

Spiritual Humanism in the Thought of Rabindranath Tagore: A Critical Study

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*Kanchan Ghosh

Department of philosophy, Sidho Kanho-Birsha-University

Abstract: *In order to create a comprehensive understanding of human existence, Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy incorporates ethical, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions. This research paper investigates the idea of spiritual humanism in Tagore's thought. By highlighting the intrinsic interconnectedness between the individual, humanity, and the universe, Tagore's spiritual humanism, in my opinion, goes beyond traditional secular humanism and orthodox religiosity. Love, compassion, and ethical responsibility are fundamental to his philosophy because they are the ways in which the ego becomes aware of its relationship to the universal. Additionally, Tagore's aesthetic sensibility—which is evident in his poetry, music, and artwork—serves as a conduit for spiritual understanding, illuminating the infinite inside the limited and encouraging a closer relationship with life. The study highlights the philosophical underpinnings, ethical implications, and current relevance of Tagore's ideas by critically analysing his primary works, such as Sādhanā: The Realization of Life and The Religion of Man, along with scholarly interpretations by Radhakrishnan, Kripalani, and Coomaraswamy. I contend that Tagore's spiritual humanism offers an inclusive vision of human dignity and international understanding in addition to presenting a framework for individual self-realization and addressing more general societal issues. His philosophy stands out as a crucial manual for developing empathy, creativity, and moral consciousness in a time of materialism, fragmentation, and ethical ambiguity. By presenting Tagore's ideas as a combination of spiritual insight and humanistic praxis, this book adds to ongoing discussions in philosophy, ethics, and humanistic studies and illustrates their continuing significance for modern intellectual and global conversation.*

Keywords: *Spiritual Humanism, Love and Unity, Ethical Philosophy, Aesthetic Experience, Human Dignity*

*Corresponding Author

 Kanchan Ghosh, Department of philosophy, Sidho Kanho-Birsha-University
 ghoshk652@gmail.com



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1 | INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy originates at the intersection of spirituality and humanism, where the realization of the universal spirit and human dignity are inextricably linked. According to me, Tagore's spiritual humanism is a lived experience with roots in the Indian intellectual heritage, particularly the Upanishadic concept of the unity of existence, rather than just an abstract notion. His philosophy promotes a dynamic interaction between the person, humanity, nature, and the divine, rejecting strict institutional religion. The human path advances "from the law to love... from the moral plane to the spiritual," as Tagore himself says in *Sādhanā* (Tagore, 1916, p. xx). This means that ethical discipline eventually leads to a higher spiritual realization based on love and unity. As I develop this viewpoint, I see that Tagore's spiritual humanism goes beyond both traditional religious frameworks and Western secular humanism. In contrast to the materialist inclinations of Western humanism, Tagore highlights the spiritual nature of mankind, claiming that it is a manifestation of the infinite rather than just a biological being. As a result, his humanism is profoundly spiritual, acknowledging the "unity" of creation as a "energizing truth" (Tagore, 1931, p. 15). For Tagore, this unity is an ethical requirement that necessitates empathy, compassion, and creative engagement with the world rather than a metaphysical abstraction. He skillfully integrates ethics and spirituality in a comprehensive understanding of human life by saying, "the moral side represents training of unselfishness... the spiritual side represents sympathy and love" (Tagore, n.d., p. xx).

