

Hirendra Nath Mukerjee



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The Great Tibetologist  
under Csoma de Koros

THE GREAT TIBETOLOGIST  
ALEXANDER CSOMA de KOROS  
HERMIT-HERO FROM HUNGARY

# **The Great Tibetologist**

## **ALEXANDER CSOMA DE KOROS**

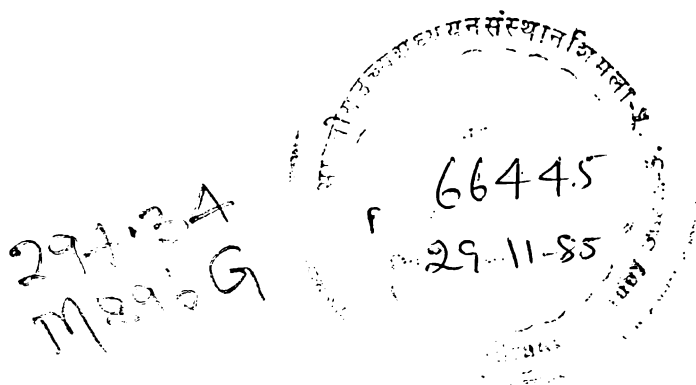
**Hermit-Hero from Hungary**

*Hirendra Nath Mukerjee*



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**Janos Vertes**  
Ambassador of  
the Hungarian People's Republic  
New Delhi

## **F O R E W O R D**

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to write a foreword to yet another book by Professor Hirendra Nath Mukerjee. After a general survey of Hungarian history and present day life (1980) he has now ventured to write about one of the most outstanding scholars of 19th century Hungary, Alexander Csoma de Koros.

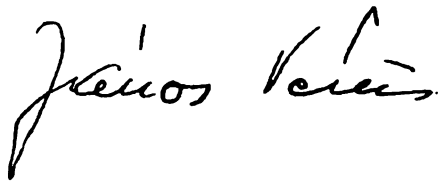
Prof. Mukerjee has some special qualities which should ensure the success of this work (qualities apart from his well-known command of style and his progressive philosophy). The interest of Prof. Mukerjee in Csoma de Koros awakened not less than 55 years ago when he published a paper on the Hungarian scholar in the student magazine of Presidency College, Calcutta, in 1926. The intimate knowledge of the historical background of Csoma's motivation also helped the author in his task. But for us, Hungarians, the main novelty of this book is the fact that in it the achievements and problems of Csoma de Koros are considered from a purely Indian point of view and by a personality of the stature of Prof. Hirendra Nath Mukerjee.

There is only one point I would like to make in connection with the Csoma-legacy. The superb energy and will-power of this great scholar was profoundly nourished by his glowing love of his nation. This feeling helped him through all difficulties, it helped him to accomplish truly stupendous work and to start on a new journey towards new tasks though aged 58. What we want to stress here is the fact that this feeling made him "very desirous to see the different countries of Asia, as the scene of so many memorable transactions of former ages", and helped Csoma to love the common people and cultural achievements of other countries and continents like the people

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of Ladakh and Bengal. This message is certainly one which never loses vitality and inspiration.

India provided not only facilities for his studies, but her land keeps the remains of the great Hungarian scholar. India considers Csoma as her son, like all those Hungarians who pay their homage to him while visiting India. Whenever we, Hungarians, go on a pilgrimage to his tomb in Darjeeling we do remember.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jenő Vári". The script is cursive and elegant, with the first name "Jenő" and the last name "Vári" clearly distinguishable.

## P R E F A C E

It has been a real pleasure to respond to my friend Ambassador Janos Vertes' request for a brief survey of the life and work of Csoma de Koros.

I recall how this tremendous man had drawn me when I was young. Even before I was nineteen, I chanced upon Sir William Hunter's article on that "pilgrim-scholar", and I was excited enough to prepare, on the basis of that article, a paper for my college historical society which was printed in "Presidency College Magazine" (Vol. XIII, No. 1, Calcutta, Sept. 1926).

I have no pretension to scholarship in the spheres of study that Csoma so uniquely pioneered, but I can claim, for whatever it is worth, that I have long been a sort of Csoma fan. I am, thus, happy that, as I near the end of life's journey, I have this opportunity of writing on that hermit-hero in the realm of learning.

It is good to see how Csoma's memory is cherished as that of a national hero in Hungary. His life was indeed a wonderful odyssey that is a joy to recall and salute. Unresting till the last in pursuit of his early-life pledge to probe the origins of his own nation, representing profoundly the quest in his time for Hungarian identity and the assertion of Hungary's national self-respect, Csoma with his passion for knowledge became the first in Europe to launch on scholarly studies of Buddhism from the original sources and to open also some closed doors in the past history of India and of Indian culture that had spread beyond the country's borders. In the process—though Csoma could not get to Lhasa, "the farthest goal of all travel"—he placed what is sometimes, a little cumbrously perhaps, called Tibetology on the map of research. With not a trace of chauvinism in his composition and with a lively distrust of certain motivations and pre-conceptions then often

distorting European studies of oriental subjects, he worked for years in the most daunting conditions but with never a grouse—worked, fundamentally, for understanding of and among all nations. This was the scholar and saint who lies buried in India's Darjeeling, and we in India, the Asiatic Society in Calcutta especially, can claim him, as Hungary does, as one of India's heroes also.

If the sketch which follows succeeds in portrayal of a luminous human being, helps a little also to strengthen the friendship now growing between India and Hungary, I shall feel amply rewarded.

New Delhi  
September 1981

**Hiren Mukerjee**



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## *‘Tapasvin’ From Europe*

Hungary may well appear to many of us a small and far-away country with little more than the famed tourist interest of Budapest and Balatonfured to excite our elite, but it will be a pitifully partial, even perverse, impression. It will be so much more worth-while to probe into the reasons for the avowal by Rabindranath Tagore in 1926 of India’s “emotional kinship” with that remote little country. This Tagore pronouncement has been powerfully fortified since by Hungary’s post-World War II emergence as a socialist state, willing and eager for amity and fellowship with the national-liberation force which independent India indubitably represents.

Situated plump in the heart of Europe, entirely land-locked, almost perforce in the maelstrom of European events for over a thousand years of trial and torture and trauma and triumph alternating, Hungary has no doubt evolved its unerringly European entity. That entity, however, is laced, as it were, with a kind of atavistic sensitivity for Asia. The Magyar people who had made Hungaria—to begin with, the Pannonian basin—their home have always had a feeling, perhaps vaguely but with the tenacity of a racial memory which multifarious happenings have not crushed out, that their fathers, once upon a time, had their habitation in hoary Asia.

India, only lately free of foreign subjection, could never withhold a spontaneous, natural fellow-feeling for Hungarians

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who had suffered similar agonies in the not very distant past, whether under Turkish Sultans or Austrian Hapsburgs. This country of ours has often enough felt herself in despair, brooding as Hungary once did on her "doom-laden destiny". Another close, if also somewhat subtle, link between our two countries is Hungary's historic quest for her people's origins. One thinks, for instance, of Hungary's great poet, Endre Ady (1877-1919), "the Magyar Messiah" drawn deeply towards Paris, culture-capital of the West, yet acutely perceptive of his own unique, if a trifle jumbled, heritage with its "Turco-Tatar", Avar and Mongol strains. No wonder Ady suffered much in his life-time, but like India's Tagore, he cursed war and war-mongers, always spoke up "as a man and a Hungarian", and after his tortured tenure on earth, left a moral command that cannot fade: "Be a man, in inhumanity!"

This quest for the "roots" of Magyar life and its deep-lying links with a part of the world that, to the then empire-hunting Europeans, was beyond the pale of what they thought was civilization—degraded, decayed, degenerate regions of the globe ("Asiatics" being itself a word of ill repute) which were "the white man's burden" but also, of course, the goose that laid the golden eggs for the forces of Empire to grab and use for feeding and fostering the Industrial Revolution which was to bring the once gorgeous East firmly under their heel—this quest found perhaps its finest 19th century expression in the life and work of Sandor Korosi Csoma (better known in India as Csoma de Koros) who lies buried in India's Himalayan heart at Darjeeling.

It was a life of a totally devoted, pitilessly stern, entirely single-minded and almost super-humanly sustained pursuit of his aim, namely, to go into the recesses of Central Asia in search of the origins of his nation. This involved willing acceptance, over the years, of hardships and hurdles in every step of a brave, bizarre, often heart-breaking life—a life at the same time of simplicity that in spite of its rigour (but also because of it) was nothing short of sublime, a life of ceaseless mental toil of a higher order, with no thought at all of oneself, a life of diligence so determined and dedicated that he gave no thought (or if he did, in weak moments, he brushed it off

his mind) to the nearly unendurable conditions he accepted always with equanimity. It was a life, indeed, of a saint and a sage in the best sense of the term.

Csoma de Koros is, worthily, a national hero of his people, cherished with special pride by socialist Hungary as the finest symbol of his country's profound feeling for the civilization of India and her neighbours. In the Hungarian Academy of Sciences at Budapest, there is, one learns, a Csoma Room where the savant's books and manuscripts, in so far as they could be collected from some virtual hideouts dispersed in inaccessible places, are reverently kept together. Alongside, there is a fine piece of sculpture depicting the scholar's austere but benign appearance. Does it not rejoice us in India where we have an old Sanskrit adage which says that "Kings might be honoured in their own country but scholars get homage everywhere"? How good would it be for us all in every country if our heroes were not the "princes and prelates and periwigged charioteers" who strut about in the tracks of power but the men and women of wisdom, of benevolence, of amity among all peoples, of the peace that passeth understanding!

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By a charming coincidence that does not appear to have been often noted, Csoma de Koros was born in 1784 (April 4),\* the year in which was also founded the Asiatic Society in Calcutta. The two pre-eminent foreign names associated with this celebrated centre for the advancement of learning are those of Sir William Jones, a great humanist and the foremost British orientalist of his time, who founded the Society, and of Csoma de Koros who lived and worked there in pristine austerity that has never yet been forgotten, and who, even as

\* In the prolegomena to Lajos Magyari's poems on "Alexander Csoma de Koros' Legacy" (Debrecen, 1976) Laszlo Kadar suggests that Csoma was born in 1789 and that to avoid the difficulties of getting a proper passport Csoma had secured (1819) a frontier-pass in the name of a five-year-old namesake. This goes against the grain of the man that Csoma is clearly seen to have been. Theodore Duka's mention of an entry relating to Csoma's birth in the parish register (April 1784) is entirely credible.

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he lay dying in the Himalayan foot-hills, wanted to bequeath all his possessions, including books and other effects, to "this noble establishment" as a token of his gratitude. Legal technicalities, of which the sage was unaware, stood in the way of fulfilment of this legacy, but the Asiatic Society in Calcutta prizes most highly its association with the unforgettable scholar. Not for Hungarians only, but for others also, is the Asiatic Society a place of intellectual pilgrimage. One can still see there a statue of the savant and the hallowed corner where, in the last stage of his life, Csoma arranged his four boxes of books around him, and defying heat and humidity and whatever, sat, laboured and slept on a mat within the little quadrangle which they formed.

This hermit-scholar would not, in his innate generosity of soul, have liked it to be said, but he was, as some have noted, in his way of life and work, "a reproach on the university professor of today". One may recall how an eminent classicist and public figure, the late Gilbert Murray who was Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford University, said once that he sometimes wished "that we men of science and letters could all be bound by some vow of renunciation or poverty like monks of the Middle Ages". There is no real need perhaps to do so, but it is heart-warming that in the annals of world scholarship there were such sublime souls as Csoma de Koros.

While at college, he had, with two fellow-students, taken a pledge to devote his life to the discovery of the origins of their race. It was characteristic that he, alone of the three, abided by that pledge to the end. One might even say to the bitter end, though Csoma was never the man to feel bitter about anything, even if the treasured aim of his entire thinking life eluded him till the last. The linguistic tools available to philological scholarship, especially since Franz Bopp's transfer of the science of language from the foundations of verbal likeness to those of basic structure, were not then at Csoma's disposal. To the end Csoma seems to have retained, however, his hope of being able to trace his people's origins to central or eastern Asia; the inspiration had come, compulsively, from the legends of his own Szekely village, legends imbibed, as it were, with his mother's milk and mingled with his senses.

Starting, thus, from a set of old unverifiable concepts he arrived, however, after an epic travail, at a different set of new, well-ascertained findings. Not quite, of course, like Columbus setting out in search of India and discovering a ‘new world’, America, but somewhat perhaps analogously, Csoma who had plunged into a perilous journey into the unknown, “both to satisfy my own desire and to prove my gratitude and love to my nation” (as he had written *en route* in a letter from Teheran), pursued the old dream but accomplished a different reality. Honest to the very marrow of his being, “he never forced his facts to fit his pre-conceptions”, as an ardent admirer, Sir William Hunter, the British scholar, once put it. Unable to determine the truth of Magyar origins in Asia, he turned out with different theses to be a great pioneer in the world of scholarship, the founder of Tibetan philology and Tibetan Buddhist studies, opening up a vast vista of the treasures of learning and thought, originally emanating from India and lovingly preserved in the lamasseries of the ‘Forbidden Land’. He became, in the process, as Professor Lokesh Chandra, a present-day Indian labourer in Csoma’s own vineyard, has put it, “an eternal bond in the friendship between the peoples of India and Hungary”.

In 1976, the President of the Hungarian People’s Republic, on a visit to India, spent a whole day in order to be in Darjeeling and pay homage at the grave of Csoma de Koros, the monument over it having been erected by the Asiatic Society, where, as noted before, much of his life-work was done. It was in the Asiatic Society’s library that Csoma, on his last journey, left his manuscripts, among them a long and truly suggestive list of Sanskrit words which have their Hungarian equivalents similar in form as well as meaning, attaching to the list a comment or rather a message in Latin, translated as follows in a recent Hungarian souvenir (1976):

“I furnished material. You know the idea.

‘Please, seek for the glorious memorabilia.’”

Here is, significantly, a reference to his original motivation about the history of his folk and their link with Asia, but he was scientist enough never to force his facts, before they were

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sufficient and decisive, to fit pre-conceptions, howsoever fondly held. His ever-memorable role, however, was to be seen not only in his published writings which contemporary conditions and communication problems perhaps made to appear somewhat fragmentary but in the great unravelling, through his own search and the many lessons from it, of the massive Buddhist literature of Tibet, China and Japan, often the only extant versions of the original Sanskrit or Pali. He opened up "a vast new field to human inquiry", to quote again Sir William Hunter, who adds: "Csoma, single-handed, did more than the armies of Ochterlony, and not less than the diplomacy of Hodgson, to pierce the Himalayas, and to reveal to Europe what lay behind the mountain wall. He has suffered the fate allotted in this world to the pioneers of knowledge. Other men have entered on his labours. They have built their easy edifices from the materials which he with a life's toil amassed: the meaner translating sort, as usual, not fearing to patronise the dead master". (*Vide* "The India of the Queen and other Essays", by W.W. Hunter, London 1903, pp. 251 ff. "A Pilgrim Scholar").

Csoma de Koros, however, has his memory honoured and cherished not by any means only on account of his pioneer and path-breaking scholarship. His whole existence had the stamp and the flavour of what, in the absence of a more adequate word, can only be called the spirit of man at its highest, a spirit free of the lightest touch of chauvinism, untarnished by anything like the near-fixation of too many Western Orientalists about the fabled East offering no more than antique museum-pieces and Eastern peoples, save for some bizarre exceptions, being *au fond* a "lesser breed". There was always a saint, though he never vaunted his piety, behind the scholar that Csoma was—the exact opposite of the Balkan saying that behind a hero there often lurks a traitor! If in 1933, one learns, that the Taisho University in Tokyo canonised him as *Bodhi-sattva*, it was in the fitness of things. To think of Csoma de Koros is to think thus, in Indian terms, of the *Tapasvin*, the lonely seer, "not a glowing coal but a shining lamp; he is not only consumed, he illumines".

## *Csoma's Quest*

To the scholars of his generation, wrote Sir William Hunter, Csoma de Koros had been "a dim Transylvanian figure, lean and homeless among the Himalayas, but projecting a giant shadow from their heights across Central Asia". However, it took just over a hundred years after Csoma's birth before a compatriot, Theodore Duka, brought out (1885) under the distinguished imprint of Trubner's, noted for Oriental research publications, a well-researched, also deservedly "loving" biography, thus performing, despite difficulties, an act of pious obligation to the memory of a great man. This biography, reprinted (1972) in Delhi in a limited edition and awaiting further and comprehensive revision which Hungarian and Indian scholars will perhaps jointly undertake, remains a valuable document. Interestingly, Dr. Duka wrote his book in English, (along with a Hungarian version, which was published in the same year) partly, no doubt, because Csoma, in the very extraordinary context of his research endeavour, "never published anything but in the English tongue", but partly also as a gesture of appreciation of what Hunter, with understandable pride, calls "English generosity" that had throughout helped Csoma in his life-work. It appears that Csoma's post-graduate studies at the German university of Gottingen was assisted by funds out of an English endowment for Hungarian scholars. During his journey across Asia, it was "English liberality", again,



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which saw him through difficulties in Persia and in Ladakh. During his sojourn and studies in secluded Tibet and also during his eleven-year stay in India, the grants, howsoever meagre, and other help he got from the British Government had been indispensable. This was a debt which Csoma, with his innate decency and suavity, always amply acknowledged.

