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Alexander Csoma De Koros, The Hungarian Bodhisattva.

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Abstract:

Alexander Csoma de Koros was a great scholar. He wrote so many books, like Analysis of the kah-gyur, A Grammar of the Tibetan Language, Tibetan and English Dictionary etc. He had contributed greatly on Tibetan Language. He was known as Hungarian Bodhisattva,

Csoma De Koros collected almost 40,000 Tibetan words. And so it was he who first contributed into the Tibetan language and its literature and thus made a discovery of the utmost importance in the academic world. For all this he received only 50 rupees – a not even modest sum even in those days. He had to pay his teacher as well as support himself from this amount. But the allowance, small as it was, brought invaluable results.

His work, the first authoritative Tibetan Grammar and Tibetan-English Dictionary, was published in 1834. The whole scientific world acknowledged his considerable contribution to the world of learning. Many scientific institutions elected him as a member of learned boards.

Index Terms:

Bodhisattva, Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, Arhat, bKa’-‘gyur, bsTan-‘gyur, Shakya, Lalitavistara.

Introduction:

Alexander Csoma de Karos, was born on the 1 April, 1784 in Kornos, a little village in Haromszek, in Transylvania, then part of Hungary, The Csoma family was poor. It was only when he attained 15 years of age that young Alexander could get into secondary school. And this was only possible because the academy at Nagyened which he attended took every year some poor boys free of charge and thereby supported themselves by part-time work to earn their very modest board.

A stipendium from an English Protestant mission made it possible for Csoma De Koros to attend the University of Gottingen in Germany. At the University, Csoma received free board and he was thus able to devote all his time to the pursuit of his studies. He worked very hard. He worked under the best professors of Oriental Languages and his studies further strengthened his youthful dream of going into the unknown territories of Asia.

Methodology

To study local dialects he travelled to northern India in 1836 and in the following year he accepted the 'post of librarian to the Asiatic Society of Bengal'. But soon the old wish to get to the unknown reaches of Central Asia arose in him and in 1842 he took to the road again.

Body of the article:

His plan was to go through Kashmir to the Karakorum pass. But he was only able to reach Leh, capital of Ladakh, adjoining the Highlands of Western Tibet. By now his small funds had run out. He learned that the journey into Central Asia was very expensive. So he decided to return again, hoping to find another route to reach his destination.

After that he went to Kashmir. On his way he met an English explorer and British Government agent named Moorcroft. This meeting proved to be a turning point in the life of Alexander Csoma de Koros.

Moorcroft was very surprised to know that Csoma was a man of extraordinary mental powers who could not only undertake difficult intellectual feats but he could also overcome extreme physical hardship. The British Indian Government was then in urgent need of such a man who could enter Tibet and study the Tibetan language. Csoma accepted the offer. Apart from his general interest in original language he was attracted to the task by the possibility of finding kinship between his native Magyar tongue and the Tibetan language.

So he returned to Ladakh on the border of Western Tibet and there in one of the coldest and highest inhabited spots in the world he took his abode in a Tibet Gompa in Zanskar. He engaged a learned lama as his tutor and began his study to which he was to devote the rest of his life there in the lama- monastery of Zanskar. He worked for a year in a cold little stone room, without any heating and enduring the extraordinary cold water which stretches eight months in the year.

During this period Csoma was able to collect almost 40,000 Tibetan words. And so it was he who first penetrated into the Tibetan language and its literature and thus made a discovery of the utmost importance in the scientific world. For all this he received only fifty rupees- a not even modest sum even in those days. He had to pay his teacher as well as support himself from this amount and could hardly make ends meet. But the allowance, small as it was, brought invaluable results.

The works of Alexander Csoma de koros :

His work, the first authoritative Tibetan Grammar and Tibetan –English Dictionary, was published in 1842. The whole scientific world acknowledged his considerable contribution to the world learning. Many scientific institutions elected him as a member.

To study local dialects he travelled to northern India in 1836 and in the following year he accepted the post of librarian to the Asiatic Society of Bengal. But soon the old wish to get to the unknown reaches of Central Asia arose in him and in 1842 he took to the road again.

But by then he was 58 years old and 20 years had passed since he had come to India. With youthful energy he was hoping to reach Central Asia through Greater Tibet. But he was destined to go only as far as Darjeeling, a British hill resort near the Tibetan border. On his way, crossing the Terai swamps, he

contracted malarial fever. Dr. Campbell, the British medical officer at Darjeeling who attended to him, could not understand the feverish mutterings of the delirious man. After a lifetime of search Alexander Csoma de Koros could approach the unknown land of his dreams only in his imagination. His body found eternal rest in the abode of Darjeeling hills.

The concept of Bodhisattva:

Alexander Csoma de Koros achieved *Bodhisattva* by attaining several feats in life and therefore it is only relevant here to compare the concept of Śāntideva's primary subject which is the *Bodhisattva*, "The Enlightenment Being," the ultimate saint of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. In contrast to the ideal of southern Buddhism, the type of holy man called an Arhat, who aims primarily at personal escape from the round of suffering which is common to all living creatures, the *Mahāyāna* hero, the *Bodhisattva*, is a universal saviour of all beings.

The distinction between the *Hīnayāna* hero- the *Arhat* or slayer of passion, and the *Bodhisattva* or Savior, marks the major different between *Hīnayāna* and *Mahāyāna* forms.

On the historical plane, however, the difference lies in the emphasis of the Arhat's career, the type of life by which he seeks the noble goal of freeing himself from phenomenal fetters, and, along the way, helping other to do the same; whereas the emphasis of the *Bodhisattva's* career is upon the noble goal of helping others to free themselves, and, along the way and incidentally, to find that freedom for himself. Similarly, we find Alexander Csoma de Koros reaching the historical plane by piercing all the rough and difficult terrains and thereby attaining salvation and achieving *Bodhisattva*.

Contribution to Literature:

In 1834 Alexander Csoma de Koros published in Calcutta two books which laid the foundation for Tibetan studies, a grammar of the Tibetan language and a Tibetan-English dictionary. His major project was an account of the Tibetan literature. During a period of eight years, from 1823 to 1831, Csoma de Koros studied the two great collections of Tibetan translations of Buddhist texts, the bKa'-'gyur and the bsTan-'gyur. After his arrival in Calcutta in 1831 he prepared for publication his Analysis of the bKa'-'gyur which was published in three articles in volume 20 of the ASIATIC RESEARCHES (Calcutta, 1836-1839), pp. 41-93, 285-317 and 393-552. The second article, entitled "Notices on the life of Shakya extracted from the Tibetan authorities", describes the life of the Buddha according to the Tibetan translations of the Lalitavistara of which has not been preserved.

Conclusion:

Thus, it is only fitting to conclude by stating that Alexander Csoma de Koros attained *Bodhisattva* by suffering the pangs and pathos of life enforced to him from his childhood till he finally dies and in spite of all the difficult calamities that was thrust upon him he emerged triumphant and therefore he may be rightly called the Hungarian, *Bodhisattva*.

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