

Green Romanticism? Exhibiting the Ecocritical Approach in Binoy Majumdar's Poems

Binoy Majumdar'ın Şiirlerinde Ekokritik Yaklaşımlar

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Abstract

Green romanticism is a term that focuses on the symmetry and interconnectedness of both human and non-human entities. It is interested in re-reading and re-evaluating the writings of romantic writers using an ecocritical approach with an enlightened perception of the features of the ecosphere. The concept and ideas of green romanticism can be found in both western and eastern romantic poets. Binoy Majumdar (1934-2006) is considered the fallen star who has changed the "chaka" (wheel) of contemporary Bengali poetry with the use of scientific and ecological avant-garde symbols and metaphors. He considers nature as equal to a human being and incorporates both real "Nature" and physical "nature" into his works to create a "Body-ecology-text" nexus. This research paper examines the intrinsic green romanticism theme in Binoy Majumdar's poems and how it manifests itself.

Keywords: Binoy Majumdar, Green romanticism, Body-ecology-text, The Hungry Movement, Bengali Poetry

Öz

Yeşil romantizm, insan ve insan dışı varlıkların benzerliklerine ve birbirine bağlılığına odaklanan bir terimdir. Eko-kritik yaklaşımın sayesinde romantik yazarların eserlerini yeniden okumak ve yeniden değerlendirmekle ilgilidir. Bu kavramı ve fikirleri hem batılı hem de doğulu romantik şairlerde bulabiliriz. Binoy Majumdar (1934-2006), bilimsel ve ekolojik avangart semboller ve metaforlar kullanarak çağdaş Bengal şiirinin yönünü değiştiren kayıp şair olarak kabul edilir. Doğayı insanla eşit görür ve "beden-ekoloji-metin" bağını oluşturmak için gerçek doğa ve fiziksel doğayı eserlerine dahil eder. Bu araştırma, Binoy Majumdar'ın şiirlerindeki içsel yeşil romantizm temasını ve bunun kendini nasıl gösterdiğini incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Binoy Majumdar, Yeşil romantizm, beden-ekoloji-metin, Bengal şiiri

Reflecting on the Sanskrit phrase "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," meaning "the whole world is one family" (Malik, 2017), ecocriticism defies anthropocentrism and desires to open up the possibility of considering non-human entities as the inhabitants of the world just as human beings. The first word, "Vasudhaiva," is made up of three Sanskrit words: Vasudha, Eva and Kutumbakam. Vasudha means the earth is the central or basis of everything, a place that provides our accommodation, food, and essentially everything we need to survive. Green romanticism, also known as romantic ecology or romantic ecocriticism, specifically can be considered a branch of ecocriticism that focuses on the intricate linking of romanticism and nature. Though Karl Kroeber at first familiarized the idea of ecological concepts within British Romantic Studies, Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* has brought the term green romanticism into the limelight (Hutchings, 2007, p. 196n2). Thereby, green romanticism is considered "an

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CUJHSS (ISSN 1309-6761) Dec 2023; 17/2, 304-312. Received April 11, 2023; Accepted Nov 30, 2023

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attempt to enable mankind the better to live in the material world by entering into harmony with the environment" (Bate, 1991, p. 40). Since then, this term has given birth to much attention, criticism, dialogue, and debate among critics and scholars.

Binoy Majumdar is considered an enigma, "a social explicator, as a critic, even as a reformer" (Goswami, 2013). He has his ups and downs in life, both silken shawls as an award and lifelong grief, trauma, and isolation. He is a multi-faceted person who is a brilliant engineer, mathematician, polyglot, and a genuine successor to the eminent poet Jibanananda Das. Intriguing natural and animistic objects gain a fresh charm and aura in his writings, which also echo love, mathematics, and the natural world. Along with mountain, tree, sun, moon, and flowers; Majumdar has provided an avant-garde look in writings, embracing unusual adjectives to present flesh, blood, fish, mosquito, ant, modern paintings, sculptures, and others. He has penned several notable books such as *Phire Aso*, *Chaka (Come back, O' Wheel)*, *Nakshatrer Aloy (In the light of the Stars)*, *Kabyasamagra (Collection of Poems)*, and *Haaspaataale Lekhaa Kabitaaguchchha (Hospital Poems)*. Among them, *Haaspaataale Lekhaa Kabitaaguchchha* has won the prestigious national poetry award (Sahitya Academy Purashkaar) and Rabindra Purashkaar for his *Kabyasamagra 2* in 2005. This paper examines Binoy Majumdar's romantic poems from the perspective of ecocriticism, implementing the concepts of green romanticism, deep ecology, politicized nature, and the "body-ecology-text" nexus.

