

Existential Finitude and Ethical Relationality: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Tagore and Sartre

Pintu Das

daspintudas711@gmail.com

Rajendra University

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Abstract

This paper examines whether mortality can ground ethical relationality across distinct philosophical traditions. It develops a cross-cultural analysis of death through a critical dialogue between Rabindranath Tagore and Jean-Paul Sartre, articulating two contrasting conceptual frameworks: a finitude model, in which death marks the absolute limit of consciousness and possibility, and a continuity model, in which death signifies transformation within a broader relational order. Drawing on close textual analysis of Tagore's *Gitanjali*, *Sādhana*, and *Personality*, alongside Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and *Existentialism and Humanism*, the study situates each account within its underlying metaphysical commitments.

The analysis shows that Sartre's account, while offering a rigorous articulation of existential finitude, renders ethical obligation philosophically underdetermined by confining meaning to individual projects within a finite horizon. In contrast, Tagore's conception of death integrates mortality with relational continuity, grounding ethical life in interconnectedness and shared existence. By framing these positions as competing models of mortality, the paper advances a comparative philosophical claim: mortality alone does not suffice to ground ethical relationality without an ontological framework that situates the self in relation to others. This study thus demonstrates that cross-cultural philosophy can clarify how divergent metaphysical accounts of death generate distinct possibilities for ethical life.

Introduction

Death has persistently occupied human thought as both an existential certainty and a philosophical problem. From ancient myths to modern philosophy, it is both an unavoidable certainty and an enduring mystery. While death unites all humans in its inevitability, responses to it vary widely: some see it with fear, others with reverence; some as an end, others as a transition; some as meaningless, others as the very source of meaning (Nagel, 1979). This problem has also been explored in contemporary philosophy, particularly in Bernard Williams' critique of death and meaning, where the finitude of life is seen as both limiting and constitutive of value. In today's world, scientific and technological advances have changed how we live, yet they cannot escape mortality. On the contrary, the attempt to prolong life has often intensified anxiety about death, particularly in secular societies where traditional religious frameworks are less central (Yalom, 1980). It is in this context that the philosophical perspectives of Rabindranath Tagore and Jean-Paul Sartre gain special relevance.

Tagore (1861–1941), the Nobel laureate poet and philosopher from Bengal, experienced profound personal losses but consistently transformed grief into insight and creativity. Drawing on Hindu spiritual traditions, especially the Upaniṣads and Vedānta, he portrayed death not as annihilation but as a continuation of life: "Death is the extinction of a lamp in the morning light, not the abolition of the sun" (Tagore, 1957, p. 47). For Tagore, death is a natural passage, a companion guiding life toward harmony and fulfillment. Sartre (1905–1980), in contrast, viewed death through an existentialist lens shaped by war, social upheaval, and the challenges of modern freedom. He argued that human existence is defined

by radical freedom, yet death imposes an absolute limit, ending life and annihilating freedom: “Death is that which comes to us from the outside and transforms us into the outside” (Sartre, 1957, p. 545). For Sartre, mortality is impersonal and final, compelling individuals to confront their finitude and live authentically.

A comparative analysis of Tagore and Sartre reveals two philosophically distinct yet critically engaging approaches to mortality. Tagore spiritualizes death, fostering continuity and ethical reflection, while Sartre secularizes it, emphasizing freedom and the confrontation with finitude. Studying them together not only fills a scholarly gap in comparative philosophy but also offers insights relevant to contemporary existential anxieties. This paper aims to (1) analyze Tagore’s and Sartre’s conceptions of death, exploring their philosophical foundations and implications, and (2) bring their perspectives into dialogue, highlighting convergences and divergences that deepen our understanding of human existence. By engaging with both thinkers, the study seeks to reveal how diverse philosophical traditions grapple with the universal human challenge of mortality. More specifically, this paper argues that while Sartre’s account of death provides a rigorous analysis of existential finitude, it remains ethically underdetermined due to its emphasis on individual isolation. The central claim is that mortality, understood merely as finitude, cannot adequately ground ethical relationality without a broader ontological framework. In contrast, Tagore’s conception of death integrates mortality with relational and spiritual continuity, thereby offering a more robust account of ethical relationality in the context of mortality. Methodologically, the study adopts a hermeneutical, text-centered comparative approach that evaluates the philosophical adequacy of each framework.

