



# Tagore's Religious Tolerance and Universal Unity Paradigm in the Era of Globalization

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Received: 07-08-2025  
Accepted: 16-09-2025  
Published: 21-10-2025



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**Abstract:** *This article examines Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of religious tolerance and universal human unity as a normative framework for an age of globalization marked by intensified interdependence, pluralization of faiths, and rising extremism. Through close readings of Sadhana, The Religion of Man, Gitanjali, and Nationalism, it reconstructs Tagore's "religion of the heart," his Vedantic claim that outward creeds are secondary to an inner spiritual harmony, and his conviction that humanity shares a single moral root. The study situates these ideas within Tagore's practical pedagogy at Santiniketan/Visva-Bharati and his critique of aggressive nationalism in favor of global citizenship. It then maps convergences with contemporary agendas—UNESCO's intercultural and interfaith initiatives, the UN's World Interfaith Harmony Week, the Sustainable Development Goals, and recent policy advances promoting enlightenment and religious tolerance—highlighting implications for education, media literacy, interreligious dialogue, and peacebuilding. The article argues that Tagore's synthesis of Eastern (Vedantic) and Western humanist traditions, his ethic of love and compassion, and his human–nature concord offer actionable guidance for cultivating a culture of tolerance, inclusive civic identity, and ecological responsibility. It concludes that Tagore*

*is not merely a historical voice but a living resource for renewing universal human solidarity amid digital fragmentation and ecological risk in the twenty-first century.*

**Keywords:** *Rabindranath Tagore, Religious Tolerance, Universal Human Unity, Globalization, East–West Synthesis, Global Citizenship, Interfaith Dialogue, Santiniketan, Ecological Ethics, "Religion Of The Heart".*

## Introduction

The globalization processes of the twenty-first century are generating profound transformations not only in the economic and political domains but also in the spiritual and cultural spheres. The intensification of intercultural dialogue, the expansion of religious pluralism, and—simultaneously—the rise of religious extremism are compelling humanity to revisit new philosophical paradigms. In this context, the views of the Indian thinker, poet, and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) on religious tolerance assume particular significance. The ideas advanced in his *The Religion of Man* (1931), *Sadhana: The Realisation of Life* (1913), and *Gitanjali* (1912) are being reinterpreted today as philosophical foundations for a paradigm of universal human solidarity.

In his literary and philosophical works, Rabindranath Tagore championed the ideals of religious toleration and universal human unity. Placing humanity above national, racial,

or religious demarcations, he remained faithful to the conviction that “the whole world is a single human family.” Across his essays and lectures, he underscores that society must develop upon the principles of tolerance, unity, and cooperation. In Tagore’s view, the welfare of a community is determined by the capacity of diverse worldviews and beliefs within it to complement one another in a spirit of forbearance. He sees broad reconciliation and concord, rather than violent confrontation, as the key to human progress.

On matters of faith, Tagore adhered not to official dogmas but to the principle of a “religion of the heart.” He believed that every person, through inner spiritual seeking and moral elevation, is capable of realizing his or her kinship and connectedness with all humanity—and indeed with all existence. For this reason, Tagore maintained that different religions and cultures can unite not merely through external rites and forms, but through an inner spiritual harmony. He sharply criticized rigid, intolerant fanaticism—doctrines that divide humankind and foment conflict. By contrast, he urged attention to the universal values at the core of all religions—compassion, fellow-feeling, and love.

## Methodology

Tagore interpreted tolerance not as a mere compromise, but as the recognition of humanity’s single spiritual root. As S. Radhakrishnan observes in *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*: “Tagore’s philosophy consists in harmonizing the Vedantic heritage of the East with Western humanist values” [4;31]. Tagore’s conception of religious tolerance emerges from the harmony of his religious and secular outlook. Drawing inspiration from the Vedantic tradition and emphasizing the harmony of human beings with nature, he provides a philosophical grounding for the idea that all religions share a common source. In *Sadhana* he renders the relation between the human and the natural world thus: “The path to the real Truth lies in the attunement of the human spirit with the spirit of the world” [1;49].