Green Romanticism in Majumdar's Poems

Green romanticism significantly compliments and appreciates the "green" as the importance of a green planet is much-talked-about. "Imagining the whole earth as our collective backyard" (Oppermann, 2012, p. 44), basically, green romanticism denotes the trendy "Go Green" initiative, but from its own literary, cultural, or postcolonial points of view. Several contemporary issues of today are essential to treat as soon as possible, as Bates (1991) recognizes them: "the greenhouse effect and the depletion of the ozone layer, the destruction of the tropical rainforest, the pollution of the sea, and, more locally, the concreting of England's green and pleasant land" (p. 9). Following this, green romanticism generally examines the junctures between text and the environment, and the nature-culture binary is investigated through this process. The concept of green romanticism is usually connected with notably Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991) and *The Song of the Earth* (2000). It fervently asserts that we have "one life" (Bate, 1991, p. 40) that is too precious to undermine the vast ecosystem.

The renowned "Chipko Movement" sees eye to eye with green romanticism in their mutual love for ecology. With the stern message "Our bodies before our trees" (Mitra, 1993), the Chipko movement romanticizes, politicizes, and symbolizes multi-faceted images. Besides, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement) and the Greenbelt Movement in Kenya are also in sharp alignment with the Chipko movement.

While these movements are the cultural outcome of people's love of nature, they simultaneously operate within a "Green Romanticist tradition" (Huggan, 2009, p. 7). Green romanticism exceeds them reserving its love for all, from a tiny seed to plants. It does not seek to limit the praxis of nature or ecology, rather it aims at re-reading and redefining the romantic texts with a polished understanding of ecology. Accordingly, Reno (2016) observes that there lies "ecophilosophy", which intensifies love in green romanticism and goes beyond a simplistic "tree hugging paradigm" (p. 30). Considering its wide depth and multilayered enterprises,

Reno (2016) also contemplates Romantics' love of nature as a "less idealized view of Green Romanticism" (p. 47). "Historical but not historicist" (Huggan, 2009, p. 4), it does not encourage the flight from the materialistic world or society, rather comprehends with a new understanding. In this regard, the Romantic age provides the early backdrop of green romanticism. At the beginning of political uprisings and industrialization, the Romantic age was associated with the broken thread of human mindfulness and ecology. Romantic literature has explored "the interconnection between the human and the non-human" (Mishra, 2017, p. 438) and reconstructed the forgotten connection between nature and human beings. Apart from this, Jonathan Bate (1991) positions Wordsworth in the middle of "the *Green Politics*" in *Romantic Ecology* and declares green romanticism as "a theory of ecosystems and unalienated labour" (p. 10). According to Bate (1991), Wordsworth has shaped the "home" by amalgamating him/herself with nature, creating wholeness and harmony (p. 103). Thus, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and other romantic poets are being redefined through the green romanticism concept.