In spite of the humility that was the natural garment of his soul, Csoma also had a sort of fierce, if at the same time gently articulated, pride in his own integrity as scholar and as a man. He would not accept a friendly personal present, that of a cloak, for example, which he needed most badly in the coldest of climates, from even one like Dr. Gerard, the earliest medical explorer of the Himalayas who visited him in 1829 and has left graphic accounts of his way of life. Csoma would accept assistance only, if at all, from a public source and in return, specifically, for research services rendered (and nothing else), always imposing on himself the harshest regimen and spending literally not a *paisa* more than absolutely necessary. Whether in the Himalayan fastnesses or in Calcutta or travelling on foot or by boat in north-eastern Bengal he always declined the hospitality of British officers (which, he felt, only impeded his studies) but preferred to stay in a hut on boiled rice and tea. From petty officialdom, almost all of them philistines to their finger-tips, he had his portion of affronts and smarts, something that was often perhaps unintended, but he avoided that tribe like the plague. In his manner, in spite of apparent eccentricities, there was an astonishing restraint and also an almost overpowering dignity which heaped, in the Biblical phrase, coals of fire on the head of those who hurt him by their incomprehension of the mission he had undertaken. "The only bitter words which he is known to have ever uttered in his life", wrote Hunter, were about the time (1824) at Sabathu, "the poor little dining and dancing hill station, the miniature Masuri (Mussoorie) of those days" (Hunter's words) where Csoma said he was "treated like a fool, caressed and ridiculed at the same time".

Csoma's austere and absolute aloofness, while at work, from all extraneous contact appears also to have stemmed from his sensing the subtler implications of much British activity at the

time which, even through the mask of scholarship or of philanthropy, was intended to further imperialist interests of expansion, penetration and consolidation, to the extent possible, of power in entirely inhospitable but strategically significant regions, both presently and potentially. In the introduction to his *magnum opus* he therefore deliberately stressed: "I was not sent by any government to gather political information". While starting on a study tour he wrote to that pioneer Indologist James Prinsep, categorically: "I will abstain from every statistical, political or even geographic enquiry".

Thus, Theodore Duka sets out in full a report from the aforementioned Dr. Gerard (bearing date 21st January 1829) where among other details about the way Csoma lived and worked he noted how he would refuse even English newspapers, lent him so that he could have a little diversion, "adding that he would not throw himself open to suspicion by attending to anything but that which he had pledged himself to prosecute—he then with great emphasis revived his old and strange ideas of his having been taken for a spy..." while "the world would soon see what he was". Even of his own personal habits he chose to be extremely careful. Once asked if he had ever partaken of "the spirits made from the grape (which are nearly as good as Scotch whisky)"—for the Britisher the *ultima thule* among beverages!—he answered that he had, when ill once, procured a little but decided never to touch spirits so that he might not earn a reputation of doing any other job than "studying". (*Vide* Duka, *op. cit.*, p. 89). Almost by instinct informed by his innate insight Csoma had known that even in the garb of scholarship unsavoury tasks, if not directly but by implication, could be called for in the interests of Authority seeking to extend itself into what might appear to be impossibly difficult but strategically and politically alluring terrain. Without naming names, one can recall the fact of a certain suspicion attaching to some apparently innocuous and even estimable intellectual pursuits by some scholars in Trans-Himalaya. Not the faintest breath of such moral misgiving has ever besmirched the shining escutcheon of Csoma's great endeavour.

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Perhaps it may be added that while the interest of the bigger Western countries could be based, more or less, on political, economic and cognate power-considerations, that of a country like Hungary was, in comparison, totally selfless. Like Julianus the Dominican monk who in 1235 had first set out to look for what was wistfully thought of as the Hungarians' original home and whose second journey in persistent pursuit of the aim was thwarted only by the Mongol invasions of the time, Csoma followed in his forbear's pious wake and never deviated from the path of virtue that his luminous loyalty to learning had mapped out. One is reminded of that great hero of Hungarian history, the poet Petofi, about whom Endre Ady wrote in 1910: "Petofi does not make bargains !" Csoma was the kind of man who, following his life's sole target, would look never sideways but only straight towards his goal. No wonder, thus, that the Korosi corner in the Asiatic Society's premises can, conceivably, be preserved and looked at reverently, but it is not easy to imbibe truly the stern, but at the same time child-like and sublime, qualities of that unique man's character.

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Even at the risk of some repetition, it is a joy to recapitulate part of what he said in his introduction to his monumental Tibetan dictionary: "He [the author] begs to inform the public that he has not been sent by any government to gather political information, neither can he be counted among the number of those wealthy European gentlemen who travel at their own expense for their pleasure or curiosity, but is only a poor student who was desirous to see the different countries of Asia as the scene of so many memorable transactions of former ages, to observe the manners of several people and to learn their languages.... The study of the Tibetan language did not form part of my original plan, but...I cheerfully engaged in the study of it, hoping that it might serve me as a vehicle to my immediate purpose, namely, my researches in respect to the origin and language of the Hungarians. The result of my investigation is that the literature of Tibet is entirely of Indian origin, the immense volumes on different branches of

science being exact and faithful translations from Sanskrit works... ." This simple statement, where one can sense a certain pain at the imminent dispelling of fondly nursed (and by no means just fantastic) intellectual expectations but also a determination to persevere in pursuit of excitingly unfolding knowledge in yet uncharted regions, knowledge that was, in his reckoning, power to move mankind towards ever better ways of life and labour.

Csoma's Hungary was, in the early nineteenth century, an impoverished land, her people then yearning to recover from the lethargy and demoralisation following upon a struggle for freedom that had failed, driven also to contemplation of a past that had been full of courage and colour, a time when Magyars were feared almost as a scourge in Europe, offspring perhaps of the dreaded Huns whose transient triumph over two continents was a heady historic memory. *En route* towards Central Asia, the cynosure then of his mind and heart, Csoma tried to traverse the Karakoram road but found himself halted at Leh, capital of Ladakh. About this time he had met the English explorer Moorcroft who advised him to learn Tibetan as the only key to understanding the region and gave him a copy of Father Giorgi's heavy but largely erroneous compilation 'Alphabetum Tibetanum' (Rome 1762), the only European effort till then to unravel the secrets of Tibet. As a scientific treatise it was a poor thing but in Csoma's laden heart it lit a torch that was to be never put out. Csoma then made up his mind that at any cost he must master the new realms of learning of which he caught faint glimpses in that Capuchin friar's work. From Moorcroft, whom he was never to meet again, he accepted some assistance (to be repaid, he had insisted, by the results of his work) for travelling further, whatever the odds, to prepare in the first place, a grammar and dictionary of the Tibetan language, still hoping that in the land of myriad monasteries he would find perhaps clues and even facts about the legendary heroes in the proto-history of his race who had warped his mind when he was younger. He found, of course, something else, but he got passionately involved—let it not be forgotten, 'passion' implies 'suffering'—in the unravelling of a hidden treasure trove, thousands of unknown Sanskrit works,

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long forgotten in India, but preserved piously in faithful Tibetan rendering. His first idea had been to prepare the Tibetan grammar and dictionary by a year's hard work and then journey onwards, the original dream still in some way, driving him, into Central Asia, but he was so fascinated by the rich splendour of the stupendous treasure he had discovered that the study and contemplation of Tibeto-Sanskrit Buddhist literature and wisdom, and later, of the Sanskrit and Bengali languages possessed his entire being for the last two decades of his dedicated life.

A somewhat sentimental journey, inspired by what might almost be described as an adolescent vision, which began in November 1819 when Csoma crossed the hill frontier of Hungary with a view to entering the fabled continent of Asia turned thus, in its effect, into a seminal illustration of the spirit of man to which, in the deepest analysis, there is "neither East nor West nor border nor breed nor birth" but the basic unity of our species. Csoma de Koros, in his luminous life and work, has won humanity's highest spurs; he belongs neither to Europe nor to Asia but to all mankind.

## *Voyage of a Strange Recluse*

Alexander Csoma was born in the picturesque little Transylvanian village called Koros on April 4, 1784, to a family, poor but proud, of military nobles called Szeklers, a warrior tribe tracing itself back to the time of the Huns, settled in the region since about the 4th century A.D. and for several centuries having for their chief task the defence of Hungary's south-eastern frontier against Turkish inroads. They had retained something of their ancient tribal forms of equality, the tillers of the land being also its owners, and kept themselves at a certain distance from the Wallachians who constituted the bulk of the population on that frontier but had forbore from encroaching into Koros. There was, it seems, in Csoma's family a certain admixture of a love of learning with the military instinct and dour devotion to the native land. One of his uncles had been an eminent professor; a cousin had taken orders as a Protestant pastor; a nephew was later to give his life in a street fight during the War of Independence in 1849.

His school life was, as usual with most pupils then, very hard and in the Nagy-Enyed gymnasium (or collegiate high-school) he was a pupil-servant working for the school in return for his board. Not known early for any special talent he was noted, with his strong physique and sound constitution (an unpremeditated preparation, as it were, for never succumbing to dreadful physical ordeals later), rather than for his dili-

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gence and also his simplicity, goodness and equanimity. When he was in the higher classes, he gave lessons to younger boys and carefully stowed away his humble earnings for further special studies which he was, then a little inchoately, planning in his mind.

History attracted Csoma and under the influence of his popular teacher of the subject he would take part in the debates and discussion of a dear theme, the origins of the Magyar people. It is on record that some time during his school life, with two of his fellow-students, he had taken a vow that they would start, when ready, on a serious scientific, though hazardous, journey in quest of the traces in the East that might enable mapping out of the annals of their own race. Not surprisingly, his two comrades, bent more on other things, grew to forget their vow, but Csoma never pushed out of his vision that youthful envisagement of his own unique future.

An early teacher of his, Professor Samuel Hegedus, to whom is owed much significant information about Csoma's youth, noted in 1814 how Csoma had made particular progress in the Greek and Latin classics and in the study of the best French and German authors. In 1815 Csoma passed the public 'rigorosum' examination, qualifying thus to continue studies at a foreign university. For three years thereafter, with a year's grant from the government of Hanover and a scholarship from an English endowment, he studied in the University of Gottingen. It was there that he learnt English, but he did also something very special. He came under the influence of the celebrated Professor Eichhorn, from whom he got to know of certain Arabic manuscripts containing valuable clues to the history of the Middle Ages and the movements of the Magyars, when they were still in Asia, manuscripts yet inaccessible and unknown to European scholarship. This was for Csoma the signal of the need to learn Arabic, which he did under Eichhorn and to decide that he must first prepare himself for his projected travels by study in Constantinople of whatever Arabic (and Turkish) literature was available on the subject of his search.

Csoma had opted deliberately for a life of toil and trial. In 1807, at the age of twentythree, he had finished his gymna-

sium course, but though elected lecturer in poetry at his college he had a hard life having to rely heavily on earnings from private tuition and it was not till his thirtythird year that he could pass his *examen rigorosum* as noted earlier. Returning home in 1818, he had tempting offers like an immediate professorship in a public school, the assurance of a first-class ~~chair~~ in the college of his youth and tutorship in a nobleman's family. Such lures meant nothing to him, for as Hegedus noted, he was intent on his long cherished quest and would just not be deterred. Though now, after much travail, a finished academic, he turned easily away from the honours and emoluments offered by his admiring compatriots to become a wanderer in pursuit of a long haunting promise that had become part of his very existence.

Thus, before the snows of February 1819 had melted, Csoma left his Transylvanian home on foot, the object then being to master first the Slavonic language spoken in lower Hungary and Croatia where he stayed for several months. Later that year, in November, he turned in earnest towards the East. Hegedus, his good friend and teacher, had tried his best to dissuade Csoma but found it was of no avail. "If I wished to start for London", Hegedus had told Csoma, "I could do so with safety with a walking-stick in my hand, and nobody would hurt me; but to travel in Central Asia is hardly a problem for a single individual to solve". However, discovering that such words only displeased the pupil he forbore further efforts at dissuasion. Between the two relations, of course, were of the friendliest, and it is moving to learn how Csoma, fundamentally then (as later) a very lonely person, came to bid Hegedus goodbye the day before he was leaving, then came again the next day also because, he said, "I merely wished to see you once more".

Hegedus had seen "that expression of joyful serenity which shone from his eyes...a beam of delight which pervaded his soul" as he drank with Csoma a farewell cup in Hungary's own old *tokay*. Next morning the younger scholar started, "lightly clad as if he intended merely taking a walk", though he was on his journey, as it were, to the ends of the earth. Hegedus watched him wistfully till he reached the banks



## 16 *Hermit-Hero From Hungary*

of a nearby stream and could be seen no longer from a distance. The two were never to set eyes on each other again, nor would Csoma see ever again the face of his beloved country. Watching the strange young man passing by, a certain count, reclining on his gate, wondered who could be the wayfarer 'clad in a thin yellow nankin dress, with a stick in his hand and a small bundle'. Did Csoma have any inkling that he would, after a life of wondrous toil, leave his bones to rest in a country where renunciation, such as his (without any advertisement of it), evoked much reverence, where, as a Sanskrit saying puts it, "the only fortunate people are those who have no more than a loin-cloth" ?

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The epic voyage, yet never perceived as such by the voyager himself, continued in the same spontaneously self-effacing spirit in which it began. So Csoma trudged across the frontiers of his land towards Bucharest where he could learn some Turkish, *en route* to Constantinople where Eichhorn's anticipation of treasures in the Arabic language lured our 'pilgrim scholar'. He found, while in Thrace, that he could not proceed to that fabled city where plague had broken out, and he was constrained to travel by boat *via* Chios and Rhodes to Alexandria which he reached on the last day of February 1820. Once there, he devoted himself at once to the study of Arabic but yet another plague scare drove him further east to Aleppo in Syria, travelling circuitously by boat and on foot. From there he travelled with various caravans "in a simple Asiatic dress", on foot or on rafts, till he floated down the Tigris to the fairy-tale city of Baghdad. A letter in Latin that Csoma wrote to the English Resident, then away in Kurdistan, elicited notable assistance, and he was enabled, after a stay of about a month and a half, to move forward from Baghdad, on September 4. This time he was in European dress and on horse-back, till the caravan reached the Persian capital, Teheran (October 14, 1820). It was in this way that almost a whole year had passed and Csoma's odyssey was variously launched. It looked still to be an almost eccentric enterprise, its hazards by no means yet calculable, its results remaining on the not apparently

propitious knees of the gods. By now, however, though the targets were nowhere in sight, Csoma could consider his mission well and truly begun and on no account to be revoked.

A whole year had gone by since he had left his home but he was far away still from the region he had aimed so ardently to reach. With his meagre funds nearly gone, he found himself in a strange city where at that point of time no other European was even in residence. Through the good offices, however, of a native servant of the British Embassy in Teheran, his predicament was communicated to the Willock brothers, cavalry officers attached to the mission, who promptly and generously responded with money, clothes and even books for the unknown traveller. These were "my noble benefactors", as Csoma called them, and he rested for four months in their care, improving his English and delving deeper than he had done so far into Persian, a language in which (fortunately for Csoma) Major George Willock was an excellent scholar. In March 1821 he resumed his travels, resuming also the Asiatic name he had adopted earlier—"Sikander Beg" ('Sikander' corresponding exactly to 'Alexander')—and veered in what he reckoned to be the most plausible direction for Mongolia. As a token of his gratitude as well as of his confidence, he left with his British benefactors almost everything he possessed, his university certificates, his passport, his few personal papers and his European suit of clothes, with a request that they might be forwarded to his family in Hungary "in case I shall die or perish on my road to Bokhara" where, he thought, he was now firmly heading. Poets in many climes have sung of "the golden road to Samarkand" but Csoma, with his heart then on Bokhara bent, was destined to get there for a while only and then to have to leave for further wanderings.

After some eighteen days' travel from Teheran, he reached Meshed in Khurasan, where he was held up on account of some regional disturbances and at last, in November 1821, he arrived at Bokhara. Reports of the impending arrival of a Russian army made it impossible for him to stay the whole winter as he had wished to, and he rushed to join again a departing caravan that reached Kabul on January 6, 1822. On the way he had seen Balkh, Kulm and also Bamian, the last

named being the site of the superb and stupendous Buddha statues hewn out of the mountain-side. One delights to imagine that Csoma had seen and contemplated that wondrous creation, but he could have had no idea, then, that he would be the first to unravel to the wide world some of the secret of that magic universe which Buddhism, crossing the Himalayas, had created in the mountain recesses of Central and Eastern Asia.

Kabul was, for many reasons, not a congenial halt and Csoma who was travelling now as an Armenian joined a caravan headed for Peshawar. On the way, he met, as he had earlier been told he might, two Frenchmen, Allard and Ventura, famous European generals employed by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who invited the lonely Hungarian linguist to come with them for a while at least to Lahore where he spent twelve days. It is not known for certain, but it is not unlikely that he had been persuaded not only to see the sights of Ranjit Singh's city but also to be introduced to that remarkable Indian potentate. Who knows if with his gift of languages and personal experience of Asian countries, Csoma was not sought even to be drawn into Ranjit Singh's service? In any event, Csoma was the sort of person who was determined doggedly to pursue, in total independence, the one aim he had set for himself in life, and thus, soon enough, he continued his effort to penetrate the Himalayan wall that kept him out of reach of his target. By June 1822 he had made his way through nearly inaccessible mountain routes to Leh, capital of Ladakh.

What awaited him, however, was disappointment. The road to Yarkand, he learnt, was too difficult and all progress eastward almost impossible, and apart from being expensive, very dangerous for a Christian. There was no other alternative than for him to turn his weary steps again towards Punjab and search for some other passage through the Himalayas to Central Asia. It was on the way that near the Kashmir border he met (July 1822) the English explorer, Moorcroft—a climacteric in Csoma's life, for the two solitary Europeans in that inhospitable region became good friends and Moorcroft's advice and assistance gave a new turn to the Hungarian's career.

