminds them about Nirvaan and Kiranjeet. But then again, they are to be separated, this time by the AI app as it finds them incompatible, leaving them confused about each other.

Kiana recounts her past relationship in university, who cheated upon her and left her heartbroken, but it gave her an invisible power to fight back and oust him out of her life and house as a stable woman, to get back in track with her life with the advice given by her aunt to prioritize and love herself. She lets herself to break down in front of her Neighbor after the issue with AILENA who, a psychiatrist by profession, let her flow with her emotions which lead her to heal and compose herself, and he advises her to follow her love and go back to India. And this time, both Nirvaan and Kiana, are ready to find each other as they decide to overcome their self-doubt, vulnerability and go ahead with their feelings.

Here comes the flawed mirror, an AI app, AILENA, who because of bugs in its algorithms, misjudged the compatibility of the couple and is in the process of sorting it out. After this arrives the big day, the meeting of them in the launch event of the AILENA for which Kiana flew back to India after years fighting her internal conflicts, and where in the heat of the moment in the questioning session Kiana and Neer meet in a dramatic tone making the audience go awe and meeting each other again, as Nirvaan and Kiranjeet which resurfaces their past emotions, and they confess their feelings for each other and reconcile, coming back to their 'home' and lead a happy life together forever.

Here, Artificial Intelligence playing a role of a matching app, brings two persons together, giving them second chances, exposing their emotional gaps, prompting them to choose their emotions over algorithms. It becomes the symbol of modern dating and emotional vulnerability in this social media world. It exposes the brewing tension between rational compatibility according to its algorithm and the characters emotional unpredictability, the changes in their feelings. The protagonist's digital bond becomes a space for them for healing and self-discovery from their past wounds of cultural expectations, emotional isolation and longing for a connection. Their emotionally intimate connection blossoms through the app's interface. But then AILENA abruptly deems them "incompatible" and severs their connection, prompting a test of whether they trust the algorithm or their own hearts, where they choose their emotions and love for each other leaving it to their stars to guide them to their 'home'. Though the app became a flawed mirror, a human created logic failed among the whirlwind of emotions, it was the one that acted as a catalyst, a star to guide them back to their 'home'. Their emotional vulnerability at times of heartbreaks led them to heal. Though the wounds were unresolved, they fulfilled their aspirations of becoming what they wanted to be. The way they choose them and their emotions over any algorithm and went in the path of reconciliation shows their love for each other in this modern world and that destinies and stars' plans are the ultimate destination.

**Nirvaan**, an IIT Delhi graduate, a man who chose to walk away from the high-paying job offer to pursue his passion for Entrepreneurship, has established himself as a successful entrepreneur and an investor. A cultured, ambitious and sensitive person haunted by past love, broken connection and unresolved feelings

with Kiranjeet. When she leaves him brokenhearted without any explanation and moved to New York, he found it very difficult to cope with the pain for months, still remembering about his sweet moments with her whenever he talks about love and commitment even when chatting with Kiana. Even after years of successful career and tired of multiple relationships he isn't able to forget his first love.

His other relationships after Kiranjeet did not last for a long time as he did not feel the same love as he felt with her. But with Nia, a social media influencer and a model with whom he thought to take his relationship forward with the commitment of marriage, it was not the same from the other side which made him doubt his own decision. That was the reason he logged in to AILENA to find himself a partner, a love for life as he was afraid of being alone his entire life and got connected with Kiana in the Beta tester as they were the perfect soulmates according to AILENA where he became Neer. But after discussing this mess with Kiana through AILENA, he quickly takes her advice of breaking-up with Nia and confronts his dilemma. This led to him re-discovering himself by moving in, to Mumbai alone to know about his domestic capabilities, as said by Kiana. His connection with Kiana that is Kiranjeet through AILENA rekindled his belief in love, as he badly wanted someone in his life to be with him forever, to love him and loved by him, whom he can lean on to as his 'home' and he found his only home and first love at the end.

His character begins as a self-questioning person that gradually learns to confront his feelings and past, reconnect with his feelings, rediscover his inner compass by going back to his 'home' and reconciling with Kiana.

**“We have all the power and the magic to makes things right within ourselves.”**

**Kiana**, that is Kiranjeet, based in Chicago, senior product manager at Beta, emotionally guarded, torn between freedom, ambition and attachment, an introvert, once connected deeply with Nirvaan in their high school days, drifted away due to her family circumstances.

