“Of Rituals, Rivers, and Rebirth : Towards an ethics of Posthuman Coexistence”

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Abstract

What does it mean to undergo rebirth in a posthuman world where the line between protector and destroyer, human and nonhuman, persistently shifts? This paper examines that question through the lens of Rosi Braidotti’s affirmative posthumanism, which understands all life as an ever-evolving process of ethical “becoming.” Using an interpretive conceptual philosophical method grounded in cultural depiction, it investigates how modern humanity misconstrues renewal for novelty.

Every year, we celebrate festivals such as Durga Puja or Chhath with unaltered rituals and unwavering delight, yet in human life we tire of continuity, replacing people and values as if novelty were virtue. This paradox raises the question of whether our idea of “rebirth” itself demands reconceptualization: is it an ethical renewal or selective repetition? A Bengali proverb says that if rituals did not exist, a daughter would have been a lifelong support; evoking the truth that, unlike other species, humans often let custom override instinctive care, making intelligence both a boon and a burden. Rebirth does not reject intellect; it realigns it with instinct so that thinking and feeling coexist rather than compete. Likewise, in Tagore’s Noukadubi, a river’s wreck rewrites human lives, portraying nature as the agent of moral renewal.

Through these contemplations the paper argues that the posthuman renaissance is not the formation of new selves but the retrieval of moral coexistence within an interlinked world. An ethical endurance of becoming that binds self and planet in one metamorphosing rhythm.

Keywords : Posthumanism; Rebirth; Ethical Coexistence; Ritual Continuity; Human and Nonhuman Relations.

‘Rethinking Rebirth in a Posthuman World’

What does it mean to speak of **rebirth** in a world that is increasingly marked by saturation, escalation, and ethical disorientation? In the contemporary discourse, rebirth is often perceived as novelty: a fresh beginning, a renewal of what no longer excites, or a departure from continuity in favour of the new. Yet this understanding sits uneasily within the periphery of everyday human practices. The Rituals, festivals, and cultural cycles are embraced with precision because they repeat, they return unchanged and provide a great sense of stability. The contradiction emerges when this comfort with repetition eventually collapses in the human relationships, values, and ethical commitments, where continuity is increasingly treated as a phenomenon of stagnation. This paradox raises a fundamental concern which is central to the idea of a posthuman renaissance. **If rebirth is celebrated in ritual and rejected in lived ethical relations, what kind of renewal are we truly seeking?** Is rebirth merely a cosmetic transformation, or does it honestly demand a deeper reorientation of how humans understand responsibility, care, and coexistence within a shared world? The posthuman turn complicates this question further by unsettling the assumption that humans alone are the measure of ethical life. In a posthuman framework, human existence is inseparable from the nonhuman forces; animals, landscapes, material environments that constantly shape the moral life as much as the human intention does.

This paper approaches rebirth not as a dramatic rupture from the past but as an ethical process of becoming. Drawing on *Rosi Braidotti's notion of affirmative posthumanism,* rebirth is clearly understood as a relational practice that realigns intellect with instinct, innovation with continuity, and human agency with planetary coexistence. Rather than imagining renewal as the creation of entirely new selves, the posthuman renaissance invites a reconsideration of inherited values and a retrieval of ethical sensibilities that modernity has gradually eroded.

The central question guiding this paper is therefore: *how can rebirth be reimagined in a posthuman world not as novelty or replacement, but as an ethical endurance of becoming; one that sustains coexistence across human and nonhuman life?* By examining these cultural practices, ethical contradictions, and literary representations, the paper strongly argues that posthuman renaissance is less about inventing the future and more about repairing the relational foundations that make ethical life possible.

The Posthuman Ethics and the 'Question of Becoming'

To rethink rebirth beyond ideas of novelty, rupture, or replacement, this paper significantly draws on an affirmative posthuman ethical framework that understands life as relational, interdependent, and continuously in the making. Within this perspective, ethical life does not emerge from mere abstract moral codes or hierarchical distinctions

between human and nonhuman, but from the various sustained responsiveness within shared ecological and social conditions. Rebirth, therefore, cannot be conceived as a sudden reinvention of the self; it must be understood as an ethical realignment that unfolds through ongoing relations.
Central to this framework is the concept of **becoming**, which challenges the assumption of fixed identities or stable moral positions. Life is not a completed state but a process shaped by interaction, endurance, and mutual dependence. Such an understanding unsettles human exceptionalism by situating human agency alongside nonhuman forces; like the animals, landscapes, rivers, and material environments that actively keep participating in the ethical realm of life. From this standpoint, rebirth is not an exclusively human *achievement but it's a relational process that takes place within a more than human world.* This ethical orientation also resists rigid binaries which continuously dominate modern moral thinking. Ethical renewal does not demand a choice between care and resistance, gentleness and strength, or openness and resolve. Instead, it requires their coordination. Ethical life depends upon a balance between **nazakat** (grace or tenderness) and **takat** (strength or endurance), understood not as competing qualities but as complementary capacities that allow coexistence to persist over time. Care without endurance collapses into fragility, just as strength without care risks turning into domination.