According to Soper (1995), nature implies "ordinarily observable features of the world" (p. 125). Being an obscure figure, Majumdar has observed nature not only using "ordinary" imagery but also applying unique and revolutionary imagery, lyrics, shades, and colours. In his poem, the ideas of his beloved and nature have been overlapped, and consequently, the outcome comes as a multi-layered cake. His poem titled "25 February, 1962" explains the mingling of voice, tune, and air, "O snake, don't you know if there is a body and whose body? / Suddenly the white song of wild geese rises. / Voice-tune mingles with air, as if crying in content winter, / crying, wanting the warmth of moonlight. / There is excitement linking with the touch of a cold snake" (Majumdar, trans. mine). Majumdar's unrequited love for scholar and critic Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak is a well-known and "much-talked-about" fact and she is the subject of Majumdar's self-proclaimed love in his writings. His *Phire Aso, Chaka* is dedicated to Gayatri, and later on, he has changed the title to *Amar Isshori* (*To My Goddess*). Gayatri-Chaka-Isshori these terms are mixed and have given birth to many myths, increasing the interests of intellectuals. His poem titled "7 June, 1962" from the same book contains his hopefulness about love, "we will be song, love in ideal country, / will mix in every skies of earth as structureless tune" (Majumdar, 2018, p. 76; trans. mine). The first word of the Gayatri mantra is "Om", which implies prana, life, universe, or absolutism, and the remaining words create the prayer for the ultimate liberation and bliss (Vardhan, 2018). Hence, the mention of Gayatri's name denotes the inherent craving for emancipation and love, also in a spiritual level. Majumdar is declaring his eternal love for Gayatri by expressing his desire to mix in "every sky of earth". Thus, romanticism and green both can be found in the writings, where he considers nature as equal to his beloved, denying anthropocentrism. His desire to fly in the sky and Gayatri's coming back in numerous poems are the archetypes of liberation in the shelter of nature. Another poem titled "26 August, 1960" exclaims, "though I don't know why, oh smile, oh pine! / Real cranes fly if human go near them!" (Majumdar, 2018, p. 8; trans. mine), as if Majumdar is a monk, entering continuously into different phases of life by liberating his soul by blending into nature. At this phase, this researcher suggests that the term "Écriture écologie" can be used in light of "Écriture féminine", a term coined by Hélène Cixous that means "female writing" (Klages, 2012) and Majumdar's writing can be stated as écriture écologie as he introduces every theme, shade, and colour of his writing based on nature. Green is the colour palette that he has selected to paint his poems to enhance the rejuvenating and refreshing aura of nature. He writes in a language that is evergreen, smells of greenery, and even his sorrows consist of the epitomes of ecological concepts. Deleuze and Guattari's (1983) declaration can

be compared in this context, "the human essence of nature and the natural essence of man become one within nature ... man and nature are not like two opposite terms confronting one another ... rather, they are *one and the same* essential reality" (pp. 4-5, emphasis added). Majumdar's writing is full of nature- the endless sly, flora and fauna, and tuning with Deleuze and Guattari's "one and the same" statement, Majumdar blends himself within nature.