Literature Review

Tagore’s philosophical reflections cannot be separated from his poetic imagination. Scholars have long recognized that his engagement with death was deeply influenced by his personal experiences of grief as well as by the Vedantic and Upaniṣadic traditions of Hindu philosophy (Radhakrishnan, 1919). Radhakrishnan emphasized that for Tagore, death was not a rupture but a process of integration, a return to the infinite that completes the cycle of existence.

Later scholars such as Banerjee (1961) highlighted the symbolic and poetic strategies through which Tagore expressed his vision of death. Banerjee noted Tagore’s frequent use of imagery—such as the ocean, the cycle of seasons, or the wedding ceremony—to convey the unity of life and death. The metaphor of death as a bridegroom and life as a bride captures the intimate, almost celebratory character of his understanding. Rather than terror, Tagore found beauty and completion in death, which he depicted as the final consummation of existence.

Sankha Ghosh (2004), in his introduction to *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Poems*, underscores the extent to which Tagore’s poetry treats death as a guest who must be welcomed. In *Gitanjali*, for instance, death is not resisted but embraced as part of the divine order. This reflects the influence of the Upaniṣads, which repeatedly insist that life and death are not opposed realities but two faces of the

same truth (Kaṭha Upaniṣad I.2.20). Tagore's engagement with such teachings is evident in his insistence that the apparent finality of death masks an underlying continuity.

Another important strand of scholarship explores how Tagore's experiences of personal bereavement shaped his philosophy. C. F. Andrews (1928), in *Letters to a Friend*, records Tagore's reflections after the deaths of his wife and children. Instead of despair, Tagore spoke of death as a "loved companion—no longer the king of terrors, but altogether transformed into cherished friend." He told Andrews: "You know, this death was a great blessing to me. I had through it all, day after day, a sense of fulfillment, of completion, as if nothing was lost" (Andrews, 1928). Recent scholars have also emphasized the ecological and cosmic dimensions of Tagore's vision. His use of oceanic and musical imagery suggests not only individual transcendence but also the interconnection of all forms of life. Death, in this interpretation, becomes a return to the cosmic rhythm, an immersion in the infinite that unites individual existence with the universe.

Jean-Paul Sartre's treatment of death emerges within the broader framework of existentialist philosophy, which places the individual's freedom and responsibility at the center of meaning-making. The primary texts for understanding Sartre's position are *Being and Nothingness* (1943/1957) and *Existentialism and Humanism* (1946/1970).

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre makes a crucial distinction between *pour-soi* (being-for-itself) and *en-soi* (being-in-itself). Human beings, as conscious subjects, exist as *pour-soi*, characterized by nothingness and freedom. Objects, in contrast, exist as *en-soi*, fixed and complete in themselves. Death, Sartre argues, transforms the subject into an object, thereby annihilating freedom and consciousness: "death is outside one's situation, outside our possibilities, because it is that which comes to us from the outside and transforms us into the outside" (Sartre, 1957, p. 545). Scholars often contrast Sartre's position with that of Martin Heidegger. In *Being and Time* (1927/2006), Heidegger described death as the "ownmost possibility" of Dasein, meaning that death reveals the finitude of existence and calls individuals to live authentically. Sartre, however, rejected this account, arguing that death cannot be assimilated into one's possibilities precisely because it ends them. As a result, death provides no existential meaning; it only negates.

Secondary scholarship on Sartre emphasizes this radical secularism. Philosophers such as Hazel Barnes (1967), the translator of *Being and Nothingness*, point out that Sartre's rejection of transcendence leaves the human being with the stark task of creating meaning within the limits of life. Death, in this framework, is not a gateway but a wall. It demands authenticity not because it offers fulfillment, but because it denies any continuation beyond. Thus, the literature on Sartre consistently stresses three elements of his conception of death: its externality to life, its annihilation of freedom, and its role in compelling authentic existence.

While the individual literatures on Tagore and Sartre are rich, there is surprisingly little scholarship that brings them into dialogue. Comparative philosophy has often juxtaposed Western existentialists with one another—Sartre with Heidegger, Sartre with Kierkegaard, Sartre with Jaspers—but rarely with Eastern

thinkers. Similarly, Tagore is often discussed in relation to Indian philosophy, mysticism, or global literature, but not alongside existentialist frameworks.

