

Ashish Kumar Pandey

Posthuman Renaissance(s) – Making Self, Making World

Existential Becoming and Corporeal Revival in Priya Sarukkai Chhabria's *Clone*

Abstract: The Renaissance, meaning “to be born again” (*re-nasci*), is embodied in the posthuman age by cloning—a form of rebirth achieved through biotechnological advancement. This paper aims to examine existentialist aspects of such revivalist technologies in Priya Sarukkai Chhabria's *Clone* (2018). The novel's cloned subject, 14/54/G, embodies a forced corporeal revival—a technological “rebirth” that introduces a new physical self but strategically directs its consciousness to trace the Original's final speech. The clone's existence rests in undoing the Original's legacy, highlighting how the authoritarian Global Community attempts to contain this existential transformation within the confines of genetic predetermination. This engineered revival lays the foundation for a critique of anthropocentric and dualistic frameworks. The clone's enforced purpose triggers an existential angst when her programmed “actuality” breaks down. Her consciousness begins to retrieve the Original's suppressed memories, and she develops traits “not characteristic of clones,” specifically the capacity to imagine, feel, and dream. This process of “making of the self” is a resistance to the authority of the Originals (a group). The paper explores this negotiation between inherited identity and emergent subjectivity, showing how *Clone* engages existential questions about authenticity and meaning within a world that denies her intrinsic worth. Ultimately, the novel's narrative challenges the idea of linear temporality associated with Humanism and embodies the concept of continuous becoming. The memory shifts of 14/54/G are emblematic of multispecies becoming, weaving history and the

perspective of other species into her present consciousness, thus dismantling the Eurocentric idea of temporality. Through this fluid subjectivity, *Clone* negotiates a new kind of selfhood and “makes world” by asserting that the birthright to be human is not genetic inheritance but an ethical praxis rooted in continuous transformation and relationality.

Keywords: *Posthuman, Clone, Corporeality, Revival*

INTRODUCTION

The term "Renaissance" derived its origin from the Latin *renasci* (to be born again), which signifies a period of cultural and intellectual awakening. The European Renaissance marked a profound revival of classical learning and culture. Coupled with the Renaissance was Humanism, which, as Mark Cartwright writes, "believed in the importance of an education in classical literature" with “focus instead on what it meant to be human." In short, humanism helped redefine humanity as a rational force that could (re)create itself through knowledge of its past.

In the Indian context, the 19th and early 20th centuries were a period of such revival—a moment of self-discovery and cultural revival under the British colonial rule. It was a period marked by the imperative to revive and reconstruct a fissured and fractured identity that sought to forge an anti-colonial consciousness which as, Partha Chatterjee notes in his *The Nation and Its Fragments (1993)*, was done by harmonizing the ancient cultural wisdoms with modern sensibilities. English education exposed Indian elites (the Bhadrak community) to liberal ideas of humanism and rationalism.

However, both the European and Indian Renaissances had an exclusionary side, as in Europe the universalist aspirations of Renaissance humanism also led to colonial misadventures.

As Rosi Braidotti argues in her book *The Posthuman* (2013), the humanist subject imagined during the Renaissance was never universal but modeled on the Vitruvian Man—a figure that fused bodily perfection, rationality, and moral authority into an exclusionary norm of the “Human.” Humanism functioned, or more accurately was allowed to function, as a civilizational logic that legitimized imperialism and epistemic violence. Likewise, the Indian Renaissance, particularly in Bengal, largely catered to upper-caste communities. This idea, however, has been critiqued by Mahitosh Mandal, who asserted the existence of a simultaneous, independent Dalit intellectual tradition that established a distinct historiography of the Bengal Renaissance.

Corporeal Revival

My paper, however, situates its inquiry within Priya Sarukkai Chabbria’s *Clone* (2018) to expand the discourse of revival beyond its cultural, political, or intellectual (ideological) parameters, relocating it within the corporeal and ontological. Renaissance presupposes access to memory, imagination, and historical consciousness; however, in the novel, this very condition of the Renaissance is foreclosed. As 14/54/G notes, “I am a Clone. I do not possess imagination...Clones are not supposed to dream: this redundancy is removed from our circuitry.” Clones are engineered without imagination and are denied the right to remember; if permitted, remembrance is regulated, monitored, and permitted only to the extent that it serves the state’s instrumental goals. In the 24th-century Global Community, cloning serves as a state-sanctioned technological rebirth, designed to ensure the longevity of the Originals, the elite. In contrast to the anti-colonial revival, this corporeal revival in the form of cloning serves as a method to imprison the body in a recursive cycle of genetic repetition, weaponizing rebirth by exerting a form of biopower, thereby maintaining a rigid socio-political status quo. So, what remains

