

# HARMONY UNVEILED: RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S HUMANISTIC VISION OF UNITY AND INFINITY

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## ABSTRACT

*Exploring the profound humanistic philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore, this article delves into his visionary perspectives on humanity, spirituality, and the interconnectedness of existence. Tagore's philosophy, deeply rooted in love, compassion, and unity, celebrates the inherent dignity and potential of human beings. Through an ANALYSIS of Tagore's key works such as 'Gitanjali,' 'Sadhana,' and 'The Religion of Man,' the article elucidates his concept of the Universal Man—a transcendent ideal embodying unity, freedom, and the divine essence within humanity. Tagore's vision extends beyond mere intellectual discourse, emphasizing the transformative power of love and self-realization in fostering harmony and interconnectedness among individuals and with the natural world. Drawing on Tagore's humanistic ideals, the article explores themes of unity, freedom, and the essence of humanity, offering insights into his enduring relevance in contemporary discourse on humanism and spirituality.*

**Keywords:** *Humanism; Spirituality; Universal Man; Love; Self-realization; Interconnectedness; surplus in man*

Humanism, derived from the Latin root 'Humanitus,' embodies a quest for the perfection of the human soul and the realization of mankind's fullest potential. Rabindranath Tagore, the poet-philosopher, profoundly embraces humanistic ideals throughout his work. He regards humanity as the pinnacle of evolution, celebrating the inherent dignity of human existence, even acknowledging the physical attributes that distinguish us. While animals are more grounded and better equipped to resist gravity's pull with their four-legged structure, Tagore marvels at humanity's ability to stand erect, granting us freedom of movement and vision. Yet, this physical liberation only scratches the surface of human nature.

Tagore contemplates the unique mental freedom bestowed upon humans, courtesy of our capacity for imagination. He recognizes that our ability to observe and interpret life extends beyond mere survival instincts, elevating us above mere biological needs. Unlike animals, our imagination transcends the limitations of our physical form, prompting us to seek more than just sustenance and pleasure. Indeed, the human psyche encompasses a profound sense of spiritual freedom—a divine essence that

establishes a connection with the divine. Thus, beyond our physical and mental faculties, lies the ethereal realm of the human spirit, embodying our true kinship with the divine.

## **EMBRACING THE ESSENCE: TAGORE'S HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON HUMANITY AND SPIRITUALITY**

humanistic philosophy predominantly revolves around the dynamics of interpersonal connections. His perspective on humanity is intricately woven throughout his works, notably in "Sādhanā" (1913), "Personality" (1917), "Creative Unity" (1922), and "The Religion of Man" (1930). Through these writings, Tagore delves deeply and passionately into the existential essence of humanity, exploring its unique dimensions and the significance revealed through its interactions with (a) nature and (b) various modes of interpersonal relationships.

Tagore, hailed as a beacon of humanism, delicately intertwines the essence of humanity with divine reverence, harmonizing the sanctity of both without diminishing either. In the inaugural chapter of his seminal work, "The Religion of Man" (1930), Tagore elucidates, "The idea of the humanity of our God or the divinity of Man, the Eternal, is the main subject of this book." He venerates humanity as the zenith of evolutionary progress, the epitome of creation's essence.

Tracing the evolutionary saga, Tagore unveils a pivotal juncture: the emergence of humanity. Prior to man's advent, evolution unfolds in a mechanistic fashion, guided solely by environmental factors and physical forces. Yet, with man's arrival, a profound shift occurs. Unlike other creations bound by deterministic responses, man transcends mere physical influence. His presence heralds a departure from rigidity, propelling evolution into realms spiritual and ineffable.

Tagore challenges detractors who dismiss the reality of the finite self, asserting its palpable existence as the vessel through which the infinite is pursued. To deny the finite self is to forsake the infinite, for it is within the finite that the infinite finds expression and realization. Even in the realm of biology, Tagore bestows admiration upon humanity, despite the comparative ease with which lower animals navigate gravitational forces with their quadruped structure. In Tagore's eloquent prose, humanity emerges not as a mere product of evolution, but as the divine culmination of cosmic creativity, deserving of reverence and awe.

