

BEYOND THE RIDER: SANDRINA AS CO-TRAVELLER IN JAY KANNAIYAN'S "RIDING TOWARDS ME"

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Abstract

Jay Kannaiyan's memoir Riding Towards Me serves as a critical site for exploring how posthumanist theory reframes the intersections of technology, subjectivity, and ecology within contemporary travel writing. Centre to this investigation is SanDRina, the motorbike that emerges not as a passive instrument but as an active co-traveller whose capacities, failures, and sensory mediations shape the narrative's emotional and structural contours.

*SanDRina's presence complicates traditional notions of human autonomy by situating agency within a distributed network that includes machine, rider, terrain, and climate. Through this rider-machine partnership, mobility becomes a shared, emergent process rather than a purely human act of control or mastery. Applying a posthumanist perspective foregrounds the agency of nonhuman actors and destabilizes anthropocentric hierarchies that have long dominated travel narratives. Kannaiyan's traversals of forests, rivers, deserts, and mountain passes which always filtered through SanDRina's mediation reveal travel writing as a discourse attuned to relational ecological consciousness. The motorbike operates simultaneously as collaborator and mediator, showing how machines and environments co-construct experience, memory, and meaning. By positioning *Riding Towards Me* within posthumanist ecocritical debates, this paper argues that the rider-SanDRina assemblage exemplifies a broadened conception of subjectivity grounded in interdependence with technology and environment. Such an approach positions travel writing as an important literary space for interrogating planetary ethics, hybrid identities, and interconnected modes of being in an era defined by technological saturation and environmental vulnerability.*

Keywords: Posthumanism, SanDRina, Travel writing, Human-Machine Interactions, Rider-Motorbike partnership

Introduction

Riding Towards Me (Jay Kannaiyan) is a travel memoir that narrates a thousand-day adventure that Jay Kannaiyan made using his motorcycle that is more than a conventional travel writing. Although previous literature has been interpreting the text through the prism of ecocriticism, where the idea of nature meekly putting down the ego and placing the human beings as the insignificant ones before the secretion of the wilderness is central to the notion (Kannaiyan, 2019, p. 75), the approach is not sufficient to draw the full picture of the narrative. Beginning with the first pages, Kannaiyan places the very motorcycle that SanDRina is a companion and no longer a tool. The memoir also starts the separation with the Chicago city in a very emotional picture: Turning the key, I fired up SanDRina... I pushed her down my garage and short driveway (Kannaiyan, 2019, p. 13-14). This engine vibration and guttural music (Kannaiyan, 2019, p. 14) join the ritual of parting, and turn the machine into a member of the parting moment.

This article aims at re-positioning the discussion of the solitary traveller to the complex association between the rider, motorcycle and the environment. The most persuasive theory to such a change is that of posthumanist theory. According to Nayar (2014), posthumanism encompasses the alteration of the human-non-human lifeforms, technology and non-living matter relationship. Kannaiyan and SanDRina constitute a hybrid assemblage in this perspective where agency is shared. The memoir foreshadows this predicament when the rider admits that he arrived at home that evening and patted SanDRina. We were going to exit this garage in a short period, and we would not go back (Kannaiyan, 2019, p. 8). The reassurance is done in the first person, with the use of the pronoun we, which makes the motorcycle the co-traveller, rather than the background.

This paper, therefore, is two-fold to show how *Riding Towards Me* can be addressed as the illustration of posthuman text within the framework of the contemporary travel literature and to imply that SanDRina is the agent of the posthuman agency in her capacity to affect the decision-making process, emotional tone, and rhythm of the narrative.

This essay will discuss SanDRina as an even competition in the travel industry using the cyborg theory by Haraway (1985), the nomadic subject of Braidotti (2013), the distributed thinking of Hayles (1999), and the posthumanism conceptualization by Nayar (2014). This research problem is made clear in a manner that it is how can we read the motorcycle as co-traveller in a historically genre which is founded which is founded on human mastery? The paper also contributes to the general redrawing of travel writing in posthumanism in that it reveals how the memoir by Kannaiyan interferes with the anthropocentric paradigm of mobility.