Since leaving home, Csoma had found in Moorcroft perhaps the first human being to whom he could fully unlock his heart and unfold his sadly baffled plans. They travelled together again to Leh where his friend gave Csoma the large tome of the 'Alphabetum Tibetanum' which greatly provoked his interest and Csoma stayed on in Leh, studying Tibetan using his knowledge of Persian with the help of a Tibetan Lama—friend of Moorcroft who was proficient in both languages. Csoma found himself readily falling in with Moorcroft's idea that learning Tibetan was the best groundwork for the success of his own long cherished plans and the two friends, after much discussion, settled on a programme of work. Moorcroft gave Csoma some money and letters of introduction to the chief officer at Leh and to "the Lama of Zangla, in Zanskar", Sangs-rgyas Phun-tshogs, Csoma pledging on his part to bring back results which would repay the kindness, apart from doing such titbits for Moorcroft as the translation into Latin of a letter written in Russian. They had been together a little over five months, and in May 1823 Csoma left, reaching Leh on June 1, 1823. Travelling further, he arrived at Zangla and he sojourned in Zanskar, to Ladakh's south-west, from June 23, 1823 to October 22, 1824, where, assisted by the Lama, he applied himself to the study of Tibetan language and literature.

Storms of intellectual emotion must have blown through Csoma's mind as he beheld, in monasteries, "many literary treasures shut up in 320 large printed volumes, which are the basis of all Tibetan learning and religion". One thinks of the poet Keats' travels "in the realms of gold" and then his exultation with the translation of Homer in which Chapman makes the world's first bard "speak out loud and bold" even in English—one thinks of the celebrated Keats sonnet which evokes epic encounters like "stout Cortez, gazing at the Pacific, silent, on the peaks of Darien". Perhaps, far transcending the harshness of the Himalayan heights, was the fire of a new feeling, rooted deep in his search for knowledge that was shorn of all chauvinism and was universal in its values, which melted all misgivings about his life's mission. This feeling came when Csoma saw, in the shadowy light of

monasteries tucked away from the world, the golden glow of Tibetan lore in serried and strangely stacked ranks. Csoma never talked idly about himself, not, for example, like his younger compatriot, the Turcologist Arminius Vambery (1832-1913) who, even in a remotely comparable context, would have spoken proudly and picturesquely about his own role in the picture. As it happened, Csoma just wrote, very simply, that he had "caused to be copied the contents of these immense works and treatises in the same order as they stand in the printed indexes", never hinting that he was doing not only a pioneer but also monumental work that the world of learning can never cease to salute.

The conditions in which he worked are difficult even to imagine but deserve to be reverentially recalled. At that altitude the cold was always intense. Even on mid-summer day, it seems, there had been snow, and before the harvest could be gathered in September the ground was sheeted with snow. During winter, the doorways were blocked with snow, the temperature constantly below zero. With his 'Lama', he would sit in a cell no more than nine feet square, with no heating, no light after dark, neither of the two venturing to leave the 'closet', with the bare floor to sleep on and nothing but the stone walls keeping out the cruel cold. He would huddle himself in a sheepskin cloak, his arms tightly clasping his own breast to conserve whatever heat there was in his body, and he would read as long as there was a streak of light, falling into a comatose sort of slumber that somehow would restore him for the next day's trial. "To put forth his hand for a moment from its fleecy shelter", wrote Hunter in his vivid portrayal of Csoma at work, "was an enterprise of pain and of danger". However, the nearly infinite capacity of man to adapt himself to his environment was seen when, in Hunter's words again, "before the end of the winter he grew quite dexterous in turning over his pages, without getting his forefinger frost-bitten".

Csoma had plans of working for another delectable year with his 'Lama' and in the comparatively temperate Kulu region, to arrange the collected materials properly, but a combination of adverse circumstances foiled the scheme and the

Hungarian scholar, in November 1824, descended the Sutelj gorge, emerging into the aforementioned British cantonment of Sabathu with his precious bundle containing, among other items, an epitome of the 320 volumes he had perused and copied and the draft of a Tibetan dictionary. With the savant's unfamiliarity with the ways of the world, he had anticipated that, through Moorcroft, his name and accomplishments and purposes were known, especially to the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, already familiarised with his project and requested, through Moorcroft, for some essential books on stated subjects. The books had not come—an affront that Csoma, the gentlest of men, could never, till the end, forget or forgive—and it seemed, when Csoma's eerily eccentric figure surprised, even shocked Sabathu, that the man than whom, in the words uttered later by the great Indian 19th century antiquarian, Rajendralala Mitra, "no European has studied Tibetan with greater success", the man who, indubitably, laid down the foundations whereon others have built, had to produce afresh his personal and intellectual credentials. One can only try to imagine how it hurt a sensitive man to whom his honour, as he once said sharply to officials in India, was dearer to him than any thought for himself. It was part, no doubt, of the trials and tribulations he had to undergo before the radiance of his achievement and his character came to be widely known and honoured.

## *Trials of a Tremendous Toil*

When Sabathu, that is to say “the little Anglo-Indian society” of that “poor little dining and dancing hill-station”, saw the apparition of a European, an Austrian subject as he said he was, professedly a linguist and scholar, with a blanket covering his frame, and calling himself Sikandar Beg’, it was a kind of shock to what was called its “respectable routine”. It was by no means surprising also if some suspicion attached to the exotic stranger, for the British government, anxiously watching Maharaja Ranjit Singh’s activities and fearful, as always, of Russian intrigues near the frontier, was gravely concerned about security problems. Csoma on his part produced a letter of introduction from Moorcroft and asked for protection from the British government so that he could return to his tasks in Tibet’s *terra incognita*. The political officer in charge of Sabathu was Captain Kennedy, to be known later as the chief founder of Simla, who saw and heard Csoma and reported the encounter for further instruction from the headquarters of the administration. Meanwhile, till orders came, Csoma was in something like civil detention, “half as prisoner and half as guest”, causing, no doubt, much mirth in Sabathu by his obvious eccentricities of appearance and behaviour as well as the disdain reserved for what must have been derided, and laughed over, as a deplorably un-British specimen of European humanity.

Csoma's first letter to Captain Kennedy was dated January 28, 1825, which elicited an answer, from the capital in Calcutta, in the month of May, the delay being due as much to distance as perhaps the ways of desk-work everywhere. It was a positive reply, offering Csoma a regular stipend of fifty rupees a month for his projected Tibetan studies that had been vouched for appreciatively by Moorcroft. He wrote another letter, dated May 25, 1825, which Captain Kennedy perhaps found baffling, but it was at great length that Csoma expounded the essence of the tasks he had undertaken and the importance thereof, a document which, in spite of some of its assumptions being outdated, is a landmark in oriental scholarship. With a fine internationalist perception of the unity of human aspiration endeavour, he could say, in passing, for example: "I and mention all these facts to excite the curiosity of the learned to search after the ancient state of the Buddhists and to respect a religion which is founded on the same moral principles with our own, namely, *on the love of all men...*" Quoted in extenso in Duka's biography (*op. cit.*, pp. 41-65) it gives more than an inkling of the calibre as well as character of the extraordinary man. He was glad, he noted pointedly, that the Governor-General in Council had "absolved" him from "the suspicion I imagined I was under at my arrival at this place [Sabathu]" and that his research plans had been approved and assisted with "generous pecuniary aid" (though the money offered was, except to that ascetic-scholar, truly pitiful). The "suspicion", however, had rankled in Csoma's sensitive soul and in some ways, perhaps, was never entirely dispelled, this lending his often idiosyncratic responses a kind of tragic nobility that haunts a great life.

"Both the Sanskrit and the Tibetan literature open a wide field before me, for future speculation on the history of mankind", Csoma wrote towards the end of his extensive and explanatory letter of May 25, 1825, and with a monthly allowance of fifty rupees he began his second journey into Tibet in June that year. Anxious to reach early the monastery of Phuktal, in the province of Zaskar, and to contact the Lama for completing tasks already undertaken, he travelled through Simla and Kotgarh into the Sutlej valley, with a



hillman Padma to help him (to whom, he wrote on October 16, he had paid, since June 26 out of his own pittance, "twelve rupees besides nourishment"). He was harried, as he went *via* Besarh (and then changing course, *via* Spiti and Lahul) by the problem of porters to carry his "boxes" "for a certain pay", but he was optimistic that he would return, with his Lama, to Sabathu by October 1826 and together collate and compile the collections he had made and would also further be making. He was in for a blow, however, for the Lama, first "absent on some mercantile affairs in the deserts of Tibet" and then, working with Csoma well enough for some months, quietly pushed out so that Csoma, with no teacher available in that eerie neighbourhood, had no other alternative than to return to India before the work he had begun could be completed.

The Lama, Bande (Pandit) Sangs-rgyas Phun-tshogs, as Csoma indicates, was a polymath, a man of much and varied learning, of course in the manner of the Middle Ages: "medicine, astronomy and astrology are his professions.. he knows the whole system of their religion, has a general knowledge of everything that is contained in their books; and of customs, manners, economy... ." This was an accomplished ecclesiastic, some fiftytwo years of age, who had travelled all over Tibet and Nepal. He was a man of the world also, having married the widow of the local chieftain, and was far-flung Ladakh's principal physician, sometimes in communication as a government dignitary with the Dalai Lama of Tibet. He had taken good care this time not to be cooped up for months, as he had been before, in a frozen little mountain hideout and gave his peculiar pupil a room in his own residence. For quite some months he patiently prepared in Tibetan, carefully and legibly, an inventory of gods, heroes, constellations, minerals, animals, plants, etc. the details comprising the Himalayan cedar-tree just as much as the hyssop sprouting aromatically in the crevices of stone walls. Csoma paid him, of course, out of his own mite, and had ventured, even with his own sheer penury, to pay more, especially as he agreed, at first, to go down with him to Sabathu and work together in a more congenial climate. Perhaps, however, the ardour of the single-minded foreigner was found a little too much by the Lama who suddenly left

Csoma stranded, as it were, intellectually, for there was no substitute at hand. To a life so far of nearly lapsed expectations, yet another frustration was thus to be added. The Lama, as the gentle Csoma could bring himself to say in reprobation, had been "very negligent" and had evaded assurances given earlier.

Csoma was not the kind of man whom defeat could drive into despair. January 1827 saw the 'pilgrim-scholar' back again in the frontier station that he had no particular reason to remember with joy. This time, however, he did not just carry a bundle laden with copies of manuscript but boxes bursting with precious literary cargo. He was a little uncertain still of the outcome of his ordeal of a truly monumental undertaking but he was sure he was on the point of blazing a trail that other scholars would follow. He now felt entirely assured of his mastery of Tibetan and his ability, in his own words, "to fix a standard for this curious language, founded on indubitable authorities". Must he rest content, he asked himself, with his half-finished work or wouldn't he rather have another try and ask for government help to complete it? His first and best friend, Moorcroft, was dead and gone. Captain Kennedy to whom he reported was a sympathetic person but no scholar. The Asiatic Society in Calcutta knew little, indeed, about Tibetan language and literature and perhaps, Csoma feared, cared even less. However, he made his difficult decision and sent a request to the government to let him go to Calcutta and explain the situation fully or help him return to Tibet for three more years to complete his studies. Things began to move and in the spring of 1827 Csoma had the honour of being presented to the Governor-General Lord Amherst who had sensibility enough to trust the apparently odd but somehow impressive savant in the further pursuit of a strangely solemn quest.

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Descending as Csoma did from fabulous Tibet where miracles, reputedly, were a matter of course and esotericisms a way of life, the scholar whose "extreme simplicity of dress and diet" had, in Sabathu especially, "moved the mirth of meaner spirits" (Hunter's words) struck all whom he met as a kind of

miracle himself—a seeker of knowledge first and last, ramrod-straight in his integrity, without a care for the hazards, repeatedly faced, in his rather bizarre quest, ready, with an inner strength that ruled out even a trace of self-consciousness, “to follow knowledge” even when it might have looked “like a sinking star”,—on any computation, a unique man in the real sense of that often abused adjective. It is no surprise that Lord Amherst decided the way he did, namely, to help Csoma return to Tibet for three years on an allowance of fifty rupees per month; his aides must have worked out on some blighted bureaucratic basis, that wonderful sum, (‘pea-nuts’, in peculiar present day parlance and hardly adequate for life to subsist on the roof of the world that is Tibet) so that his work could be completed. Csoma, of course, was an astonishing man; one never knows how, but out of the five hundred rupees provided him more than two years previously, he had “saved” a hundred and fifty! He had lived in perhaps the world’s most rigorous climate and for a European especially, in near-impossible conditions, and had gathered together a vast treasure of Tibetan manuscripts, spending in the process the magnificent sum of what Hunter himself calculated as fifteen rupees per month.

He could not have made any enemies then, for he was hardly, if at all, known, and if he was, hostility would not in normal circumstances, be the reaction. But there must have been carpers and critics, bent always on fault-finding that had also some little plausibility in a situation that was adverse to Csoma’s case. Csoma had been wearing himself out in Tibet when meanwhile a sort of advance had been made on Giorgi’s ‘*Alphabetum Tibetanum*’ (1762) which Moorcroft had given him, because of the appearance in Calcutta (1826) of a new Tibetan dictionary printed at Serampore. It seems that a nameless Catholic missionary on the Bhutan frontier had left behind several lists of words which, after his lonely death in the highlands, fell into the hands of an English officer who passed them to another missionary in Bengal. The East India Company, learning of it, got the dictionary printed in 1826, though the words, rather haphazardly collected and from almost exclusively colloquial sources, had not been properly sifted

and sorted, let alone corrected and edited in tolerable scientific fashion. This, though really lame, was the excuse for a kind of whispering campaign, which Lord Amherst must have known about, that Csoma's intended work had been done by other hands and was now superfluous.

Two European scholars of the time, Klaproth and Remusat, also appear to have thought of Csoma's work so far, as of little consequence and unworthy of support. While Remusat conceded his own lack of real acquaintance with the subject, Klaproth was emphatic and in his pedantic manner dismissed altogether the value of any successful study of Tibetan "by the English in India". This had perhaps put the back up, so to speak, of a learned British Indian official, Horace Hayman Wilson, who, in the 'Government Gazette' of September 10, 1827, noted with approbation Csoma's having gone on his Tibetan journey and also, with some malicious glee, that in Csoma's view "the recent labours of Klaproth and Remusat, with regard to the language and literature of Tibet" were "altogether erroneous". One cannot be sure of psychological motivations, but it is not unlikely that Wilson, whose translation of Kalhana's "Rajtarangini" (history of Kashmir) had been adversely criticised by Klaproth, was attempting a retort. It is interesting to find from the report of Dr. Archibald Campbell who attended on Csoma during his last illness that learning for the first time of this Wilson report (made when he was not on the scene), the "ascetic", that he doubtless was, laughed heartily and even as he denied having given his view on Klaproth as reported, mumbled something about Wilson's acute judgment. This again, may be differently interpreted but it does not matter overmuch. There is, in any case, as numberless instances show, a kind of envy among scientists, as among writers, artists, politicians and all—only a few like Csoma might escape it, but, perhaps, being human he did suffer from it a little, though, with his natural serenity, he overcame its effects.

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It was "about the autumnal equinox of 1827" that Csoma had trudged by way of Simla and the wilds of Kunawar to re-

ascend the Himalayas for the third time and reach the monastery of Kanum, some 10,000 feet above sea-level, to pursue his mission. There he worked, in silence and solitude, displaying the daily heroism (so much more difficult than sudden, inspired flashes of bravery) that neither the cold nor the sheer privation of lonely life at that alien altitude could affect. A picture in this period of the hermit as hero can be seen in the report of Dr. Gerard, the earliest medical explorer of the Himalayan region, who visited him in 1829. Duka prints the report in full and Hunter gives the essence of this pathetic but extraordinary and ennobling human document. Here are the first specific references not only to what Csoma suffered in physical terms but to what might be termed his spiritual agonies. With the diffidence he never quite shook off he felt, at this time, when sorely tried, much self-distrust, embittered by what appeared inevitably to his mind as the world's utter indifference and neglect, and to make it worse, from time to time, even an inward query about his soul-searing labours being at all worth-while or not. Such anxieties and agonies have pursued solitary seekers of knowledge, always and everywhere; Csoma's odyssey could not be in sheltered seas. There is no apter comment on Csoma's ordeal than that of William Hunter, as a Britisher reputedly phlegmatic, who could not, however, help an earnest emotional outburst: "Like Buddha, he [Csoma] had to bear his Temptation in the Wilderness, alone and hungered; but unlike Buddha, no angels came to comfort him after his struggles with the Doubting Enemy of mankind." (cf. Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 268).

Dr. Gerard's report about Csoma's stay at the monastery of Zangla in Zanskar (1827) notes his "privations such as have been seldom endured," though he, Csoma, had "lost none of his ardour". To the medical explorer who was, among other activities, collecting fossil shells, measuring unusually massive deodars, observing cholera cases and the possibilities of vaccination, watching from a 20,000 feet elevation "a scene of desolation and grandeur beyond my power to describe", notes also that "the Hungarian" Csoma, was "far from the least remarkable of the many objects which have passed before me in this journey". His Lama had given the indispensable

help of an instructor to Csoma in collecting and arranging, as Dr. Gerard noted, 40,000 words of Tibetan "in a situation that would have driven most men to despair". While the Tibetan was "a man of vast acquirements, strangely disguised under modest confidence of superiority, the mildest and most unassuming address, and a countenance seldom disturbed by a smile," Csoma appeared to him "like one of the sages of antiquity," living most frugally and interested in nothing but his "literary avocations which, however, embrace the religions of the countries around him."