Man's evolutionary journey is marked by the remarkable development of his physical and mental faculties. With the ability to free his hands, stand upright, and survey his surroundings, man attains a newfound freedom of action and perception, all through his biological structure. However, this physical liberation only paints a partial picture of humanity. Beyond the realm of biology lies man's mental freedom, facilitated by his capacity for imagination. Unsatisfied with mere survival, man seeks to transcend mundane existence, giving rise to a plethora of imaginative pursuits—science, philosophy, art, and ethics. These endeavors, born of free will, serve no immediate biological

imperative. Instead, they emanate from a surplus—a surplus of creativity, of aspiration, of existential depth. In this phase of human endeavor, the pursuit of the surplus takes precedence over mere survival needs. Activities like stargazing or poetic composition, while not essential for bodily sustenance, represent the expression of this surplus. Man engages in such pursuits not to fulfill immediate physical desires but to explore the realms of imagination and idealism.

Throughout history, humanity has grappled with the fundamental question of its own identity, evolving through various stages of societal development. From primitive civilizations to the complexities of modernity, individuals have continuously sought to define what it truly means to be human. Despite centuries of contemplation and discourse, a definitive answer remains elusive.

Rabindranath Tagore contends that humanity's pursuit of self-understanding is a testament to its surplus—the inherent drive to transcend mere existence and strive for something greater. This surplus finds expression through diverse avenues, ranging from the formation of vast empires like the Roman Empire to the establishment of various religious institutions.

In each era and through various means, humanity endeavors to assert its identity and perfection. Yet, the quest for self-definition persists, reflecting the enduring complexity of the human condition and the inexhaustible depth of human potential. Man traverses the ever-shifting landscape of human civilization and culture as a perpetual traveler. His pursuits evolve over time, yet they do not follow a predictable or natural pattern. Unlike the seasons, human expression is not bound to a singular stereotype; rather, it is characterized by an innate drive to transcend boundaries. At the core of humanity lies an insatiable impulse to surpass existing limits. No obstacle can fully restrain this boundless energy; every goal beckons man forward, spurring him to relentless action. Even in the face of failure, man persists, driven by an unyielding determination to overcome challenges and achieve new heights. “Man is not entirely an animal; he aspires to a spiritual vision which is the vision of the whole truth. This gives him the highest delight because it reveals to him the deepest harmony that exist between him and his surroundings” (sādhanā, 1913)

## **TAGORE'S HUMANISTIC VISION IN 'GITANJALI'**

In his seminal work, "The Religion of Man" (1930), Rabindranath Tagore expounds upon his philosophy of humanism, asserting that humanity represents the pinnacle of creation—a culmination wherein the animate and inanimate coalesce into their finest expression. As creations themselves, humans embody the essence of the creator, enabling them to perceive the world through their imagination and find union with the omnipresent spirit that permeates all existence.

In Tagore's "Gitanjali," a compilation of 108 poems initially penned in Bengali and later translated into English, the essence of divine spirituality permeates every verse. Each poem encapsulates Tagore's profound yet simple poetic imagery, showcasing his humanistic philosophy with

unparalleled clarity. In the poem "Leave this chanting," this humanistic approach reaches its zenith, inviting readers to explore the depths of their own spirituality and embrace the simplicity and purity of existence. The poet asks the priest,

"Leave this chanting, singing and telling of beads!

Whom dost thou worship in this lonely

dark corner of a temple with doors all shut?...

Meet him and stand by him in toil and

in sweat of thy brow"(Gitanjali,1910)

The poem serves as a poignant illustration of Tagore's humanistic ideals. Tagore critiques the devotion of the priest confined within the closed doors of the temple while the impoverished toil away in the fields, tending to the harsh earth. He finds fault in the priest's exclusive focus on ritualistic worship within the temple walls. Instead, Tagore urges the priest to seek the divine in the sweat and labor of the hardworking people, emphasizing the inherent dignity and spirituality in their daily struggles.

God treats all human beings equally. The simple gifts of God are the greatest gift to mankind. The perils of human life are the uncertain goals.

"When I awaken and hurry in search of my goal,

Day by day thou art making me worthy of full

acceptance by refusing me ever saving me from perils of

weak uncertain desire".{Gitanjali,1910}

--- The simplicity of life makes us happy. This is the simple meaning of the poem. Each poem of Gitanjali translated into English is packed with beautiful thoughts.