Deep Ecology in Majumdar's Poem

Norwegian philosopher and environmentalist Arne Naess (1973) popularizes the "Deep Ecology Movement" (p. 95), which seeks to challenge the anthropocentric viewpoint and this term has been closely connected with green romanticism. The word "deep" raises the question of our resolutions and ideals in regard to the environment. The deep ecology movement includes deep questioning, going down to root points, while the opposite version, the shallow approach, promotes technological and instrumental solutions. Approving the Deep Ecology principles eases the path of accepting the "ecosophy" which preaches the philosophy of ecological synchronization or equilibrium among indigenous people. Consequently, leading our lives by the wisdom of different places, cultures, people, and largely nature enables us to be more humanistic. The ecocentric ideologies also enable the urge to protect the earth and its inhabitants. Therefore, the deep ecology movement encourages to harbour respect for variety and diversity, which helps to identify the ecological wisdom. It is similar to green romanticism, as both ideas aim at linking human and non-human entities to maintain harmony and, most importantly, to protect the earth. Naess (1987) introduces the concept of "ecological self", which grows from the beginning of our childhood, embracing the immediate environment, home, our relationship with non-human entities and nature (p. 35). According to Reno (2016), "ecological love" or "ecophilia" intensifies grey matter in regions of the brain that control and theorize our emotions (p. 29) and Majumdar's ecophilia has also controlled his emotions rapidly. In light of this proposition, Binoy Majumdar's ecological self also acknowledges the necessity of accentuating the bountiful nature in his writing which transcends the anthropocentric romantic worldview. Majumdar (2018) shatters his narrow ego in the process of gaining ecological self, "A hungry tiger has no qualm / to the tough task of the location changing. / It is you who have no ideals, he can still come. / After a while, there rises cream on top of milk" (p. 29, trans. mine). The destruction of the narrow ego and turning towards one's true ecological self is a liberating and lengthy process, yet Majumdar emphasizes the waiting. His ecological self, revealing ecophilia, longs for green romanticism, which cannot be fulfilled without ecology or his beloved. Green romanticism centres around "the green earth because it recognizes that neither physically nor psychologically can we live without green things" (Bate, 1991, p. 40). The second part of his poem "Duti Kabita" opens up another paradigm, "God-like bird flaps its wings rapidly / landing on the ocean bank, shore, rig, delta" (Majumdar, 2014b, p. 23, trans. mine). Majumdar compares the bird with God, if according to the deep ecology, everything is equal, then God is the cause where everything occurs for reasons. Accordingly, the "archetypal image" of garden, or in a broad sense "nature", is related to "the feminine principle of fertility and abundance" and "the pre-patriarchal Earth-goddess" (McKusick, 2011, p. 20). Conforming to this idea, Majumdar surpasses his limitations and mentions his beloved as "Isshori" or Goddess and later on matches a non-human entity with God as well. According to his view, not only nature and human are equal but also he transcends and idealizes them to a spiritual position. Therefore, a kind of "cosmic egalitarianism" (Huntington, 2017, p. 6) takes place and Majumdar merges himself continuously with nature, portraying intense ecophilia.

Any “Politicized” Nature?

The green romantic movement denies the claims of new historicist scholars such as Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson, and Alan Liu who state that natural romanticism derives chiefly from “as a mode of displacement of the political failures of the French Revolution” (Huntington, 2017, p. 1). Responding to Alan Liu’s (1989) argument that there is “no nature except as it is constituted by acts of political definition made possible by particular forms of government” (p. 104), Kroeber and Bate have established the amalgamation of green and romanticism that will shatter Liu’s new historical criticism.

In contrast, Bate (1991) argues that it is obstructive to state that there is no nature in challenging times when it is mandatory to “address and redress the consequences of human civilization’s insatiable desire to consume the products of the earth” (p. 56). But is apolitical and ahistorical romanticism the rightful answer?

Moreover, “The Hungry Movement” is the literary movement launched by several poets including Binoy Majumdar, Shakti Chattopadhyay, Saileswar Ghosh, Malay Roy Choudhury, Samir Roychoudhury, and others during 1960 in Bengal. The poets have labelled themselves “Hungryalists” and coined “Hungryalism” from the word “Hungry” used by Geoffrey Chaucer. Their pamphlet, named “Manifesto of the Hungry Generation”, states, “Poetry is no more a civilising manoeuvre...” (Das, 2019) and the poets have wanted to “disturb the reader’s mind that was filled with preconceived colonial ideas” (Imtiaz, 2016). Consequently, it has received hatred and protests from the government and elite society. Majumdar has submitted his poems to the Hungryalist Bulletins, but later on, he left due to contradictory and debatable reasons. One of his published poems in the bulletin is “8th March, 1960”, “Endangered cranes fly, escaping ceaselessly, / since it is known, that underneath her white feathers exist / passionate warm flesh and fat; / pausing for short stalls on tired mountains” (Majumdar, 2013).