Theoretical Framework

The posthumanist theory redefines the human subject as not distinct and separate of its nonhuman co-constituents. Haraway companion-species model (1985) and Braidotti zoe-centred assemblage (2013) focus on how humans co-evolve with animals and machines to create hybrid identities and not individual selves. The same is echoed by Hayles (1999) who emphasises that posthuman subjectivity is intertwined with information and embodiment. Affective relationships with nonhuman partners become a legitimate component of the self in this opinion. Indicatively, Dolezal and DeFalco (2023) claim that since gestation, the technologies and artifacts of caregiving, as well as caregivers, touch us. Human bodies therefore are as well relational radically and necessarily with non-human beings. They use to refer to it as posthuman touch the sensory features of our formative entanglement, the cutaneous, affective features of our relationality that form and constitute more-than-human being. In this respect, any close contact with a technology (a motorcycle), in the case of Jay, which is a constituent element of his embodied subjectivity (Braidotti, 2013; Nayar, 2014).

The mobilities paradigm put travel and transport in terms of power and impact. Cresswell (2012) points out that mobility is the core of being human, and in the past it is both about freedom and an issue that has to be regulated. This is extended by Sheller (2018) model of mobility justice which insists that mobility is not equally distributed and is experienced in conditions of inequality. Travel writing critics such as Clifford (1997) and Pratt (1991) have demonstrated how journeys serve as places of translation and authority: accounts of travel mediate between cultures, and usually replicate or challenge colonial gazes. The same themes are echoed in the journey Jay makes in *Riding Towards Me*: he follows paths between the Global South and the North, is constantly caught between identity and difference (Clifford, 1997; Pratt, 1991). Huggan (2010) also insists on the fact that extreme travel texts often work at ecological and affective levels; they tend to celebrate land or self change. These mobility views emphasize that SanDRina, instead of being a neutral medium, plays the active role of defining the spatial, emotional and cultural outlines of the journey made by Jay. In such a way, our framework unites posthuman conceptualizations of co-constitutive human-nonhuman relationship with mobilities research of travel, space, and justice (Cresswell, 2012; Sheller, 2018). We read *Riding Towards Me* in this atmosphere of posthuman touch: Jay and SanDRina provide the example of how a machine-partner can be not just object of use or transportation, but an agent of global movement and emotional ally.

Human, Machine and Environment Relations

A posthuman entanglement of rider, machine and environment is vividly depicted in Jay Kannaiyan memoir *Riding Towards Me*. At the beginning of the ride Jay is free on top of his bike: I could feel that my shoulders were lifting. I was free, and heading Overland to India; I was alone (Kannaiyan, 2019, p. 1). This feeling of freedom is not only psychological, but also physical: the motorcycle (SanDRina) turns into the part of his body, the mobile house which substitutes the wall prison with the panoramic view. Jay is experiencing machine and body fused as he rolls the throttle and feels connected to the guttural music that was coming out of the exhaust pipe (Kannaiyan, 2019, p. 14). Jay and SanDRina create a cyborg assemblage, a sort of a hybrid creature, where the lines between human and technological elements are erased in the context of Haraway (1985). The bike is not a lifeless object, it is an active and breathing companion which literally talks to him, using the growl of the engine. N. According to the posthuman criticism by Katherine Hayles (1999), privileges to an abstract pattern of information should not eliminate the embodiment. In this case, the body is in the spotlight: the body of Jay is entangled with the mechanized feeling and nature. The idea of the nomadic subject introduced by Braidotti is also quite similar since the identity of Jay is not fixed as he is created by the continuous motion across the landscapes, riding SanDRina.

The role played by SanDRina is a co-constitutive one. Months Jay is making the preparations to her engine to build her panniers, even drilled holes to install the solar panels until this motorcycle and whatever might fit in her panniers were all she would have in this world (Kannaiyan, 2019, p. 8). Even the very process of naming the motorcycle is symbolic. SanDRina, which Jay decided to name as a feminized version of her model, the 1998 Suzuki DR650. Such an act is both identification at work and affectionate attachment, and it renders a technical designation a personality that would go with him on the road. Introducing intimacy into the machine by using the acronym of DR as a personal name, Jay strengthens the posthuman perception of identity, generated in such human-nonhuman mires. This extreme minimalism is a change of agency: Jay no longer controls the world, but rather must comply with the limitations and abilities of his machine and the road. The agency is dispersed as posthuman theory implies, between the human and nonhuman components of the assemblage (Jay, SanDRina, the surface of the road). Even simple actions turn to be common actions; Jay gives SanDRina pat (Kannaiyan, 2019, p.) 8) at the garage, he does not treat her like an object but like a companion. Travel ceases to be an unidirectional activity of human will in this rider-machine association but is an interactional process that develops out of the interrelationship of flesh, metal, and land (Haraway 1985; Braidotti 2013).