## **"HARMONY UNVEILED: TAGORE'S HUMANISTIC VISION OF UNITY AND INFINITY"**

In Tagore's conception, the idea of man transcends the limitations and contradictions imposed by the material ego. While the ego tends to prioritize material interests, leading to inner conflicts and dualities, the universal self or the 'Universal Man' inspires individuals to overcome these limitations and contradictions by nurturing a holistic spirit of unity and synthesis. Tagore profoundly expresses, "Someone lives in our heart, who is Man, but who crosses individual man... He is a man for all and

for all times. Great men feel Him in all men, and sacrifice life easily though his love." (The religion of man,1930) Through this sense of universality, individuals transcend their individual boundaries and attain the essence of humanity itself.

Human beings inherently yearn to surpass their limitations and finitude, aspiring to achieve a state of self-identity and unity with nature. Man embodies the beauty of nature within, driven by an innate urge to transcend his own capabilities and reach towards the infinite. Tagore elucidates that man serves as a bridge between two poles: one where he acknowledges the universal laws governing existence, and the other where he stands as a unique individual, distinct from all others.

For Tagore, the realization of one's true self or nature as unity and identity lies in the complete development and progress of one's personality. To understand oneself as part of the process towards universal unity is to embody the essence of a universal man. This realization culminates in the concept of 'Manava Brahma,' where an individual, through attaining universal consciousness or infiniteness, becomes divine, while God, in his infinite potentiality, manifests and realizes himself in human life.

In Tagore's humanistic ideals, such as the 'divinity of Man' and 'the humanity of God,' the profound interconnection between humanity and divinity unfolds, portraying a vision where the boundaries between the two blur, and the essence of humanity is elevated to a divine realm.

According to Tagore, the pinnacle of human existence is attained through unity, transcending all contradictions, limitations, and finitude to merge into an infinite process known as 'Brahmavihara'—living in the infinite. In this state of completeness, all life's contradictions dissolve through the profound realization of infiniteness within oneself and the world. Tagore illustrates this state by describing dwelling in contemplation, whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, until sleep overtakes, as living in Brahma. In this heightened state of existence, individuals achieve the utmost mental equilibrium, untouched by narrowness or limitations, enabling them to perceive beyond contradictions and diversities.

Realizing this ultimate state of integral experience entails the development of the highest form of human existence—becoming infinite through merging with the infinite. Tagore emphasizes that this process finds manifestation in love, as it facilitates the expansion of one's existence towards infinity through relationships of the utmost value in life. This method of love develops the infinity in the finite life and existence, which goes so well with Tagore's statements: "...the infinite was not the idea of a spirit of an unbounded cosmic activity, but the infinite whose meaning is in the positive ideal of goodness and love, which cannot be otherwise than human." [14] {sādhanā,1913}

The humanistic perspective embodied in Tagore's philosophy inspires individuals to resolve moral and social contradictions by cultivating selflessness in love and action. Through this ethos, individuals can transcend contradictions and strive towards establishing a humanistic ideal of unity through love, characterized by selfless service to others.

Tagore's humanism emphasizes the importance of love as a guiding principle in both individual and societal life. While individuals may typically prioritize their own interests, the ideal of love fosters a sense of altruism that motivates them to work for the betterment of others within society. This interconnectedness with others forms an integral part of the continuous process of life within society, ultimately leading to a sense of unity with all.

In essence, Tagore's Universal Humanism, viewed from an international perspective, revolves around the development of universality or infiniteness through the cultivation of universal humanity. As individuals strive towards realizing the concept of 'Manava Brahma' or 'Universal Man' in human existence, they embody the highest ideals of humanism, fostering a sense of unity and interconnectedness that transcends boundaries and divisions.

### **INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP(I AND THOU)**

Tagore's humanism centers on the assertion of the fundamental relationship between individuals, which he refers to as the Religion of Man. However, the term "Religion" in this context does not imply subjugation to an infinite spiritual entity like God. Rather, its purpose is to foster harmony among individuals in reason and love, aligning them with the supreme man, the universal being. Tagore posits that the reality of the supreme person is contingent upon personal being, just as the latter relies on the former. Thus, God is perceived as a personal being akin to man.

