

# THE DICTIONARY OF CSOMA DE KOROS

—Lama Chimpa

In 1967, we my colleagues and myself—were working on some Tibetan Texts at Kalimpong and used to consult various Tibetan dictionaries including that of Csoma De Koros. That was my first chance to read and realize the importance of the Tibetan - English Dictionary by Csoma de Koros. We got the English meaning of many strange Tibetan words from this dictionary. Since then I am using it with great respect for Csoma de Koros. We went to Darjeeling to pay our respect to the great Hungarian pioneer in Tibetology by way of visiting his grave in Darjeeling cemetery.

While silently standing in front of the epitaph announcing the death of Alexander Csoma de Koros, I remembered a Mongolian passage, which, rendered into English runs as following, "Your artificial body is laid under small piece of stone, but your real body which has been made immortal by yourself, cannot be covered by the Sumeru Mountain".

Csoma de Koros not only left his advice for us to do some thing for restoration of those Indian literature which were lost from the country and preserved in Tibetan translations, but he himself also has done a lot of valuable work in this connection. Here I shall say a few words about his Tibetan-English Dictionary only. For which, first of all, let me quote some of the remarks on Csoma de Koros made by those compilers of the later Tibetan dictionaries, who have depended much on Csoma de Koros in their works.

H.A. Jaschke wrote, "The work of Csoma de Koros is that of an original investigator and the fruit of almost unparalleled determination and patience. The compiler in order to dedicate himself to the study of Tibetan literature, lived like a monk for years among the inmates of a Tibetan monastery".

Sarat Chandra Das wrote, "The result of his investigations, to speak in Csoma's own words, was that the literature of Tibet is entirely of Indian Origin. The immense volumes on different branches of science, etc., being exact or faithful translations from Sanskrit works taken from Bengal, Magadha, Gangetic or Central India, Kasmir and Nepal, commencing from the seventh century after Christ".

Prof. F.D. Lessing, University of California, in his foreword to the Tibetan Sanskrit Dictionary of Dr. Lokeschandra, wrote,

“More than one hundred years ago, the eminent Hungarian pioneer of Tibetology, Csoma de Kores estimated with rare intuition, the importance of Tibetan translations made from Sanskrit texts by Indian Panditas in cooperation with Tibetan Locchavas, and included in the “Corpus Scriptorum Buddhicorum”, known as Kanjur and Tanjur. He also recognized the extraordinary help a Western Sanskritist might derive from the Tibetan translations towards a better understanding of the Sanskrit originals”.

Thus we have a clear idea of the aim of Csoma de Koros for compiling an excellent Tibetan English Dictionary in those primitive days of Tibetan studies outside Tibet. It is a matter of wonder that how could Csoma de Koros make it possible to produce such a flawless work formed with two different languages neither of which had anything to do with his basic education ! At his grown up age, when he reached Ladakh, Csoma de Koros had even no primary knowledge of Tibetan. And neither he had any trained teacher to guide him, nor he had any good book for learning the language of a strange country. However, he with his incomparable intellect, not only learned the language, but became a master of it and produced a good grammar and a high class dictionary, which has become the mother of all the modern Tibetan dictionaries.

Excepting a Tibetan Lama who knew no other language than his own, Csoma de Koros had no help for compiling his Tibetan-English Dictionary. Before the publication of his dictionary, however, a small Tibetan dictionary meant for European students, compiled by a Roman Catholic missionary and edited by Marshman, appeared in 1826. Since the date of the publication of these two dictionaries differ by only eight years, there can be no question of the former being useful for Csoma de Koros. It can be only assumed that these two dictionaries had been prepared simultaneously. And more over, Csoma de Koros himself stated that he had not seen that dictionary until his arrival at Calcutta in 1831. The following is from the Preface of Csoma’s dictionary, “nor had he seen the Tibetan Dictionary edited by Mr. Marshman, Serampore, 1826, until his arrival at Calcutta in 1831, when it could prove of no use to him, since his dictionary had been long since ready in the same form and extent, as it is now published”.

The only possible help Csoma de Koros obtained, it appears, was from Tibetan to Tibetan and Tibetan to Mongolian dictionaries and particularly the Mahavyutpatti, the Tibetan Sanskrit Dictionary specially prepared for the grand translation of Indian literature into Tibetan. The present Tibetan Kanjur and Tanjur are the result of such lexicons, and such dictionaries of olden days which had no alphabetical

order properly. In modern sense, we can better call them vocabularies than dictionaries. So, if Csoma de Koros utilized them for his dictionary, he must have experienced enough hardship for bringing the words into proper order. And of course, giving suitable English equivalents of Tibetan words, without any consulting material to go by is itself the task of a great master.

There is no doubt that the later Tibetan dictionaries like those of H.A. Jaschke, Sarat Chandra Das, Lokeschandra and others are richer than that of Csoma de Koros, but all credit goes to Csoma de Koros, because of the enormous labour he undertook to learn the Tibetan language and to write the Dictionary all by himself. The wise Csoma de Koros already predicted the coming of more improved and enlarged Tibetan dictionaries. The following is from the Preface of Csoma's dictionary, "when there shall be more interest taken for Buddhism, (which has much in common with the spirit of true Christianity), and for diffusing Christian and European language, throughout the most Eastern parts of Asia, the Tibetan Dictionary may be much improved, enlarged and illustrated by the addition of Sanskrit terms".