In my opinion, Tagore's criticism of limited nationalism enhances his humanistic perspective. His well-known statement that "my refuge is humanity" (Tagore, 1917, p. xx) demonstrates a strong preference for universal human values over local identities. This universalism affirms a deeper spiritual connection that binds all people together rather than rejecting cultural uniqueness. In this way, by putting out a vision of humanity based on mutual recognition and a common spiritual destiny, Tagore foreshadows current discussions on global ethics. In line with my conception of Tagore's philosophy as a synthesis of the limited and the infinite, scholars have also pointed out that his humanism accords man "divinity" and stresses the importance of human experience in comprehending reality. Furthermore, Tagore's approach to religion is characterized by a critical openness that upholds the core of spiritual experience while rejecting dogmatism. He shifts the emphasis from institutional authority to individual spiritual awakening in *The Religion of Man* by redefining religion as the realization of the "infinite in the human." This method engages with worldwide philosophical currents, such as liberal humanism and Romanticism, while also striking a chord with the larger Indian tradition. Tagore's spirituality is "not bound by religious dogma," according to some observers, but rather represents an inclusive and intimate relationship with the divine and humanity, which highlights his significance in a multicultural world. As a result, I contend in this paper that Tagore's spiritual humanism provides a convincing framework for reconsidering how the individual and the universal are related. It questions the divisions between the national and the global, the individual and the group, and the material and the spiritual. Tagore presents an ethical, artistic, and transcendental perspective of humanity by establishing human dignity in spiritual unity. Thus, this introduction lays the groundwork for a critical analysis of his ideas, emphasizing their philosophical underpinnings, ethical ramifications, and current applicability.

2 | CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF SPIRITUAL HUMANISM:

According to my interpretation, the conceptual underpinnings of spiritual humanism in Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy result from a deep synthesis of metaphysical unity, ethical universalism, and the inherent divinity of the human individual. Although Tagore's philosophy has its roots in the Upanishadic concept of unity, it goes beyond conventional metaphysics by turning this ontological unity into a dynamic humanistic ideal. His spiritual humanism, in my opinion, is based on the belief that self-realization and global realization are inextricably linked, erasing the distinction between the infinite and the individual. The notion of unity as an experienced and dynamic reality is central to this philosophical

framework. According to Tagore (1931, p. 15), “the unity becomes not a mere subjective idea, but an energizing truth.” According to my interpretation of this phrase, spiritual humanism is a transformational force that influences social and ethical behaviour rather than a theoretical philosophy. Therefore, the human being is a part of a greater cosmic and spiritual order rather than an isolated creature. By highlighting that humanity discovers its genuine self in relationships rather than in solitude, Tagore expands on this idea: “he finds his own larger and truer self in his wide human relationship” (Tagore, 1931, p. xx). Therefore, relational existence—where the self grows by communion with others—is the cornerstone of his humanism.

I contend that Tagore’s translation of the divine in human terms is another essential aspect of his spiritual humanism. Tagore finds the divine within human awareness and experience, in contrast to transcendentalist or theistic traditions that situate God beyond the human realm. According to Tagore (1931, p. 172), the “Eternal Person [is] manifested in all persons,” meaning that each person represents a piece of the infinite. By elevating human dignity to a sacred level, this notion makes treating others ethically not just a moral duty but also a spiritual requirement. In this way, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan’s description of the Indian tradition’s stress on the “divinity in man,” where the human being becomes the locus of spiritual revelation, is consistent with Tagore’s ideas (Radhakrishnan, 1927, p. 52). In my view, a critical reassessment of religion itself is also the foundation of Tagore’s spiritual humanism. He promotes an internal and experienced spirituality in place of institutional orthodoxy and ritualism. This shift is emphasized by his claim that religious development has progressed “from the external and magical towards the moral and spiritual significance” (Tagore, 1931, p. 75). Here, spirituality is realized via moral behaviour, creativity, and love rather than being limited to temples or ideologies. This view is consistent with Krishna Kripalani’s perspective, which notes that Tagore’s religion is “the religion of man,” focused on human experience and compassion for all (Kripalani, 1962, p. 210). Furthermore, I believe that Tagore’s conceptual framework incorporates self-transcendence and freedom as fundamental components of spiritual humanism. According to his worldview, human fulfilment comes from self-dedication to the universal rather than self-assertion. According to Tagore (1931, p. 185), “the renunciation of the individual self for the sake of the supreme soul” is the path to true realization. However, this renunciation is an expansion rather than a negation—a shift from an ego-centric existence to a global consciousness. In this sense, Tagore foreshadows contemporary humanistic discourse by defining freedom as involvement in a larger spiritual totality rather than just individuality.