This triadic relation is even enriched by the environment. Jay literally is in the road because: on top of a motorcycle, one is in and between the elements of nature. Adoring sunshine when it is bright and tolerating rain when it is chilly, (Kannaiyan, 2019, p. 15). No glass and steel cocoon; Jay is blown and rained and sweated as he hangs on to the handlebars of SanDRina. This exposure is mediated by the physical presence of the bike, the frame and gear afford his protection, but it also necessitates respect (when his loosened engine cap almost kills him).

These scenes are representative of what Hayles (1999) puts across when he suggests that technologically enhanced bodies are still subject to material conditions. The nature itself is a landscape with which Jay is reacting. In the case of Patagonia, the wild engulfs his loneliness until tears defiantly he screams I will survive! (Kannaiyan, 2019, p. 145). The terrain, in this case, makes the story, as well as inner development of the rider: the humid rainforest is not exotic spectacle but a challenge of toughness (Nixon 2011), the first dust of the Sahara is the initial hints of the desert (Kannaiyan, 2019, p. 195) on his face that being off-road soon returns him to survival. In both instances, nature is not a passive background but an active force in the development of experience which resonates with the thought expressed by Cronon which states that human involvement and not idyllic distance is the hallmark of a wilderness. Such relational vulnerability is highlighted by posthuman theorists such as Nayar (2014): the corporeal experience of Jay shows how he is exposed to forces that are not under his control (storm, heat, mechanical failure) and, therefore, the myth of humanity as autonomous is dismantled.

Simply put, Rider, SanDRina and environment assemblage playing in *Riding Towards Me* reflect posthumanist concepts. The subjectivity of Jay is not determined but developed due to the attunement to the rhythms of the natural world and responsive association with his bike (Charalambous and Djebbara, 2023). A parallel to Haraway (1985) is found in the mode of biannual staying with the trouble (biannually becoming) of multispecies: The plot of Jay is not about overcoming the landscapes, but understanding how to exchange them, having the possibilities of some machine, which also is based on the environmental conditions. Human, machine and milieu are co-constructed to create meaning as each stroke of the throttle and each gear that is shifted is a penned letter in a common narrative.

Discussion

The story of Jay Kannaiyan written by the author multiple times refers to his motorcycle, SanDRina as a talking animal. The article *Early in the journey* he insists there were two of us on this journey, me and SanDRina (Rediff, 2014) cites this fact that the bike was also a co-participant in the adventure. The memoir explains that Jay does not only use SanDRina as his taxi but he also takes care of her as he would a co-traveler: he provides her with equipment, takes care of her in moments of breakdown, and even spends the night under her guard. SanDRina is in a way an extension of Jay and home. She becomes his shelter, support and emotional anchor as Jay describes SanDRina as his home on the road, (Rediff, 2014). The fact that even the name of SanDRina is based on her identity as a mechanic, Suzuki DR650, model 1998, further increases the personalisation of the character. When Jay refidder the name of the DR650 to the endearing name SanDRina, he has collapsed the technical and the emotional. These are the brand and the specification of the bike that can never separate with her narrative character. This personal depiction echoes the ideas of Haraway (1985) of companion species, in which the human and machine of two different beings develop an interdependent form of relationship. By so doing the industrial origins of the machine are not lost but are rearticulated into a co-traveller presence and engineering is combined with effect.

The bike is not inert through the eyes of Jay: it has moods (strain and relief when the ride is smooth or tough), it tells Jay something through its performance and Jay responds by talking back with the help of tune and maintaining it. They have an affective, agentic relationship (Braidotti, 2013), and this demonstrates that the subjectivity of Jay in *Riding Towards Me* is not made in isolation but in collaboration with SanDRina.

The spatial and political dimension of this co-constitution is also present. Jay is always reconstructing himself in the new cultural contexts, which he goes through in 33 countries, across two continents (Pratt, 1992). SanDRina is the mediator of those interactions: when Jay meets people, the motorcycle turns into an ice-breaker and a symbol in many cases. The concept of travel as what Clifford considers to be translation can be seen when Jay goes through the foreign sceneries with SanDRina; the two people are a mobile identity that transcends locations. Besides, Jay is also inflicted by mobility justice. Being a middle-class engineer, Jay has a certain amount of mobility unavailable to other people. The storyline is a foreshadowing of inequalities (e.g. his dependency on CouchSurfing networks) despite the fact that Jay records his privilege of choice. His own commons of mobility, SanDRina, emphasizes that Sheller is right in stating that transport freedom is not universal (Sheller 2018). However, Jay is so much in love with SanDRina that it complicates simplistic automobile beliefs: humanizing the bike is putting sustainable care over disposal consumerism. In that respect, *Riding Towards Me* is consistent with the issues of responsible travelling as expressed by Huggan and Tiffin. Jay is not a wanton conqueror, and his story pays respect to locations and people that he encounters. SanDRina has endured work, which turns her journey of extremes into human and kind.