Though I have not seen it, according to Jaschke, the Tibetan English Dictionary by Csoma de Koros had been translated into German by I.J. Schmidt. And it is said that Schmidt had consulted three Mongolian dictionaries and from which a certain number of words have been supplemented. From this also we know how much importance was being given to the Dictionary of Csoma de Koros. Besides this, though I know duplicated ones, I never heard or seen any dictionary which has been translated from another dictionary.

It is to be regretted that a number of important words cited in Csoma's dictionary have been dropped and the meanings of many other words have been changed by later dictionary makers like Sarat Chandra Das and others. Addition of new words into a dictionary is always welcome. But omission of eagerly collected words of a master like Csoma de Koros is to be considered a loss. Tibetan is a language that can be written in various ways. Different spellings of a word are easily to be found in any Tibetan writing. Specially, the dictionary of Csoma de Koros is good for old Tibetan words.

The number of words collected by Csoma de Koros but neglected by the later Tibetan dictionary compilers are considerable. But since my scope is limited, I can mention only three such words here by way of illustration. I choose these three because they are different by nature. One is a common word, the other is a classical word and the third is a word of historical value. Words such as following:-

- (1) **'Ga Shig**, (Csoma) "Some one, some". Das dropped.
- (2) **gTan-tshigs-rig-pa**, (Csoma) "dialectic; logic; philosophy."  
**gTan-tshigs-rig-pa**, Das dropped. (not given the word itself).
- (3) **Za-hor** or Sa-hor (Csoma) "name of a place or city in Bengal". Das, "a corrupt form of Sahar, signifying a city or town. According to some, the present Mandi...". He has given no more meaning, but a comment of his own.

Csoma de Koros is perfectly right as far as spellings and interpretations of these three words are concerned. And Sarat Chandra Das might have dropped the first two by mistake. But while giving a long account of the "Za-hor" in a different way, S.C. Das ignored the interpretation of Csoma de Koros as well as the Tibetan account of this term (Za-hor). "Za-hor" is a well known term, mentioned all over Tibetan literature as the name of a place in Bengal where the world famous Atisa Dipankara was born. So, one sticking to Tibetan source, must admit that "Za-hor" is in Beng.l. At the most, one can say that the "Za-hor" is a corrupt form of "Sabhar" which is situated near Dhaka, now in Bangladesh. It seems to me that the entire area of Dhaka was known as "Sabhar" in those days and the Tibetan scholars Tibetanized it as "Za-hor".

It is also interesting to add, that Csoma supposes U-rgyan to be Ujjain. Das omits such reference and clearly equates U-rgyan with Odiyana/Udyana in the north west.

Thus, the later Tibetan dictionary makers have overlooked many valuable Tibetan words collected by this pioneer Tibetologist, Alexander Csoma de Koros. If one goes on making a list of those words which were cited by Csoma de Koros with right translations, but were dropped or given a changed meaning by the later Tibetan dictionary compilers, then the list itself will become a book.

Because of these reasons, the Tibetan - English Dictionary by Csoma de Koros is a must for all English knowing Tibetologists. Before seeing Csoma's dictionary I myself had an impression that since I have the latest and largest Tibetan dictionary with me, what is the use of an old and small dictionary like that of Csoma de Kosos? But I was wrong in my idea. Yet, I do not mean that the later Tibetan dictionaries are of no use. Of course the later ones are richer by various supplementary words, some of which even came into use after Csoma de Koros himself.

The Tibetan Hindi Dictionary by Pandita Rahul Sankrityayan also deserves eulogy. The first part of the work, edited by S.K. Pathak and published by the Sahitya Academy, is already in the market. Besides the published part, I have seen the whole manuscript. Like the Tibetan Dictionary of Csoma de Koros, this dictionary contains many Tibetan words which the other dictionaries do not consider. Being a man of independent thought, Rahulji took all such words which according to the other dictionary compilers were wrongly spelled ones and therefore neglected by them.

Copies of Csoma's dictionary have become very rare, at least in India. Photo-mechanic reproductions are now reported. In the present case, I would like to put a proposal to the Asistic Society or the Sikkim Institute for steps for making the Tibetan - English Dictionary by Csoma de Koros available in good form in the interest of Tibetan studies. Before reprinting however, the dictionary should be re-edited, not for any correction, but for the alphabetical arrangements of the Tibetan words which should agree with the modern methods of the other Tibetan dictionaries. Csoma de Koros adopted a different method of the alphabetical arrangements, which Jaschke called, "Csoma's rough grouping of words". Moreover, the Tibetan type used in printing of Csoma's dictionary is not very good, and so, photo printing of the work may not yield good result.

I bow down to the great selfless Hungarian scholar Csoma de Koros for his supreme achievement of compiling a Tibetan - English Dictionary. He had done this job for the interest of Buddhism and Sanskrit literature, neither of which primarily had anything to do with his personal faith and national interest. Csoma de Koros made tremendous labour for compiling this work which can never lose its importance as long as Tibetology interests the scholars outside Tibet.

Lastly, I shall quote the following from the Preface of the Tibetan English Dictionary by Csoma de Koros for obvious reason.

"And he begs to inform the public, that he had not been sent by any government to gather political information; neither can he be accounted of the number of those wealthy European gentlemen who travel at their own expense for their pleasure and curiosity; but rather only a poor student, who was very 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, of which, he hopes, the world may see hereafter the results; and such a man was he who, during his peregrination, depended for his subsistence on the benevolence of others."