This gap matters because Tagore and Sartre represent two fundamentally different yet complementary responses to the same problem: the inevitability of death. Tagore interprets death as continuity and fulfillment, Sartre as negation and finality. By comparing them, we can illuminate the ways in which cultural contexts shape philosophical responses while also uncovering universal concerns that transcend those contexts.

The existing literature establishes the foundations for a comparative study. On the one hand, Tagore's conception of death has been interpreted through his Vedantic background, his poetic imagery, and his personal experiences of grief. On the other, Sartre's existentialist framework has been understood through his ontological categories and his rejection of transcendence. Yet no study has systematically compared their views. This paper addresses that gap, offering a cross-cultural analysis that highlights both convergence and divergence. However, existing scholarship remains analytically fragmented. While Tagore is primarily interpreted within Indian spiritual traditions and Sartre within Western existentialism, there is limited cross-cultural engagement between these frameworks. This gap restricts a deeper understanding of mortality as both a metaphysical and ethical problem. The present study addresses this limitation by bringing these traditions into a critical comparative dialogue.

Methodology

This study adopts a comparative philosophical methodology grounded in hermeneutical analysis, emphasizing interpretative engagement with primary texts within their cultural and philosophical contexts. The research focuses on Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) due to their influential yet contrasting reflections on mortality. Primary sources include Tagore's *Gitanjali* (1912/2015), *Sādhana: The Realisation of Life* (1913/1957), and *Personality* (1917), alongside Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943/1957) and *Existentialism and Humanism* (1946/1970). These texts were selected for their explicit treatment of death, consciousness, and human freedom.

Secondary sources comprise both classical and contemporary scholarship, providing historical, philosophical, and cross-cultural perspectives on mortality, ethics, and existential thought. Hermeneutical techniques were employed to unpack Tagore's poetic metaphors, such as rivers, seasons, and music, situating them within Upaniṣadic and Vedantic frameworks. For Sartre, analysis focused on his ontological distinctions of *pour-soi* and *en-soi*, and his conceptualization of death as a limit-experience negating freedom.

The comparative phase was thematically structured, examining: (1) the metaphysical orientation of death (continuity vs. finitude), (2) ethical and psychological implications, and (3) stylistic and epistemological modalities (poetic-intuitive vs. analytical-reflective). This approach preserves the integrity of each thinker's worldview while enabling cross-cultural dialogue. The comparative method employed here is not merely descriptive but critical, aiming to evaluate the philosophical adequacy of

each framework in accounting for the ethical implications of mortality. By juxtaposing Eastern spiritual-humanism with Western existentialism, the methodology illuminates how cultural contexts shape philosophical responses to mortality and reveals points of convergence and divergence in ethical, existential, and metaphysical reasoning.

Tagore's Concept of Death

Rabindranath Tagore's thoughts on death transcend simple expressions of sorrow. They represent deep reflections on the impermanence of life, the continuity of the soul, and the ethical cultivation of human existence. Across his extensive body of work—including *Gitanjali*, *Punascha*, short stories like *Jibita o Mrita*, and his Rabindra Sangeet—Tagore portrays death as a natural and harmonious passage, a return to the eternal rather than a definitive end. His insights blend poetic imagination, philosophical depth, and lived experience, rooted in Upanishadic and Vedantic traditions yet suffused with a profound humanistic sensibility (Radhakrishnan, 1919; Banerjee, 1961; Ghosh, 2004; Chakraborty, 2015).

Central to Tagore's philosophy is the notion that life and death are not opposites but interconnected stages of a continuous, dynamic process (Das, 2020; Sen, 2018). Death does not erase individuality; rather, it transforms it, reintegrating the finite self into the greater cosmic whole. In *Gitanjali* 91, he presents death as a long-awaited guest, the "last fulfilment of life," whose arrival he embraces with serene anticipation:

"O thou the last fulfilment of life,

Death, my death, come and whisper to me!

Day after day have I kept watch for thee; for thee have I borne the joys and pangs of life.

All that I am, that I have, that I hope and all my love have ever flowed towards thee in depth of secrecy."

— *Gitanjali* 91

This depiction reframes death as an integral aspect of existence rather than an external threat. Similarly, in *Gitanjali* 90, Tagore honors death as a revered visitor, to whom one offers the accumulated fruits of a well-lived life:

"On the day when death will knock at thy door, what wilt thou offer to him?

Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel of my life—I will never let him go with empty hands.