There are fine human touches, not unmixed with humour, in Dr. Gerard's extensive observations. Csoma's guide, the Lama, he wrote, "exhibits a singular union of learning, modesty and greasy habits; and Mr. Csoma in this last respect vies with his learned companion, which is not very strange in such a country." Finding the doctor capable of appreciating his work, Csoma would evince much pleasure in telling him about "those vast mines of literary riches" he was exploring—Tibetan and Sanskrit works expounding, in immense compilations, "systems of philosophy" that, in Csoma's view, were "sublime in conception and will astonish the learned in Europe". The doctor, interested more in books on medicine, saw five volumes (with more to be rescued) where Csoma had collated references to some 400 diseases and also copious physiological disquisition—"in fact", Dr. Gerard noted, "there is no knowing what they do not contain." The doctor had to restrain his initial impulse to let others know of the impressive tasks on which Csoma was engaged, because he saw that the scholar was "so scrupulously tenacious of correctness in everything relating to and said of him, and carries his high feeling and independence to a degree which may be the custom of his country but I am inclined to consider a fault in one so situated" (*vide* Duka, *op. cit.*, p. 85). There can indeed be no doubt that Csoma was *sui generis*, very unlike, for instance, his later compatriot Vambery who, in his place (which is difficult to conceive!) would have behaved very differently.

Csoma was human enough, of course, to have his occasional (though extremely rare) tantrums, and as Gerard reports, "in his conversations and expressions he is frequently disconsolate,

and betrays it in involuntary sentiment, as if he thought himself forlorn and neglected". In his self-chosen but gruelling predicament he could not be sure how the government would "receive his works", and perhaps even withdraw support. In his own mind he was sure of the value of what he was doing—he told the doctor, "with melancholy emphasis, that on his delivering up the grammar and dictionary of the Tibetan language and other illustrations of the literature of that country, he would be the happiest man on earth, *and could die with pleasure on redeeming his pledge*". (Emphasis in the original). Csoma never lost what Hunter calls "the noble confidence in his work", but it is only natural if in the excruciating conditions of his life and the absence, usually, of tangible appreciation (except for the rare mention of his labours in the 'Government Gazette') his spirit sometimes sank though his mind never lost its alertness and ardour.

Even at the cost of repetition, it must be said, again in Dr. Gerard's words based on first-hand observation, that Csoma's "whole earthly happiness consists in being merely able to live and devote himself to mankind, with no other reward than a just appreciation and an honest fame". If he had more resources, he could invite learned men from Lhasa and other places, study the Mongol language, pore over "the many valuable books in the libraries of those ancient cities" which Csoma alone could probe properly and yearned always to do. Though entirely trusted in the region where he worked, he could, with greater resources, get rid of some "irksome restraints" and even "suspicious vigilance" he still had to confront from local bigoted elements. But he never complained, for his strong sense of self-respect forbade him. Meanwhile, out of the meagre fifty rupees he had every month, he paid twentyfive to his Lama, four to a servant, one rupee for rent and something, for sure, on account of writing materials, leaving him less than twenty rupees for sustenance, and that in a remote and secluded area where everything was "expensive", for often it had to come from Sabathu or from a distance of two hundred miles. He lived almost entirely on tea "in the Tartar fashion, which is indeed more like soup, the butter and salt mixed in its preparation leaving no flavour of

tea". Living as an ascetic, "perhaps in consequence", (as Gerard noted with grim humour) he enjoyed the best of health, but it could not help being a little too much when he had to be content day after day with this "poor repast", "at once greasy and nourishing, and being easily made, very convenient in such a country"!

One must be grateful to Dr. Gerard for some detailed observations that, trivial in themselves, are also touching—in November, with winter coming, Csoma showed the doctor how, out of his pittance, he had eked out twelve rupees for a fire-place ! With deep sympathy and respect but perhaps also with a wry smile, Gerard then saw Csoma's monastery "filled with grapes and about thirty whole sheep hung up for winter consumption, yet poor Mr. Csoma can hardly afford to taste even a piece of one". Even in summer, when hill fruits were profuse and easily procured, "he abstained from everything of this sort from a prudent conviction that they would not make him happier". In a bare hut, with neither table nor bed, "two rustic benches and a couple of ruder chairs" being all the furniture there was, Csoma would sit in serene simplicity with his volumes of Tibetan, the "Kahgyur" and "Stangyur", his manuscripts and papers, piled high around him.

The sting of having been taken even for a spy at Sabathu (where, his identity established, he "was treated", it has been quoted before, "as a fool, caressed and ridiculed at the same time"), but he had salvaged his own spirit, as it were, by claiming, even in that extremity of distress, that "the world would soon see what he was". On the heights of Kanum, thus, he worked single-mindedly, sometimes even with avoidable eccentricities (as he declined Gerard's offer of English papers not only as unnecessary diversion but also as conceivable ground for suspicion of his exclusively and totally scholarly bona fides). Perhaps knowing (or intelligently guessing) some of the then far-from-pure British motivations of penetrating Trans-Himalaya, he was so punctilious that when Gerard, with whom he had formed a genuine friendship, sent him some rice and sugar he returned it all and out of his paltry purse, somehow produced sixteen rupees for some purchases at Sabathu.



Csoma's point of principle, from which he never deviated (not even in the earlier phases of his life in Hungary), was that he would accept assistance only from a public source and repay it with his work. That work, in his case, could be only—and nothing else than—the work of a scholar. “Too diffident, to appeal in his own behalf and too independent to seek the means through the hands of others” (Gerard's words), Csoma suffered much, neither the government nor the Asiatic Society, from whom, with mute suffering perhaps, Csoma from time to time expected sensitive gestures, responding as they should have done much earlier to Csoma's programmes and perspectives of work. Even so, the great man went on labouring in his own chosen vineyard—a story that astonishes, sometimes makes one angry to see the pettiness of the possessors of power, but reinforces faith in “man, proud man” who, at a certain elevation of character, can shame even the gods.

## *Tibetology Placed on Learning's Map*

Cooped up, of his own free will, in a dreary little corner of what was the stony roof of the world, Csoma spent four freezing winters in one of the most rigorous of climates, inexorably determined to fulfil the research undertaking he had promised the Government in India. Except for some meteorological observations about the temperature variations in that altitude (which he had agreed to make for some time on Dr. Gerard's particular importunity) he looked at nothing, as it were, other than the hidden treasure that he was to unravel for the world of scholarship to marvel at. Next only to Moorcroft, it was Gerard who had won his friendship and reciprocated with deep esteem. His intercession for a proper appreciation of Csoma's extraordinary labours was largely responsible for the Government Gazette (July 9, 1829) applauding "the heroic devotion of that singularly disinterested and enterprising person to the cause of literature". The Gazette noted also that Csoma was anxious "to get to the country of the Mongols" and work, as he alone could, in the libraries, rich beyond reckoning, of "the ancient cities of Lhunpo and Lassa". By this time, the Asiatic Society had shed its earlier somnolence about Csoma's mission and on its behalf Horace Hayman Wilson wrote (July 15, 1829) to Csoma, informing that strange and solitary savant that the Society would add fifty rupees a month to the government

stipend he was receiving of the same monthly amount, and would also "procure for you such books as you may think serviceable to your inquiries".

Never given to making complaints, for he knew there were horrible hurdles in the way of life he had chosen, Csoma was at the same time a sensitive, sometimes even touchy, person whose patience could occasionally break down. Hunter who knew well the habits of pen-pushers at office desks could understand, even if he could not always quite approve, why Csoma would from time to time, turn, uncharacteristically, sour. While accomplished governors-general like Amherst and William Bentinck or the more perceptive civil servants like Metcalfe, Trevelyan and Prinsep could admire and honour Csoma and his work, there were also what Hunter calls "the meaner sort of secretaries" who delighted in "petty affronts" towards other people, "the routine gentlemen" who had "the art of twice making Csoma wait for six months for an answer", who had "also the triumph of keeping him very poor". Thus disabled earlier from buying much needed manuscripts, Csoma was now too proud also to ask. The extra fifty rupees now coming his way would surely have helped, but Csoma would not touch it. Having been starved earlier of books when he needed them most, he just could not bring himself to accept an offer which, if made six years ago when he had wanted it badly, would have been gratefully received. "I beg leave", wrote Csoma in his "quaint" but clear English to the Asiatic Society, "for declining to accept the offered allowance and of returning the draft. In 1823, being destitute of books, Mr. Moorcroft, on my behalf, had requested you to send me some necessary works. I have never received any. I was neglected for six years. Now, under such circumstances and prospects, I shall want no books." (cf. Hunter, *op. cit.*, pp. 270-71; Duka, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-04).

It was perhaps a trifle regrettable, but Csoma never specialised in the worldly virtue of discretion and time-serving flexibility. Deep down in his mind and heart he had felt hurt and he could not help showing it. In this same letter he added, with a certain pride (without which he could not sustain himself the way he did): "If not prevented by some unforeseen

event, next year I shall be ready with my papers. *Then, if you please, you shall see what I have done and what I could yet do.*" (Emphasis added).

Csoma did not know how his few friends had tried in their own way to help his labours. If he did, he would perhaps have not got, as he obviously did, into a temper. But of course, he was human, not always in possession of that total detachment which was the theme of some of the texts he was rescuing from oblivion. It is not unnatural also for Captain Kennedy, generally well-disposed towards him, to write in annoyance about Csoma's "eccentric character", his "hasty and suspicious disposition", even a kind of "meanness" co-existing with his "eminent talents". Perhaps Csoma, in spite of his total involvement in purely scholarly pursuits, could not also help sensing, vaguely but with certitude, the pernicious concomitants of the fact of an imperialist power penetrating, as Britain was then doing, a region with incalculable strategic-political significance, howsoever benign the appearance might be of an explorer here or a scientist there. Thus he did have to be "suspicious" so that he could protect his own integrity. It was a trial for him, and sometimes, when even an apparently good gesture (like the Asiatic Society's) touched him in the raw, he could turn, untypically, surly and sour.

His conduct, however, was so "exemplary" (as Kennedy himself noted) during more than three years of stay in the heights that, writing on March 26, 1830, Kennedy recommended a grant of five hundred rupees to enable Csoma to travel to Calcutta with the books and manuscripts he had got together. Sanction for the amount came without trouble and Csoma's long cherished desire was at last fulfilled as he reached Calcutta, with his precious load, in April 1831 and reported his presence (and his cargo) to the Secretary to the Government on May 5, 1831. Meanwhile, he had been in correspondence with fellow orientalist like B.H. Hodgson, British Resident at Kathmandu, a pioneer of Buddhistic studies in Nepal, on subjects of mutual research interest. This correspondence reveals a typical trait in Csoma's character, namely, an excess of humility, even of diffidence—diffidence which was "most surprising" (as Henry Torrens, some time secretary of

the Asiatic Society, noted in its Journal, Vol. II, 1844) even "on subjects on which he might have dictated to the learned world of Europe and Asia". Humility sat well on this hermit of a scholar, "the pupil of Blumenbach and a graduate of the University of Gottingen", who had sat at the feet of his teacher, the Lama, and learned how to spell Tibetan like a child". This humility shines forth in his telling the rather haughty Hodgson, for example: "When Europeans shall have been acquainted with the practical part of the Buddhistic doctrine, with the language of Tibet, and with the useful popular works it contains, then I think they will excuse them in some degree for the extravagance in the dogmatical part of their religion". Nothing human was alien to this man who had known in *terra incognita* and in the "forbidden land" magnificent polymaths and splendid specimens of the human spirit in the most inhibitory climatic and communicational conditions. Csoma had fallen in love with "realms of gold" of which he never knew earlier, when he had begun his quest for the solution, if possible, of ethnological and historical problems overwhelming his mind as a young Hungarian patriot and seeker of truth. That quest was ever in his mind and heart, but for twentytwo years, traversing greater and more difficult distances than any traveller before or since in comparable circumstances, he was pioneering new fields of study, new disciplines of language and cultural inquiry, new areas of intellectual investigation that would light up the fact of man's humanity overcoming barriers put up not only by nature but by himself. Csoma's life-work is proof of the RgVedic motto of Rabindranath Tagore's 'world university', *Vishvabharati*: let us all collect "where the world becomes a single nest" ("yatra vishvam bhavatyeka needam").

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This was the time when Csoma completed, in insufferable conditions, the first part of the great task that was to be his. The whole vast domain of what might be called the classical literature of Tibet had come within his survey. In *circa* 1071 A.D. the first monastery was set up in grey-soiled country ('Sa-skya') where the sect named 'Sa-skya-pa' made itself

celebrated by espousing the learning of the time and produced eminent scholars like the author and chronicler Bu-ston (1290-1364 A.D.) who had collected and arranged all the available Tibetan translations of the Buddhist texts into two groups—Bkash-hgyur and Bstan-hgyur. These were to be popularly known later as Kanjur ('Kahgyur') and Tanjur ('Stangyur'). The former corresponds to 'Sutra', (and 'Tantra'), divine words said to have been uttered by the deity, and the latter to 'Shastras', being commentaries and other scholastic work. Incidentally, it is of great interest that the celebrated Taranath (whom India also claimed as her son) who wrote in Tibetan a "History of Buddhism in India" (completed in 1608)—to be translated into German by A. Schiefner (St. Petersburg 1869) and from German into English in "Indian Historical Quarterly", Vol. III, 1927—himself belonged to a sub-sect of the 'Sa-skyapa' and, with Bu-ston, aforementioned, became justly famous. 'Kanjur' means 'Word of the Master' and contains 104 folio volumes of 500 to 700 pages each, comprising about 1108 distinct books, in canonical form and chiefly ethical in character. 'Tanjur' means, in effect, the commentaries—in Hunter's phrase, "a still more colossal encyclopaedia of science in 225 folios, each weighing about five pounds", comprising 3,458 works on Buddhist philosophy, the system of 'Tantra' and other non-canonical literature. The once close contact of Tibet with India, especially since Shantarakshita (755-97 A.D.) was invited by its King to preach Buddhism and the doctrines of the Ten Virtues in Tibet, followed as he was by his kinsman Padmasambhava (long enshrined in Tibet's memory), was revived now by Csoma's journeys between the two countries and his incessant toil for advancing the frontiers of knowledge.

In his article on "A Pilgrim Scholar" ('Pioneer', Allahabad, 1885), often referred to earlier, Sir William Wilson Hunter adds some picturesque detail about the two massive compilations. "A single copy of the 'Kahgyur' sells in Central Asia for 7000 oxen, and its official production at Peking is officially estimated at 600 pounds sterling. In the monastery where Csoma worked these vast compilations were arranged 'in chests or cisterns standing on end and partitioned into cells, each containing a volume which is carefully wrapped within many folds, laced

with cord, and bound tightly between boards of cypress or cedar'." It was after eight years' study of such material that Csoma returned to India in 1831, a train of coolies carrying the precious cargo of manuscripts. Reaching in April 1831 the then capital of British India, Calcutta, he fulfilled the obligation he had entered into and "placed all the literary treasures in his possession at the disposal of the authorities". It took some four and a half years before the result of Csoma's literary labours could be brought almost to completion and some of them published. When that was done, "this indefatigable and unassuming student" (as James Prinsep described him) planned further programmes for the prosecution of his research.

After Amherst, the more celebrated William Bentinck was then Governor-General of British India, and it seems the atmosphere in government circles was a little less uncongenial than Csoma had the mortification of experiencing earlier. He could meet at least a few people of intellectual calibre who were not entirely insensible of the traits of greatness, lingering but not quite lost, which India had inherited from her hoary past. He was offered not only some genuine appreciation of his talents but also an increased stipend. Csoma, however, was such a proud ascetic that he would not agree to draw more than the original beggarly rate which he had not even fully spent! He took on also, without demur, the task of preparing a systematic catalogue of the Tibetan works forwarded from Nepal by R.H. Hodgson, with whom he had already been in correspondence, though not particularly friendly on the part of the other man. Hodgson, though a keen scholar, just could not hold a candle to Csoma as a human being.

On December 26, 1832, more than eighteen months after Csoma reporting himself in Calcutta, Dr. Wilson, then preparing to leave India and in some hurry, wrote again to Government about Csoma's work being ready for the press. Apart from the dictionary and the grammar that Csoma, so to speak, had contracted for, the translation of a Tibetan vocabulary that was, in effect, according to Wilson, "a summary of the Buddha system" was ready for publication and awaited government sanction of it. Wilson thought of the material

highly enough to offer to take it all with him to London for publication there, if adequate arrangements could not be made in Calcutta, with Csoma himself supervising the work. Meanwhile Csoma was lodged in the Asiatic Society's building and had happy access to its noble library for his own undisturbed research avocations. Without much delay, happily, five thousand rupees were sanctioned for printing Csoma's work and the usual ways of bureaucracy were softened somewhat when the publishing expenditure came to Rs. 6,142 (for "500 copies of one neat quarto volume of some 600 pages in typography and 32 in lithography") which also was approved without the pettifogging fuss that might have made its appearance to irritate, especially, the sensitive Csoma. On February 6, 1834, Csoma was unanimously elected Honorary Member of the Asiatic Society, a distinction the humble scholar prized highly, though it was the Society which was honouring itself by being able to count a man like Csoma on its rolls. Before election, Prinsep himself got it into the Society's record that apart from his "qualifications as a Tibetan, Sanskrit and general linguist", Csoma "had spent the last two years in preparing catalogues, translations, and superintending the printing of his Dictionary, without accepting any remuneration from the Society or the Government".

The Dictionary and the Grammar (which followed the former in a few months' time) had been compiled entirely from authentic sources, and this was vouched for by Csoma's profuse acknowledgment to the Lama of Zanskar, Csoma's constant companion (1823-30) in the monasteries of Zangla, Phuktal and Kanam, whose name is mentioned on the title page as: *Bande Sanags-Rgyas Phun-Tsogs*. With becoming modesty, Csoma spoke of "the elementary works herewith published" as "a key to unlock the immense volumes, faithful translations of the Sanskrit texts, which are still to be found in Tibet, on the manners, customs, opinions, knowledge, ignorance, superstitions, hopes and fears of a great part of Asia, especially India, in former ages".