But it should be perceived that Majumdar has always been a lonely passenger rather than being tied to a bunch of poets in their journey. Feeling disinterested, he left the movement, and thus the rest of the poems cannot be associated with the movement. Besides, the Neo-classical age has concentrated on social and contemporary issues and the poems of Dryden and Pope reflect scientific and philosophical issues. The Romantics have wanted to break the cycle by taking shelter in natural assets. Even so, it is contradictory to say Majumdar has done so, mimicking exactly the romantics. Liu’s (1984) famous (or infamous?) comment about Wordsworthian nature as “an imaginary antagonist” (pp. 538-39) indicates the unfeasibility of experiencing the natural world that is not systematically moderated or shaped by culture/history. Wordsworth, who is considered one of the greatest romantic poets, has chosen nature as a backdrop in most of his writings. That being the case, to only construct and label his writings as the outcome of the failed French Revolution not only maximizes the ongoing problems but also does not bring any solution. The same saying goes for Majumdar too. His fewer poems have aimed to break the conventional norms of culture, but to restrict them in the boundary of the Hungry movement will deny the readers the ability to fully savour the taste and will be reductive. Nature is a goddess and also a lady with flesh, bone, and a desire for Majumdar. Contradicting Liu’s (1984) statement, “most capacious theme of Wordsworth’s life work, I believe, fits that of the nineteenth century generally” (p. 540), Majumdar’s poems transcend the time-cycle, history, and culture as they are not romantic in any form, which is considered backdated as he states, “length, weight and time- / these three worldly units / are talked about too often / like there's nothing else in the can....” (trans. Aryanil). He has indulged and applied scientific materials to his poems along with the flora and fauna. Majumdar muses, “Can I smell

my own hair? / Marvellous sights have been seen. / A full moon was to have risen last night -- / only a quivering sickle appeared! / It was an eclipse" (trans. Jyotirmay). This is in good agreement with Majumdar's theorem of poetry, this theorem asserts, "appearance 2 → feelings 2" (Phire Aso, Chaka, 2018, p. 91, trans. mine). As there is no appearance 1 in the poetry, a reader connects the poem with his life; therefore, it becomes a personal poem and turns into a more general object rather than just holding the memory of the poet's. For example, in his poem "Okalponik", Majumdar (2014) muses, "I will enter inside of you, O' my city, I will enter silently / sometimes in spring, sometimes in rainy season when secret jealousy anger / will lose against this pen" (p. 55, trans. mine). In light of the theorem of poetry, this city, the poet's getting lost in its maze, the anger, or jealousy can be associated with anyone. As a result, it will produce appearance 2 and feelings 2, consuming appearance 1 and feelings 1, giving it a more universal result. It is therefore difficult to say that Majumdar's "nature" is totally divorced from ideology, politics, culture, or any philosophical idea. Instead, it can be said that he worships nature and has incorporated the environment into his writing.

"Body-ecology-text" Nexus

Though Freud's position is anthropocentric in most cases, the statement of his (1930), "our bodily organism, itself a part of that nature" (p. 86) indicates the body ecology. Body ecology, a micro-ecology, is a practice of self-care that also aims to care for people through lifestyle selections. This discipline has derived from "philosophical naturism, deep ecology, and holistic body-mind practices developed since 1850" (Andrieu, Nobrega and Sirost, 2018, p. 17). It's a holistic way of living that includes preserving one's "inner ecology," improving one's physical and mental well-being, and becoming an ecological human—according to this theory of body ecology, humans become ecological when natural resources enter their bodies. Without knowing about the body's inner harmony, it is impossible to perceive the outer ecology. Creating a "micro-micro-situation" (Andrieu, Nobrega and Sirost, 2018, p. 18), the natural elements generate an internal effect on the physical body. Correspondingly, Majumdar's poems can be brought to attention. In light of body ecology, Majumdar's poems awaken inner harmony and create the path for the consciousness of the soul with the touch of natural entities. His poems of *Phire Aso, Chaka, Aghraner Anubhutimala (Series of Feeling in a late Autumn)*, despite their exquisite poetic language and narrative, portray implicit graphic descriptions. But after spreading countrywide controversy and criticism of having crudeness and obscenity, his *Balmikir Kabita (Poems of Balmiki)* was banned after its publication. From an alternative angle, if Majumdar had been a western poet, things might have turned out in a different way, but trauma and isolation have turned Majumdar into a vulnerable situation. Narayan Chandra Sen, a renowned researcher on Majumdar, has described 'Balmikir Kabita' as a continuation of 'Balmikir Pratibha' by Rabindranath Tagore (Ghosh, 2019). Majumdar muses in this regard, "I understood at the age of twenty-five that the theory of creation among the human, non-human and plants is equal" (qtd. in Ghosh, 2019). The presence of this "oneness" has awakened his internal sensations, along with the sources of natural elements. He additionally states, "Body is mind and the mind is body, from this absolute came everything—light, sky, poetry, body everything" (Majumdar, 2014a, p. 122, trans. mine). His emotions, thrills, and atmosphere are all perfectly captured in text, so there grows a "body-ecology-text" (Ryan, 2019, p. 166) nexus. Majumdar embraces the real "Nature" and bodily "nature" in his text and a raw example of the re-returning in the bodily "natural" self is a poem titled "1st July 1961", "I know it wouldn't hair anew; pain sits / calm on sorrowed thoughts like a nocturnal fly- / on the way back from hospital, in momentary mind. / Sometimes unawares, / I know, the pain will wither / with the