All the sweet vintage of all my autumn days and summer nights, all the earnings and gleanings of my busy life will I place before him at the close of my days when death will knock at my door."

— *Gitanjali* 90

Here, death is conceptualized as an ethical and existential encounter rather than an object of fear. Tagore frequently employs metaphors drawn from light and nature to illustrate life's continuity into death. He states:

Death is not extinguishing the light; it is putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.

In this image, death is not an end but a transformation—the closure of night and the arrival of dawn. Likewise, in *Gitanjali* 35, he portrays the liberated soul:

“Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls...”

— *Gitanjali* 35.

Such imagery emphasizes the soul's aspiration to transcend earthly constraints, viewing death as a passage into boundless, eternal existence.

Tagore also examines mortality through prose. In *Punascha* (1932), particularly in the prose poem *Mrityo* (Death), he reflects on the inevitability of death as an essential aspect of the human journey. In his short story *Jibita o Mrita* (*The Living and the Dead*), the narrative of Kadambini—who returns to life after being presumed dead—challenges conventional notions of mortality, inviting contemplation on the essence of existence.

Tagore's musical compositions carry similar meditative depth, intertwining mortality with melody and emotion. In “*Mor Bina Jiban Biroho*” (Life Without Me is Separation), death is imagined as a transformative union beyond worldly existence. In “*Nirbhor Sondhya*” (Fearless Evening), the evening symbolizes the approach of death, portraying the soul's surrender with calm and readiness. Similarly, “*Shesh Bikal*” (The Last Afternoon) captures life's final moments as a luminous, sacred threshold:

“Let me go, gently, into the quiet light,

Where the heart ceases its restless wanderings,

And merges with the unseen dawn.”

These songs resonate with the philosophy of his poetry: death is a transformation, a return to the infinite, and a culmination of life's journey.

Ethically, Tagore sees the awareness of death as a stimulus for living fully, compassionately, and creatively (Banerjee, 1961; Chakraborty, 2015; Das, 2020). He frequently intertwines mortality with natural imagery—the flowing river, the fading sunset, seasonal changes—embedding death within life's cyclical rhythm (Ghosh, 2004; Tagore, 1912/2015). In this way, Tagore fuses poetic sensitivity, ethical

reflection, and metaphysical insight into a coherent conception of death that is existential, spiritual, and aesthetic.

Tagore's reflections also highlight the personal dimension of mortality. While death is universal, individual responses are shaped by emotion, spirituality, and personal experience (Andrews, 1928; Chakraborty, 2015). It is a moment where the finite self meets the infinite, and the soul reconnects with the divine principle that pervades existence (Radhakrishnan, 1919; Sen, 2018). So, Tagore's vision of death is multi-dimensional: it is a natural transformation, a spiritual reintegration, an ethical reminder, and a poetic insight (Ghosh, 2004; Andrews, 1928; Das, 2020; Chakraborty, 2015). Death is not to be feared but embraced as a meaningful passage that illuminates life's transient yet profound significance. Through poetry, prose, and song, Tagore encourages a serene, reflective, and ethically engaged approach to mortality, revealing death as a gateway to understanding the essence of existence.

Sartre's Concept of Death

Jean-Paul Sartre, the eminent existentialist philosopher, approaches death from a radically different perspective than Tagore, emphasizing the human experience of freedom, responsibility, and nothingness (Sartre, 1957/1970; Barnes, 1967; Flynn, 2006). For Sartre, death is not a mystical or spiritual transition but a profound existential phenomenon that confronts humans with the limits of their existence. It is both a personal and universal concern, a boundary that defines the structure of human life and the nature of human consciousness (Sartre, 1943/1957; Barnes, 1967). Unlike Tagore, who perceives death as a natural and spiritually integrated part of life, Sartre's concept of death is rooted in existentialist ontology, focusing on individual subjectivity, anxiety, and the confrontation with the void (Flynn, 2006; Solomon, 1974).

Sartre's existentialist philosophy situates human beings as beings-for-itself (*être-pour-soi*), conscious entities capable of reflection, choice, and self-definition (Sartre, 1957/1970; Barnes, 1967). Death, in this framework, represents the ultimate limitation: it is the point beyond which human freedom and consciousness cease (Flynn, 2006; Solomon, 1974). For Sartre, this inevitability imposes a unique form of anxiety, often termed "existential angst," because it highlights the finitude of existence and the impossibility of absolute transcendence (Sartre, 1943/1957; Barnes, 1967). Death, therefore, is not merely a biological event but an ontological limit that terminates the structure of possibilities (Solomon, 1974; Flynn, 2006).