What Csoma, characteristically, called "elementary works" were indeed of what may well be said to have been of seminal significance. His "Essay towards a Dictionary, Tibetan and



English", as he modestly described it and prominently acknowledged his debt in the preparation of the work to the Tibetan encyclopaedist who had been his teacher, was published from Calcutta in 1834 (pp. I-XXII, pp. 1-351) and was received with acclaim as the first truly scientific study of a complex and yet largely undeciphered subject. Reprinted in 1973 and again in 1978, both times from New Delhi, this work continues to be considered as the authentic foundation for all subsequent scholarship in its specialised sphere. Csoma's "A Grammar of the Tibetan Language in English" (Calcutta 1834), pp. I-VII, 1-145, App. I-VI, 147-204, lyth. pp. 1-40, was illustrative, with equal acumen, of his astounding mastery of a nearly esoteric language and its rules of construction. This book, usually assessed along with the dictionary as his foremost achievement was reprinted once in the United Kingdom in 1970 and thrice in India (1971, 1973, 1974). Another remarkable work which might be noted here was "Sanskrit-Tibetan-English Vocabulary: being an edition and translation of the Mahavyutpatti", which was culled out, on account of its unique interest, in 'Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal', Vol. IV, No. 1 (Calcutta 1910); No. 2 (Calcutta 1911), edited by Sir E. Denison Ross, and No. 3 (Calcutta 1942) edited by Mahamahopadhyaya S.C. Vidyabhushan. One might add that while Csoma's analysis of the Kanjur and the Stanjur were translated into French and appeared in the Annals of the Musee Guimet, his papers remained strewn in "Asiatic Researches" and the Asiatic Society's Journal, but learned interest will still be deeply drawn towards Sir E. Denison Ross's edition of "Tibetan Studies", being a reprint of articles by Csoma in 'Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal', which is the Alexander Csoma de Koros memorial volume of the same learned Journal, Vol. VII, Extraordinary Number, 1911. This is not an exhaustive list, but only illustrative, of Csoma's scholastic feat, but as so often stressed in this brochure, Csoma was no mere scholar but a sage and in his own way also a seer, a *rishi* in our Indian parlance, for all humanity.

It appears that on September 30, 1835, Mr. Dobrenței described as "secretary of the Hungarian Literary Society at Pest", intimated to Csoma that a public subscription could be opened

in his honour so that "the Hungarian nation might provide in a suitable manner for one of her sons who, for the sake of her ancient history, is sacrificing himself on such a thorny path". The proposal, doubtless, was rejected by Csoma who wanted no such thing. Csoma had made sure, however, that fifty copies of his book were sent to learned institutions in Europe. Besides, copiously thanking those Englishmen who had helped him through his ordeal, Csoma, characteristically, made it a point gratefully to mention in his preface the names of "two humble citizens who had been kind to him, namely, a merchant at Aleppo, a native of Bohemia, Ignatz Pohle, and Joseph Schaefer of Tyrol, a blacksmith at Alexandria, in Egypt". (*Vide Duka, op. cit.*, p. 125).

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It was as if "Providence", as Csoma noted in the preface to his dictionary, had "led him into Tibet", and through the help of Moorcroft, he had "cheerfully engaged in the study of Tibetan literature, hoping that it might serve me as a vehicle to my immediate purpose, namely, my researches respecting the origin and language of the Hungarians". Even in his last conversation with Dr. Campbell, when death was soon to overtake him, he never forgot his hopes of reaching "the goal of his most ardent wishes", the lands to the east and north of Lhasa and on the western confines of China. There, he felt, he could at last, if possible, put to the test certain vaguely but umbilically inherited ideas about the origin of his people. It is no surprise that, in some manner, this hope persisted, deep down in Csoma's heart. Perhaps also it can be said, remembering Wordsworth's famous poem, that for Csoma his "Yarrow" was better "unvisited". But the aspiration, even as it faded, was real. After all, even Endre Ady, European to his fingertips, could write much later of his Hungary having been "a land which is like a river ferry, uncertain whether it belongs to east or west". Ady also could invoke in his verse the mythical ancestors of the Hungarian people: "I am the son of Gog and Magog / In vain I hammer upon gate and wall".

En route to his goal, Csoma came across another subject of study which he gladly espoused as an aid to the pursuit of his

#### 44 *Hermit-Hero From Hungary*

basic objective. This was the literature of Tibet, “entirely”, as he noted, “of Indian origin, the immense volumes on different branches of science being exact translations from Sanskrit works”. “Many of these works”, he added, “have again been translated from Tibetan into Mongol, Manchu and Chinese languages, so that by that means the Tibetan became in Chinese Tartary the language of the learned, as the Latin is in Europe”. It was this language and its voluminous literature enshrining, in particular, the thinking of ‘Northern Buddhism,’ massive and notable for intellectual quality as well as for many esotericisms, that Csoma placed for the first time on the map of the world republic of learning.

## *Diligence, Devotion, Discovery*

Twentyfour years after Csoma's death, his compatriot, the scholarly G.W. Leitner had an interview (1866) at Phuktal with the abbot of the monastery where Csoma had lived and worked. Leitner's report indicated how Csoma was remembered with affection and reverence as the "Philangi Dasa" (foreign disciple) whose total unselfishness, uncomplaining endurance, unfailing modesty and untiring diligence had made a deep impression. Learning that Leitner came from Csoma's own country, the Tibetans whom he encountered gave him special respect, and the Abbot of the monastery made a most exceptional gesture, that of offering to conduct Leitner safely to Lhasa, "leaving, if desired, his two sons! as hostages in the hands of the government" ! This was an utterly unprecedented offer which Csoma in his time would have jumped at but Leitner, being otherwise preoccupied, could not accept. This most extraordinary invitation was open, it is learnt, to "any other European who may be actuated by the same love and devotion as Csoma had been", but in spite of Leitner repeatedly bringing this amazing opportunity to the notice of likely scholars, there was no one forthcoming. (*Vide Duka, op. cit.*, p. 160). Perhaps there was good reason for this, for even among scholars there could hardly be any whose hands were as clean as Csoma's, clean in every sense of the term, clean in the context, especially, of scholar-spies having already made their

appearance in one of the least explored yet highly strategic areas of our planet.

Meanwhile, in Calcutta, Csoma could not bring himself to rest on his oars. He kept himself busy seeing through the press his grammar and his dictionary. He made an effort, with the support of James Prinsep, to recover a donation of 142 pounds sent for him in 1832 from Hungary which, through a bad investment, the British authorities had lost but which they could easily arrange to pay in view, especially, of Csoma having always refused money for himself. It was his desire that, if the sum could be found, he would use it for buying Sanskrit manuscripts for the learned institutions of Hungary. Csoma never wanted anything for himself and offered to remit whatever sum was available, as compensation for the loss of the earlier deposit, directly to Hungary for the foundation of scholarships and other aids to learning.

Characteristically, he was supremely indifferent towards money, though of course he knew its uses and esteemed genuine philanthropy. In 1836, public subscription in his honour in his native Transylvania had raised a fund which Csoma did not accept but preferred to return it to set up at the college of Nagy-Enyed a scholarship known as the Kenderessy-Csoma award. It was exactly like Csoma never to forget that when in 1819 he had set out on foot towards Croatia, a councillor, Michael de Kenderessy, had given him a hundred florins and promised him a similar amount every year till he would return from Asia. Csoma's grateful heart was touched by this unsolicited generosity and it is this which accounts for his nomenclature of the endowment in Nagy-Enyed.

It will be like painting the lily or gilding the gold to say, repetitively, as in these pages, that the publication (1834) of Csoma's Dictionary and Grammar—the work, Csoma said, of “only a poor student”—was among the most enduring and precious additions, at the time, to human knowledge. And yet this needs to be stressed, for while subsequent scholars had the advantage of working from the heights that Csoma had first scaled there should be no forgetting the truly pioneer genius that Csoma so uniquely was. The learned H.A. Jaschke

(1817-83), author of the Tibetan-German Dictionary (1873) which includes many colloquial terms not to be found in the earlier work, said about Csoma's dictionary and grammar that they were "the work of an original investigator and the fruit of almost unparalleled determination and patience". Jaschke could, in Hunter's words, place the copestone on an edifice of which Csoma *alone* had laid the foundation and built also a large part of the structure. The St. Petersburg Tibetan Lexicon, (ed. Isac Jacob Schmidt, 1841) could be little more than an adaptation of the almost entirely irrelevant Serampore dictionary of 1826 unless Csoma's great work of 1834 was accessible to it. Even so, the St. Petersburg compilation calls for some discredit on itself on account of a perverse pose of superiority over Csoma's labours, a pose which is so pettily "patronising" that, as Hunter says, it only "moves mirth". It is not that Csoma's work did not have its defects. There were defects of method, by no means implausible also in the circumstances of the time. Csoma also had worked much too exclusively from the high ground of Tibetan classical literature, largely disregarding its contemporary, spoken forms. This was defect indeed, which Jaschke's diligence rectified, but there can be no detracting from the stupendous merits of Csoma's Dictionary and Grammar which, between themselves, constitute in the words of his Darjeeling tomb-stone, "his best and real monument".

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It will be recalled that in May, 1825, Csoma, already deeply drawn by what he called "the vast *terra incognita* of oriental learning" (drawn enough, that is to say, to adjourn for the time being, his "great aim and unceasing anxiety to get access to Mongolia") had offered the British authorities in India, whose "generosity" was indispensable even to his "subsistence", that he would do three jobs: a Tibetan grammar, a Tibetan-English dictionary of over 30,000 words, and an account of Tibetan literature, with typical illustrative specimens and all essential history super-added. This was the promise he set out to redeem during his days in Calcutta. He had so far only partially fulfilled his great desire, nourished from adolescence,

“to enter into the cabinet of curiosity of remote ages”. But there was no let-up in his toils. The “Bengal Asiatic Society’s Journal” and the “Bengal Asiatic Researches,” noted herein-before, furnish evidence, in many of its volumes, of the work he was turning out. It was thus that he became the father, so to speak, of a new discipline, Tibetology, which gave another qualitative dimension to Oriental studies in Europe. Let it also never be forgotten that even before the great Burnouf who in the ‘forties of the 19th century laid the foundation not only of Vedic and Pali studies but also of Buddhism in the West, it was our lonely Hungarian, far away from the aura of association with academies, the somewhat astonishing but in his near-mendicant austerities always endearing “Philangi Dasa” (foreign disciple) of apparently inscrutable Lamas, this strange but sublime “pilgrim” from a far away country, who was “the founder of Tibetan studies in Europe”.

Csoma was as far from spiritual pride as one could be, but he was perceptive enough to realize that his pioneer labours, almost as a sapper-and-miner and also a commander, would open up a new field of humanistic inquiry and learning. Thus he once wrote: “When there shall be more interest taken for Buddhism (which has much in common with true Christianity)...the Tibetan dictionary may be much improved, enlarged and illustrated by the addition of Sanskrit terms”. It is good to see that the intrepid Indian investigator Sarat Chandra Das who followed somewhat in the wake of Csoma and did original work in the sphere of Tibetan research, said in the preface to his “Introduction to the Grammar of the Tibetan Language” (1915) that “the scholarship which (Csoma) displayed has not been surpassed by any subsequent student of Tibetan”. It is good also to note that in his introduction to “Tibetan Compendia Written for Csoma de Koros” (Budapest 1976), a collection of manuscripts in the Hungarian Academy of Sciences which his learned Indian colleague Lokesh Chandra helped to edit, Jozshef Terjek speaks of Csoma as “the first to recognize humanism in Tibetan culture”. This will be no surprise, for “the founder of Occidental Tibetology”, as some recent scholars have rather cumbrously designated Csoma, had met, in the ‘forbidden’ land, such men, in every sense the peer

of the best in the West, as the three Lamas who had been his teachers and prepared at his behest compendia of their own scholastic knowledge, now available to the inquisitive, thanks to the Lokesh Chandra—Terjek compilation. Csoma and the Lamas must have looked mutually to one another very different, without doubt, perhaps somewhat diverting, almost funny, denizens of apparently dissimilar planets, their historical conditioning utterly unlike, yet—this merits repetition—they discovered also (and this, indeed, was Csoma's superb spiritual struggle) that on a certain, universal plane "there is neither East nor West / Border nor breed nor birth", and that we are all, in our varied human predicament, "members of one another" in the best scriptural sense of the term.

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From 1834 to 1837, as an honorary member (then a rare distinction) of the Asiatic Society, Csoma busied himself especially with the study of Sanskrit and other Indian languages descending from it, for he had learnt that without mastery of Sanskrit there could not be any real grasp of philology and cognate studies to which he had been drawn. In November 1835 he wrote to James Prinsep, by this time an illustrious researcher and as kindred a soul as one could be to Csoma (for Prinsep during 1834-39 was making wonderful discoveries about the age, the script and the language of our oldest inscriptions in the so-called Kharoshthi, Brahmi, Kushan and Gupta characters) asking for a 'passport' so that he could travel "to the interior" and "improve himself in Sanskrit and in the different dialects". His idea had been to make a wide sojourn not only in north-eastern Bengal but also "the north-western parts of India", which is why he wanted two passports, one in English under the simple title of 'Mr. Alexander Csoma, a Hungarian philosopher, native of Transylvania' and the other in Persian, the designation being, as earlier on his voyage, 'Molla Eskander Csoma az Mulk-i-Rum'. Csoma reiterated his undertaking, voluntarily given in order to ward off the least suspicion of association with espionage or allied operations (even the thought of it irked him deeply), that he would correspond with Europe, if at all, only in the Latin language



and through the government, while *all* his letters would be sent "without being closed".

He had, in keeping with his character, asked for no pecuniary assistance but Prinsep, solicitous about ensuring at least the barest minimum for "this indefatigable and unassuming" savant on a three-year journey, informed government that Csoma would not take anything out of the balance of some five hundred rupees that was his, and proposed that he should be given an allowance of fifty rupees per month "as long as he may remain prosecuting studies from which the government or the learned of our country may derive benefit". Prinsep stressed also that Csoma's "publications on Buddha literature in the pages of the Asiatic Society's Journal, are of the highest interest". He conveyed once again to the authorities his appreciation—which coming from one of Prinsep's genius is doubly significant—of "the labour it must have cost" Csoma to go through the multitude of Kanjur and Tanjur volumes, now made known for the first time to the learned world. The passport was issued and Csoma moved out of Calcutta, travelling by boat till he reached Malda, on the river Ganga, in northern Bengal, on January 20, 1836.

Like St. Francis of Assissi who had chosen to "espouse poverty as a bride", our hermit-hero wrote from Malda to Prinsep: "...I have suffered nothing of which I should complain...I feel much obliged for the kindness and good service done to me by you and by those whom you had employed to procure me this boat with such men. According to the agreement made with the 'Manji' (boat-man), which I have enclosed here, I had paid 8 rupees in Calcutta, besides one for oil and 'masul' or 'duty', and of the remaining six, I have given him here again 3 rupees, and I beg, sir, you will order the other 3 rupees also to be paid him, and to be put on my account. Besides the above specified 12 rupees, I have given yet to these five men in common, 3 rupees as a reward for the service done me by them. Tomorrow I shall leave this place, having hired again a small boat for 8 rupees to carry me up to Kissenganj. When I shall have fixed myself at any place in the upper part of this country, for a certain time, and have visited the Sikkim Raja, I shall be happy to acquaint you with

what I shall have learned... ." These are not tedious little details ; the simple narration almost draws tears out of one's eyes.

British officers, perhaps not appreciative but not ill-intentioned either towards the singular personality of Csoma, would offer him hospitality on the way north, but Csoma always avoided them. Even Major Lloyd (later known as founder of Darjeeling) who commanded a frontier station and achieved near-friendship with Csoma, could not get him to stay in his house. "He thought his eating and living with me", wrote Lloyd, would cause him to be deprived of the familiarity and society of natives with whom it was his wish to be colloquially intimate." This was, doubtless, not only a philological but also a philosophical preference. Csoma would live in a hut and subsist on boiled rice and tea. "I got him a servant to whom he paid three or four rupees a month", Lloyd once recalled, "and his living did not cost him more than four more... ." 'High thinking' must thus have compensated for what was indeed 'plain living' with a vengeance ! To cut short the story which could be easily lengthened of his deliberate self-deprivation, the accumulated surplus of his stipend, along with what he had been presented from Hungary, was sent back home to his relatives and in aid of Hungarian scholarly pursuits.

Csoma's programme at the time was the study of Sanskrit and Bengali and also "the acquirement of the principal dialects". His extraordinary talent for languages led to his proficiency in ancient and modern tongues—Hebrew, Arabic, Sanskrit, Pushtu, Greek, Latin, Slavonic, German, English, Turkish, Persian, French, Russian, Tibetan, to which list were now added Bengali, Hindustani, Marathi. (It appears, from one unclear Prinsep reference that he had intended also to study Maithili with its rich literature that was spoken in the Bihar-Bengal border). As he settled down for some length of time in Titilya, which was in Major Lloyd's beat, he was found, Lloyd reported, "absorbed in the study of the Sanskrit, Mahratta and Bengali languages". It appears he nursed for a while the idea of going over the mountains to Kathmandu, capital of Nepal, but he was then allergic, (if Lloyd's report is to be credited) to travelling through Sikkim towards

Lhasa in Tibet. Even the journey to Kathmandu, where B.H. Hodgson himself had once before invited him, was given up because of Csoma's feeling that he could not get to Tibet *via* Nepal. The reason perhaps for his refusal to take the Sikkim route (through 'Nathu-La, presumably) was that he had meanwhile taken on other studies that he wanted for some time at least to pursue before he could resume his earlier Tibetan trail. In 1838 also, he would receive an official invitation to join a mission to Bhutan, which he rejected because, he said, there was no prospect of reaching Tibet by that route. Perhaps a deeper reason was his distaste, even detestation, for close links with officialdom and his concern, now grown deep and dear, for Sanskrit and allied studies that he had keenly undertaken. In January 1837 he was back in Calcutta, a more than competent Sanskrit scholar, ready to resume tasks already begun in the only urban haunt that could draw him, namely, the premises of the Asiatic Society.