possible in this posthuman order is not a cultural or an ideological renaissance, but a narrowly controlled corporeal revival—bodies reborn without sanctioned access to the past. This is what Foucault meant by “docile body”—one that may be subjected, transformed, used, and improved. My analysis instead foregrounds the existential crisis that unfolds when the clone is confronted with memory and a historical consciousness. Much like the colonial subject who, in response to imperial domination, turned inwards to what Partha Chatterjee calls the “inner realm” to wage an ideological struggle, the clone’s awakening marks a revival that is not merely corporeal but historical and ideological. The novel thus traces moments of resistance as acts of becoming and self-making that unfold in response to crisis.

Samsara and Existential Crisis

In Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, the cycle of *Samsara* (*rebirth*) is inherently teleological—a movement towards the ultimate liberation of the self (*Moksha* or *Nirvana*). In these frameworks, reincarnation or rebirth is not a forced repetition but one that is aimed at moral or spiritual evolution. However, in Priya Chabria’s 24th-century dystopia, cloning subverts this idea into a “stagnant Samsara.” The state, or the Global Community, operates on this logic that identity is biological and corporeal, residing solely in the *Sthula Sharira* (the physical body) or the DNA. Yet, Hindu ontology posits that the existence of the *Linga Sharira* (the vital body) carries the *vasanas*, which are the latent impressions of the past lives that seep through births and cannot be filtered.

While the GC views the DNA as the definitive “essence” of the human, possessing and using which can lead to replication, Jean-Paul Sartre would label this DNA as mere facticity that comprises the brute facts of one’s existence—the genetic makeup one did not choose and was,

thus, stripped of agency. The Global Community attempts to collapse and contain the identity of the clone, 14/54/G, into this facticity. The *Vasanas* act as leaked spiritual data from one form to another, and it is reflected in the narrative as this leakage of memory—"When I awoke, I no longer knew to which world I belonged for I still felt I was swimming through memory, and my organs of perception were deceiving me. Which world was real?"—from the Original, who was a writer in the 21st century, to the clone. This leakage brings in a sense of terminal existential crisis: "I am a fourteenth-generation Clone and something has gone wrong with me." For Sartre, the human condition is defined by the tension between facticity (what we are) and transcendence (what we can become). The Global Community manufactures a condition that deems 14/54/G to live in "bad faith" (*mauvaise foi*), a state where she must deny her own freedom and believe she is nothing more than her "actuality" as a fourteenth-generation clone. The existential angst develops when her transcendence—her conscious ability to project herself beyond the confines of her biological programming—shatters the illusion of her "actuality": "Clones exhibit actuality. I do not know the reality of my actuality."

Tentacular Memory and Subaltern Retrieval

The idea of clones engineered to maintain the status quo highlights what Sartre argues: that for objects, the essence precedes their existence—and so does the idea of caste. As B.R. Ambedkar in his *Annihilation of Caste* (2014) suggests, the work one chooses to do was already preordained before their birth, not by their ability or action. Sami Ahmad Khan, too, highlights in his article "Annihilation of Cloning" that cloning serves as a caste system that divides society into hierarchies. But for Clone to move beyond her engineered constraints, as Sartre argues, existence must precede essence. The GC provided her with a manufactured essence, but through

her visitations, she discovers that her existence is a blank canvas of “no-thingness”—“But in truth who am I?”—that she must define through her own choices. The crisis deepens as her body begins to ‘rebel’ against its engineered facticity. The growth of hair and menstruation are biological “mutations” that signify the failure of the GC to contain her in a state of stagnant DNA-based repetition. As 14/54/G says, “Clones do not grow moles.” These corporeal changes are manifestations of her transcendence. Her body ceases to be a passive archive and is transformed into a site of becoming. As Braidotti suggests, the posthuman self is not a fixed entity but a “process of becoming.” Clones, in the Global Community, are engineered according to their “actuality”—a state of functionality wherein they are stripped of independent existence. The protagonist, 14/54/G, a fourteenth-generation clone, is provided with a conducive environment solely for the purpose of facilitating the retrieval of her Original, Aa-Aa’s, intellectual legacy (her last speech). The GC operates on what Kerry Lynn Macintosh defines as the “resurrection fallacy”—the belief that cloning is a means of extending or resuming the life of a deceased genetic predecessor. This is what GC aims to do by identifying her Original as “Aa-Aa” which suggests a primordial and a foundational voice that mirrors the logic of repetition to contain the clone’s identity and treat it as a mere extension of the Original, Aa-Aa, rather than a new individual.