The language used and the events in the memoir constantly preliminarily predict the posthuman touch between Jay and SanDRina. Examples of physical contact, riding over rough areas, hand-oiling components, sleeping on the bike which are emotionally colored. Jay explains how he used to hang the fresh meat of his chicken-curry routine on SanDRina, how he cooks to entertain hosts and how he feels that even the curry rides with the bike as a kind of efficient net of interrelationships. Most importantly, the formulation of Dolezal and DeFalco embodies this convergence: they claim that all developmental touch is always already posthuman since it is defined by technologies and nonhuman agencies (DeFalco & Dolezal, 2023) In the situation with Jay, all of the miles ridden is a point of contact in the human intention and a nonhuman reaction. To Jay, SanDRina is not a passive instrument but rather an “ally whose spirit and welfare is equivalent to his own. This is evident in such instances as Jay panics when her engine stops, and she runs once more, he is glad. These loving interactions hapticize our developmental entanglements (DeFalco and Dolezal, 2023): Jay and machine haptically and figuratively make one another around continents.

Altogether, *Riding Towards Me* is the example of a posthuman travel story. The agency of SanDRina and the affection accord of Jay according to the post-human ethics of co-presence: the journey is a journey based on a web of human and nonhuman actors. As we read SanDRina as the co-traveler and emotional support of Jay, we emphasize the fact that as Haraway and other people want us to believe, the lines between rider and ride are blurred.

This posthuman contact makes Jay even more meaningful of home, self, and mobility as it denotes that in the modern travel writing, the vehicle of the hero could be an actual companion in building the global identities.

Conclusion

This analysis of *Riding Towards Me* validates that Jay Kannaiyan and his bike commuting is a very posthuman story. Having made important discoveries, it is possible to state that Jay, SanDRina and the natural world are connected in an assemblage. The presence of a machine and the challenge that the environment presents to Jay form his selfhood, a dynamic that breaks down hard human-technology or human-nature dichotomies. SanDRina is revealed as a posthuman co-agent, a partner who is not only required to carry the body and soul of Jay but also must also be attended to and even cared after. This collaboration disrupts anthropocentric ideals: Jay is not the lord of the journey as well as its passive object. Rather, the agency passes through a meshwork of flesh, metal, and marble. The landscape imparts to Jay hardiness and humility; the bike displays some sort of agency which regulates speed, control and vulnerability. The whole time the ride fosters an ecological consciousness nature is an educator, as Kannaiyan notes, not a setting of human ambition but the working element.

Altogether, *Riding Towards Me* can be assessed as depicting SanDRina as an actual posthuman collaborator, rather than vehicle, to Jay in his transformation. In our analysis, we bring out the manner in which the embodied presence of the motorcycle restructures the travel discourse into a cross-species (human, machine, animal, plant) dialog. This conforms to the companion species harbored by Haraway, and to the fluid subjectivity of Braidotti; identity of the rider is redistributed and multiplied. We therefore reiterate that in the story of Jay, the road is the teacher and SanDRina is but a messenger and together they are leading the rider to new modes of being.

Research in the future could be based on these findings by comparing *Riding Towards Me* with other mobility stories such as cross-cultural tours such as *Eat, Pray, Love* or other transportation vehicles such as *The Transport* by Tolstoy to determine how machines resurface in other settings. Machine-human storytelling is abundant: how do the other writers of travel personify cars and places, and how do they make themselves? The second direction is to be used by the study of digital mobility memoirs in which technology is playing a comparable role (e.g. GPS, apps), how do they enlarge or modify the posthuman entanglement with the environment? When we place travel writing in the context of posthumanist and ecocritical arguments, we are opening the travel literature as a platform where we can discover planetary ethics and hybridity. In a society of climate crisis and cyberspace, Jay and the thousand-day ride makes us aware that despite riders being human, the ride is a collaboration of all riders, machine and environment nexus they meet.

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