

# Humanism and Spiritual Unity: A Comparative Study of Rabindranath Tagore and Muhammad Iqbal

Research Review Journal of  
Interdisciplinary Studies

double-blind peer-reviewed and  
refereed online quarterly Journal

ISSN (online): 3108-0472

1(3) 73-79, 2025

©The Author(s) 2025

 10.31305/rrjis.2025.v1.n3.010

 <https://rrjournals.in/>



Received: 18 Oct, 2025

Revised: 26 Nov, 2025

Accepted: 29 Nov, 2025

Published: 31 Dec, 2025

\*SK Abdul Hamid

Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Education

**Abstract:** *The intellectual, ethical, and spiritual aspects of humanism as expressed by Muhammad Iqbal and Rabindranath Tagore are examined in this study, with a focus on their mutual dedication to spiritual unity as the cornerstone of moral and social existence. The study compares and contrasts Iqbal's dynamic conception of khudi (selfhood) as a means of ethical responsibility and creative self-realization with Tagore's universal humanism, which is based on the understanding of the inner light of the soul and sympathetic interaction with others. Iqbal positions human dignity within an organized metaphysical and Islamic ethical framework, emphasizing the interaction between individual agency and divine unity, whereas Tagore places it inside a relational and intuitive experience of the universal. This study explains how both thinkers oppose narrow nationalism, materialism, and reductive secularism in favour of a cosmopolitan vision where spiritual awareness, moral responsibility, and social solidarity are interdependent. It does this by drawing on primary texts—The Religion of Man and Sadhana for Tagore, and The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam for Iqbal—as well as current scholarship. The comparison shows that Tagore and Iqbal's concept of real humanism is inextricably linked to spiritual unity, providing a timeless framework for moral behaviour, social harmony, and individual growth. In order to solve the current issues of cultural fragmentation and moral relativism, the study suggests that incorporating spiritual consciousness into humanistic and ethical frameworks is essential.*

**Keywords:** *Humanism, Spiritual Unity, Ethics, Rabindranath Tagore, Muhammad Iqbal, Selfhood, Moral Responsibility, Universalism*

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore and Muhammad Iqbal are notable figures in South Asian intellectual history who articulate a combination of humanism and spiritual unification. Their creations offer an integrated vision

### \*Corresponding Author

 SK Abdul Hamid, Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Education

 skabdulh14@gmail.com



Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 License (<http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits non-Commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed.

73

Scan and Access



that reimagines the human as both an independent self and a microcosm of the divine truth, challenging the fragmentation of contemporary identity. I approach their writings because I really believe that humanism is a spiritual philosophy based on creative self-realization and universal connection, rather than just a secular ethical position. In order to highlight their mutual dedication to human dignity, spiritual unity, and the development of love as the ontological foundation of human flourishing, this introduction places Tagore's and Iqbal's contributions within a comparative context. According to Tagore, a cosmology that finds the divine in both the natural world and the human heart is inextricably linked to humanism. According to Hina Khalid's theological interpretation of Tagore, he states clearly that "love is the perfection of consciousness...we do not comprehend because we do not love" (Tagore, as cited in Khalid, 2025, p. 1). This claim captures the essence of Tagore's humanist philosophy: love, a force that transcends local identities and promotes spiritual unity, is the only way to truly understand oneself and others. The human being becomes a place where the finite and the infinite dance together in Tagore's poetry and prose, rather than existing outside the sacred. His conviction that the pursuit of unity—with others and with the transcendent—is simultaneously an ethical and spiritual requirement is reinforced by this ontological connection between human and divine.

Despite coming from the Islamic philosophical tradition, Iqbal's contribution to humanism resonates with a comparable affirmation of creative self-affirmation as the route to social and spiritual unification. The theory of Khudi (selfhood), which holds that the self must be strengthened in order to achieve its inherent divine potential, is central to his philosophical output. This moral and spiritual urgency is evoked in Iqbal's poetry, which declares, "This bell calls other travellers to take the road...Come, if thou wouldst know the secret of everlasting life!" (Iqbal, as referenced in Khudi literature, para. 1). Iqbal uses the bell as a metaphor to call people toward self-realization via active interaction with the world rather than withdrawal from it. According to him, affirming oneself for the sake of world peace leads to spiritual unification. Iqbal's humanism maintains that the individual ego can only achieve freedom when it co-creates with others and with the divine essence that permeates creation, far from supporting solitude. Iqbal places creative self-assertion (Khudi) as the catalyst for both individual achievement and group uplift, whereas Tagore's humanism stresses love as the creative heartbeat of human awareness. This subtle convergence is highlighted in Hina Khalid's comparative study: for both thinkers, "the finite world stands as a shimmering sign of the inexhaustible infinite," where human creativity and moral involvement act as channels of divine presence (2025, p. 2).