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It sounds perhaps a trifle ironic but this marvel of a scholar from Transylvania was given the designation of sub-librarian of the Asiatic Society that also gave him living space in its building. He did not need much of the things of this world, and he set up house, so to speak, in a little quadrangle formed by four boxes of books around him, and in between a mat where he sat, worked and slept, undeterred by the normal ways of life even in that centre of learning. His room, if it can be so-called, looked like a cell which he never left except for rare, short walks in the corridors of the building and nowhere else. A distinguished visitor who saw him from time to time in Calcutta has left a description of the hermit "absorbed in phantastic thoughts, smiling at the course of his own ideas, taciturn like the Brahmans who, bending over the writing desks, are employed in copying texts of Sanskrit". Csoma had found treasures untold in trans-Himalayan monasteries, the first European truly to decipher and describe the hidden wealth of multiform, if also surely and ineluctably 'medieval', Tibetan lore. Its fountain-head Sanskrit was now being imbibed in Csoma's own manner and he would just shut his doors against

every inessential intrusion on the realms he had plunged himself to explore.

He even kept his room locked from the outside so that the keys had to be sent for before entry was possible. This is almost funny but Csoma had truly barricaded himself away from the world—did not Sir William Hunter feel impelled to the thought that Csoma was like Robert Browning's famous "grammarian": "This man decided, not to live, but know—"? Csoma, of course, was no cynic; he was never one who had lost faith in mankind and cloistered in his cell, just kept austere away. All contemporary reports indicate that he was a different person, even though he must have been somewhat difficult, whenever he found congenial company, but such company, necessarily, could count itself in the fingers of one's hand. To Dr. Malan, for some years the Asiatic Society's secretary, for example, he was "so kind and genial", "a man of middle stature, much weather-beaten from his travels, but kind, amiable, willing to impart all he knew". "I used to delight in his company", the learned and reverend doctor once wrote, "he was altogether one of the most interesting men I ever met." It was to Malan that Csoma gave "all his Tibetan books" which were later presented by the former to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Whoever was capable of appraising a rare soul like Csoma's, then in Calcutta, felt fascinated, if not always admitted to the charmed circle where only a very few could find entry. And from the end of 1837 to early 1842 Csoma was keeping himself occupied with cataloguing manuscripts and other solid work for the Asiatic Society, while perhaps preening himself, spiritually, for further flights of intellectual inquiry he had always carried in his mind and heart but was not destined to perform.

What also shines brightly in his ascetic seclusion was the deep love for his homeland that had never faltered, a kind of feeling, that only such as Endre Ady could articulate, for "this little country hounded by fate", for Hungary, then (as Ady once said poignantly) "a great fallow" that called for "new flames, new faiths, new forges, new saints" to prevent relapse into "a fog of nothingness". Csoma and Ady were, of course, in very different brackets of life but they shared the propensity of

Hungary's great men for proximity with their people and their "many hungers". This alone perhaps accounts for his compatriot Theodor August Schofft, a native of Pest and a well-known painter (highly esteemed and busy with his brush for some years in the court of Ranjit Singh in Lahore) speaking of Csoma in the way he did as they met in Calcutta (1839): "He [Csoma] was cheerful, often merry, his spirits rose considerably when he took the opportunity of talking about Hungary. Often, when speaking of our native land, our conversation was protracted till after ten o'clock [This was a normally inconceivable deviation from Csoma's routine !], I began to suspect, however, that he would never see his native land again... . "The painter wrote also that he "never saw a more strange man than him"—"very talkative" when the subject was Hungary but "a hermit among his Tibetan and other works," living "almost a prison life...a mere shadow of an existence", but in his own way giving "the people of that city [Calcutta] much clearer ideas about Hungary than ever before". (*Vide Duka, op. cit.*, p. 141; Hunter, *op. cit.*, pp. 274-75). Who can ever know, much less communicate (except perhaps a creative artist "delving into the deepest and thorniest problems" of a life like Csoma's, "with bold and painful hands", as Ady said in a different context) what went on in the mind of Csoma, grave, almost taciturn, sometimes lit up with an inward smile, a Hungarian patriot in every fibre of his being but one to whom, as a Sanskrit adage goes, "all the three worlds are his own country"?

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It was not to be long, however, before Csoma decided to leave his self-chosen "prison life" and soar again into the heights where he felt free, felt also that perhaps from that Pisgah of his climbing, he would spot correctly the Promised Land of his young dreams. By 1842, when he was fiftyeight, he felt sure he could try and tread again the soil he had always yearned avidly to explore. Sir William Hunter perhaps was not exactly a typical, phlegmatic Briton, but Csoma clearly inspired him into fervid prose. The Hungarian had "soberly worked and cautiously reasoned" from that "little quadrangle of book-boxes

that was his duke-dom," wrote Hunter, but there now arose before him "visions of the cloud-cap't towers and snowy realms of the Himalayas". On February 9, 1842, he wrote a farewell letter to the Asiatic Society, recounting his heartfelt gratitude for everything, and intimated his intention of "a tour in Central Asia", again as an ascetic who firmly declined any correspondence during his travels from Europe (if it came, the Society must "kindly do with it as you think best"), and reiterating his earlier resolution to bequeath all he possessed to the Asiatic Society in the event of his death.

It was again, very probably, in a "native boat" that he travelled up the Ganga, then by land northward till he reached the 'Terai', the swampy area abutting on the foothills, his immediate destination being the range where Darjeeling was the focal point. Very probably, again, it was in the 'Terai', dreaded almost as a death-trap then and for long years subsequently, where the people, Europeans particularly, were prone to seizure by paroxysms of high malarial fever. Csoma was travelling then, no doubt, on foot, slowly and as inexpensively as had ever been his wont, in the process spending more time than if he could rush through, in a territory teeming with terrible health hazards. He reached Darjeeling on March 24, and on April 6 he was overtaken by fever which played painful pranks with his body and in a mere six days consumed it (April 11, 1842).

Thanks to the clear and perceptive reports sent in by the worthy Dr. Campbell, the chief officer at the station, one gets a good, even memorable picture of Csoma's last days. In spite of the fatigue gnawing at his frame and the fever boiling up, Csoma was cheerful enough, to begin with, for the good doctor thought he could procure, through the Raja of Sikkim, permission for Csoma to proceed into Tibet. Even the agent of the Raja, who had come to see what Csoma was like, was astounded "at finding a *Feringhee* ['foreigner' deriv. 'Frank'] a complete master of the colloquial language of Tibet and so much his superior in acquaintance with the religion and literature of that country". Dr. Campbell had also successfully vouched for the complete integrity of the scholar who had no political, religious or any other axe to grind. The Raja, it was

felt, would help the scholar's journey and Csoma, always modest and almost silent on the value of his tasks, looked forward happily to meeting the learned men of eastern Tibet, reputedly superior to those whom Csoma had been able to contact so far. In conversation with the doctor, Csoma would often exclaim: "What would Hodgson, Turnour and some of the philosophers of Europe not give to be in my place when I get to Lassa?" He was making his final plans, leaving with Campbell "all his books, papers and bank-notes to the amount of 300 rupees" and a complete series of the Asiatic Society's journal to be kept in the doctor's custody if he never returned from his quest.

A six-day illness, with the patient resisting even Dr. Campbell's kindly ministrations (because, as Csoma would protest with typical obstinacy, he had often recovered "without physic") ended at the early hour of five in the morning of April 11, 1842 when he died, the good doctor wrote; "without a groan or struggle". Dr. Campbell, pursuing the duties of his office, took charge of Csoma's earthly belongings—"the effects" consisting of "four boxes of books and papers, the suit of blue clothes which he always wore and in which he died, a few sheets and one cooking pot". The "detailed list" is also brief: "bank-notes for 300 rupees to which he alluded before his death, a memorandum regarding government papers for 5000 rupees [which he had wished to leave to the Asiatic Society], cash to the number of 224 rupees of various coinage and a waistbelt containing 26 gold pieces (Dutch ducat, I believe)... ." The intricacies of testamentary law kept the Asiatic Society out of the picture, and Csoma's worldly goods, such as they were, went back in due course to his beloved country. The legacy he left, however, not alone to Hungary but to the world, can be counted in coin very different from what currencies circulate. With poetic justice, as it were, he lies buried in the high Himalayas—"Here, here's his place / where meteors shoot, clouds form, lightnings are loosened / stars come and go... ." How apt, indeed, is Hunter's moving citation further from Browning's famous verse: "Lofty designs must close in like fects: / Loftily lying, / Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects, / Living and dying"!

## *Scholar Extraordinary*

In India's estimation, Csoma de Koros has a very special place and Hungarian friends of our country should understand that it irks us in India to see, though in hurried and presumably transient journalistic references, the mention almost in the same breath of another Hungarian orientalist, Arminius Vambery (1832-1913). The latter also was, doubtless, an admirable, innovative and intrepid investigator, the language and ethnography of Turkey being his speciality, but Csoma—bless his saintly soul !—was in a very different category, both as scholar and as a deeply dissimilar human being, his life and his labours to the very last emitting a glow whose uniqueness deserves commensurate perception and respect. Certain comparisons, besides, are not only just invidious but definitely better avoided. How one wishes someone like Csoma's compatriot who was in India during the 'fifties of the last century, the violinist M.E. Remenyi, who had learnt to sense something of the secret strength and seductiveness of our long-lasting India (this can be guessed from some of his correspondence with Dr. Hunter), could have seen Csoma and written contemporaneously about his *tapasya* and his *Sadhana* (these are untranslatable Sanskrit words which are known, anyway, to many people abroad and to all in India).

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In the years before independence Indian historical scholarship



would often seek some spiritual salve for the wounds of subjection by recalling with ardour the glories of the country's past, sometimes even in the manner of wish-fulfilment exaggerating the picture. For a time, thus, the proud claim of a 'Greater India' had come into vogue, the story of Indian culture spreading far into other Asian lands warming the cockles of our heart. Happily, it was almost entirely free of the latent taint of chauvinism, but something like an excessive Indo-philism could hardly be avoided. One of our recent scholars, Nirmal C. Sinha, himself a Tibetologist, who tried in "Greater India: Fact, Fiction and Fetish" (Bhagalpur, 1971, p. 10) to draw a balance quotes, for instance, a German orientalist: "The waters of the Ganga made fertile the arid steppes of Central Asia".

Leaving aside the errors of exuberance there is good reason, however, for India to rejoice that for many hundred years a vivid and variegated cultural interchange was pursued with neighbour countries, overcoming natural and other obstacles that were almost insurmountable. All this, no doubt, was possible because in spite of ups and downs in her history India was yet far away from the inexorably alien assault that imposed on her the subjugation of Britain and threw on her soul a load of damp cement, as it were, to keep her inert and almost entirely sterile.

Though not immediately relevant to our theme, it is a joy to remember such landmarks as the visit, along with Dharmaratna, of Kashyap Matanga, the first Indian scholar known to have reached China (circa 65 A.D.), the emperor Ming, according to legend, having, after a dream, sent for the Buddha's gospel. A Yue-chi, given the name of Dharma Raksha, is said on his part to have travelled widely in India and translated no less than 211 Sanskrit works into Chinese (circa 284-313 A.D.), among them a translation of 'Lalitavistara' (circa 1st century B.C.) one of the so-called 'nine Dharmas' held in great reverence in Mahayana Buddhist literature, a biography of Buddha, more superman than man, its original text available in Mongolia whose scholars were at one time to Tibetan monasteries like our Csoma had been in the 19th century in search of treasure. The next great peak of an Indian name in China is that of Kumarajiva (end of 4th century A.D.), who became after a long

stay, 'Rajguru' (King's preceptor) in the imperial court, under whose direction over 800 scholars did more than 106 translations from Sanskrit (most of them lost in India but extant in Chinese). It was Kumarajiva whose apostolate established 'Mahayana' (which he had accepted after having been an adherent of 'Hinayana', the original creed) as the dominant school of Chinese Buddhism. Kumarajiva translated also the philosopher-scientist Nagarjuna's seminal works since he and his disciple Aryadeva had been the pre-eminent restorers of Mahayana, but neither Nagarjuna nor other notables like Asanga and Vasubandhu, who were in their own way no less important than the later Sankara and Ramanuja, would have escaped oblivion if Chinese translations and biographies were not preserved abroad. Their fate would have been like that of Kanada and the materialist Charvaka school whose very memory was obliterated in a virtual class war (in the ideological field) some time during India's past. It appears that Dharmakshema, from central India (died 434 A.D.) had done many translations into Chinese of important texts, among them, pre-eminently, the great Asvaghosha's 'Buddha-charita' epic, the extant Sanskrit text having 17 cantos while the Chinese translation covers a longer theme and has 28 cantos concluding with the Buddha's 'Nirvana'. The doctrine of direct inner experience, that of the 'Dhyana' school, is said to have been taken to China from India by Bodhidharma who reached Canton about 520 A.D. Towards the end of the 7th century A.D. Vajrabodhi travelled from southerly Kerala to India's famous north-eastern university at Nalanda and then, with his chief disciple Amoghavajra reached China (719 A.D.) to propound what were described as the 'prime mottoes' of Buddhism. Not Buddhism alone but other Hindu beliefs and systems were spreading for several exciting centuries, and it was no surprise when the late Raghu Vira, founder of the International Institute of Culture in New Delhi, could bring back around 1953 a vast treasure from China and Mongolia, among which were a third-century summary of the Ramayana story, a banner with the 'Gayatri' hymn inscribed in Mongolian and a host of other precious antiques. When the present writer was in the Mongolian capital Ulan Bator in 1965, he was delighted to see in a Buddhist monastery the words

'Om Manipadme Hum' inscribed in Sanskrit characters on the door-post. 'Mahayana', the 'Great Vehicle', often called (with doubtful precision) 'Northern' or just 'Tibetan Buddhism', represents, at any rate, a memorable journey of the human spirit across the high Himalayas. And to balance the Indian names already noted (which are unfamiliar to the world), one should name here also that tremendous Chinese trio, Fa Hien who was in India during the whole of the first decade of the fifth century (399-410 A.D.), Hiuen Tsang in the 7th (630-45 A.D.) and I-tsing (671-95 A.D.) following him, the T'ang period (A.D. 618-907) having been the heyday of India-China cultural contacts. These thoughts suffuse the mind even as one contemplates Csoma in his solitary labours, thoughts, for example, of the literature of 'Prajna', begun, it is said, by Subhuti, a direct disciple of the Buddha, the basis, one learns, of Mahayana beliefs that Csoma studied in their myriad manifestations in thought and action.

It will be crude "materialism" if one scoffs at this apparent pre-occupation with what one might, in exasperation, call a lot of mumbo-jumbo, for whatever, on historical grounds, comes truly to grip the masses turns, as Marx himself once said, into a material force. There can be no mistaking the powerful historical role of religion as a social factor. Who else has referred to it in such truly majestic terms as Karl Marx did when he described religion as "the generalised theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compend, its logic in a popular form" and hence, as he put it, "the criticism of religion is the beginning of all criticism"? Let there be no straying, however, into such entrancing but not easily charted fields, for our hero is Csoma—no theologian flaunting rigid doctrines but a seeker after the truth of life, coolly and patiently collecting facts out of which could be glimpsed the reality of man's existence on this planet, his work and worship, his problems and pains, his yearning, in different ways, for transcending 'la condition humaine' which has always thrown up riddles without end. Csoma, however, was no mere speculator but a scientist-investigator who knew how to limit himself to objective areas of study and analysis, and it is to his eternal credit that he was the first to throw open to the world the Tibetan treasures, to pioneer Buddhistic studies in Europe, to expand the connotation itself of Indology, to illumine the links

between Tibet and Central Asia on the one hand and India on the other, and to win for himself, a European savant, a special place in Indian hearts, that of a sage and a scholar right out, as it were, of the ancient epics.

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It appears that Tibet had a ruler, her greatest in the early period, Srong-tsang-gampo (629-50 A.D.) who annexed portions of Assam and introduced into Tibet a modified Indian alphabet based on Nagri. He had a Nepalese wife who might have influenced the growth of the Indian cult of 'Tara' worship. During the reign of Khri-Srong-ide-Btsan (circa 755-797 A.D.) many Indian scholars were invited, the most notable being Santarakshita who became the King's *guru* (preceptor) and is said to have been responsible for getting invited to the mountain country the great Padmasambhava (750-800 A.D.), founder of the 'Tantric' sect of Buddhism in Tibet, known till this day as 'Guru Rimpoche', the precious teacher. On their part, Tibetan monks were coming up fast, like Phags-Pa who was invited in 1256 A.D. to the Mongol court and became the preceptor ('Raj-guru') of the redoubtable Kublai Khan who made him head of the Buddhist church. Even earlier, in spite of the dreaded Chengiz Khan having compelled Tibet's surrender (1206 A.D.), Tibet had won spiritual hegemony over the Mongols, as in 1239 A.D. the abbot Sa-Sakya (the still legendary 'Sakya Pandita') won them over to Buddhism. The one major work of purely literary interest which Csoma de Koros picked out for translation from the vast realm of Tibetan writing was Sakya Pandita's 'Subhashita-ratnanidhi' (the Tibetan title, of course, is different and is not cited here as being rather intimidating to unaccustomed eyes and ears !), about which much scholarly disquisition has followed since.