Tagore believed that the ultimate goal of humanity is to realize its relationship with all through union with the divine. This union signifies the culmination of human fulfillment. Love, Tagore asserts, is the key to understanding this spiritual union—the spirit of one in God encompasses the many, and love is the underlying truth behind this unity.

According to Tagore, man is fundamentally a lover, and his freedom and fulfillment lie in love, which represents perfect understanding. Through the power of comprehension and the permeation of his being with love, man becomes united with the all-pervading spirit. Love is the cornerstone of human society, enabling the best expression of man, and its perfection leads to the complete realization of the divine within humanity.

### **UNITY, FREEDOM, AND THE ESSENCE OF HUMANITY**

Tagore's concept of the universal man represents the ultimate realization of human nature, neither supernatural nor superhuman. To grasp this highest form of human existence, one must understand the essence of human existence itself. According to Tagore, human existence encompasses two types of needs: ordinary, material needs, and higher, human needs. The humanistic perspective arises from the intrinsic power inherent within individuals, blending these two needs into a unified outlook.

This pinnacle of life, Tagore contends, is characterized by human freedom or salvation through unity. Salvation, in this context, is not an external imposition upon human nature but rather a natural expression or self-manifestation of human existence reaching its apex of unity amid contradictions. The ultimate salvation, taking the form of universal nature, is not confined to individual processes but is manifested through the eternal and universal union of individual humans with all beings, culminating in perfect unity with the universal man.

This notion of universal humanism reflects the expression of the universal nature of humanity within its material existence, serving as the manifestation of the total man necessary for freedom in unity. Tagore identifies the personal man as the epitome of humanity—the Eternal man, the Complete Man—realizing unity in beauty, truth, and goodness.

Tagore emphasizes the interrelation between the world and the personality of man, asserting that the world is indispensable for the development of human personality. Through experiences of love, hatred, pleasure, pain, fear, and wonder, the world becomes intertwined with our personality. Without this world, our personality would be devoid of substance. Tagore posits that the ultimate form of human freedom lies in the realization of one's universal nature inherent in material existence. However, he believes that man is more than just a material being; within him resides a false ego that engenders contradictions in life and society. Yet, through the cultivation of universality, the universal or eternal 'I' within man can surmount these contradictions. This development doesn't entail the eradication of contradictions within society but rather their reconciliation through the harmonious growth of human existence as a creative personality. Ultimately, this leads to the attainment of unity in the highest state of freedom.

Tagore, a humanist and advocate of love, compassion, empathy, and cooperation, rooted his humanism in spiritual principles. Central to Tagore's universal humanism is his emphasis on interpersonal relationships. He conceptualized human personality as intimately connected to nature, advocating for the realization of closeness with the natural world. In Tagore's view, nature is not foreign to humanity; rather, we are inherently linked to it, akin to family. Tagore espoused the concept of universalism over nationalism and patriotism, championing ideals that promote the unity of humanity and a world without boundaries.

In Tagore's humanistic philosophy, love for humanity takes precedence. In his work "Sadhana," subtitled "Realization of Life," which comprises lectures delivered at Harvard University, Tagore delves into the concept of self-realization. Drawing inspiration from the Upanishadic tradition, the poet contemplates self-realization not only from a contemporary perspective but also through his distinctive vision. He asserts that self-realization can only be achieved through active engagement in social action.

To the humanist Rabindranath, a true civilization is present only where rules the profoundest and noblest spirit of humanity. He says in ‘Sadhana’- “Civilization must be judged and praised not by the amount of power it has developed but by how much it has evolved and give and expression to by its laws and institution. The love of humanity , the first question and the last it has to answer is whether and for it recognises man more as a spirit than as a machine”. [8]{sādhana,1913} Tagore himself admits that, ‘We have great faith in humanity like the Sun, it can be clouded but never extinguished.....we are waiting for the time when the spirit of age will be incarnated in a complete human truth and the meeting of men will be translated into the unity of man’.

Tagore's philosophy of humanism is universal in scope, as it explores the universal nature and creative essence of humanity. Through a thorough examination of the infinite personality of man, Tagore concludes that it has the capacity to formulate a philosophy of life rooted in universal humanism. According to Tagore, a prominent humanist in the East, universal humanism is based on the expression of inner personalities.

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