

Gurudev and Vijaya: friendship between Rabindranath Tagore and Victoria Ocampo

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The story, the friendship of Rabindranath Tagore and Victoria Ocampo (Gurudev and Vijaya respectively, as those words meant Master and Victoria) is a bridge between two cultures, between two different worlds. They were great friends since 1924, and he wrote to her the poems of *Purabi*. But, who was Victoria? She was the best Argentinian writer, editor of SUR -her literary magazine, published since 1931 to 1993-, and "an exotic muse in the life of Tagore"

Victoria was born in Buenos Aires on 7th April, 1890, into an aristocratic family, and when she was a teenager study ad La Sorbonne and Le Collège de France, in Paris. In 1912, Victoria got married with Luis Bernardo de Estrada. But, in her honeymoon -in 1913-, she started to hate her husband because she had knew Julián Martínez (Monaco's cousin) and she fallen in love with Julián.

Victoria Ocampo came back to Buenos Aires in 1914, just before the start of the First World War. Walking on Florida Street (in the center of the City), she bought *Gitanjali*, in the French version of André Gide. Let me quote a passage of Victoria's memories: "When Gitanjali first came into my hands it came as a double blessing, for at the time I was going through one of those crises which youth believes to be without issue. I felt the need to confide in someone and this someone could only be God. However, I did not believe in God, not in the revengeful, demanding, petty, implacable and limited God I had in vain been taught to worship. But unbelief in God occupied an ever growing place in my life and was becoming, at that time of stress, a constant presence through absence. [...] The love to which Tagore refers in these poems was not the love that was tormenting me; but Tagore's God was someone to whom it was possible to talk even of that profane (and to me sacred) love. [...] God of Tagore, said to myself, you who do not want to shelter to me from anything and do not mind the oblivion in which I hold you, how well you know me!" (Ocampo 1961: 28)

In September 1924, the newspapers announced that Tagore would pass through Buenos Aires on his way to Peru. He had been specially invited by the Peruvian President -Augusto B. Leguía- to attend the celebration of the Centenary of Ayacucho and its Independence.

Tagore embarked from India this spring on board of a Japanese ship. In France, he met Leonard Elmhirst -his honorary assistant- and both embarked on board of the *Andes*. The ship tied up at the quay of Buenos Aires on 6th November. But the poet was ill: he had insomnia and bronchial attacks.

Tagore and Elmhirst were staying at the Plaza Hotel. On 8th November, Victoria Ocampo and Adelia Acevedo decided to go: "His secretary, L.K. Elmhirst, received us and told us of his concern.

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