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## Rabindranath Tagore Songs: A Humanistic Outlook on Present Society

**Dr. Gitanjalee Bora**

(HOD of Philosophy), Krishnaguru Adhyatmik Visvavidyalaya, Na-Satra, Barpeta (Assam)

Email:gita.philo@gmail.com

**Mrinal Dutta**

Assistant Professor in philosophy, B.H.B.College, Sarupeta, Barpeta, Assam

Email:mrinaldutta.dutta@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

Rabindranath Tagore, a giant in the history of the world music and literature world, rendered his songs-popularly called Rabindra Sangeet with a great humanistic vision which does not recognize time, country or religion. His music once was an artistic statement and a philosophical one at the same time and it stressed on the sanctity of human life, universal brotherhood, spiritual freedom and a close, yet harmonious relation with nature. Tagore s songs grow into a source of the inner awakening and the appeal to self-transcendence in a world where social fragmentation grows, there is technological alienation, and moral uncertainty is increasing. His song like Ekla Cholo Re and Where the Mind is without Fear carries his plea of moral courage, integrity of the individual, and reform of society. Tagore has been able to incorporate individual and collective elements in his humanism in such a way to produce a mixture of personal and universal. This work discusses humanistic aspects of his music and evaluates its current application in the modern world that is overwhelmed by intolerance, inequality, and environmental pollution. By using a qualitative and



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interpretative approach, the author found out that Tagore music is a living voice of morality, hope and a more inclusive and caring society.

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### **Introduction:**

The Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to a non-European for the first time to Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) in recognition of his poetic genius, for his broad vision as one of the outstanding humanists, as well as his philosophical reflections. His songs, Rabindra Sangeet in. sum, even though they are only a small part of his vast creative output, which embraces poetry, prose, plays and educational thought, form a central point. Such songs are an individual realization in harmony the unity between aesthetic beauty and spiritual immersion which are based on wording the reality of Tagore and his ideas of beauty, truth, freedom, and unity of the world. A common humanism pervades his poetic compositions transcending a caste, creed, race and nationality and appeals to the heart of humanity transferring generations and nations. Tagore humanism does not go beyond abstract idealism. It is entrenched in personal experience of human pain, happy moments, struggle and transcendence. His ideas about the moral and spiritual uplift of an individual and the community were the key features of humanity, as he tended to think. There is a feeling of Bonhe offer like universal compassion, respect to life and an enduring communion with nature which he depicts in his songs. Tagore focused on human dignity of a person, whether inner freedom was important and the necessity of harmony with the world in his compositions. His songs are immortal and, even in this modern era of social unrest, moral decay, ecological degradation, and emotional estrangement, there is strong ethical and spiritual voice employed by Tagore. They remind us of the shared bond of humanity and the urgent need to nurture empathy, understanding, and moral courage. Whether calling for fearless thought in “*Where the mind is without fear*”, inspiring resilience in “*Ekla Cholo Re*”, or expressing love for nature and the divine in his seasonal songs, Tagore urges us to transcend narrow identities and embrace a larger vision of existence.

Humanism of Tagore is not passive; it requires him to get into it. He was aware of the revolutionary nature of arts regarding social awareness and social improvement. His songs hence do not only become subjects of cultural heritage but lively tools of moral education and social remedy. In the current era when the world is facing a state of heightened polarization and value crisis, Tagore has given us lyrical reminder to go back to the roots of introspection, inner freedom and cultivation of universal goodwill. The aim of the paper is to discuss the humanistic vision which is implied in the songs by Tagore and test



its applicability in resolving the moral and cultural complexities of the modern society. The reinterpretation of his musical legacy in the key of contemporary issues will help the study demonstrate that his vision of the world helps to open the way to a more open, compassionate and spiritually flourished world.

### **Objectives:**

The primary objectives of this paper are:

- To analyze the humanistic philosophy embedded in Rabindranath Tagore's songs.
- To investigate how his lyrical works reflect concerns related to human dignity, unity, and freedom.
- To assess the relevance of Tagore's humanistic ideals in the context of present-day societal issues such as inequality, intolerance, and ecological imbalance.
- To critically interpret selected songs that embodies Tagore's ethical and spiritual humanism.