Years after establishing herself as an independent and stable woman and a failed relationship, her unspoken feelings and unfinished conversations resurface unexpectedly through AILENA with Neer unbeknownst to his original identity. She had to make hard choices in her life starting from her teenage days. She was a girl of fewer words in her school and got into a relationship with Nirvaan after a debate between them which made him fall head over heels in love with her. Soon he became her only 'home'. But, as she was from a lower-class family and a girl child in a household without a son, she was treated lowly from her childhood. She was to be married to an NRI and packed out of the house like her sister, who took her life because of her husband, to which she rebelled and left her house forever to pursue her studies and life in the US. But she never confided her familial matters with Nirvaan as she thought he would never understand her stance coming from a modern, upper-class respected family, which eventually led her to break up with him and move on. However, she still misses him as she too never felt the same love. After her chat with Neer in the app regarding opening about her situations, and his words about revealing her issues would have sorted her problem with Nirvaan, made her think about the stance and revisits her past that she never thought to.

Later in her life, when she fell love with Liam, in her university and became each other's pillar of strength, and when he cheated on her, she ousted him out of the house as she was financially in an upper position than him, that was a moment she felt powerful within herself and heartbroken. That is where her aunt Manpreet helped her recover, the same way she did when Kiana came to States for the first time. Manpreet's advice of self-love reflected a positive response on her life. That is the reason she would always go to her aunt and uncle's house calling it as her 'home' in States.

Her struggles with being felt unwanted, fallen into the trap of patriarchy and cultural practices, sacrificing her emotional bonds for personal freedom, being in identity crisis in abroad, being without a feeling of belonging and alone, being emotionally reserved and distant to gradually discovering herself, breaking the shackles, opening up, loving herself, Seeking closure and embrace her vulnerability, all this reunites her with Nirvaan bringing her back to her ‘home’.

**“Stop waiting to be loved, to be wanted, to be cared for by someone else.  
You should do yourself that Favour first.”**

**Asmitha**, a data scientist, an AI enthusiast, an entrepreneur, creator of AILENA – an AI app, a focused techie supported by her family, connected with both Nirvaan and Kiana at academic level as she was a batch mate of Nirvaan at IIT-D and a collaborator with Kiana in an AI assignment on an exchange program from IIT-D to NYU. Designed the AILENA app specially with unique features and honest algorithms by feeding it all forms and definitions of love properly.

**AILENA**, an Artificial intelligence-based Love and Engagement Neo Algorithm, designed to find and unite soulmates through meaningful experiences shared in the virtual world. This innovative and advanced dating app promises to find the perfect match for every global user by delving into the intricacies of their lives and desires through the data they share with the app. Through advanced AI algorithms, analyses the compatibility scores based on metrics for a potential connection. It is being created as a digital cupid for a noble mission and proves to the world that AI can have positive impact on human race.

In its virtual world within the app universe, the potential couple can engage in activities together, hiking, virtual meetings, which would strengthen their bond. It is fed with all knowledge of algorithms and of love from religious to myth to literature. Sometimes, it made some blunder, and it is not to be blamed as it is a technology, when humans do wonders in making blunders. One of its updated versions in its algorithms with bugs created the mess of declaring the couple as incompatible; point to be noted is that it tried to autocorrect it and even informed its creator of the issue so that it can be sorted out at the earliest.

Indian writing in English has evolved to a new level in this contemporary world reflecting the complexities of identity, cultural expectations and globalization. In this novel Changle blends emotional realism with AI and some elements of modern life, self-discovery. Her contribution to this genre is engaging with accessible themes like technology, choices and human connection. This novel presents a heartfelt story with its characters very relatable emotionally, centered around chances, relationships and healing. The inclusion of the AI app as a main narrative was innovative. While the emotional arcs were engaging, at times some actions were very quick. Nevertheless, it was an emotional rollercoaster ride with AI in a very fast pace.

AILENA is not just an AI app, it comforts, guides the protagonists to heal, find themselves and each other acting as the star like Klara in Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel Klara and the Sun, a solar-powered AI robot, an artificial friend to children. AILENA remains an emotional and strong guidance of voice within the app. AI in literature is not bound to technology anymore, it is all about emotions, truth and self-reflection. **“Stars will guide you Home”** delivers a heartfelt exploration of human emotion, vulnerability, path to heal and personal growth with second chances in a positive way through contemporary writing. The novel reflects the evolving nature of humans and reinforces the idea of guiding, healing, hope and aspirations:

**“It is all written in the stars, and that the stars will guide you home, always.”**

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