It is evident from charting these intellectual currents that Tagore and Iqbal promote complementary spiritual humanism models. The cosmic love that permeates Tagore's worldview transcends ego borders and unites people into a single, universal spirit. In turn, Iqbal's philosophy unites spiritual unity with ethical self-affirmation, encouraging the ever-evolving self to actively engage in the divine creative process. Both frameworks maintain that true humanism is fundamentally spiritual—a philosophy of life in which creativity, love, and union form an indivisible triad—while rejecting reductive secularism and strict doctrinal exclusivism. Thus, this comparative investigation presents humanism as a lived sensibility that both broadens the moral imagination and establishes spiritual unity in the common endeavour of human emancipation rather than as an abstract ideal.

## 2 | PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF TAGORE'S HUMANISM:

My comprehension of Rabindranath Tagore's humanism stems from a long-term study of his philosophical works, particularly *The Religion of Man* and *Sadhana: The Realization of Life*, as well as from critical readings in modern scholarship. Fundamentally, Tagore's humanism is based on a deep conviction that every person has inherent value and spiritual potential. According to Tagore, humanism is primarily spiritual and universal rather than only ethical or secular. He maintains that "the inner light of the soul is the ground of all morality and unity," suggesting that genuine humanism only emerges when people acknowledge their common spiritual nature (Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, pp. 42-44). A

metaphysics that emphasizes unity in difference is the foundation of this spiritual humanism. Tagore emphasizes again and time again that the human self is a node of global consciousness rather than an isolated ego. "Man's self-realization is realised only in communion with others and the infinite," he writes in *Sadhana* (Tagore, *Sadhana*, p. 306). Rigid borders between people and, consequently, cultures and religions are effectively dissolved by this perspective. It positions humanism as a relational endeavour that rejects reduction to atomistic liberalism or simple individualism. This spiritual aspect is emphasized by current research. For example, Halder (2023) emphasizes that the "creative existence of man is inherently universal and transformative," arguing that Tagore's humanism synthesizes individual autonomy with universal interdependence (Halder, 2023, p. 138). This is consistent with Tagore's own assertion that genuine freedom is experienced via responsible interaction with the outside world rather than seclusion.

Love as the warp and weft of reality is another philosophical tenet. Although this concept applies to both Tagore and Iqbal, Tagore views love as ontological rather than sentimental. According to him, love is the power that unites the person with the universe; this idea is particularly prevalent in *Gitanjali*, where divine unity and human longing meet. The universal orientation of Tagorean humanism is demonstrated in *Gitanjali*, where "the human subject is situated within an infinite web of divine relations that transcends ego and nation," according to Babu Lal's study (2014). There is a clear synergy between Tagore's humanism and Muhammad Iqbal's philosophy: both thinkers view humanism as profoundly spiritual. According to Rabeya's (2024) comparative analysis, both Tagore and Iqbal view the human being as a reflection of the divine spirit—a place where the limited and the infinite converge (Rabeya, 2024, p. 187). In contrast to reductive secular humanisms, this affirms that any strong humanist philosophy must be based on spiritual unity.

However, Tagore's humanism also had a critical component: he was leery of dogmatic ideology, mechanical materialism, and inflexible nationalism. Tagore criticizes limited political identities and contends that "freedom without inner unity is a hollow shell" in his essay *Nationalism in India* (*The Home and the World*, p. 63). His belief that ethical humanism cannot be linked to sectarian or geographical allegiances is reflected in this criticism. Instead, it has to focus on a cosmic feeling of belonging that respects both individual liberty and communal peace. Tagore's humanism is based on three philosophical pillars: (1) a spiritual metaphysics that places humans within a universal consciousness; (2) a relational anthropology where freedom is realized in intersubjective communion; and (3) a critique of fragmentary identities that promotes an inclusive human unity. By using this integrated lens, Tagore's humanism articulates a vision of human growth based on spiritual unity, love, and shared moral responsibility, dissolving the division between the secular and the sacred.

