

# Tagore and Spain

Jose Paz

It is very surprising that the man who made Tagore known for the first time in Spain was from Ourense. It is also curious that he was a teacher and a director of the Teacher Training College—Vicente Risco, a central figure in the Galician culture as a lawyer, writer, educator, researcher and founder of several journals and to whom the people of Spain are grateful for making Ourense known as the “Athens of Galizai”.

Vicente Risco’s interest in Tagore comes from reading, by chance ‘The Mystic Way’ by Evelyn Underhill (London, 1912). About the book Risco said : “Thus, one of those extraordinary beings is Rabindranath Tagore. In a book of great success published in English last year, ‘The Mystic Way’ by Miss Uinierliill, Tagore is presented as a great poet whose exquisite art and whose serene vision of the eternal through the temporary makes him appear as an exceptional genius, a leading star in the firmament of art. There is no exaggeration in this assertion. “

Risco, who knew English, read afterwards the splendid first edition of *Gitanjali* published by The India Society of London in 1912. He also read *The Crescent Moon*, *The Gardener* and *Sadhana* published by Macmillan in 1913. These four books inspired Risco so much that he was always talking to his friends about Tagore’s extraordinary works and thought. His closest friends nicknamed him “Tagore.” Many people, who attended his lectures, thought he himself was Tagore, as Risco reported in some of his articles about Tagore.

The Nobel Prize in Literature was conferred on Tagore in 1913 and Risco was invited that same year by the Atcnco of Madrid to lecture on the work and thought of this outstanding Baiigirii. It was published afterwards in the journal *La palabra*. It was the first detailed and serious biographical study about Tagore carried out in Spain in spite of the fact that it contained minor inaccuracies about his family.

Risco’s thought went through different stages throughout his life. First he went through a neosophic and Orientalist stage, in which his admiration and total identification with Tagore came as no surprise. He founded an interesting journal, *La Centuria* (“The Century”) subtitled “Neosophic Journal Ourense-Spain” and managed to publish, from June 1917 to July 1918, seven issues. In the October 1917 issue, Risco translated and published three poems and wrote an article where he mentions among other tilings that: “Rabindra-nath started the reform of education inspiring himself in the national model of the *asrams* or forest schools : creating, thus the Santiniketan (abode of peace) School in Bolpur.” and also that : “Tagore’s poems when translated into English naturally lose all their musical colouring, but not the originality of the images, nor the exquisite and extreme simplicity of style, nor the treasures of thought and emotion that they enclose. “

With the publication of his book *Teoria do Nazouali.smo Galego* (Ourense, 1920), Risco’s nationalistic stage began. He focused Galiza and the struggle for its liberty and self-government. At that moment, Ireland and India were fighting for their independence, two models to be followed by Risco and those Galicians

belonging to the movements Irmandades da Fala (“Brotherhood of the (Galician) Language”) and Generacion “Nos” (“We (the Galician) Generation”). However, Tagore’s thought was still a guide for Risco and numerous articles written in Galician about Tagore, along with poems and fragments of his works, were published in two nationalistic journals, where Risco had an important influence, A Nosa Terra and the emblematic Nos. Around that time, he gradually became interested in, and finally took sides with, another figure. Mahatma Gandhi. Although Gandhi and Tagore didn’t share perspectives, Risco, however didn’t understand that both were extraordinary persons and compatible.

In the text Risco makes negative comments about the poet’s garments, his paraphernalia, his hieratic attitude and his theatrical behaviour. That is why Risco writes, “compared to Tagore, Gandhi’s naturalness, which is, too, probably exaggerated, necessarily comes out better off (...)” and concludes that “It is in this way how Rabindranath Tagore’s image vanishes in front of my very eyes in Berlin.”