3 | THE ROLE OF LOVE AND UNITY:

The key tenet of Rabindranath Tagore’s spiritual humanism, which serves as both a philosophical basis and an ethical imperative, is the role of love and unity, according to my study of his philosophy. Tagore raises love to a universal energy that unites the individual with humanity and the infinite, rather than treating it as solely an emotional or sentimental experience. According to my interpretation, Tagore reinterprets this concept in a profoundly humanistic and experiential way, but it is firmly anchored in the Upanishadic ideal of oneness. According to his theory, love serves as a conduit for the realization of unity, converting abstract philosophical principles into actual human connections. Tagore states unequivocally that achieving unification by love is the ultimate goal of human existence. He states that “love is the ultimate meaning of everything around us” in *Sādhanā: The Realization of Life*. It is the delight that is at the heart of all creation, not just a sentiment (Tagore, 1916, p. 48). This phrase, in my opinion, captures the spirit of his spiritual humanism, which holds that love is both the fundamental basis of existence and an ethical virtue. The broken self-overcomes its constraints and engages in the universal via love. Therefore, unity develops naturally via the growth of the self in love rather than being imposed from the outside. Additionally, Tagore expands on this realization in *The Religion of Man* by arguing that human empathy and communion are inextricably related to the realization of unity. He notes that “all the contradictions of existence merge themselves and are lost in love” (Tagore, 1931, p. 63). This, in my opinion, emphasizes the ability of love to heal divisions, whether they are between the self and the other,

the individual and society, or the human and the divine. Love is therefore essential to both individual and societal change since it becomes the dynamic force that balances difference into unity.

Other academics' views of Tagore's conception of love and unity also resonate. According to Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, "love is the expression of the realization of oneness" in the Indian spiritual tradition (Radhakrishnan, 1927, p. 74). This observation, in my opinion, is especially pertinent since it places Tagore in the context of a larger philosophical tradition and emphasizes his special role in converting this metaphysical realization into a humanistic morality. In a same vein, Krishna Kripalani emphasizes that Tagore's spiritual vision is inextricably linked to his concern for mankind by stating that his philosophy is essentially "a gospel of love and human unity" (Kripalani, 1962, p. 215). Tagore's focus on love also functions as a critique of contemporary society, which he saw as disjointed and motivated by egoism and materialism. He opposes the reduction of human connections to instrumental or utilitarian concepts by putting love at the core of human existence. Rather, he promotes a type of relational living based on spiritual kinship and mutual recognition. "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence," as Tagore eloquently puts it (Tagore, 1917, p. 142). I contend that the only way to achieve this equilibrium is to cultivate love, which unites individuality and universality as well as knowledge and wisdom.

Furthermore, Tagore's concept of unity celebrates variation within an underlying spiritual coherence rather than uniformity. Love makes it possible for people to recognize the deeper commonality that unites all beings while also appreciating distinctions. In this way, Tagore's spiritual humanism foreshadows current discussions about global ethics and pluralism. His philosophy is extremely pertinent in the current situation because his idea of unification by love provides a foundation for resolving disputes and differences in a broken society. As a result, I argue that love and unity play a fundamental and transformational role in Tagore's spiritual humanism. While unity serves as the philosophical foundation for love, love serves as the experiential manifestation of unity. When combined, they provide a comprehensive understanding of human existence that goes beyond dualities and promotes a greater feeling of interconnectivity. In addition to defining Tagore's philosophical perspective, this interaction between love and oneness offers a normative framework for rethinking interpersonal interactions in a way that is more sympathetic and spiritually cohesive.

4 | AESTHETIC DIMENSION OF SPIRITUAL HUMANISM:

According to my understanding of Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy, one of spiritual humanism's most fundamental and distinctive aspects is its aesthetic dimension, where beauty, creativity, and creative expression become crucial means of comprehending the relationship between the human and the divine. Tagore incorporates aesthetics into the basic framework of spiritual experience rather than treating it as a distinct or purely ornamental facet of existence. According to him, seeing beauty is a kind of spiritual awakening that makes the harmony that underlies everything visible. I contend that this viewpoint defines aesthetics as an essential part of his spiritual humanism and turns art into a vehicle for self-transcendence. This relationship between spiritual realization and beauty is eloquently expressed in Tagore's observations in *Sādhanā: The Realization of Life*. "Beauty is the harmony which we realize in the world, and it is the expression of the infinite in the finite," he notes (Tagore, 1916, p. 64). This phrase, in my opinion, captures the core of his aesthetic philosophy: beauty is an experiential understanding of the wholeness of reality rather than an exterior quality. The human being bridges the gap between the material and the spiritual by perceiving the infinite inside the finite forms of nature and art through aesthetic experience. This realization is consistent with his larger humanistic perspective, which holds that unity can be realized via both moral behaviour and imaginative experience.