falsity of a child urinating in sleep” (trans. Aryanil). Nonetheless, Majumdar enters into “a nocturnal fly”, then again leaves that body to enter into a sleeping child, and lastly transcripts it into a text to gain a spiritual and transcendental “body” where everything is equal.

Conclusion

When ecology is considered “holistic science” (Bate, 1991, p. 36), green romanticism or romantic ecology admires the green earth as it distinguishes that, being “a single vast ecosystem” (Bate, 1991, p. 40), we cannot live without it. Green romanticism does not celebrate “imagination” or the escapist mentality of the materialistic world; rather, it aims at creating a physical world of equality and harmony. “As a retreat from the world, [but rather as] a new way of comprehending the world” (Coupe, 2000, p. 15), it becomes a new branch of ecocriticism and teaches how to (re)read “green” in literature, or more specifically, in romanticism. It claims that romantic poems can be analyzed, as ecocritical writings and current ecology is the (re)appraisal of romanticism. This paper has highlighted the importance of green romanticism, as it is not mandatory for romantic poets to write by being influenced by ideology, politics, culture, or history; on the contrary, labeling romanticism as “politically influenced” will only serve to undermine and constrict the goals of ecocriticism. Furthermore, Binoy Majumdar can be correctly termed a “green romantic” poet. He has lived an impressive life- physics, mathematics, biology, Russian language, coffee house, hungry movement, Gayatri, love, nature, Jibanananda, parents, mental asylum, sun, moon, and trees- all are disseminated and scattered in his life. Contributing remarkably to Bengali poetry by breaking the conventional poetic style, Majumdar revolutionarily has applied scientific materials and a unique sense of natural objects in his poems. Following Schiller’s (1985) statement about poets, “they will either be nature, or they will seek lost nature.” (p. 191), Majumdar has lived both lives splendidly. Human and non-human entities are treated equally in his writing; instead, he adds some natural elements that are often overlooked in writing. As a “Hungryalist”, Majumdar has been a part of opposing politics, but unlike Liu’s claim, it is complex to ascertain that Majumdar is fully influenced by culture and ideology. As Schiller (1985) proclaims poets as “the guardians of nature” (p. 191), alternatively, it can be asserted that Majumdar was influenced by both “Nature and nature” (life and ecology). Bharata and his Rasa theory can be mentioned here: Majumdar has measured “Anubhuties (feelings)” as the equivalent of rasa and divided it into four categories: “ujjibak, uttejak, nistejak, and apradhan” (Chatterjee, 2019, p. 9). Majumdar has embellished his “green” poetry with “feelings” by redefining rasa theory in his own unique manner. By not being anthropocentric, he celebrates life and nature to the full extent in his poems, his beloved also turns into a living nature by the touch of ecological elements. Constructing a home within the materialistic nature and appreciating both human and non-human entities, Binoy Majumdar’s poems can be observed through an ecocritical lens as having an underlying notion of green romanticism.

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