Equally crucial is the ethical posture that sustains this balance: a coordination between **mudrata** (tender responsiveness) and **dhrirata** (firm ethical resolve). Ethical coexistence cannot be maintained through tenderness alone, nor through firmness in isolation. Rather, it demands an inner capacity to remain receptive without dissolving boundaries, and resolute without abandoning care. This coordination must be sustained within the ethical interiority of living beings, not coercively applied as a hierarchy of values or distributed as opposing roles. By articulating rebirth in this way, the posthuman renaissance emerges not as a cultural spectacle or a symbolic return, but as an ethical demand. It calls for patience rather than acceleration, endurance rather than replacement, and relational responsibility rather than individual reinvention. Thus ‘Rebirth’ becomes meaningful only when it sustains the precarious balance between human life and the more than human world within which it exists.

Ritual Continuity and the Paradox of Human Renewal

One of the most striking discrepancies of modern ethical life appears in the way continuity is embraced in ritual practice yet resisted in human relationships. Across cultures, festivals and rituals are valued precisely because they return unchanged. In Bengal, for instance, Durga Puja arrives every year in the same season, along the same

routes, at the same neighbourhood pandals and river ghats. The idols may be newly crafted and the clothes may change, but the existing structure, rhythm, and anticipation of the festival remains stable throughout. This cyclicality is not experienced as monotony; instead, it generates reassurance and belongingness.

The paradox unfolds when this comfort with continuity collapses in the domain of human relations. While ritual repetition is often celebrated with great enthusiasm, meanwhile the continuity in personal bonds is increasingly perceived as a form of stagnation. Commitment is replaced by choice, endurance by novelty, and patience by the impulse for change. This contradiction raises a critical ethical inquiry: why is repetition meaningful in ritual life but intolerable in relational life? *If continuity sustains joy and meaning in cultural practice, why is it treated as a burden when it comes to people, values, and responsibilities?*

This tension illuminates a deeper misunderstanding of rebirth itself. In ritual contexts, rebirth is understood as return with renewal rather than simple replacement theory. The goddess returns every year, not because she is new, but because her presence sustains continuity. Human life, however, increasingly interprets rebirth as an alteration; new roles, new partners, new values; often without ethical reflection on what is being left behind. Renewal becomes confused with novelty, and ethical endurance is mistaken for emotional exhaustion. Such contradictions are not accidental; they are shaped by a persistent belief in human exceptionalism. Humans frequently assume that their capacity to reason entitles them to constant reinvention, even when this reinvention erodes relational stability. Yet when viewed alongside nonhuman life, this assumption becomes questionable. Many forms of life perpetuated care through reflexive continuity rather than symbolic obligation. The human tendency to intellectualise relationships; to categorise, replace, and rationalise departure, often complicates care rather than trying to deepen it.

This paradox clearly suggests that the crisis is not one of generational failure or moral decline, but of ethical misalignment. The problem lies not in continuity itself, but in how continuity is unevenly valued across domains of life. A posthuman renaissance, therefore, demands a reassessment of this imbalance. If ritual life can sustain repetition without fatigue, then ethical life too must relearn how continuity can coexist with change; without reducing rebirth to replacement or freedom to abandonment.

Instinct, Intellect, and the Ethics of Care

If ritual life reveals how continuity can sustain meaning without exhaustion, human relationships expose how ethical care becomes strained under excessive intellectualisation. Human beings often claim moral superiority on the basis of reason, choice, and self-awareness. Yet these very capabilities frequently complicate care rather than strengthening it. Where nonhuman life sustains relations through instinctive continuity, human life transforms care into an object of calculation, deliberation, and replacement. This tension becomes particularly visible in how care is structured and justified. Human societies often formalise responsibility through roles, customs, and rational explanations: who is permitted to care, when care is obligatory, and under what conditions it may be withdrawn. In contrast, many nonhuman forms of life sustain care without symbolic compulsion or moral deliberation. This is not to elevate instinct, but to question whether human intellect always deepens ethical responsibility or sometimes distances individuals from it.

The problem, then, is not intelligence itself, but its misalignment with ethical endurance. Intellect enables reflection, planning, and innovation, yet when detached from instinctive responsiveness, it can legitimize withdrawal under the language of choice or self-fulfilment. Ethical care becomes conditional rather than sustained. The posthuman perspective disrupts this hierarchy by refusing to place human cognition above relational responsibility. It asks instead whether the capacity to think should enhance care; or excuse its renunciation.