Padmasambhava is said to have introduced 'Vajrayana' Buddhism in Tibet and carried with him many Tantric texts from India which with the help of Tibetan scholars like Vairochana (the name is Sanskritised) he translated into the language of the country. Mention must be made of an eminent Tibetan, Thon-mi-sam-bhota, minister to Tibet's greatest king already mentioned, who translated, with Indian help, many

Tibetan Buddhist works, like Karanda-vyūha and truly began the massive work (that Csoma discovered) of the two sacred collections, the Kanjur (which was the Word of God, as it were, being 'Buddha-vachana', authoritative as revelation like the Indian 'śruti') and the Tanjur (which were doctrinal treatises corresponding to the 'śāstras', to 'smṛiti', etc.). What astounding human annals lie behind the tussle, which must have happened, between the new learning and the old Tibetan 'Bon' beliefs and practices, till Buddhism in Tibet, mingled with native concepts, developed a mystic esotericism not unrelated to later Mahayana cults in India like 'Mantrayana' 'Vajrayana', 'Kalachakrayana' and 'Sahaja-yana' ! What a stupendous co-operative enterprise was represented in getting together the truly monumental Kanjur and Tanjur compilations, far overshadowing encyclopaedias prepared in incomparably more congenial conditions ! It is amazing how people deeply dissimilar in every way came to develop this truly winning quality of happy collaboration on literally endless intellectual tasks, so that the scriptures and philosophical works, giant vocabularies (the Indian 'Amarakośha' finding its counterpart), literary works, treatises on grammar, prosody, drama, aesthetics, astronomy *et al* could be faithfully duplicated. It can be no surprise that when Csoma's eyes lighted on such treasure untold, he felt perhaps, as Keats had imagined Cortes, overwhelmed by sight of a New World, "silent, upon a peak in Darien". Though "a quintessence of dust", one muses, remembering Shakespeare, "what a piece of work is man !"

From Odantapuri, the famed university campus in north Bengal, had gone across the Himalayan heights the "precious teacher", Padmasambhava, and it was again from Bengal (which is the present writer's home) that there went *via* Nepal, to Tibet (1042 A.D.) a man whose memory is cherished in legend and in song, the great Dipankar Atisa Shrijñan, a sophisticated philosopher who, rather allergic towards 'Vajrayana' and similar mysteries, stressed and expounded the doctrines, formulated with the tried tools of intellectual discourse, of Asanga and Nagarjuna. Dipankar Atisa Shrijñan did not entirely deny the merits of the then new-fangled schools of 'Hatha-yoga' and other aids, presumably, to meditation, but his bent was scholas-

tic though there must have been in his composition the charity (in the Biblical sense) which made him so remarkably acceptable to a very alien environment. He based himself and his elucidations on 'Prajna-paramita' literature which Csoma found engrossing and important to an understanding of the human milieu in the Asian Middle Ages. One hardly dares make these inevitably incidental and inadequate references to that tremendous structure that was the Buddhist Canon, but to get at least a faintly perspective picture of the scene that Csoma was the first to unveil there must be some mention here of a significant fact. Nagarjuna, whose name well deserves to be in the world's pantheon of learning, wrote a great commentary on 'Prajna-paramita' and apropos of the same theme, a monumental work on Hinayanic and Mahayanic lore, but the original Sanskrit is lost while Kumarajiva's Chinese translation is luckily extant. Many of the originals of Buddhist literature in Pali, Buddhist Sanskrit and pure Sanskrit are lost but can be recovered only from Tibetan and Chinese translations. It was Csoma de Koros, finding his treasure-trove, who drew attention first to this phenomenon and lighted the way ahead.

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In the library of the K.P. Jayaswal Institute in Patna will be found many original Sanskrit texts which Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityayana had brought back in 1930-31 after a long stay for study in Tibet. A Buddhist monk for some time, Rahul turned into a Marxist, pursuing academic research under his teacher the great Tcherbatsky in Leningrad, participating for some time in the communist movement, especially among the toiling peasants, in India, on all accounts a remarkable scholar and patriot. Like Mahamahopadhyay Haraprasad Shastri, born perhaps a decade after Csoma's death, who had followed in Hodgson's wake to work among the treasures of Sanskrit in Nepal, Rahul, though in a very different context, had found his way in Csoma's footsteps. Sarat Chandra Das, working earlier under the cloud, unfortunately, of British employment, was more a lexicographer than a scholar of the type that could hold a candle to one like Csoma. Happily, good work in Tibetology has been done since Csoma, in his own fashion (which modern scholarship, with a

plethora of aids and tools, can perhaps scoff at in view of certain lacunae in Csoma's method but, one trusts, will never do) led the way.

If it was like old times in Tibet when Csoma found himself on its fringes, perhaps he would have been like Sakya Pandit or his nephew Phagspa (1235-80 A.D.), feted by Godan and by Kublai Khan of famous memory, invested, as Phagspa was, with supreme authority over Tibet. A Polish scholar, Piotr Klafkowski, speaking in Delhi at the Csoma memorial Seminar (April 11, 1977) mentioned an entry in Phagspa's diaries under the year 1271 about a foreign traveller who had arrived at the court and got friendly with the Khan. "What a challenge it is for a literary imagination", he wrote, "to visualize Phagspa engaged in conversation with Marco Polo !" (Seminar Report, Delhi University 1979, p. 41). Csoma, however, was a hermit or had sedulously brought himself to grow into one, and he was at home in solitude, content to commune with the mountain wilderness and with the eerie winds that blew so often as he sat and worked or reflected in his not-too-well-sheltered cell. "Absorbed in phantastic thoughts, smiling at the course of his own ideas", he appeared even to eminent observers a "taciturn" man, reticent, retiring, almost perhaps a misanthrope, but while his work and the stern moral imperatives of his being kept him away from normal human contacts, it is always abundantly plain that the meticulous scholar had a heart of gold, that for his own native land he always had love abounding, that even as British Indian officialdom irked him badly he responded with warmth to every human advance, that for subjugated India he had the understanding that comes only out of profound perception, that there is never the faintest hint of a whisper in his conduct which reflects unfavourably on the stricken people with some of whom, like his Brahman assistants, he came in close contact. He had his own clear task cut out and he felt himself always under a moral obligation to the British government to refrain from anything that could be even remotely to its prejudice. He was in nowhere near the position of the Russian orientalist who specialised in Buddhist history, Minayev, who visited India later and wrote on his experience of men and things. Perhaps if he was, he would have made memorable observations on the Indian

scene, the rich past of the country, its current ordeals and the perspectives of the future. Such speculation is idle and in Csoma's case, almost unworthy. He was what he was, a scholar extraordinary and a miracle of a man.





## *Last Repose in the Himalaya's Heart*

There is a letter dated September 30, 1835, from the then Secretary of the Hungarian Literary Society, Dobrentei, asking for Csoma's consent to a "public subscription" at home to help one "who, for the sake of Hungary's ancient history, is sacrificing himself on such a thorny path." Csoma, presumably, did not agree—at any rate no reply from him has been traced, though his attitude in such matters, as noted earlier, was plain. Besides, by that time Csoma had launched on deeper pursuit of Sanskrit studies, Tibetan and Sanskrit having for over a decade then having opened wide fields of investigation and "speculation on the history of mankind", his mind impressed by such discoveries as that the whole of the Mahabharata epic, if lost in its home, could be recovered from Tibetan monasteries that had "afforded an asylum" to the neighbour country's literature. He had found valuable tit-bits of knowledge like that in the Tanjur there were "many excellent treatises on grammar" written by "a celebrated ancient pundit or professor", Chandra Komi, after whom, wrote Csoma, the town of Chandernagore (for a long while a French enclave in India) near Calcutta had been named. He found it scintillating, for example, to discover that in 1592 A.D. Padma Karpo, "a celebrated Lama in the Bhutan country of Tibet" had made an important contribution towards settling the "great uncertainty" over the era of Shakya the Buddha. It was to him a never-ending delight to find reason for respect of our own

human species in every clime as when he found in the Tanjur such universal moral maxims as in the English version that follows: "Hear ye all this precept, hear / Having heard, do not forget / 'Whatever I wish not to myself / I never do it to another.'" With the intellectual expectations fondly nourished since early youth, Csoma did, perhaps around 1835, exclaim: "Till now, I could not do anything for my nation." But he was working, and worked unto the last on a wider plane, the higher plateau that lent him the vision of an inter-related world, of humanity linked as "members of one another".

The treasures of Tibetan lore and learning must have fascinated him, quite apart from whatever anticipations he might have had in his mind about clues to be gleaned for exploring the origins of his own race and language. This can be seen plainly from his correspondence, and more, from the minute and meticulous care he took in such endless and exacting tasks as were involved in the preparation of his grammar and dictionary as well as the voluminous extracts he brought to light about Tibetan history and literature. With what rare generosity of spirit and without a tinge of superiority complex he refers to his Tibetan masters, doubtless very unlike their European prototypes but in their own right entitled to respect as wonderful encyclopaedists! There was, for example, Sangye Phuntsog, a red sect 'Lama' of Zanskar who knew "the whole system of religion" and almost everything worth-while in the books as well as in regard to the customs and manners, the economy, the history and the geography of Tibet and its adjacent regions, apart from his mastery of "medicine, astronomy, astrology, grammar, calligraphy, poetry, rhetoric, dialectic and arithmetic". It was to this stupendous person that Csoma, wondering as he delved into such mines as the Kanjur and the Tanjur ('sruti' and 'smriti' respectively of Tibetan lore), put questions, explained his doubts and difficulties, to be answered by the master. The manner was not and could not be exactly Socratic, but it is a reminder, as A.H. Franke, the eminent Tibetologist points out, of the 'Questions' that the Indo-Greek chieftain Menander, convert to Buddhism, had asked of the monk Nagasena close on two thousand years ago. It is significant, especially in the context of a study of Csoma, that

'Milindapanha' ('Questions of Milinda', i.e. Menander) was composed originally in Sanskrit or some north Indian Prakrit, but the original text is lost and the extant text is a Pali translation of the original made in Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Milinda, however, was aching for belief while Csoma was aching for knowledge, both seekers from the west in different ways of the wisdom there must be in every clime.

Maurice Winternitz of Prague's Charles University has left us perhaps the finest historical survey of ancient Indian literature and remarks, rightly, that in India, one learns the texts not just out of the manuscripts and books but from the mouth of the teacher, often endowed in these old countries with astonishing memory retaining correctly over the generations the texts, sacred as well as profane, with commentaries and all, and (with no printed books about) making sure that from teacher to disciple the torch continued to be faithfully relayed. Tibet had the comparative advantage, as did China also for a longer period, of the printing technique, howsoever clumsy, having been devised, and the physical elevation and climate of Tibet automatically helped preservation of texts which, in India, even if written down, were much at the mercy of wind and weather and the pests proliferating in tropical regions. It is thus that in India proper, there have been found only a few manuscripts which date back to no earlier than the 11th and 12th centuries A.D., the oldest Indian manuscripts being found in countries like Nepal, Japan and what used to be called Eastern Turkestan.

The systematic search for manuscripts and other clues to knowledge by specialists and learned societies, which began in the late eighteenth century in a small way, picked up as the nineteenth century advanced. This is not the place to recount the story which, again, has many aspects that only the cognoscenti can assess. In the year of Csoma's birth (1784) was founded the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, followed by sister societies in Paris (1822) and in London (1823). The first University chair in Sanskrit in Europe was created at the College de France in Paris, and its example was quickly emulated by the newly opened University of Bonn in Germany. Along with such progress there began the publication of very valuable texts, translations and other studies. Friedrich Max Muller, of

famous memory, published, for an outstanding example, his remarkable editions of the Rig Veda with Sayana's commentary (1849-75) and other studies, while another illustrious German savant Albrecht Weber started the journal 'Indische Studien' (1850-68), followed by 'Indische Streifen' (1868-73), and wrote the first scholarly history of ancient Indian literature. Among the early publications of immense interest on the early history of India could be mentioned the edition and translation of the 'Mahavamsa' by George Turnour (1837), a collection of the fragments of Megasthenes by E.A. Schwanbeck (1846), the translation of Fa-Hien's travels by Abel Remusat and others (1836) and that of Hiuen Tsang's 'Records' by Stanislaus Julien (1853, 1857).

Without the least little hint of disrespect to the great Burnouf, teacher of such as Max Muller and celebrated for having founded in the 'forties of the 19th century Vedic and Pali studies and also of Buddhism in Europe, it is only fair to the memory of Csoma de Koros to affirm that the primacy in regard to Buddhist studies in the West should be credited to that amazing "pilgrim-scholar" whose work in incredible conditions it is the privilege of this brochure to salute and bring forward for pious remembrance. There are two names in the paragraph just preceding, those of Turnour and Remusat, names that the careful reader might remember from earlier pages. Their work is certainly notable, both the 'Mahavamsa' and Fa-Hien's travels having also to do with the story of Buddhism, but Csoma did his work before them and well before Burnouf could, in the 'forties, draw the attention of world scholarship to the phenomenon that Buddhism in its home in India and also abroad had been. This is no contentious proposition but a statement purely of fact, an added reason for stress on it being that Csoma who spent his active life of intellectual investigation (which only the highest spirit could sustain) in a far-away land, tucked closely away from the world's gaze, and in Calcutta, in spite of the Asiatic Society's reputation, not yet on the research map of the globe. From around 1829, certainly, Csoma's findings, perhaps even thought of as curiosities not quite part of the new learning but on its margin, had begun to appear in the Asiatic Society's publications which could not have been ignored,

and as his work expanded and publications multiplied, there could no longer be any question of whole new realms of oriental life and thought having been revealed by the Hungarian's phenomenal enterprise. Csoma's ways might have appeared often bizarre but his life, in its own manner, was a brilliant flame and its lustre never dims but grows with time.

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Tibetan and Indian monk-scholars had worked together for centuries to collect what came to be known as the oft-mentioned 'Kanjur' and 'Tanjur'. Both in accuracy and volume the Tibetan anthologies of Indian texts in translation are much larger than their Chinese near-counterparts. Csoma must, in moments of meditation, contemplated the genius of such forgotten heroes of the intellect (forgotten, that is to say, by the world outside Tibet) as Bu-ston (1290-1364), eminent both as scholar and as an authoritative historian of his country. One wonders if in the history of antiquarian investigation there is another example to rank with Csoma's, the example of profound, personal and protracted involvement of a western scholar, trained in European academies and a stranger to Tibet's esoteric way of life (and perhaps from time to time even involuntarily repelled) with what he not only encountered, but also never tried to avoid in that reputedly forbidden zone of the earth.

It was not only that Csoma brought something like a treasury of books, manuscripts, etc. to illumine many a dark corner of history and thought. He did it, of course, as a pioneer, just as Hodgson had done for Buddhist literature in Nepal—though, it must be stressed, both as scholar and as a man Hodgson, howsoever worthy, was nowhere near Csoma in quality. Without Csoma's path-finding performance, it would perhaps have been very difficult for such work to be done as the Max Muller pupil Bunyio Nanjio's exposition, for the first time, (but helped largely by Csoma's analysis of the Kanjur) of the vast Chinese Buddhist literature (*vide* "Catalogue of the Chinese translations of the Buddhist Tripitaka" Oxford 1883). It was the path blazed by Csoma in whose trail appeared truly eminent people like T.W. Rhys Davids who directed the Pall

Text Society to bring out valuable texts, editions and translations. It was Csoma's example, whether consciously pursued or not, that brought about such publications as in the series "Bibliotheca Indica" and its successors like "Gaekwad Oriental Series". Almost in Csoma's street, as it were, one finds such massive, if not always faultless, work like Theodore Aufrecht's "Catalogus Catalogorum" (1891-1903) or Macdonnell and Keith's "Vedic Index of Names and Subjects" (1912). How Csoma would rejoice over the work of such as Oldenberg and Geiger, of Chavannes and Foucher, of Louis de la Vallee Poussin, of J. Przyluski who started in 1928 directing publication of a "Bibliographie Boudhique"—but the list grows long and is liable to errors of omission that are not certainly intended. Avoiding further invidious mention of names, let the hope be expressed that as the Ramayana reputedly carries the *punya-gandha* (holy perfume) of Sita's piety in its lines, those who work in Csoma's vineyard, in Budapest or Warsaw or New Delhi, will imbibe, even as they work with tools unknown to Csoma, something of the serene, selfless and unpretentiously universal spirit of that great seeker.

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When Csoma de Koros began his last journey north, his little boat rocking gently in the Ganga waters, he retained perhaps still something of his boyhood dream about questing, till the last, for the origins of his people, but there is no doubt also that, with a mind like his, that always refused to build on unproved hypotheses and could recognise and reject wish-fulfilling presuppositions, he was ready, without flinching, to face the truth as he could find it. He had no regrets, indubitably, about the years of life he had given to Tibetan, to Sanskrit and allied studies that had for him a fascination which in his habitual reticence he never could noise about. Even so, lingering thoughts of being in Lhasa must have been exciting—"what would Hodgson, Turnour and some of the philosophers of Europe not give to be in my place when I get there?" as he told Dr. Gerard from what turned out to be his death-bed. Didn't Csoma also, during his last conversations, try to outline his old obsession about the first 'Huns' and their

not-unlikely relationship with his own people, a theme that Dr. Campbell naturally found too complicated? Didn't he also convey to Henry Torrén, the doubtless learned Secretary of the Asiatic Society, the impression that while he did hold some "singular opinions" about "the origin of the Huns" and would occasionally make "curious speculations" on the derivation of geographical names in Central Asia, Csoma was scholar and scientist enough to invariably refuse committing himself to hypothetical conclusions that he could not fortify with factual proof, for his aim was always to "publish to the world something sounder than speculation". (*Vide* especially citations in Duka, *op. cit.*, pp. 153, 158). He did not have enough material on "the early history of his nation" to sustain the groundless hope of many of his countrymen that he would find somewhere in Central Asia a Hungarian-speaking folk, as Friar Julian was supposed to have found Hungarians at the mouth of the river Kama in the 13th century. What he left as his intellectual legacy was the work he did in Tibetan and Sanskrit and in the migration of cultures in the Indian sub-continent and its neighbouring countries—work that was not only of pioneer but also of seminal value.