A critical dimension of Sartre's understanding is the notion that death is fundamentally impersonal to the self. While we are acutely aware that we will die, we can never experience our own death directly, because the very act of dying implies the cessation of consciousness (Sartre, 1957/1970; Barnes, 1967). In this sense, death is a unique form of absence: it is the limit that we approach but can never inhabit. Sartre describes this as the "nothingness" at the heart of human reality—a void that both threatens and defines the contours of existence (Flynn, 2006; Solomon, 1974). Unlike Tagore, who sees death as a

return to the universal or divine, Sartre sees it as an absolute negation, a horizon against which our finite freedom must confront itself (Sartre, 1970).

This confrontation gives rise to two existential orientations in human life: the temptation of bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) and the pursuit of authentic existence (Sartre, 1946/1970; Barnes, 1967). Bad faith occurs when individuals deny or evade the reality of death, seeking comfort in illusions, social conventions, or deterministic narratives that minimize personal responsibility (Flynn, 2006). Many human behaviors, Sartre argues, are attempts to escape the anxiety that the awareness of death evokes. In contrast, authentic living arises when humans confront mortality openly, recognizing that life is finite and every choice carries ultimate significance (Sartre, 1957; Barnes, 1967). Death, in this context, does not destroy meaning but intensifies it, forcing individuals to live deliberately, take responsibility for their actions, and define themselves in the absence of predetermined essence (Flynn, 2006; Solomon, 1974). However, Sartre's rejection of death as a meaningful possibility, while philosophically rigorous, may be seen as limiting insofar as it isolates mortality from broader relational and ethical contexts. This raises the question of whether existential finitude alone can adequately account for the ethical significance of death.

Sartre also highlights the relational dimension of death. While my own death is inaccessible to me, it becomes an inevitable event for others (Sartre, 1970; Barnes, 1967). This asymmetry—where I am aware of others' mortality but not my own—creates complex dynamics in human relationships, responsibility, and social life (Flynn, 2006; Solomon, 1974). The awareness that others will die and that my existence is intertwined with theirs imposes an ethical dimension: our freedom is always exercised in a world where the mortality of others shapes possibilities, relationships, and projects (Barnes, 1967).

Moreover, Sartre emphasizes that death, as a limit, forces reflection on the absurdity and contingency of existence (Sartre, 1957; Flynn, 2006). Life has no predetermined meaning or divine teleology; rather, it is a canvas of freedom, choices, and consequences (Solomon, 1974). Death underscores the finality of all human projects and ambitions, yet it is precisely this finitude that enables authenticity. By confronting death, humans recognize the preciousness of time and the necessity of living in accordance with one's values rather than external impositions (Sartre, 1970; Barnes, 1967).

Sartre's concept of death also resonates in his literary works, particularly *Being and Nothingness* and his plays such as *No Exit* (Sartre, 1943/1957; Barnes, 1967). Characters in his writings often grapple with mortality as they confront freedom, responsibility, and the gaze of others. Death is portrayed as a boundary that illuminates the choices, desires, and existential projects of individuals, exposing both vulnerability and potential (Flynn, 2006). Unlike Tagore's poetic serenity, Sartre's treatment is stark, often unsettling, highlighting human anxiety while simultaneously celebrating the human capacity for self-definition in the face of absolute limits (Sartre, 1957; Solomon, 1974).

In summary, Sartre's concept of death is existential, impersonal, and finite (Sartre, 1957/1970; Barnes, 1967; Flynn, 2006). Death is the ultimate boundary of consciousness, an unavoidable horizon that defines human freedom, responsibility, and the pursuit of authenticity. It is neither a spiritual reunion with

the infinite nor a natural rhythm of life; it is a radical confrontation with nothingness that shapes how humans live, choose, and relate to one another. Through death, Sartre illuminates both the fragility and the dignity of human existence, emphasizing that meaning is created, not discovered, and that authentic life arises only in the acknowledgment of mortality's inevitability (Sartre, 1957; Flynn, 2006).

