



## HUMANISTIC RELIGION AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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### Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore, a towering intellectual and visionary, redefined religion as a deeply personal, humanistic experience rather than a rigid system of dogma. His philosophy of humanistic religion is rooted in the belief that divinity is immanent within every individual, a concept he expressed through *Jivan-devata*, the "Lord of Life." Tagore emphasized that spirituality is realized through active engagement with the world—by finding the infinite within the finite and embracing love and beauty as pathways to enlightenment. Rejecting sectarianism and ritualism, Tagore advocated for a universalistic spiritual vision that transcends religious and cultural boundaries. His ideas found expression not only in his literary and artistic works but also in his social and educational reforms, notably through the establishment of Visva-Bharati University. His philosophy extended to global concerns such as nationalism, colonialism, and peace, underscoring the ethical and social responsibilities of spiritual realization. In the contemporary world, marked by religious fundamentalism, ideological divides, and environmental crises, Tagore's humanistic religion provides a relevant and transformative framework. His emphasis on interfaith dialogue, universalism, and the integration of spirituality with everyday life offers a means to cultivate social harmony and ethical responsibility. By recognizing the sacred in human relationships and creative expression, Tagore's philosophy serves as a bridge between spirituality and secularism, inspiring a vision of interconnectedness and unity.

**Keywords:** Rabindranath Tagore, Humanistic Religion, Jivan-devata, Universalism, Spirituality

### 1. Introduction

Rabindranath Tagore's intellectual and artistic output spanned a vast spectrum, encompassing literature, music, painting, and philosophy. Yet, a unifying thread that runs through his diverse creations is his profound understanding of religion, which he articulated not as a system of dogma but as a lived experience of human connection with the infinite. This paper seeks to explore Tagore's unique perspective on humanistic religion, highlighting its relevance in contemporary discourse.

Tagore's upbringing, influenced by the Brahmo Samaj, a monotheistic reform movement, laid the foundation for his rejection of ritualistic and anthropomorphic conceptions of God. He advocated for a religion that resonated with the human heart, emphasizing the inherent dignity and potential of every individual. This paper will analyze how Tagore's personal journey and engagement with various spiritual traditions shaped his philosophy.

### 2. The Core Tenets of Tagore's Humanistic Religion

#### 2.1. The Immanence of the Divine (Jivan-devata):

Tagore's concept of Jivan-devata, often translated as the "Lord of Life," is central to his humanistic religion. It posits that the divine is not an external entity but an immanent force residing within every human being. This internal divinity is not static but dynamic, evolving through our interactions with the world and our pursuit of truth, beauty, and goodness.

#### 2.2. The Realization of the Infinite in the Finite:

Tagore believed that the finite world, with its inherent limitations, provides the stage for the realization of the infinite. He argued that true spirituality lies in recognizing the infinite within the finite, finding the divine in the everyday experiences of life. This concept emphasizes the importance of engagement with the world rather than renunciation.

### **2.3. Love and Beauty as Pathways to Spiritual Enlightenment:**

For Tagore, love and beauty are not mere aesthetic experiences but profound pathways to spiritual enlightenment. Love, in its broadest sense, encompasses compassion, empathy, and a deep sense of connection with all beings. Beauty, whether found in nature, art, or human relationships, is a manifestation of the divine and a source of spiritual upliftment.

### **2.4. Universalism and the Rejection of Dogma:**

Tagore's humanistic religion transcends the boundaries of traditional religions, embracing a universalistic perspective. He rejected rigid dogma and sectarianism, advocating for a religion that fosters unity and understanding among diverse communities. His philosophy emphasizes the shared humanity that binds us together, regardless of our religious or cultural backgrounds.

## **3. Tagore's Philosophy in Practice**

### **3.1. Literary and Artistic Expressions:**

Tagore's literary works, particularly his poetry and plays, are replete with expressions of his humanistic religion. Works like "Gitanjali" and "The Religion of Man" eloquently articulate his spiritual vision. His art, particularly his paintings, also reflects his search for the divine in the human form and the natural world.

### **3.2. Social and Educational Reform:**

Tagore's philosophy was not confined to abstract contemplation; he actively sought to translate his ideals into practice through social and educational reform. His establishment of Visva-Bharati University exemplified his commitment to fostering a holistic education that nurtured the individual's spiritual, intellectual, and creative potential.

### **3.3. Engagement with the World:**

Tagore's engagement with global issues, including nationalism, colonialism, and the pursuit of peace, reflects his commitment to applying his humanistic principles to the challenges facing humanity. He believed that true spirituality required active participation in the world, working towards the betterment of society.

## **4. Tagore's Relevance in the Contemporary World**

In an era marked by religious fundamentalism, cultural polarization, and environmental degradation, Tagore's humanistic religion offers a compelling alternative. His emphasis on universalism, the immanence of the divine, and the importance of love and beauty provides a framework for fostering interfaith dialogue, promoting social justice, and cultivating a deeper sense of connection with the natural world.

## **5. Conclusion**

Rabindranath Tagore's humanistic religion presents a transformative vision of spirituality—one that transcends rigid dogma and embraces the intrinsic divinity within humanity. His concept of *Jivan-devata* underscores the idea that the sacred is not external but immanent, evolving through our engagement with life. By advocating for the realization of the infinite within the finite, Tagore redefines spirituality as an active, dynamic process rooted in love, beauty, and human connection.

His rejection of sectarianism and emphasis on universalism remain profoundly relevant in today's fractured world. At a time when religious intolerance and ideological divisions threaten global harmony, Tagore's philosophy offers a bridge—encouraging dialogue, mutual understanding, and a recognition of shared humanity. His vision extends beyond personal spirituality to encompass social reform, education, and global peace, making it a practical guide for ethical living in the modern era.

As we navigate an increasingly interconnected yet divided world, Tagore's humanistic religion stands as a beacon of hope. It invites us to seek the divine not in isolation but in our relationships, our creative expressions, and our pursuit of justice. By embracing his ideals, we move closer to a world where spirituality is not a means of division, but a unifying force that celebrates the dignity, beauty, and boundless potential of human existence.

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