This thought constitutes the metaphysical foundation of religious tolerance: the distinctions of religion, nation, or race that appear to divide humanity are, in essence, diverse facets of an underlying unity. The central thesis of *The Religion of Man* is that the outward forms of religion are secondary; the true essence is the spiritual harmony within the human heart. “God dwells in fire, in water, and in trees. We behold Him in all things” [1;35]. This proposition aligns with the paradigm of religious tolerance in an age of globalization, for it shows that the ultimate aim of all religions is the elevation of the human spirit. For Tagore, religion is not merely a compendium of rituals; it is the spiritual source of a universal conception of human unity.

Tagore’s poetic and artistic legacy gives vivid expression to the ideals of religious toleration and universal unity. In his celebrated collection *Gitanjali* (“Song Offerings”), the soul’s aspiration toward the Divine is depicted as a summons to a universal moral unity that transcends any national or confessional boundary [8;2]. In this work, Tagore sings of love for the Creator and of compassion for all beings, advancing the idea of a profound inner commonality among diverse faiths. “Only through love does the human being harmonize himself with the Infinite” [2;102]. This statement grounds universal solidarity in ethical and

spiritual unity. Thus, Tagore's conception of tolerance encompasses not only interreligious forbearance but also a global human unity.

Tagore embodied his ideals not only in theory but also in practice. In India he founded the experimental school Santiniketan, which later became Visva-Bharati University—a place where education was conducted in the spirit of art, nature, and universal solidarity and unity. At Santiniketan, young people of different nationalities and cultures studied together, learned to respect each other's heritage, and were encouraged to think freely and creatively. This educational initiative was the practical expression of Tagore's philosophy of cultural and religious tolerance. He sought to nurture a new generation that, while grounded in its own roots, would be open-minded and respectful toward other peoples and faiths.

The ideas of cultural and religious tolerance that Tagore advanced are particularly significant under conditions of globalization. As nations and religions interact more closely in the modern world, Tagore's "principle of synthesis"—that is, the idea that different cultures can interpenetrate and harmonize through mutually enriching contact—gains urgency[8;1]. He advocated not a lifeless uniformity but a living unity achieved through diversity. This principle resonates with contemporary concepts of intercultural dialogue: every people can preserve its national identity while learning from others, thereby contributing to world civilization. As Tagore wrote, each culture is a varied flower in the common garden of humanity, and this garden is beautiful only when all the flowers bloom together—an idea that accords with the tenets of multiculturalism.

Critiquing nationalism, Tagore stressed the difference between patriotism (love of one's own people) and aggressive nationalism. True patriotism, he argued, does not exclude respect for other nations, whereas nationalism is often bound up with denigration and the will to dominance. Hence, he articulated the broader notion of "global citizenship." He held that all members of humanity are interdependent and morally responsible for one another, and that international solidarity and cooperation are essential. His universal humanism implies that each person is first and foremost a member of the human family and only thereafter a representative of a particular nation or faith - a view consonant with modern theories of cosmopolitanism and the principles of globalism, which scholars today develop under the rubric of a "global civil society."

The convergence between Tagore's advocacy of religious tolerance and contemporary globalization is especially clear. Tagore supported interfaith dialogue and concord, asserting that confessional conflicts can be overcome through love and enlightenment of the heart. Writing in 1917 in the essay "Nationalism in India," he observed: "One of the most important truths of our time is that different races and peoples have drawn close to one another. They face two paths: either nations will continue in ceaseless struggle, or they will find the true basis of reconciliation and mutual help; the choice, therefore, is between endless competition and cooperation." These words have not lost their force in today's globalized world. In the twenty-first century, as humanity grows ever more interconnected, it is evident that a path of antagonistic rivalry leads to ruin, whereas the choice of cooperation and tolerance serves the common ascent.

## Result and Discussion

Colonialism, national awakening, interreligious tensions, and Western modernization directly shaped Tagore's worldview. He condemned colonial policy and regarded the over-politicization of nationalism as dangerous. In Nationalism he wrote: "The mechanical power called the Nation is not capable of destroying the spiritual unity of mankind" [5;57]. A historical perspective shows that Tagore's conception of tolerance was not merely a philosophical theory but an answer to the socio-political challenges of his time. A fuller understanding of his views on tolerance also requires comparison with other thinkers.