### 3 | IQBAL'S VISION OF HUMANISM AND SPIRITUAL UNITY:

A dynamic spiritual anthropology that aims to reconcile freedom, selfhood, and collective unity within a cosmological horizon emerges when I consider Muhammad Iqbal's concept of humanism and spiritual unity. Iqbal rejects any reduction of human dignity to biological or material conditions alone; his humanism differs from the secular humanism of Western modernism. Instead, according to Iqbal, the human being is a creative center of potentiality, grounded in spiritual self-realization (*khudi*), and perpetually on the path to greater consciousness and oneness with the Divine. Iqbal argues that human existence is inherently meaningful because it is a scene of continuous creative growth rather than a passive object of fate in his groundbreaking book *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Iqbal, 1930/2013). His humanist perspective, which is both spiritual and participative in nature, is based on this metaphysical commitment. A key component of Iqbal's human vision is the idea of *khudi*, or selfhood. Iqbal views *khudi* as a spiritual potential that needs to be awakened and actualized through moral striving and creative involvement, in contrast to philosophical traditions that see individuality as merely self-interest. He claims in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* that humans are

endowed with freedom and self-responsibility, which sets them apart from inert material processes and enables them to collaborate with the Divine in the continuous process of creation (Iqbal, 1930/2013). This perspective opposes materialist reductionism and fatalistic mysticism, which Iqbal believed to be harmful to moral agency and human dignity.

Iqbal's humanism goes beyond crude divisions between secular and religious contexts, according to current research. For instance, Basrir Hamdani and Rasid (2024) point out that Iqbal's philosophical understanding of humanism is holistic and spiritual anthropological, reacting to both the overemphasis on passive transcendence in mystic doctrines and the disregard of inner life in secular humanism. They contend that Iqbal's human being reconciles divine transcendence and human agency by being both a spiritually oriented self and an active participant in the worldly reconstruction of knowledge and society. A greater unity between people and the universe is unavoidably produced by this synthesis. According to Iqbal, human spiritual development is not only an inward endeavour but also a component of a greater social change project. According to him, ethical interaction with the community and the universe fulfils the human self rather than seclusion. As stated in his poetic philosophy *Asrar i Khudi*, critics point to Iqbal's conviction that "life is preserved by purpose"—a purpose that drives the individual into a creative struggle against fragmentation and lethargy. This sentence is consistent with his philosophical commitment to moral purposiveness and human dignity in *Reconstruction*, although coming from his poetic corpus.

Crucially, Iqbal expands his humanism to support what he refers to as spiritual democracy, in which freedom, equality, and fraternity—rather than material interests or local identities—are the foundations of human unity. Spiritual democracy is a paradigm based on cosmopolitan unity that transcends race, language, and nation, according to academics who explain his political philosophy. According to this perspective, a society split by sectarian or nationalistic identities undercuts the spiritual unity that Iqbal envisions; all people have latent creative and moral potential that must be realized for true human unity to develop. Because it upholds human freedom and creativity while grounding them in a more comprehensive metaphysical union with the Divine, Iqbal's humanism is fundamentally spiritual. His mission is an appeal to acknowledge that humans are dynamic centers of spiritual consciousness that bind various peoples within a common cosmic horizon rather than merely aggregates of biological requirements or material surroundings. Iqbal's view maintains that spiritual unity is the essential foundation for any genuine humanism—one that can foster both individual self-realization and social well-being—in contrast to secular humanism, which frequently isolates human dignity from divine purpose.

#### 4 | COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS:

Even though Rabindranath Tagore and Muhammad Iqbal sometimes have different starting points and conceptual vocabularies, it is immediately clear to me that both thinkers articulate a spiritually grounded humanism that aims to reconcile individual dignity with universal unity when placed within a shared intellectual horizon. The understanding that both Tagore and Iqbal view people as places of divine encounter and moral creation rather than as merely objects of social science or reductive secular categories is at the core of this comparative synthesis. Iqbal's humanism is based on the idea of *khudi* (selfhood) as a dynamic force of spiritual self-realization (Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*), whereas Tagore's humanism is based on his concept of *Visva Manava* (Universal Man) and his insistence that the human spirit is intrinsically open to the "infinite within" (Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, pp. 42-44). According to Taposi Rabeya (2024), one of the most insightful comparative studies on the topic, both philosophers saw the pursuit of human unity as essentially a mystical endeavour. Rabeya states that "Tagore and Iqbal's writings hold that mysticism and humanism are the primary sources of an individual's spiritual power and that God's presence permeates all of creation" (Rabeya, 2024, p. 189). This realization reveals a common philosophical ground: both philosophers believe that spiritual ontology and humanism are inextricably linked. While Iqbal's philosophy places human agency inside

the Islamic metaphysical framework of freedom, creativity, and divine will, Tagore's vision synthesizes Upanishadic, Vedantic, and Sufi intuitions into a universal humanism that transcends religion (Rabeya, 2024, p. 187).