Comparative Study of Tagore and Sartre on Death

At the center of this comparative inquiry lies a fundamental philosophical problem: can mortality itself provide a foundation for ethical meaning? If death signifies absolute termination, as Sartre suggests, then the basis of ethical responsibility appears confined to individual projects within a finite horizon. However, if death is understood as a form of continuity within a larger relational or cosmic order, as in Tagore's thought, then mortality may serve as a ground for ethical interdependence rather than isolation.

This comparison can be clarified through two competing philosophical models of mortality: a finitude model and a continuity model. These models provide a conceptual framework for evaluating how different metaphysical assumptions shape ethical possibilities. The philosophies of Rabindranath Tagore and Jean-Paul Sartre present two contrasting yet illuminating responses to the inevitability of death. While at first glance their perspectives appear fundamentally opposed—one spiritual, the other existential—the comparison reveals subtler points of convergence, divergence, and mutual illumination. Tagore's metaphysical framework situates death within a cosmic continuum. Life and death are part of a rhythmic, harmonious process where the individual soul (*ātman*) is never truly annihilated. Drawing on Upaniṣadic and Vedantic insights, Tagore conceives death as a transition from individual consciousness to universal consciousness, akin to rivers merging into the ocean (Radhakrishnan, 1919; Banerjee, 1961). Death does not mark an ultimate rupture but rather a transformation, integrating personal existence with the cosmic order.

Sartre, in contrast, emphasizes existential finitude. Death, for Sartre, is an external event that definitively terminates the freedom of consciousness (Sartre, 1957/1970). There is no spiritual continuity; the individual ceases to exist as a subject capable of choice. Unlike Tagore, who views death as a bridge to a higher order, Sartre situates death as a limit-experience, confronting humans with the radical absence of predetermined meaning. Mortality, therefore, is a boundary that frames human freedom but simultaneously negates its ultimate realization. This position corresponds to a finitude model of mortality, in which death functions as an absolute limit that terminates relational continuity and confines ethical meaning to individual projects. However, Sartre's account, while philosophically rigorous, raises a critical difficulty. By situating death as an absolute negation external to human possibility, it risks isolating the individual from broader ethical frameworks. If meaning is entirely self-generated within a finite existence, the basis for enduring ethical obligation—particularly toward others—remains philosophically underdetermined. Critically, this divergence reflects the broader metaphysical orientations of the two thinkers: Tagore operates within a theistic and holistic worldview, while Sartre adopts a secular, ontologically realist perspective. The metaphysical contrast underscores how cultural and philosophical contexts—Indian spiritual-humanism versus European existentialism—shape

conceptions of mortality. This contrast can be analytically clarified through two distinct models of mortality. The first may be termed the 'Finitude Model,' exemplified by Sartre, in which death represents the absolute cessation of consciousness and the limit of all possibilities. Within this framework, ethical meaning emerges from individual freedom and responsibility, but remains confined to the horizon of personal existence. The second may be termed the 'Continuity Model,' exemplified by Tagore, in which death signifies transformation rather than annihilation, situating the individual within a broader relational and cosmic order. Here, ethical meaning is grounded not only in individual choice but in interconnectedness and shared existence. The philosophical significance of this distinction lies in the fact that while the finitude model explains the urgency of individual choice, it remains philosophically underdetermined in justifying enduring ethical obligations beyond the self, whereas the continuity model situates ethical responsibility within a shared ontological horizon. The limitation of this model lies in its inability to justify enduring ethical obligations beyond the individual horizon, raising the question of whether finitude alone can sustain a relational ethics.

Despite their contrasting metaphysical orientations, both Tagore and Sartre agree that death profoundly influences human conduct. For Tagore, awareness of death enhances moral consciousness. Mortality is a reminder of impermanence and interconnectedness, fostering compassion, empathy, and ethical engagement with the world (Ghosh, 2004; Andrews, 1928). Death is a pedagogical force, guiding individuals toward meaningful relationships, creative expression, and spiritual refinement. Philosophically, this account can be understood as grounding ethical relationality in a continuity model of mortality, where the self is constituted through its relation to a broader ontological order. Nevertheless, Tagore's perspective is not without its philosophical tensions. His emphasis on harmony, continuity, and cosmic integration may risk underestimating the existential anxiety and absurdity associated with death, particularly within modern secular contexts. In this sense, mortality functions as a moral catalyst, deepening the ethical dimensions of life. Sartre, by contrast, positions death as a provocative force for authenticity. Awareness of death exposes the nothingness at the core of existence, compelling individuals to embrace freedom and responsibility fully. Ethical conduct emerges not from cosmic continuity or divine order, but from conscious, self-imposed projects. In Sartre's framework, death foregrounds the necessity of choice; the finitude of life intensifies the responsibility to live deliberately (Barnes, 1967). This raises the question of whether Tagore's framework sufficiently accounts for the experience of existential rupture, where death is encountered not as continuity but as radical loss. However, this model also raises a concern: by emphasizing continuity and harmony, it may underplay the disruptive and anxiety-inducing aspects of mortality highlighted in existential philosophy.