### **Methodology:**

The approach taken up in conducting the research entitled Rabindranath Tagore Songs: A Humanistic Approach to the Current Society is basically qualitative, interpretative, and philosophical in its nature. It is a thorough textual research of chosen sets of songs created by Rabindranath Tagore that express his humanistic values, whose goal is getting the answer to the question of the way these songs as lyrical works reveal the picture of universal love, spiritual liberation, and social unity. The study is founded mostly on careful reading of the songs by Tagore and discovering the philosophic and ethical subject-matters inherent therein. To do so, such primary texts as the first Bengali editions as well as common English translations of Tagore songs and appropriate secondary sources are analyzed. Academic commentaries, literary reviews, biographies, and criticism on Tagore and his philosophy and artistic Endeavour are fundamental to the study of the stuffs in an intellectual and cultural background. The paper also consults the prose work, letters and philosophical meditations of Tagore himself in an attempt to understand a little more about the values.

### **Humanistic nature of the songs of Rabindranath Tagore:**

The songs by Rabindranath Tagore are not any ordinary musical composition but are a rich affirmation to a highly humanistic philosophy that does not seem to be terminated in time or space. Through tenderness and moral clarity the human condition and the greatness of its aspirations, sufferings and dignity and



spiritual possibilities are expressed in his lyrical works. His humanism is based on the inflexible belief in the ability of a person to realize herself, to self-develop and to be able to universal, moral love. Instead of being firmly fixed on abstract ideals Tagore humanist philosophy is interwoven with emotional, spiritual and aesthetic texture of his songs and bears the power to raise a degree of ethical consciousness and mass awakening.

Tagore did not visualize a piecemeal existence of the human mind chained by religion, country, or social status but rather a spiritual unity of mankind developing to be a more knowing and a free being. His music sings of the immured dignity of all the human beings, irrespective of social and cultural disparities. Such understanding of the oneness of mankind is expressed in the forms of lyrical love-, sorrow- and resilience- lyric, the desire of transcendence. To Tagore, it is the divine who is reflected in every human being, thus, he deserves respect and mercy. His lyrics tend to eulogize ordinary life of a person: his worries and pleasures, his relationships with nature, and with seeking. A strong respect is expressed toward the universalism of the human experience. Tagore songs were a form of resistance since Tagore was living in the era when colonialism was rife and every social hierarchy had its own strictures to be followed. His outer focus on freedom of inner man was not turning away but a demand to moral and spiritual awakening. The song, like where the mind is without fear, causes the vision of the society whose foundations are truth, reason and dignity. He believed that real liberation must begin within the human soul, and that fearlessness, honesty, and intellectual courage are pre-requisites for a humane society. This inner freedom, once achieved, would naturally lead to a more just and harmonious world.

A strong ecological sensibility also exists in Tagore as he follows a humanistic belief. Rivers, trees, birds, seasons, and skies are everywhere in his songs, but it is not because they are metaphors of a poetry but because they are lively beings that accompany the course of humanity through life. Man and nature share their relationship with each other respectfully and spiritually in his songs. Unlike exploitive mindset promoted by the modern industrial culture, Tagore saw nature as a divine entity to feed the human spirit. Such a united picture of the world supports the notion that human dignity cannot be alienated to the health of the environment. His songs are based on personal loss and happiness but it is more than expressive of himself it is about the universal emotion of truth. Art to him became a means of intercourse between the individual and the universe, the finite and the infinite. His music had the effect of encouraging the listeners to overcome egoism, sectarianism and materialism and achieve the common purpose of love and understanding. His humanism was not then a narrow matter of political, social



theory, it was spiritual in its nature, an appreciation of the eternal in the everyday, the divine in the human.