As Tagore foresaw, the most successful societies in a global age are those in which people of different nations and religions can live together in amity and accept unfamiliar ideas and cultures. He went so far as to predict that "in the future, those who are free from hostility toward strangers and who can perceive spiritual unity will occupy the most fitting places; conversely, the strong-armed and the intolerant will in any case pass from the stage of history." This insight shows how vital religious tolerance and cosmopolitan solidarity are. Whoever approaches others with compassion and breadth of mind will thrive in the global era; by contrast, the bigoted and narrow-minded cannot adapt to the spirit of the age.

Today, the issue of religious tolerance has become a pressing social concern worldwide. Under globalization, religions and cultures have drawn together to an unprecedented degree—creating both great opportunities and serious challenges[9;98]. On the one hand, closer contact among peoples and faiths fosters cultural enrichment and mutual understanding. On the other, regrettably, in some regions there has been an increase in religious intolerance and extremism. Disrespect, hatred, and violence grounded in religious animus threaten global peace. In recent years, for example, acts desecrating sacred scriptures, religious discrimination, and hate-motivated violence in certain countries have alarmed the international community.

Religious tolerance has an immeasurable impact on social stability and development. Where tolerance prevails, interfaith peace can take root, leaving no room for violence and bloodshed in the name of religion. Conversely, when tolerance is weak, extremist ideas spread more readily and conflicts—including armed clashes—can erupt among religious groups. For this reason, many states today strive to support interreligious harmony at the level of national policy. In Uzbekistan, for instance, the Constitution and laws guarantee freedom of conscience for all citizens; more than 130 nationalities and faith communities live together in peace; and nationwide policies are carried out to strengthen interethnic and interfaith concord. These examples show that religious tolerance is not only a moral value but also a concrete factor of social stability.

Internationally, advocacy of religious tolerance has also intensified. In 1995 UNESCO adopted a program on "Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue," aimed at fostering respect for diverse religious customs and cultural values and highlighting their place in world culture. Moreover, the United Nations has proclaimed the first week of February each

year the World Interfaith Harmony Week, an important initiative to strengthen understanding and respect among religions.

It should be emphasized that, under conditions of globalization, religious tolerance depends not only on the efforts of religious organizations or governments but also on cooperation at every level—from individual citizens to the international community. While the Internet and social media have amplified the voices of people of different faiths, they have also raised the problem of “hate speech.” Hence public media literacy and responsible behavior are essential to preserving religious tolerance. Educating children in schools and families to respect other religions and cultures is a guarantee of a tolerant society in the future.

In today’s globalized world religious tolerance has become an indispensable condition of peace, stability, and development. The international community increasingly recognizes this and seeks to cultivate a “culture of tolerance” in various fora. Tagore’s philosophy that “the spirit of all religions is one” expresses precisely this standpoint: in the modern world, recognizing the shared humanistic essence of religions and drawing on it can protect humanity from disintegration and lead it toward a new renaissance.

The contemporary applications of Tagore’s paradigm of universal human unity are manifest in many political, social, and cultural processes today. The great trials of the twentieth century and early twenty-first—two world wars, the Cold War, global financial crises, climate change, pandemics, and so forth—have shown that a world divided into fragments cannot overcome such problems. Consequently, ideas of global cooperation and collective action are increasingly advanced. In this sense, the concept of “universal human unity” has moved from a theoretical principle to a practical necessity.

Today this idea is embodied in numerous international initiatives and frameworks. The concept of “global citizenship” is being actively promoted in education: it calls for raising a generation that cares for the welfare of all humanity and feels global responsibility. UNESCO and other international organizations advocate global citizenship education, recommending that schools and universities everywhere inculcate in young people universal values such as peace, tolerance, respect for cultural diversity, and care for the environment. This direction accords with Tagore’s ideal of the “large-hearted person who embraces the whole world.”

Likewise, a number of United Nations documents enshrine the ideas of universal unity and solidarity. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), announced in 2015, assign priority to “global partnership” and “inclusive societies.” These documents call upon all states and peoples to advance together “leaving no one behind,” urging both rich and poor countries, small and large nations, and diverse religions and races to share responsibility for the common destiny of humankind. Such an approach exemplifies the application of Tagore’s idea that “the interests of all humanity are shared” to contemporary policy.