This same spiritual orientation, in my opinion, is essential to comprehending why both Tagore and Iqbal reject theological parochialism or limited nationalist frameworks. Tagore's criticism of militant nationalism stems from his belief that "freedom without inner unity is a hollow shell." He elaborates on this point in articles such as *Nationalism in India*, where he places human unity above political identity. Thus, his universalism is an ethical and spiritual position that aims to creatively synthesize the individual and collective aspects of life as well as the East and West. On the other hand, both Eastern mystic passivity and Western individuality are rejected by Iqbal's philosophical humanism. He affirms both freedom and moral responsibility by articulating the human self (*khudi*) as an active process of being in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. His conception of human unity is intrinsically dynamic because of this emphasis on self-formation; wherein inner transformation serves as the foundation for broader spiritual and social coherence.

Rabeya's comparative analysis reveals significant variances in emphasis while also highlighting profound spiritual parallels. Echoing his lyrical imperative that the human heart must respond to the call of the infinite with empathy and creativity, Tagore believes that humanity's moral unity arises from an experiential sense of the divine in nature, art, and interpersonal communion (Rabeya, 2024, pp. 190-192). Iqbal's poetry, such as *Asrar e Khudi*, and his philosophical essays, which state that human life is substance only in active self-realization, both reflect the idea that spiritual unity is created through the strict discipline of the self, where *khudi* is strengthened through moral struggle (Reconstruction, pp. 67-72). Iqbal therefore outlines a dialectic of spiritual individuality and community unity that begins with personal transformation, whereas Tagore emphasizes interconnection and shared spiritual sensitivity. The fact that neither thinker reduces spiritual unity to doctrinal sameness or restricts humanism to secular ethical frameworks is what most impresses me about this comparison. Both Tagore's Vedantic mystical universalism and Iqbal's affirmations of self, freedom, and divine agency are examples of humanisms that are both cosmopolitan in scope but deeply steeped in religious sensitivities. This shared inheritance emphasizes that human dignity and spiritual unity are not antagonistic but rather mutually reinforcing in an era characterized by fragmentation and sectarian conflict, and that genuine humanism ultimately necessitates both an inward awakening and a commitment to community flourishing.

## 5 | HUMANISM, ETHICS, AND SPIRITUAL UNITY:

I am driven to a common metaphysical anthropology that places human dignity within a wider spiritual perspective that transcends the secular-religious divide when I consider humanism, ethics, and spiritual unity as expressed by Rabindranath Tagore and Muhammad Iqbal. For both philosophers, a living encounter with the divine that enables moral agency serves as the foundation for an ethical existence rather than just abstract rationalism. According to Tagore, "the inner light of the soul is the ground of all morality and unity," implying that moral life arises from an awakened spirit that recognizes its oneness with others and the universe (Tagore, *The Religion of Man*, pp. 42-44). In his view, human freedom is inextricably linked to spiritual openness. Therefore, his humanism is a spiritual ethic that uses love, compassion, and inner peace as normative guidelines for moral behaviour in the outside world rather than just a secular ethics. This realization is supported by current research, which emphasizes Tagore's connection between spiritual recognition and moral agency. For instance, according to Halder (2023), Tagore's humanism places "a premium on people's inherent worth, autonomy, and interdependence," meaning that moral relationships are based on both personal dignity and interconnectedness with the outside world. Because of this relational aspect of ethics, Tagore sees moral life as a lived experience of shared spiritual awareness that defies reduction to simple utilitarian calculation rather than as a collection of rules.

Despite coming from an Islamic metaphysical framework, Iqbal's vision and Tagore agree on the fundamental significance that spiritual unity plays in leading an ethical life. Iqbal emphasizes the dynamic idea of khudi (selfhood) in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, encouraging the believer to cultivate the self as a "creative center of potentiality" by moral endeavour and a relationship with the Divine. According to Iqbal, true moral agency only emerges when the ego recognizes its spiritual foundation in divine unity (Tawhid) and, as a result, acknowledges its obligation to others as fellow members of the cosmic order. Because it promotes fairness, equality, and solidarity among people as manifestations of divine oneness, tawhid is consequently not only theological but also ethical in its ramifications. This idea makes Iqbal's humanism extremely pertinent to current ethical issues, particularly human rights, according to scholars of his philosophy. Lidinillah et al. (2023) contend in a philosophical analysis of Iqbal's humanism that his framework, which is based on the spiritual idea of divine unity, "reconciles religion and human rights..." by defining a reciprocal link between religion and humanity (p. 74). Here, spiritual unity—which upholds both individual dignity and group responsibility—becomes the moral prerequisite for a fair and compassionate social structure.