The songs by Tagore provide a moral and spiritual guide to modern society, which is highly segmented, consumeristic and cold-hearted. They invite us to re envision the society not as a set of unrelated individuals but as a moral community in which connection is mediated through empathy, conversation and the use of our creative power. His hope and confidence in the moral capability of artwork and its need to cultivate the human soul is relevant more than ever. In his own words, as recorded by Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson in *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man*, “The spirit of man is waiting for the call of the future. Let it not sleep too long.” (Dutta & Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-Minded Man*, p. 124, Bloomsbury Publishing). This statement encapsulates the main idea of humanism in Tagore, which is a lifelong belief in moral progress of humankind and spiritual potential that it has. Thereby, humanistic philosophy which is incorporated in the songs of Tagore is not an idealization but a poeticized reality of life. It addresses the worth of life, the need of moral imagination and the meditative nature of love and togetherness. His songs effectually contribute not only to aesthetic appreciation but also to ethical contact with the world - and in this Tagore turns out as not only a poet and composer, but as a visionary humanist of whose voice we hear the echo even yet in the conscience of the present.

### **His lyrical works reflect concerns related to human dignity, unity, and freedom:**

Lyrical works created by Rabindranath Tagore on the one hand take up his special niche in the development of world musical and literary culture, and, on the other hand, present a deep reflection on human dignity, unity, and freedom. His musical pieces, written as lyrical compositions with philosophical overtones, become not the pronunciations of passion or piety, but lifelong writings of moral and spiritual awareness. Their origin are based in his intense involvement in human condition and his undisputed belief in the ideal of world where humanity is ruled by compassion, freedom of thought and the dignity of every human being. These worries do not exist in vacuity but are the main strands in the whole vision of his creativity and they vein some of their strongest expression in his musical compositions. The issue of human dignity that Tagore has is due to his faith that each person represents the divine. He was opposed to any kind of discrimination, whether social, religious or racial or national that compromised this divine possibility of the human being. The voice of the ordinary citizen, the poor, the outcast, the forgotten is subjected to exaltation and prominence in most of his songs. As a humanist, Tagore was radical in the



sense that what he did was advocate humanity without pronouncing his understanding anywhere afar; rather he was asking us not to treat people who had traditionally been at the edge of the same understanding. In the metaphor of light he frequently identified the human soul with a spark of the infinite. This spiritual view of the human being placed every life above the material classification, to the moral and transcendental value. The concept of unity is also very central to the lyrical vision of Tagore. He opposed the hardened nations, sect, races, which fragment mankind. He wrote the music that evoked a sense of solidarity amongst people and the unity of rhythm of life which gives so much variety with different performances of culture, nature, and spirituality. In the case of Tagore, unity never meant the absence of diversity but a harmonious pluralism in which the differences enrich, and never fragment someone. His songs are painted with the scenes of rivers flowing to the ocean, heartbeats, and also the flowers growing together in one garden. These symbols describe the unity of the human life beyond geographic, verbal or political boundaries. Such a motif of unity could hardly be regarded as poetic or utopian; it was highly political. When nationalism was on rise, and the colonial regime was being oppressed via slogans of elimination, Tagore could see a bigger humanity. He disapproved of violent nationalism and was more comfortable with the conception of cultural interdependence. His music relays the vision of a world in which mankind emerge beyond the boundaries of existence and operate with universality. He did not sing for Bengal or India but to mankind. It is this universalism that has made his songs to always remain relevant in a world where sectarians and identity politics have been growing.

For Rabindranath Tagore, freedom extended far beyond the realm of political independence; it encompassed the liberation of the mind and soul. His songs celebrate not only freedom from fear, dogma, and material bondage but also the possibility of inner awakening. Tagore envisioned a world where individuals could grow fully, express truth freely, and connect with the divine without constraint. This vision is powerfully expressed in one of his most iconic verses from Gitanjali (Song 35), where he prays for a world “Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high.” This line, rich in philosophical insight and poetic clarity, encapsulates Tagore’s conception of freedom as mental, moral, and spiritual liberation. According to Tagore, true freedom originates within the individual. Once this inner freedom is achieved, it radiates outward, contributing to the formation of a just and peaceful society. His songs emphasize that lasting freedom cannot be achieved through external changes alone; it must be sustained by inner growth, the awakening of conscience, and the cultivation of beauty and truth. In his compositions, the joy of personal liberation is inextricably linked with a deep sense of responsibility toward humanity. In the context of contemporary society—characterized by increasing intolerance,



systemic injustice, and widespread alienation—Tagore’s lyrical affirmations of dignity, unity, and freedom serve as a powerful call to conscience. His songs are not merely nostalgic echoes of a bygone era but continue to offer ethical guidance and spiritual inspiration. They challenge us to build a world where every human being is treated with respect, every community lives in harmony, and every individual has the opportunity to grow in freedom.