From this stance, rebirth cannot be conceived as an escape from relational difficulty. A posthuman renaissance demands that intellect be reoriented toward ethical coexistence rather than self-exemption. Care must involve both openness and boundary, responsiveness and resolve. Without this coordination, tenderness dissolves into vulnerability, and firmness hardens into exclusion. Ethical life depends not on choosing one over the other, but on sustaining their balance over time.
Seen this way, the posthuman challenge is not to transcend humanity, but to relocate it. Humans are not superior caretakers by virtue of intellect alone; nor are they absolved of responsibility because care is intricate. Rebirth, therefore, becomes an ethical practice of endurance: remaining accountable within relations that are difficult, uneven, and rigorous. It is in this sustained ethical labour, rather than in constant reconfiguration, that the possibility of genuine renewal emerges.

The River and Moral Renewal: ‘Nature as Ethical Agent’

If human intellect complicates care and ritual life maintains continuity symbolically, nature introduces another crucial dimension to the posthuman understanding of rebirth: ethical renewal that unfolds beyond human intention. Rivers, landscapes, and

ecological forces do not merely provide settings for human action; they actively reconfigure moral trajectories. In literary and cultural imagination, the river often emerges as a site where human certainties dissolve and ethical life is reconfigured.

This is powerfully illustrated in Rabindranath Tagore's Noukadubi, where a river accident unsettles social arrangements, marital identities, and moral expectations. The river does not function as a passive backdrop to human drama; it intervenes decisively, dismantling the structures through which human lives had been organised. What follows is not a simple restoration of order, but an ethical reorientation forced by circumstance rather than choice. Lives are not renewed through intention, but through endurance, through navigating uncertainty, loss, and responsibility in altered conditions.

Read through a posthuman lens, the river in Noukadubi becomes an ethical agent rather than a natural obstacle. It exposes the fragility of human systems built on rigid social codes and highlights how renewal often emerges from disruption rather than design. Rebirth here is not celebratory or voluntary; it is imposed by forces that exceed human control. Yet it is precisely through this imposed rupture that ethical awareness deepens. Characters are compelled to confront care, accountability, and restraint outside familiar frameworks. This literary representation resonates with the posthuman insistence that ethical life is co-produced by human and nonhuman forces. Nature does not merely sustain life biologically; it participates in shaping moral experience. Rivers flood, erode, redirect, and transform, just as ethical life demands realignment when familiar routes collapse. Rebirth, in this sense, is inseparable from precarity to the more than human world.

By foregrounding nature as an active participant in ethical renewal, the posthuman renaissance challenges the fantasy of human mastery. Renewal cannot be engineered solely through intention or ideology; it unfolds through relational exposure to forces that resist control. The river thus becomes a metaphor not of chaos, but of ethical becoming, giving us a strict reminder that coexistence requires humility, patience, and responsiveness to a world that is never fully governed by human will.

"Rebirth as Ethical Endurance"

The preceding discussions reveal that rebirth, when understood through a posthuman lens, cannot be reduced to novelty, substitution, or symbolic transformation. Ritual life demonstrates how continuity sustains meaning without fatigue; human relationships expose how continuity is increasingly resisted; instinctive care highlights the limits of over-intellectualised ethics; and nature, through disruption, reveals how moral renewal

often unfolds beyond human intention. Together, these perspectives challenge the assumption that rebirth is achieved by replacing what no longer satisfies.
This ethical tension becomes especially visible in cultural expressions that imagine care as something deferred rather than sustained. A familiar Bengali proverb suggests that if rituals did not exist, a daughter would have been a lifelong support; implying that responsibility is often postponed to symbolic frameworks rather than practiced as lived endurance. Care is imagined in another birth, another role, another condition, instead of being enacted in the present. Such conveyances expose how human ethics frequently displaces responsibility through imagination rather than confronting it through action. Seen from a posthuman perspective, this displacement is not a sign of moral progress but of ethical misalignment. Unlike many nonhuman forms of life, where care persists without symbolic validation, human life often converts responsibility into obligation, hierarchy, or deferral. Intelligence, rather than deepening care, becomes a means to rationalise withdrawal. Rebirth, therefore, cannot mean escaping these contradictions through reinvention; it must involve re-situating ethical responsibility within the present conditions of coexistence.

A posthuman renaissance, then, is not the formation of new selves or the celebration of endless beginnings. It is an ethical endurance of becoming; an ongoing commitment to balance care with resolve, openness with boundary, and human agency with planetary humility. Rebirth acquires meaning only when it restores the fragile continuity between human and nonhuman life, not by transcending the world, but by remaining accountable within it.

Rebirth, then, is not found in the pursuit of endless novelty or replacement, but in sustaining ethical continuity within a changing world;
“কতো রঙ দেখে দুনিয়া” (the world reveals countless colours).

References

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