The paradigm of universal human unity is also applied in international diplomacy and platforms for intercultural dialogue. At forums such as the Alliance of Civilizations and various interfaith conferences, state and religious leaders gather to discuss “partnership

among civilizations” and global solidarity. In 2017, from the rostrum of the United Nations, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan advanced the resolution “Enlightenment and Religious Tolerance,” which the international community recognized as a call to lead humanity toward tolerance, enlightenment, and goodness. Aimed at eradicating ignorance, expanding access to education for all, and—above all—establishing an atmosphere of tolerance and mutual respect, the resolution was supported by more than fifty states, attesting to its universal significance. Such examples confirm that Tagore’s philosophy of universal human unity remains alive in practical initiatives today.

We must also acknowledge that a community of global problems has already taken shape—issues that no single state or people can resolve alone: combating climate change, preventing international terrorism, ensuring cybersecurity, mounting global responses to pandemics, and more. In such matters every state and nation must act on the principle “we are all in the same boat.” Viewed from this angle, the paradigm of universal human unity becomes a key to global survival. The idea articulated by thinkers like Tagore—that “humanity is one community”—has acquired strategic significance on a planetary scale.

Moreover, the information age and digital globalization are uniting humanity in their own way. Through the Internet and social media, people in distant corners of the world interact directly and exchange ideas globally. Here, too, common ethical norms and principles of solidarity are needed: without spiritual unity, the digital sphere can become an arena of various threats and conflicts. Consequently, universal principles—such as respect for others alongside freedom of expression, and norms of “cyber-solidarity”—are receiving increasing attention in the global Internet community.

The foregoing shows that Rabindranath Tagore’s reflections on religious tolerance and universal human unity remain pertinent not only to his own time but also to our present in the era of globalization. The basis of his reflections is the concept of spiritual unity. Inspired by Vedantic philosophy, he grounds the unity of the human being and the cosmos. In *Sadhana* he states: “We grasp truth only by harmonizing our spirit with the universe” [1;76]. Thus, spiritual experience is not merely personal; it is the key to universal human solidarity. Tolerance, therefore, is not simply accepting another’s faith but recognizing humanity’s single spiritual root.

Tagore emphasizes that all religions share a common root. Their outward forms and rituals may differ, but their inner essence is one. This idea resonates with contemporary ecological philosophy. In a century marked by climate crisis and ecological degradation, Tagore’s notion of “human–nature harmony” is especially significant.

For Tagore, tolerance must manifest not only in religious outlooks but also in social justice and moral integrity. Through the Santiniketan school he sought to educate the young not only in knowledge but also in tolerance and ethical character.

Tagore’s paradigm of religious tolerance and universal human unity is of exceptional relevance, philosophically and socially, within the processes of globalization. The principal concepts highlighted in the Results—spiritual unity, interreligious commonality, cosmic

harmony, moral justice, union through love, and an East–West synthesis—call for deeper analysis in this section.

## Conclusion

In summary, the philosophy of universal human unity articulated in Tagore's works accords with many of the ideas advanced in globalization theory. We can see that the anxieties and hopes he anticipated have become contemporary realities: on the one hand, excessive nationalism and religious intolerance threaten global peace; on the other, international cooperation, intercultural dialogue, and the promotion of cosmopolitan values open possibilities for a more peaceful and prosperous life. Tagore calls us to a broader identity of unity that encompasses all people—an appeal that remains a moral cornerstone of globalization today. Ultimately, Tagore's philosophy of universal human unity is being applied in the modern world not only in theory but also in practice, and its value is confirmed anew. He warned that "a society suffers more when its members lose a large part of their humanity than when it is materially poor." If in our day we pursue material gains while forgetting humane regard for one another, society's inner harmony will be broken and we shall be deprived of true happiness. Conversely, if we apply the principles of universal human unity and tolerance in every sphere, the process of globalization will serve humanity's striving for lofty moral perfection. As Tagore dreamed, in a world where "humanity has become a single family," diverse cultures will blossom like flowers, and through peace and cooperation a prosperous life will be built for all.

Rabindranath Tagore's paradigm of religious tolerance and universal human unity is not merely a product of the social-philosophical currents of India's national awakening; it remains a universal concept that has lost none of its relevance amid contemporary globalization. In the twenty-first century, religious extremism, interethnic conflict, and ecological crisis pose urgent challenges. Tagore's paradigm of tolerance offers a philosophical groundwork for addressing them. Thus, his views can function not only as historical legacy but also as a universal theoretical framework for solving present-day socio-philosophical problems in the era of globalization.

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