The critical insight is that both philosophers recognize mortality as constitutive of human agency, though the underlying justification differs: spiritual integration for Tagore versus existential authenticity for Sartre. This juxtaposition highlights the cultural embeddedness of ethical reasoning—one rooted in relational spirituality, the other in radical individualism.

Tagore's approach emphasizes relationality and continuity of consciousness. Death is not an isolated event but part of a larger web of relationships that include family, community, and cosmos. The grieving

process, for instance, is not merely personal but communal, fostering solidarity and compassion. Poetic imagery—rivers, music, sunsets—serves to illustrate this continuity, creating a sense of belonging even amid loss (Banerjee, 1961; Ghosh, 2004). Sartre, by contrast, foregrounds radical isolation. Death terminates subjectivity, and no spiritual or cosmic framework mitigates this fact. Each individual confronts death alone, underscoring the solitary nature of existential responsibility (Sartre, 1957/1970). The relational dimension in Sartre is contingent: interactions with others matter insofar as they shape choices, but death ultimately isolates.

Here, the critical divergence is stark: Tagore's death is relational, integrative, and cosmic, whereas Sartre's is individual, negating, and terminal. Yet both acknowledge the profound psychological impact of mortality, influencing how humans relate to others and perceive themselves. Tagore communicates through poetic symbolism, blending philosophical reflection with artistic imagination. His literary aesthetics—metaphor, music, seasonal imagery—allow death to be experienced as an emotional and spiritual phenomenon, rather than an abstract concept (Tagore, 1912/2015). Sartre, in contrast, employs analytical and literary forms, combining ontological reasoning with existential drama (*No Exit, Being and Nothingness*) to convey mortality's implications (Sartre, 1957/1970).

This stylistic difference has epistemological significance. Tagore's poetic method invites experiential engagement, fostering an intuitive comprehension of life-death continuity. Sartre's analytic-literary method demands rational and reflective confrontation, emphasizing logic and existential introspection. Both approaches enrich human understanding of death, but from complementary modalities— affective versus cognitive, contemplative versus confrontational. Despite divergences, both thinkers converge in acknowledging mortality as central to human life. Tagore and Sartre recognize that death shapes consciousness, creativity, and the ethical dimensions of existence. For Tagore, mortality motivates love, harmony, and moral reflection. For Sartre, mortality drives authenticity, choice, and existential responsibility. Both treat death as a mirror reflecting life's significance, revealing that the awareness of finitude—whether spiritually or existentially construed—is essential to the richness of human experience (Nagel, 1979; Yalom, 1980).

Taken together, these perspectives reveal a deeper philosophical tension between ontological individualism and relational ontology. Sartre's finitude model powerfully captures the existential seriousness of death but risks ethical isolation, whereas Tagore's continuity model offers a relationally grounded ethics but may soften the disruptive force of mortality. A philosophically adequate account of mortality may therefore require integrating existential finitude with relational ontology, recognizing death both as a limit and as a condition shaping ethical interdependence. Critically, this convergence underscores a universal philosophical insight: while cultural, metaphysical, and stylistic frameworks differ, human beings share a common preoccupation with mortality, and it is through confronting death that meaning, value, and ethical engagement are discovered. A comparative reading of Tagore and Sartre provides insights relevant to contemporary discussions on death, dying, and the human condition. In an era dominated by secularization, biomedicalization, and technological prolongation of life, Tagore's vision reminds us that ethical and spiritual dimensions of mortality remain crucial. Simultaneously,

Sartre emphasizes the need for existential clarity and authentic living, highlighting that human freedom is bounded by finitude. Together, these perspectives encourage a balanced approach: one that integrates ethical, spiritual, and existential dimensions, fostering resilience, moral awareness, and psychological well-being in the face of mortality. While Sartre's account powerfully captures the existential seriousness of finitude, it risks isolating the individual from broader ethical and relational contexts. Tagore's framework, by contrast, re-situates mortality within a network of interconnected existence, offering a more ethically expansive understanding of death. Together, these perspectives suggest that mortality is not only a limit but also a relational condition that shapes human responsibility.