By the time Risco began to lose interest in the work and thought of the Bengali poet, he was going through another process that would lead him to a new stage. In 1936, probably because fear is an uncontrollable feeling, he joined Franco’s fascist rising, to avoid the likely reprisals against him because of his past activities. In this new stage, Tagore and Gandhi were no longer useful for Risco; their ideas, were too far from the political ideas predominant in Spain, which constituted, in the words of the Galician poet Celso Emilio Ferreiro, “unha longa noite do pedra” (a long night cast in stone) lasting 40 years. In any case, Risco, highly influenced by Tagore in the past, continued, though less enthusiastically, publishing newspaper articles about Tagore and his work. Tagore’s death was reported in the Ourense newspaper La Region (12 August 1941). No doubt Risco had a lot to do with it. His last article about Tagore was written in 1961 on the occasion of the centennial of his birth. Spain was right in the middle of Franco’s dictatorship.

The Indian hispanist, Shamu Ganguly, teacher of Spanish Language and Literature at the Jawaharal Nehru University in New Delhi, wrote “Recordando a Tagore” (Remembering Tagore), published in Culturas, a supplement of the Galician newspaper Diario 16 (no.311, 14 July 1991, pp. 4-5). In this interesting article, Dr Ganguly makes a detailed review of Tagore’s relationship with the Hispanic world. Naturally, the article focuses mostly on the relationship of Tagore with the couple formed by Zcnobia Camprubf and Juan Ramon Jimenez, an excellent Spanish poet who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1956. Thanks to them, Tagore was and is still read in Spain and Latin America. Campnibi was fluent in English and translated most of the works originally published by Macmillan. Jimenez made the poetic corrections of his wife’s translations; she gradually improved the accuracy of her translations.

In gathering data for PhD dissertation about Tagore as an educator, this writer had to consult the documents and personal files in Juan Ramon Jimenez’s collection, which is well-kept in the National Historical Archive in Madrid. In a bundle of documents dealing with the relationship between this couple and Tagore, one can see the manuscripts, the translations, the letter and, interestingly, the programme thoroughly designed by Juan Ramon, for Tagore’s

planned visit to Spain for April 1921. a visit which never took place. Among the manuscripts, one can also find Camprubi's unpublished translation of Ernest Rhys's biography of Tagore.

Together they translated twenty of Tagore's books dealing with poetry, theatre, stories, aphorisms and education. The editions of these books have been numerous: first, the ones published in Spain during the 1920's and 1930's; then, after the Spanish Civil War, the ones published in Argentina by Losada Publishing House (which no longer exists); and then again in Spain during the 1980's and 1990's by Alianza Editorial and EDAF Publishing Houses. Most of the books translated by Camprubi contain splendid poems written by Jimenez in the introductions and dedicated to Tagore or the characters in the texts. Many translations of other Tagorian texts by Camprubi were planned, however, in the end, some were not translated or, if so, not published.

It should be mentioned also that the translations by Camprubi and Jimenez had a great influence on the "Generation of 1927", a group of well-known intellectuals and writers such as Rafael Alberti, Federico Garcia Lorca, Vicente Aleixandre (1977 Nobel Prize winner); and by extension on Latin American writers such as Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda (both Nobel Prize winners, 1945 and 1971, respectively). Several editions in the 1930's by Camprubi and Jimenez were chosen by the Ministry of Education during the II Republic regime in Spain to stock up school libraries all over Spain. Some of the titles requested were: *Santiniketan*, *The Crescent Moon*, *The Gardener*, *Song Offering* and *The Post Office*, in those years they were published by Signo, a Madrid Publishing House, and were distributed by the Society for Pedagogical Missions. These books were shipped to both school libraries and people's libraries, many of them created during the fruitful period of the Republic (1931-1936).