By expressing these ideals through music, Rabindranath Tagore transforms abstract values into real emotional experiences. His songs not only evoke a sense of beauty but also awaken a deep sense of responsibility in the listener. This responsibility includes upholding human dignity, preserving social unity, and striving for freedom—not merely for oneself, but for all members of society.

### **The relevance of Tagore’s humanistic ideals in the context of present-day societal issues:**

The humanistic ideals of Rabindranath Tagore prove to be extremely insightful and enlightening in the context of the current concerns of the modern world where inequality, intolerance, and ecological imbalance prevails. His sight, planted in the lyrical and philosophical richness of his songs, promises besides the aesthetic enjoyment a moral gauge to a world in distress because of ethical disorientation and socio-political atomization. Humanism of Tagore, with its underlying notion of the nobility of the individual, the sacrosanctity of life and the unity of all things could become an antidote to the understanding of divisiveness, exploitation and alienation that characterizes so much of modern society. With the widening of disparity between the wealthy and the needy, on the globe and in the respective nations, Tagore discussed with vehemence about equality and human dignity that should be revisited. He thought that any human being irrespective of status, caste, and creed has innate value and should be given freedom to develop intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. He tends to give voice to underdogs through his songs and raise doubts about the validity of strictly-defined social roles. This is a vision that ameliorates universal respect, and it becomes a radical idea in the world where many forms of systemic oppression and economic injustice still disenfranchise large layers of the population. Tagore was more concerned about the underprivileged and this concern was no poetic imagination, but it was deeply rooted and moralistic in nature, compelling the society to break the walls of privilege and prejudice.

Similarly burning is the revival of the intolerance in many aspects something about religious and cultural intolerance, political and ideological intolerance. At the moment when polarized identities are deployed as weapons to foster hatred and fear, Tagore has a desperate relevance when he insisted on the unity in



diversity. He was a believer of an international humanism not affected by restricted nationalism and communalism. His lyrics, which are composed under the banner of harmony and willingness to find common ground, sound a profound respect of the diversity in human expression. Tagore was opposition to the notion of nationalism that grew on the gets of elimination and cautioned that unrestrained by such forces, one might eventually result in violence and moral dissolution. In the words he powerfully quoted in Nationalism, India has never felt a true feeling of nationalism. Although since childhood I was taught that idolatry of the nation is nearly as good as the worship of God and man, I think that patriotism is too egoistic to meet the generalizing spirit of the humanism of Tagore .(Tagore, Nationalism, Macmillan, 1917. p. 84). The quotation indicates the extent to which humanism stood a rank higher above political ideology as Tagore called people to adhere to the general values of empathy and collaboration. The situation with the ecological crisis in the 21 st century also contributes to the topicality of the vision of Tagore. Well before the world embraced the discourse of environmentalism, the work of Tagore was based on a deep connection with nature and humankind. He did not regard nature as something to be sold but a life supporting element that feeds the spirit and saves life. Nature in most of his seasonal songs and devotional songs also acts as an inspiration and an ethical guide to him. This harmonious interdependence between man and the world around is a practical solution to exploitative ideas of growth and utilization that characterize the contemporary world as eloquently discussed by Tagore. With its harmony of living along with nature, his ideal calls us to devise humility, piety, and custodianship, values so badly required in times of climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity decline.

Thus, Rabindranath Tagore's humanistic ideals, expressed through his songs, are not relics of romantic past but living philosophies with the potential to renew ethical life in the modern age. They speak directly to the crises of inequality, intolerance, and ecological degradation by advocating a vision of humanity grounded in compassion, justice, and holistic consciousness. His music continues to remind us that the path to a better society lies not in conquest or division, but in the cultivation of empathy, unity, and spiritual awakening.