Additionally, by highlighting the creative aspect of the human spirit, Tagore expands this aesthetic-spiritual synthesis in *The Religion of Man*. According to Tagore (1931, p. 98), "man's consciousness of

the infinite is not through logic but through joy, through creation.” This, in my opinion, emphasizes how important creative innovation is to spiritual humanism. Whether it poetry, music, or visual art, creation is a part of the divine process rather than just an act of expression. In this way, the artist becomes a co-creator who uses artistic forms to illuminate life’s deeper realities. Tagore’s humanism, which affirms the creative impulse as a route to spiritual enlightenment, is hence intrinsically creative. Scholars like Ananda K. Coomaraswamy have deftly interpreted Tagore’s aesthetic orientation, pointing out that in Indian philosophy, art is essentially “the expression of a spiritual vision” (Coomaraswamy, 1956, p. 23). This insight, in my opinion, is especially pertinent to Tagore, whose creations perfectly capture this fusion of spirituality and art. In a same vein, Krishna Kripalani highlights that Tagore’s brilliance is found in his capacity to balance “the poet’s vision with the philosopher’s insight” (Kripalani, 1962, p. 178). These readings support my claim that Tagore’s aesthetic component is essential to his philosophical endeavour rather than incidental.

According to my interpretation, Tagore’s focus on aesthetics also functions as a critique of utilitarian and mechanistic ideas about contemporary existence. He advocates for a life enhanced by creativity and sensitivity to beauty, opposing the reduction of human existence to economic or functional terms. He states that “the highest education is that which makes our life in harmony with all existence” (Tagore, 1917, p. 142), and I contend that this harmony is profoundly artistic. It entails developing a refined sensibility that enables people to recognize and engage with the beauty of the world, creating a stronger bond between people and the cosmos. Furthermore, Tagore’s spiritual humanism’s aesthetic component emphasizes how imagination shapes the human experience. For Tagore, imagination is a way to reach the deeper levels of reality rather than an escape from it. The person breaks free from the confines of the ego and enters a more expansive contact with existence through imaginative involvement. I argue that this process is intrinsically spiritual since it entails the realization of unity and the dissolving of boundaries. Aesthetics thus serves as a link between the finite and the infinite, the subjective and the universal.

5 | CONCLUSION:

When I consider Rabindranath Tagore’s philosophy, I see that his spiritual humanism provides a deep synthesis of ethics, aesthetics, and metaphysics, creating a framework in which spiritual realization, human dignity, and creativity are inextricably linked. Tagore’s ideas show that genuine humanism must be based on the understanding of the infinite inside the human and the human within the infinite; it cannot be limited to material or social elements alone. In my view, his philosophy emphasizes relational existence and the transformational potential of love, unity, and aesthetic experience, challenging inflexible dichotomies—between self and other, individual and community, or human and divine. His emphasis on the spiritual as an active, lived aspect of existence places his humanism in a holistic framework where moral imagination, ethical behaviour, and artistic expression come together to promote a more compassionate and interconnected world. Furthermore, Tagore’s criticism of utilitarian modernism, dogmatic religion, and limited nationalism emphasizes the vision’s ongoing relevance and provides insights for current discussions on social responsibility, global ethics, and intercultural understanding. Tagore encourages us to develop a life that is driven by empathy, creativity, and ethical awareness rather than just intellect or obligation by placing our experience within a larger cosmic and spiritual connection. To sum up, studying Tagore’s spiritual humanism reveals a philosophy that is both profoundly personal and global, offering a normative and aspirational framework for rethinking human existence in ways that balance the moral, artistic, and spiritual aspects of life. His ideas are still relevant today as a crucial manual for fostering humanity in its most complete and cohesive form.

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