The unresting scholar could not sit still, however, and when he thought he had reached what was for him the well-deserved terminus in Sanskrit and Tibetan studies, he resumed his wanderings towards the mountain magnet that, for all his accumulating misgivings about former pre-conceptions, he could not still resist. "How dull it is to pause, to make an end / To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use / As tho' to breathe were life."—these Tennyson lines which come almost as a complement to the Browning lines that wandered into William Hunter's mind as he thought of Csoma, appear apposite. Some later words in Tennyson's "Ulysses" seem also relevant—"Life, piled on life / Were all too little, and of one to me / Little remains: but every hour is saved / From that eternal silence, something more / A bringer of new things!" Csoma just could not "hoard himself" but moved further in his quest. Perhaps he wished to revive the exhilaration of his '*dris-lan*', the reply to queries during dialogue with his Tibetan masters and of his happiness over such things as the wordly-minded but truly



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ethical '*Subhashitas*' (wise-sayings) he had unearthed in plenty and also, at an extreme, the '*Prajna-Paramita*' hymns that had drawn him so—the hymns originally composed, it was said, by Nagarjuna in '*Aryabhasha*' (Aryan language), then in Tibetan and Chinese and Turkic (Uigur) versions—"when one realizes Dharma's incomparable essence, one sees that it has no end".

Not Japan's Taisho Buddhist University alone in 1933, but whoever learns of Csoma's life and work will not hesitate to call him a '*Bodhisattva*', the highest praise a man can get in Buddhist terms. Csoma was a seeker after the truth not only about his own people but of all mankind, pursuing, with fortitude and a deep passion animating him always, the quest of knowledge and understanding of the human condition. Csoma has left thus a memory that should never perish. What Pericles said some twentyfour hundred years ago in Athens comes back to mind as one thinks of Csoma: "The whole wide world is the brave man's common sepulchre". There is much in the life of Csoma de Koros about which the only apt adjective, perhaps, is "blessed". But he was also, pre-eminently, brave, a brave battler for the spirit of man who can never be forgotten, not surely in India where his bones remain reverently lain to eternal rest.

## *Appendices*

These are taken from Theodore Duka's "Life and Work of Alexander Csoma de Koros" (New Delhi 1972) which prints short abstracts, carefully prepared, of some of Csoma's valuable papers.



## *Appendix I*

What follows is taken from the short abstract of Csoma's papers prepared by Th. Duka. Appendix XIII of Theodore Duka's "Life and Work of Alexander Csoma de Koros" (edition 1972, New Delhi), pp. 199-200.

### **Remarks on Amulets In Use by the Trans-Himalayan Buddhists**

The two scrolls procured at Rampur, near Kotgarh, by Surgeon W.C. Carte of the 69th Regiment N.I., were forwarded to the Asiatic Society of Calcutta, where, at the request of the secretary, an explanation of them was furnished by the librarian, Mr. Alexander Csoma, who stated that they contained abstracts of some larger Tantrika or religious works in Tibetan, interspersed with Mantras in Sanskrit.

*The first scroll*, eight feet and a half long, is covered with figures to the extent of two feet. The rest of the paper bears printed text, containing 244 lines in Tibetan, each line being three and a half inches long. The figures are roughly traced, representing a victorious king, a tortoise with nine spots on the belly, showing the lucky and the unlucky periods, according as the moon is affected by the planets in her path. Afterwards come the twelve animals representing the twelve years of a cycle: then the zodiacal signs, the planets, sun and moon, &c., then the

representations of the four, eight, and ten corners of the world. There is also seen the picture of a king with his minister, a horse, an elephant, a soldier, an eye, &c., then the head of a bird, and also certain Chinese symbolical figures, which appear to have been used under the Hun dynasty 200 years before Christ. The Tibetans still use them extensively. After these symbolical representations follows the text, containing abridgements of five different Tantrika works.

The first is the salutation to the "Circle of Time", the Kala-chakraya. Then come the regents of the year, month, day, and hour, and those of the planets and stars. The Nagas, imps, &c., are requested to be favourable to the person who wears these symbols and to the mystical prayers, that he may succeed in all his undertakings. All classes of divinities are requested not to hinder him in any of his occupations, but to give assistance that he may increase in prosperity.

The abstract of the second Tantrika work contains in Sanskrit short addresses to Shakya, Vagishwari, Manipadme, and others.

The third contains a sloka and a half in Tibetan to Manju Sri, the god of wisdom.

The fourth is called the venerable Sutra dispelling the darkness. The salutation is addressed to the God of Wisdom, to the ten Buddhas in the ten corners of the world. To each is addressed a short prayer thus: "If I go towards that corner over which you preside, after having obtained my aim, grant that I may quickly return."

The fifth is styled the Sutra of eight lights. The salutation is addressed to Buddha, to religion, and to the holy priests. There are several prayers in Sanskrit, asking to avert any unlucky year, month, day, and hour, and to counteract the influence of a malignant planet or star. Other mantras are written down, having the object of preventing any unlucky accident in the morning or in the afternoon, &c.

*The second scroll*, four feet eight inches long, contains twelve figures of animals representing the cycle of twelve years. The text covers 121 lines, each three inches in length. There are, besides, rough sketches of a tortoise with the nine mystical spots in a square, and the twelve animals of a cycle of twelve years.

This is the sum of the general contents of these two scrolls.

## *Appendix II*

‘Review of a Tibetan Medical Work’, culled out of Duka, *op. cit.* Appendix XIV, pp. 201-204, attests, typically, some of Csoma’s many fascinating discoveries about Tibet and her age-old culture.

### **Review of a Tibetan Medical Work**

The principal work on medicine in the Tibetan language is called *rGyud bZhi*, in four parts. Its authorship is attributed to Shakya himself. The materials of the Tibetan treatise are derived from Sanskrit works. The learned Lama who made the analysis gave the following account of it to Csoma.

In the time of King Khri-srong Dehutsan, in the eighth or ninth century after Christ, a Tibetan interpreter, during his residence in Kashmir, with the assistance of a pandit who was himself a physician, made the translation into his native tongue, and presented the work to the said king. The treatise was subsequently revised and augmented by other learned men, and generally accepted as an authority. It is stated that besides this there are about forty other works on medicine in Tibet, not counting the five volumes embodied in the great encyclopaedia the Stangyur.

The principal medical school of Tibet is in Chak-phuri, a monastery near Lassa. Two smaller ones, called Chak-Zur are in the interior of the country.

### *A. The First Part*

is called the *root* or basis of the medical treatise, and is divided into six chapters.

I. The first chapter describes how, in a forest abounding in medicinal plants, Shakyā transformed himself into a chief physician, and there, in a magnificent palace, delivered his instructions, having for his pupils the gods, the sages, and a large number of orthodox men and also heretics.

II. In the second chapter Shakyā speaks thus:

Friends ! be it known to you that every human creature who wishes to remain in health, and such also as desire to cure disease and to prolong life, must be instructed in the science of medicine. So also he that seeks after morality, virtue, wealth or happiness, and seeks to be delivered from the miseries of sickness, as also such a one as wishes to be honoured and respected by others, must be taught the art of healing. He must be instructed on the four parts of the medical science, which are as follows:

The theory, the explanation, the instruction, and the manual operation requisite for the practice. He must likewise be specially instructed in the eight branches of healing, namely:

1. The treatment of the body as a whole.
2. The treatment of diseases of childhood.
3. Of diseases of women.
4. Of diseases caused by evil spirits (mental diseases).
5. Of wounds inflicted with a knife or spear.
6. Of venomous or poisonous infections.
7. Of the infirmities of old age.
8. How to increase the power of manhood.

The number of chapters in the whole treatise amounts to 156.

III. In the third chapter the human constitution is illustrated by a simile taken from the Indian fig-tree; thus, there are to be considered three roots or trunks, nine stems, forty-seven branches, 224 leaves, two blossoms, and three fruits.

The seven fundamental supports of the body are described as those on which life depends, namely: the chyle, the blood, the

flesh, the fat, bone, the marrow, and the semen.

The excretions are three: *foeces* urine, and sweat.

The principal causes of disease are these three : lust, anger, and ignorance.

The accessory causes are four: *a.* the seasons, hot or cold; *b.* evil spirits, *c.* abuse of food; *d.* indiscreet or bad conduct.

The parts of the body capable of being affected by disease are said to be six : the skin, the flesh, the veins, the bones, the internal viscera, and the alimentary canal.

There are three humours : the phlegm, the bile, and the wind.

The fourth chapter treats of symptoms of diseases. Examination of the tongue and urine. Feeling of the pulse. Inquiry into the origin of the disease, and its progress ; what food has agreed or disagreed ? what pain is felt ? The physician's twenty-nine questions, which are to be put to the patient, regarding food, exercise, previous history of the disease, &c., are here detailed.

The fifth chapter enumerates the means of curing diseases, and these are to be considered:

- a.* With respect to food.
- b.* The patient's mode of life, such as exercise, &c.
- c.* The therapeutics adapted to the three offending humours, viz., the phlegm, the bile, and the wind, which are fully discussed.

The varieties of medicines are such as assuage pain, or purge the bowels, or cause vomiting. Then there are remedies for flatulence, for anointing the body, embrocations, &c. Against bile, phlebotomy and bathing in cold water ; against phlegm, warm applications are prescribed.

The sixth chapter contains recapitulation of subjects contained in the last three chapters.

Carrying on the metaphor of the Indian fig-tree, the two blossoms are, health and longevity ; the three fruits, good morals, wealth, and happiness.



*B. In the Second Part*

four things are considered as to treatment of maladies, namely:

1. What is to be treated ?
2. What are the proper remedies ?
3. In what manner the remedies are to be applied ?
4. By whom are they to be applied ?

The means of curing disease are enumerated thus: diet, exercise, medicine, and surgical operations. A chapter on the conception and the growth of the embryo is added, one chapter on bones, and another on nerves. Then the humours are fully considered. And the last chapter describes the requisite qualities of a physician, namely, that he should be well acquainted with the theory and practice of medicine, and be an unselfish, an upright, and a good-hearted man.

*C. The Third Part*

treats on separate diseases, and the following points are considered under each head:

*a.* Primary causes ; *b.* accessory causes and effects ; *c.* subdivisions ; *d.* symptoms ; *e.* manner of treating disease.

The following is the list of maladies: swellings, dropsies, pulmonary diseases, including phthisis, fevers, wounds, and inflammation; epidemic diseases, smallpox, ulcers, catarrh ; diseases of the eyes, of the ear, of the nose, of the mouth, of lips, tongue, palate, of the throat and teeth, with several distinctions under each ; diseases of the neck, of the chest, the heart, liver, spleen, kidneys, stomach, bowels; diseases peculiar to women; haemorrhoids, erysipelas. Then follows the treatment of wounds, simple and poisoned. Diseases of old age are treated of, and the subject of virility is discussed.

*D. The Fourth Part*

contains details of the practice of medicine, such as examination

of the pulse and urine ; varieties of medicaments, mixtures, pills, syrups, and powders. Nomenclature of medicinal plants. Description of purgatives, emetics, extracts, or elixirs.

The conclusion is this:

Though there be 1200 ways of *examining* the heat and the cold, &c., in any given disease, they are all summed up in the following: examine the tongue and the urine, feel the pulse, and inquire into the history of the case. The remedies are said to be 1200 in number ; but they are reduced into the following four classes:

*a.* Medicament ; *b.* manual operation ; *c.* diet ; *d.* exercise.

Medicaments either assuage pain or are depuratory. Manual operations are either gentle or violent. Food is either wholesome or noxious. Exercise is either violent or gentle.

There are said to be 360 practical ways of curing disease ; but they may be reduced to these three:

1. Examination of the patient.
2. Rules of treatment.
3. The manner of applying remedies

Hints are given how a physician can keep himself safe from any malignant or infectious disease.



## Appendix III

‘A brief notice of Subhashita-ratna-nidhi of Sakya Pandita’, will be found of much interest as throwing light on the significance of Csoma’s labours. This is set out below exactly as it is in Duka, *op. cit.* Appendix XV, pp. 205-206.

### **A Brief Notice of Subhashita Ratna Nidhi of Sa-skya Pandita**

This paper was ready in 1833, but owing to the difficulties in the way of bringing out the Tibetan text with the translation, it was not published till eleven years after Csoma’s death, and then it was accomplished through the kind assistance of Dr. A. Campbell.

This work was composed by the celebrated Sa-skya Pandita, who flourished in the thirteenth century of our era, in the time of Gengiz Khan and his successors. The author resided in the Sa-skya Monastery in Middle Tibet, in the province of Ts’ang and was the uncle of a Great Lama. Many important Sanskrit books, brought thither from India, are still to be found in the monastery. The work begins thus:

To the ten commandments<sup>1</sup> are to be added the following

1 The ten commandments of Buddha are these:

(1) Not to kill. (2) Not to steal. (3) Not to commit adultery. (4) Not to tell falsehood. (5) Not to use abusive language. (6) Not to speak

rules, which were enacted by a religious king of Tibet named Srong-b'tsana (apostolic king, defender of faith, Dharma Raja). These rules are:

1. Reverence God ; this is the first.
2. Exercise true religion ; this is the second.
3. Respect the learned.
4. Pay honour to your parents.
5. Show respect unto superiors and to the aged.
6. Show good-heartedness to a friend.
7. Be useful to your fellow-countrymen.
8. Be equitable and impartial.
9. Imitate excellent men.
10. Know how to enjoy rightly your worldly goods and wealth.
11. Return kindness for kindness.
12. Avoid fraud in measures and weights.
13. Be always impartial and without envy.
14. Do not listen to the advice of woman.
15. Be affable in speaking, and be prudent in discourse.
16. Be of high principles and of a generous mind.

These are the sixteen rules. Subhashita Ratna Nidhinama Shastra is the title of the work in Sanskrit.

### *Solution to Manju Sri*

To the question: What is a "precious treasure of elegant sayings ?" the following answer is given:

It is the exhibition of judicious reflections upon all sorts of worldly affairs and upon the conduct of holy men, without offending against good morals. The following are the chapters:

- I. Reflections on the wise, with ten aphorisms.
- II. On the excellent , the virtuous, and the good, with thirty-three sayings.

non sense. (7) Not to slander. (8) Not to covetous. (9) Not to bear malice. (10) Not to be stubborn in a wrong principle.

III. On the fool, the mean, and the wicked, with twenty-three aphorisms.

IV. On the mixed character of the wise and the foolish, with twenty-eight aphorisms.

V. On evil practices, with nineteen sayings.

VI. On good manners of men, with forty sayings.

VII. On unbecoming manners, with twenty-nine sayings.

VIII. On general conduct of men, with forty-four sayings.

IX. On the effect of religion on good morals, with twenty-three sayings, some of which are very striking, and we cite the following as examples:

The wealth of a man who is contented with little, is inexhaustible ; he who seeks always and is never satisfied, will have a continual rain of sorrow.

As children are loved by their parents, to the same degree they are not respected in return by their children.

He that is acquainted with the manners of the world, will exercise true religion. He that practises good morals is the living biography of a saint, &c.

This work contains 454 slokas in the original, but only 234 are given in this paper.

## *Appendix IV*

In Duka, *op. cit.* Appendix XVI, pp. 207-217, a remarkable Csoma manuscript on "Sanskrit and Tibetan words, phrases and technical terms," being a kind of resume and index indicating the extent, the importance and also the methodology of Csoma's search in most difficult conditions, was printed from the Asiatic Society's archives with a note by the eminent 19th century Indian antiquarian, Rajendralala Mitra. Necessarily catalogic, it will nevertheless be read with great interest and help understanding of the formidable task that Csoma had undertaken.

### **A Dictionary of Sanskrit and Tibetan Words, Phrases, and Technical Terms**

We give the following resume and index kindly furnished by Dr. Rajendralala Mitra, of an extensive and most important work which has already been referred to in these pages, but the existence of which is known at present to only a few, because since Csoma's decease Tibetan learning in India seems to have received no special attention. With some adaptation to the requirements of the present day and with the addition of a special index, this compilation, if rescued, as it deserves to be, from its manuscript condition will form a most valuable help to the study of Buddhist writings, to which so many eminent and learned men in Europe are devoting their earnest attention.

The MS. is in the library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

*Note by Dr. Rajendralala Mitra, dated 14th February 1883*

“The volume is a foolscap folio of 686 pages, with 20 pages of index and some blank pages, in a good state of preservation. Some sheets of the paper bear the water-mark of ‘Snelgrove, 1828,’ others of 1830. The writing, therefore, was not undertaken until 1831, when Csoma de Koros was in Calcutta, and he must have taken some time to complete it. The whole is in the handwriting of Csoma. From the general appearance of neatness and absence of erasures, corrections, and interlineations, it is evident that volume is a fair copy. The matter is arranged in four columns, the first containing the serial number, next the Sanskrit word in English letters, then the Tibetan equivalent in Tibetan character, and lastly the English meaning. The words are grouped in classes, as shown in the index. The arrangements being according to classes and not alphabetical, it is difficult to use the volume for reference.”

This is the index of the work, showing the several heads or titles under which Sanskrit and Tibetan words, proper names, phrases, technical terms, &c. &c., were collected or compiled by ancient learned Indian pandits and Tibetan Lotsavas (interpreters) or translators.

*Note.*—The number of titles shows the regular series in the original (though it has not been marked there) ; and the number of page indicates where the chapter under that head or title commences in this compilation.

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