### **Some of the songs representative of Tagore ethical and spiritual humanism:**

The songs of Rabindranath Tagore are a lyrical projection of his humanistic ethics and spirituality and scenery view that is immersed in empathy, moral freedom, and an inborn sense of life reverence. His music is not just the music of aesthetic beauty; it is the music of philosophical position where the human spirit occupies the central place in the world. When songs that Tagore was to create were assessed



critically, one thing that is clear is that his art form was an avenue through which he was able to bring a vision about life whereby man was able to transcend into little boxes and become what he was meant to be morally and spiritually.

The song *Ekla Cholo Re* written by Tagore is the strongest expression of his ethical humanism that teaches the moral power of a single individual in an indifferent mass. This is a song of those who are alone; he encourages the listener that although society does not support the man of truth and justice, he must keep on doing the right thing. As the world is becoming more and more run by conformity and moral trade, the song acts like an ethical manifesto to do what one thinks is right rather than what the crowd does. It chimes strongly with Tagore feeling of dignity of having individuality, and moral freedom of self. The chorus, *If no one answers your call, then thou thyself go on thy way*, is the statement of human strength and moral standing of the human being, in the direct contact with the truth and ethical duty. This moral courage of the heart is not divorced of a bigger spiritual picture. The ethical and the spiritual do not exist as a different domain in Tagore songs. There is no separation between the two but are mixed up in a manner that moral action is a means to spiritual realization. His song of *Gitanjali*, *Where the mind is without fear (Chitto Jetha Bhoysunyo)*, as it is recited frequently and as a song is sung as a devotional song. It makes us think about the world where there is no fear, prejudice and narrow-mindedness, a world not only of the political emancipation but of the spiritual liberation too. In this case, Tagore dreams of the heaven of freedom in which the human beings act within reason, dignity, and truth. This vision of freedom is not only external but freedom of the inner being of falsehood and ignorance.

Humanism used by Tagore is not a religious construction, in conformity with institutionalized religion, but rather the release of the divine in the human and nature. He eclipsed dogma and institutional religions and instead had an adaptable spirituality that did not disregard the endless in whatever he did in life. There is not only a reverence in his seasonal songs, and devotional hymns, of nature as a frame-work and context of human life, but as a living presence, beautiful, divine, and morally instructive. Such songs as: *Aaji Bangladeshher Hridoy Hote or Amar Matha Nato Kore Dao He Tomar Charnodhole* represent nature and God not as something separate but closer to being immanent to human experience. Humility through bowing down of the head is not a subordination but submission to the truth, love and presence of divine within the daily routine. Spiritual humanism proclaims Tagore and states that the transcendence is embodied through labor, amity and art-making. His music is frequently a hymn to the virtue of work, to the innocent grace of country life and to the human soul in its naive singleness of address. They reject



hierarchy, ritualism, and materialism, advocating instead for a life of moral clarity and spiritual awareness. In a modern world overwhelmed by technological distractions and existential disconnection, Tagore's music rekindles the idea that true progress lies not in external accumulation but in the inward cultivation of values.

The religious and moral attractiveness of the songs given by Tagore is the fact that it is familiar and close to the human heart. Although these are extremely philosophical, they are neither abstract nor esoteric. Their speech is tender and strong, it attracts the listener into a serenity and transformative place. The greatness of Tagore is that it appeals both to the heart and the intellect, and combines both in the search of a synthesis that brings about moral intervention, rooted in spiritual enlightenment. Most simply stated, these are songs that Tagore represents the vision of life in which the ethical and the spiritual are inseparably combined in pursuit of the truth, beauty and the human dignity. The challenge of his music to the contemporary world is subtle but very serious, to acquire knowledge, but wisdom, power, but compassion, success, but spiritual fulfillment. In his songs Tagore keeps on singing of such a humanity that is not afraid, human beings are generous, and they are tied to the infinite through their love and understanding.