Conclusion

Death, as explored through the lenses of Rabindranath Tagore and Jean-Paul Sartre, reveals the profound complexity of human existence. Both thinkers invite us to confront mortality, yet they guide us in different ways: Tagore with a vision of spiritual continuity and cosmic harmony, Sartre with the stark reality of finitude and existential responsibility. Together, their perspectives illuminate the paradox of death—it is both an ending and a source of meaning, a limit and an invitation to reflection, a reality that both terrifies and inspires. Tagore's philosophy encourages us to see death not as a rupture but as a transformation, a gentle merging of the individual soul with the eternal rhythm of the universe. In his view, mortality deepens the significance of love, compassion, creativity, and ethical living. Life, though transient, is profoundly meaningful because it participates in a larger cosmic and spiritual order. Death, therefore, becomes a teacher: it reminds us to cherish every moment, to embrace beauty and goodness, and to recognize the interconnectedness of all beings.

Sartre, in contrast, challenges us to face death as the ultimate horizon of human freedom. For him, mortality is absolute, impersonal, and inescapable. It exposes the finite nature of existence and forces us to confront our choices with clarity and honesty. There is no preordained meaning beyond the life we live; each individual must construct purpose through authentic action. Death, though final, intensifies the value of life, urging us to live deliberately, embrace responsibility, and define ourselves in a world without guarantees. Philosophically, both perspectives converge on a subtle truth: death shapes how we live. The comparative analysis thus demonstrates that mortality is not merely a metaphysical problem but also an ethical one. Whether understood as finitude or continuity, death fundamentally shapes how responsibility, meaning, and relationality are conceived. Whether through the spiritual lens of Tagore or the existentialist lens of Sartre, mortality calls us to reflection, responsibility, and ethical engagement. It reminds us that life is finite, fleeting, and precious. Metaphysically, death bridges the finite and the infinite, the individual and the universal, the temporal and the eternal. It is both a mystery and a reality that cannot be fully grasped but can be meaningfully encountered.

In the end, contemplating death is not merely a theoretical exercise but a transformative practice. It compels us to explore the depth of our consciousness, the significance of our choices, and the quality of our relationships. By facing the inevitability of death, we gain insight into the essence of life itself—its beauty, its impermanence, and its profound potential for meaning. Death, understood through both

finitude and continuity, reconfigures how meaning, agency, and ethical engagement are conceived. Thus, the philosophies of Tagore and Sartre, while different in approach, converge in urging us toward awareness: to live consciously, ethically, and authentically, with the recognition that our time is limited, yet infinitely significant. Death is not merely an end; it is a mirror that reveals the depth and dignity of life, inviting a deeper philosophical engagement with the conditions of human existence and the world with courage, clarity, and wonder. The analysis suggests that cross-cultural philosophy is not merely comparative but reconstructive, offering conceptual resources for addressing enduring philosophical problems such as the ethical significance of mortality. Future philosophical work on mortality must therefore move beyond the dichotomy of finitude and transcendence, toward frameworks that can simultaneously account for existential limitation and ethical relationality. This study contributes to comparative philosophy by demonstrating that cross-cultural engagement can deepen our understanding of mortality beyond isolated traditions. By bringing Tagore and Sartre into dialogue, it offers a framework that integrates existential clarity with ethical relationality, providing a more comprehensive philosophical response to the problem of death.

Declarations

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Author Contribution

****Author Contributions******Pintu Das****** solely conceived and designed the study, formulated the central research question, and developed the theoretical framework. Pintu Das conducted the literature review and performed the comparative textual analysis of the primary philosophical works of Rabindranath Tagore and Jean-Paul Sartre. Pintu Das interpreted the philosophical arguments, synthesized the comparative findings, and developed the paper's original conceptual contribution concerning mortality, ethical relationality, and cross-cultural philosophy. Pintu Das drafted the manuscript, critically revised it for important intellectual content, prepared the final version for submission, and approved the final manuscript. As the sole author, Pintu Das is responsible for all aspects of the work and confirms the accuracy and integrity of the research.

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