Besides Risco and those mentioned above, there were others who also wrote about the Bengali poet and educator, such as the writers Perez de Ayala, Domínguez Berrueta, Eugenio D'Ors, Gregorio Marañón, Gómez de la Serna, Gerardo Diego, Manuel Machado, Ricardo Gullón, Francisco Garfias (a Juan Ramon Jimenez specialist) and Enrique Diez Canedo. Later on, appeared interesting studies and serious biographies on Tagore by the orientalist Ramiro A. Calle, Ramon Castelltort, Agustín Caballero, Aurora Díaz-Plaja and Emilio Gasco Cornell who translated *Sadhana* (Meditations) and *Lectures and Essays* for the Madrid Escelicef Publishing House.

Two more educators also promoted Tagore's works. One is Lorenzo Luzuriaga, a specialist in the new schools movement, who was in charge of the *Revista de Pedagogía* (Journal of Pedagogy). In 1936 he had to go into exile in Argentina where he ended up teaching at the University of Buenos Aires. In 1919 the Madrid newspaper *El So!* published his article "La escuela de R. Tagore" (R Tagore's School), in 1925 he published the article "La escuela de R Tagore" by Rosa Branca Talmore in *Revista de Pedagogía*, originally published as "Nuevas escuelas, nuevos métodos" (New Schools, New Methods) in the bulletin of the International Fraternity of Education, Spanish Section.

The other educator is Llorenç Vidal, a specialist in Tagore's pacifist thought, who wrote his Ph.D dissertation on peace education, a topic on which he has written extensively. Today Vidal is a school inspector in Cadiz (Spain) and has

been a promoter of the International Peace and Non-Violence Day observed on the anniversary of Gandhi's assassination every year on January 30th for many years.

It is appropriate to underline the important presence that Tagore always had in Catalonia (a Spanish self-ruled region whose capital is Barcelona) thanks to the many editions of his works translated into Catalan, a second language spoken in Spain, and published by Montserrat Abbey and Selecta Publishing Houses. Maria de Quadras translated most of Tagore's works published in Catalan. It is worth mentioning, incidentally, that a Catalonian musician worked in Santiniketan.

### **TAGORE'S FAILED TRIP TO SPAIN**

In his book *My Reminiscences*, Tagore makes an affectionate portrait of the only teacher he remembers well, the Spanish Jesuit Penaranda of the Saint Javier School in Calcutta.

Although Tagore was tireless and had gone all-around the world, he, against his wishes, never came to Spain. The imaginary trip programmed in detail by Juan Ramon Jimenez for April 1921. Tagore was supposed to have visited Madrid, Toledo and Andalucia, especially Mogucr, Jimenez's home-town (nowadays his house is a Museum and Foundation named after him). It was a pity the visit did not come about.

It is worth mentioning, for example, the party in his honour at the ILE Residence Hall. Zcnobia Camprubi and Jimena Menendez Pidal were supposed to read Tagore's poems in Spanish, Elena Royo had to read the story Mashu Federico Garcia Lorca, Rubio. Luis Bunuel, Adolfo Sala/ar, Carmen Hiider. Carmen de Juan, among other ILE members, were to stage the dramatic poem *Sacrifice*. Tagore and Juan Ramon Jimenez were to read poems in Bengali and in Spanish.

There was a hand-written letter Tagore sent to Camprubi from Geneva (Switzerland), dated 5 April 1921, apologizing for not coming. The letter, in English, is quoted verbatim and says the following :

*Dear Madame Jimenez,*

*I can not tell you how sorry I am to have to postpone my visit lo Spain till a later date. Unfortunately, I have come to Europe with a cause, and I am not absolutely free about my movements owing to this. You will know what it is from the accompanying leajlet. It became urgently necessary for me first to come to Switzerland for the purpose I have in mind. And if I had strictly followed my original programme, my visit to your country would have been a hurried one, which would have disappointed me greatly, for the idea of Spain has such a deep attraction for my mind. I am looking forward to the time when I shall have the leisure to have a full enjoyment of my stay in your beautiful country and lo he able to come into an intimate touch with the heart of Spain.*

*Very sincerely yours,  
Rabindranath Tagore*

Unfortunately, he had no other occasion to come to Spain, and after 1936 it was out of question.□