### **Conclusion:**

Rabindranath Tagore's songs, deeply embedded in the philosophical and spiritual ethos of India, continue to resonate with extraordinary relevance in the context of present-day society. His oeuvre, often referred to as Rabindra Sangeet, is far more than an aesthetic or musical effort—it is a profound embodiment of ethical, spiritual, and humanitarian values. Through the difficult blending of melody and meaning, Tagore's compositions offer a vision of humanity that transcends temporal boundaries and reaches into the universal core of human experience. At a time when the world is witnessing the fragmentation of social unity, the erosion of moral values, the rise of materialism, and an intensifying crisis of identity, Tagore's songs emerge as a powerful cultural and philosophical resource, reaffirming the sanctity of the human soul and the necessity of compassion, empathy, and interconnectedness.

Tagore's humanism was not rooted in mere idealism; it was shaped by lived experiences, historical consciousness, and a deep awareness of global and local realities. His humanistic approach does not alienate the spiritual from the social. On the contrary, it finds the divine in the human and the eternal in the everyday. His songs, replete with themes of love, suffering, unity, nature, and transcendence, function



as meditative spaces where the listener is gently guided toward introspection and a greater sense of responsibility toward others. In this sense, Tagore's musical compositions become tools for ethical cultivation. They do not preach; instead, they awaken. They do not impose morality; they evoke empathy. They do not separate the individual from the collective; rather, they affirm that the fulfillment of the self is inherently connected to the well-being of others. In contemporary times, when social alienation and spiritual emptiness afflict many, Tagore's songs serve as a balm for fractured sensibilities. They remind us that the essence of our humanity lies not in dominance, wealth, or technology, but in our ability to feel, to relate, to care, and to coexist with others and with nature. Tagore was deeply aware of the danger of mechanized living and the loss of personal connection in modern civilization. His poetic melodies often call for a return to simplicity, sincerity, and soulful engagement with life. The clarity of this vision is what makes his songs strikingly relevant today. In the cacophony of a fragmented world, his music still whispers the need for unity. Moreover, Tagore's humanism is inclusive. It breaks barriers of caste, creed, and nationality. He refused to accept narrow parochialism and instead celebrated the diversity of the human condition. His songs reflect this expansive outlook. They are addressed not just to Bengalis, Indians, or any particular community, but to the universal human being. His idea of *manusher gaan*—songs of and for mankind—continues to hold transformative power. It speaks directly to today's multicultural, pluralistic, and increasingly polarized world, offering a hopeful alternative rooted in mutual respect and shared emotional experience. His commitment to truth and justice also surfaces in subtle but striking ways in his music. Through gentle lyrical persuasion and emotional depth, Tagore inspires listeners to confront injustice not with violence, but with the strength of moral conviction and the resilience of love. His songs offer solace to the downtrodden, courage to the oppressed, and introspection to those in power. This balanced, non-doctrinal humanism—rooted in both inner awareness and outer responsibility—represents a rare harmony of the personal and political. Importantly, Tagore's humanistic songs draw attention to the natural world as an essential partner in the human journey. His deep reverence for nature is evident in his musical imagery and metaphors, often portraying the divine and the human as inseparable from the rhythms of the seasons, rivers, trees, and birds. This ecological awareness, so subtly embedded in his art, aligns powerfully with the environmental concerns of our own time. His songs inspire a form of ecological humanism, where nature is not a resource to be exploited, but a sacred companion in our collective existence.

In conclusion, Rabindranath Tagore's songs offer a timeless humanistic vision that continues to illuminate the moral and emotional landscape of the present society. His music transcends the immediate



concerns of his own era and speaks directly to the soul of contemporary civilization, urging a return to empathy, unity, and spiritual wholeness. As articulated by Krishna Kripalani in *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography*, “In his songs, as in his life, Tagore pleaded for the recognition of the human soul as the ultimate reality, and love as the highest law of existence” (Kripalani, *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography*, p. 241, Oxford University Press). These ideals are not only philosophically profound but also urgently necessary in the face of today’s fractured world. The enduring relevance of Tagore’s humanistic outlook lies in its capacity to inspire not only thought but also action—a call to awaken the latent divinity within each human heart and to build a world where music, poetry, and moral imagination are integral to the fabric of everyday life.

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