The way that spiritual unity serves as an ethical axis in both Tagore and Iqbal's beliefs is what makes their comparison particularly interesting. While Iqbal's ethical vision arises from the realization of Tawhid as a living spiritual principle that dissolves egoism and fosters mutual respect, justice, and fraternity, Tagore's universal humanism arises from an inner spiritual experience in which humans recognize the divine presence in others. Though they use different terminology to express their worries, both thinkers criticize limiting materialism and secularism that separate moral life from spiritual depth: Iqbal in the conceptual logic of Islamic metaphysics and moral rationalism, Tagore in the language of poetic universalism and intuitive spirituality. This focus on spiritual connection as the basis for humanistic ethics, in my opinion, provides a potent response to current problems characterized by societal division, moral relativism, and fragmentation. It implies that ethics runs the risk of becoming meaningless or instrumental if it is separated from a feeling of human interconnectedness based on spiritual unity. True humanism, according to both Tagore and Iqbal, is a spiritual stance that acknowledges the sacred in oneself and the other and motivates moral behaviour based on love, justice, and shared humanity rather than just a philosophy of rights or obligations. Therefore, Tagore and Iqbal teach that spiritual unity is the source of ethical life in the comparative landscape of ethical humanism, connecting metaphysics and morality in ways that enhance both individual and societal existence.

## 6 | CONCLUSION:

It is clear by considering the philosophical and ethical aspects of Muhammad Iqbal and Rabindranath Tagore that both intellectuals share a vision of humanism rooted in spiritual unity while having different cultural and spiritual backgrounds. Empathy, love, and creative communion are emphasized as the cornerstones of an ethical existence in Tagore's humanism, which is based on the experience of the inner light of the soul and the realization of the universal self. In a same vein, Iqbal places human dignity within the dynamic evolution of khudi, arguing that promoting justice and societal harmony requires self-realization, moral responsibility, and spiritual participation. Both philosophers argue that genuine humanism necessitates the combination of spiritual consciousness and ethical action, rejecting reductive frameworks such as narrow nationalism, materialism, or secular rationality. Their comparative findings, in my opinion, highlight the fact that spiritual unity is the source of ethical humanism since it develops a collective consciousness that transcends local identities and fosters each person's moral potential. This study emphasizes that Tagore and Iqbal provide a convincing model where human dignity, moral responsibility, and spiritual solidarity are interrelated in the current context, which is characterized by cultural fragmentation and ethical relativism. In the end, their contributions show that the quest of humanism is inextricably linked to the development of spiritual unity, offering a timeless framework for both individual growth and the moral development of society.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Hamdani, B., & Rasid (2024). Muhammad Iqbal's humanism: A response to religious-sufistic and secular humanism. *Kordinat*, 23(1), 112–130.
- [2] Iqbal, M. (1930/2013). *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (pp. 67-72). Oxford University Press.
- [3] Lal, B. (2014). Spiritual humanism in Tagore's *Gitanjali*. *International Journal of Research*.
- [4] Lidinillah, M. A., Syamsuddin, M., & Kuswanjono, A. (2023). Iqbal humanism and human rights: Reconciling religion and human dignity. *Jurnal Filsafat*, 33(1), 74-95
- [5] Malook, S. (2024). Muhammad Iqbal's politics of spiritual democracy. *Al-Manhal Research Journal*, 4(2), 48-62.
- [6] Tagore, R. N. (1970). *The religion of man* (pp. 42-44). Unwin Books.
- [7] Tagore, R. N. (2008). *Sadhana: The realisation of life* (Vol. 2). In S. K. Das (Ed.). Sahitya Akademi.
- [8] Uddin, M. J. (2025). Islamic spiritual humanism in the poetry of Allama Iqbal and Kazi Nazrul Islam: A quest for a justice-based society. *Iqbal Review/Iqbaliyat*, 66(4), 105-127.
- [9] Rabeya, T. (2024). Mystical thoughts of Tagore and Iqbal: A comparative analysis. *Philosophy and Progress*, 73(1-2), 183-214.

### Cite this article

Abdul Hamid, S. (2025). Humanism and Spiritual Unity: A Comparative Study of Rabindranath Tagore and Muhammad Iqbal. *Research Review Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 1(3), 73-79. <https://doi.org/10.31305/rrjis.2025.v1.n3.010>