The body, however, acts as a subversive archive as 14/54/G begins to experience “visitations” that resist the Global Community’s requirement for a coherent and singular narrative. These memories, as the novel depicts, are not linear but what Donna Haraway calls “tentacular” and dispersed. She begins to question her singularity: “Am I comprised of multiple selves?” Her consciousness retrieves and gets interspersed with the perspectives of historical and

non-human beings like Trichaisma, the three-eyed dog, the parrot, and a fish of Kashi. “Let me put it this way: I remember,” she declares, defying the circuitry that supposedly removed redundancy like dreaming.

The visitations transcend time and space, moving beyond the logic of coherence that the Global Community demands from her. By remembering and reviving the stories of the “unaccounted” and “uncounted” pasts—such as that of the madwoman of Daoli, whose son was killed in the Battle of Kalinga—14/54/G performs an act of subaltern retrieval. When she is interrogated, she is found “cloaked in literature,” identifying as “Anna Karenina” or “Shakuntala.” Her faltering is an act of rejection of the “dogma of the predestination.” Her imagination, dreams, and biological aberrations—such as the growth of hair and menstruation—mark the transition from the predestined “actuality” to a posthuman subjectivity that acknowledges the body as a site of multispecies understanding.

The “Making of the Self” for 14/54/G is an act of defiance against the hegemonic structure that denies the clones the ability to feel, imagine, or dream. The development of pathos and love for the Leader, an Original, is not a programmed interaction but one that is based on an emergent and dispersed subjectivity. This interiority is a threat to the Originals, who think of imagination as a “mutation.” By dreaming, 14/54/G creates a “redemptive space” that state surveillance cannot penetrate. The state expects a perfect, coherent repetition of her Original’s final speech; instead, 14/54/G chooses to leave it incomplete and, thus, refuses to provide the closure that the Global Community expects and desires. By doing so, not only does she reclaim her identity, but she also moves beyond the engineered limitations of cloning. These visitations that make her idea of self-apparent lead to a “making of the world.” Chhabria’s narrative

challenges the linear temporality associated with Western Humanism by providing a cross-species narrative that subverts anthropocentrism.

Posthumanism, as scholars like Francesca Ferrando and Rosi Braidotti elaborate, is also post-dualism and post-anthropocentrism. 14/54/G's memory is not of a singular "I," but a dispersed network of being. The fragmented visitations do not follow a coherent path; instead, they are tentacular, reaching into different historical times and cultural moments of the Indian past. This represents a radical departure from the anthropocentric limits of traditional narrative, evolving into a tentacular and dispersed memory that functions as a site of ontological resistance.

This narrative strategy aligns with Marco Caracciolo's idea of posthuman narrative, where he argues that engaging with non-human perspectives allows literature to challenge anthropocentric bias and foster a cross-species affect. By weaving these plural cosmologies, the clone effectively dismantles the humanist requirement of a coherent and singular identity. The "Making of the Self," therefore, becomes inseparable from the "Making of the World," as 14/54/G leverages this dispersed archive to negotiate a selfhood that is multispecies, relational, and ethically grounded in the vast, interconnected web of life.

CONCLUSION

The novel traces the development of clone 14/54/G from her breaking away with her programmed actuality to revisiting her Original's memories to carving an identity beyond her engineered constraints. This negotiation between inherited memory and emergent subjectivity is what Shreyansh Jain and Smita Jha label as *Bildungsroman*. A posthuman renaissance must now be a revival of relationality rather than a revival or rekindling of the logical Vitruvian Man since

we have transcended the exclusive bounds of humanism. The Global Community in Clone and other contemporary nation-states function through a mandated selective amnesia—"We wish to remember. They wish to forget" but a renewed interest in history must be the catalyst for the posthuman renaissance. This interest must come from a dispersed archive of previously silenced voices rather than from the straight idea of human greatness.

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