

SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY  
PEER REVIEWEDTHE INTERPLAY OF INDIVIDUAL AND UNIVERSAL PERSPECTIVES  
IN TAGORE'S HUMANISM

Amit Kumar Mondal

**Introduction:**

Humanism as a philosophical tradition is often imposed to the western European Renaissance. It derives directly from the Latin word “human,” “humanus.” That’s Latin for “man” (‘homo’) and “humans” (‘homines’). The philosophical idea of humanity, which expresses man’s material and social freedom, is best understood in its European definition. When we look at the several Eastern philosophies and religions—including Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Vaisnavism, Baulism, etc.—as well as the various Eastern thinkers and the philosophical and religious systems in India, Japan, Bangladesh, and other East Asian countries, we see that all of them are share some humanistic approach or attribute. I believe that all of these systems place great emphasis on the reorganization of man’s social existence via mental development, is related to his material and social nature. “*savar upar manus satya, tahar upare nai,*” as one Bengali *vaisnava* poet (Baru Chandidas) put it. This suggests that the man values honesty above anything else. The most pressing issue here is, obviously, identifying that man. ‘*Maner manus,*’ or the ideas of man, is the explanation given by Lalan sha, a respected Baul of Bengal. He resides in the guy who is unencumbered by the trappings of humanity. In light of this, Lalan poses the existential issue, “*sav loke kay Lalan ki jat sansare,*” or something to that effect. The universal human spirit knows no bounds as to religion, race, ethnicity, or geography. The Eastern humanist tradition has as its primary focus man, in human existence beyond his distinctions and limitations. The universal form of humanism that Tagore articulated is addressed in this context. Tagore’s humanist philosophy is global since it examines the nature of humanity as a whole and the human capacity for creativity. In this way, Tagore, a renowned humanist from the East, concludes that the infinite personality of man is capable of developing his philosophy of life as the universal humanism, which is based on the expression of inner personalities. The emphasis on interpersonal connection is central to Tagore’s humanistic philosophy, which I will explore below. To elaborate on his view of man and

**SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**PEER REVIEWED**

how it relates to his humanist philosophy. He resides in the guy who is unencumbered by the trappings of humanity. In light of this, Lalan poses the existential issue, “*sav loke kay Lalan ki jat sansare,*” or something to that effect. The universal human spirit knows no bounds as to religion, race, ethnicity, or geography. The Eastern humanist tradition has as its primary focus man, in human existence beyond his distinctions and limitations. The universal form of humanism that Tagore articulated is addressed in this context. As a humanist, Tagore’s philosophy is global since it examines the nature of humanity as a whole and the human capacity for creativity. In this way, Tagore, a renowned humanist from the East, concludes that the infinite personality of man is capable of developing his philosophy of life as the universal humanism, which is based on the expression of inner personalities. The emphasis on interpersonal connection is central to Tagore’s humanistic philosophy, which I will explore below. To elaborate on his view of man and how it relates to his humanist philosophy.

**The concept of Man:**

To talk about the concept of man, Tagore makes a profound observation,

*“Someone lives in our heart, who is Man, but who cross 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. Through the feeling of that man, a man crosses the individual limitation and reaches the boundary of man.”<sup>1</sup>*

Man is never satisfied with his lot in life. Man, desires to be one with nature because he believes that this is the only way to achieve his ultimate aim of transcending his own limitations. Nature’s splendor and the yearning to go beyond one’s capabilities both reside within the human soul, that’s why man can contemplate the infinite. Tagore argues that man is a connecting point between extremes. His words:

At one pole of my being, I am one with stock and stones. There, I have to acknowledge the rule of universal law. That is where the foundation of my

---

<sup>1</sup> Tagore, R. N. (2008). *Sadhana*, In the English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore (Vol 2, pp. 19-26). Ed. by Sisir Kumar Das. New Delhi: Sahitya Academy.

**SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**PEER REVIEWED**

existence lies, deep down below...But at the other pole of my being, I am separate from all. There I have broken through the cordon of equality and stand alone as an individual. I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable.<sup>2</sup>

**Universal Man:**

Tagore comes to see his own nature as a unified whole, through the wholeness of his own person. Becoming a universal man, then, involves coming to terms with one's individuality as part of a larger quest for global harmony. According to Tagore, this is the "Manava Brahma" realization, in which a man achieves "divine" status by realizing a universal consciousness or infiniteness, and God, as infinite potentiality, achieves "human" status by perfectly manifesting and realizing himself in human life. Tagore's humanistic principles, such as the "divinity of Man" and "the humanity of God," are further upon in this context.

Tagore posits this condition as the pinnacle of salvation via unity; it occurs when all inconsistencies, limitations, or finiteness are merged into the endless process that is '*Brahmavihara*' (the abode of the infinite). The effective manifestation of boundless potential in one's life and the universe eliminates all seeming paradoxes. Tagore describes this as "living in Brahma," and he states that it can occur while one is "standing, walking, sitting, or lying down." When a person's sense of confinement is lifted, he or she reaches a point of mental equilibrium where they can see possibilities beyond apparent dichotomies. Developing the pinnacle of human being as infinite through a mergence with the infinite requires reaching this last stage of integrated experience. Tagore proposes a method manifest in love, as the pursuit of it aids a man in realizing his infinite potential by means of the most meaningful human connections.<sup>3</sup> Tagore's words find perfect expression in this approach to love, which cultivates infinity within the confines of life and existence.

---

<sup>2</sup>Tagore, R. N. (2008). *Sadhana*, op. cit., P.306.

<sup>3</sup> Tagore, R. N. (1970). *The Religion of Man* (pp. 42-44). London: Unwine Books.

**SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**PEER REVIEWED**

...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.<sup>4</sup>

By introducing the human ideal of love in man and society, this sort of humanism is present in Rabindra Nath Tagore's concept of man. Normal human behavior involves working for one's own benefit, but the ideal of love as described here causes a person to cultivate a selfless concern for the welfare of others. A man's relationships with his fellow humans are part of a never-ending cycle of social interaction that brings them closer together in the end. From a global perspective, this is the culmination of Tagore's Universal Humanism: the advent of universality or infinity through the growth of universal humanity, as recognized by man at the advent of Manava Brahma, or Universal Man.<sup>5</sup>

Tagore's concept of the universal man represents the pinnacle of human realization absent of any superhuman or otherworldly qualities. To grasp this pinnacle of humanity, we must first have a firm grasp on what it means to be human. According to him, man has two basic requirements: material needs and spiritual needs. Both of these requirements are met in the human condition, and Tagore rightly notes that man's innate strength is expressed in his humanistic worldview.<sup>6</sup> Tagore explains that this peak experience is the realization of human liberation or salvation via oneness. Salvation is not a foreign imposition on human nature but rather the highest possible manifestation of human existence as a unified whole. When a person achieves an eternal or global union with all humans, that union is a perfect unity with universal man, and not the end idea of salvation itself, which is in the form of universal nature and hence cannot manifest itself in an individual in a particular process. This understanding of universal humanism as the manifestation of man as a whole in his material existence may be called the entire man's necessary

---

<sup>4</sup> Hegel, G. W. F. (1979). *Phenomenology of Spirit* (p.14). Translated by A.V. Miller. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Tagore, R. N. *The Religion of Man*, op.cit., P. 17-22.

<sup>6</sup> Banerjee, S. P. (1988). *Rabindranath's Concept of Personality* (p.10). Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study.

**SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**PEER REVIEWED**

expression of freedom and unity.<sup>7</sup> Tagore argues that the one who has attained this insight into the unity of beauty, truth, and goodness is the pinnacle of humanity, the Eternal Man, the Complete Man. The environment we live in has an effect on the way we think and act. In fact, human beings need this planet to grow and flourish. Tagore argues that the world becomes an integral part of our identities when we pour our positive and negative emotions (such as love and hate, joy and suffering, fear and awe) into it. Tagore believes that the fullest expression of a person's freedom is when he or she realizes his or her inherent potential for a universal nature in this planet. Tagore disagrees with this view, arguing that man is more than a material entity because of the false 'ego' he expresses, which is the source of many of the paradoxes we see in our world. However, with the cultivation of universality, the eternal "I" in man is able to reconcile these apparent inconsistencies. However, progress does not mean that societal inconsistencies will disappear; rather, it is the reconciliation of contradictions that ushers in unity at the pinnacle of freedom, as the human existence as a creative personality matures and grows in harmony. It is not the eradication of contradiction, but rather a reconciliation in unity via a process of love that shows the whole or wholeness of human life, according to Tagore's conception of human freedom.<sup>8</sup> Tagore argues that this sum represents the truth of man as it appears in the various ways that he expresses his creativity. Human nature and original thought, he adds, are inextricably linked. Humanity breaks free from its material constraints and advances down two parallel lines—the path to oneness and the path to individuality. But, as he puts it, true independence is achieved by creative becoming rather than merely existing. Tagore believes that in order to achieve world-consciousness, we must merge our emotions with the infinite emotion that permeates everything, and only that's possible when we break free of our attachments to material things, take on our social responsibilities, and bear the burdens of our fellow humans.

---

<sup>7</sup> Radhakrishnan, S. (1919). *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (p.45). London: MacMillan and Co.

<sup>8</sup> Tagore, R. N. (2008). *Personality, in the English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore* (Vol 2, p.13), Ed. by Sisir Kumar Das, New Delhi: Sahitya academy.

**SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**PEER REVIEWED**

**Conclusion:**

Tagore concludes that the key to understanding universal humanism is understood how a man might become Universal Man, or infinite. Tagore notes that the discovery of truth, goodness, and beauty as an intrinsic unity in man is the purpose of all human relationships, and not just in the restricted sense of providing service to others out of love. The absolute subject, he argues, lives through a process, a movement, in which it poses its own conditions of existence to the cosmos, faces resistance from the universe in order to learn about itself, and ultimately succeeds. Tagore's explanation goes beyond the traditional explanation because it expresses a synthetic attitude toward human life, in which man becomes divine by realizing the absolute value of unity through the manifestation of this value or goodness as the socio-cultural value of creative humanity in various self-creating and self-manifesting states of human existence. Tagore argues that one of the most effective ways to convey ideas is through one's own unique voice. Man, as an expressive entity, reestablishes his connection to the cosmos. It's rooted in the human understanding that we're all interconnected parts of a larger whole. A dialogue with nature at large lies at the heart of the self-disclosing being (I). The perpetual connection between the self-expressing being and the other is mutually dependent on my own existence. This results in the development of a connection between "I" and "they."

**Bibliography**

1. Radhakrishnan, S. (1919). *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*. London: Macmillan.
2. Roy, Pabitrakumar (2002). *Rabindranath Tagore*. New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research.
3. Sinari, Ramakant (Ed.) (1991). *Concept of Man in Philosophy*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advance Study.
4. Tagore, Rabindranath (1913). *Sadhana*. In *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore (Vol. 2)*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 277-345.

**SKBU JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY**  
**PEER REVIEWED**

5. Tagore, Rabindranath (1931). *The Religion of Man*. In *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore (Vol. 3)*. New Delhi: Sahitya academy, 83-189.
6. Tagore, Rabindranath (1937). *Man*. In *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore (Vol. 3)*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 191-218.
7. Tagore, Rabindranath (1917). *Personality*. In *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore (Vol. 2)*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 347-416.
8. Banerjee, S. P. (1988). "Rabindranath's Concept of Personality." In Bhudeb Chaudhury and K. G. Subramanyan (Ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore and the Challenges of Today*. Shimla: IAS.

---