

4. ALPHABET SELECTED; IMPORTANCE OF SIMPLICITY FOR PRACTICAL USE.

The selection of a system of transcription we found to be a matter of no inconsiderable difficulty. Professor LEPSIUS's propositions in his "Standard Alphabet" are altogether the most detailed and rational we know of; but for our present use the adoption of his system would have entailed the disadvantage of introducing several new signs into a mode of transcription having the English alphabet for its basis, and which has not only been received for a considerable period into a great part of European literature, but has long become familiar to many an educated native. Considerations of this nature induce us to follow Sir WILLIAM JONES's system, which is also adopted, with few modifications, in the most recent Indian publications. For general application the alphabets used in England and India are still, perhaps, too full of distinctions.¹ Being far from considering these meager contributions to a branch of science so materially differing from our ordinary occupations as any thing else but a selection of facts based to a great extent upon physical, as well as upon philological observations, I have thought it preferable to give, in the present memoir, for words written in Hindostáni characters only the general phonetic transcription. I must leave it, however, to the judgment of others, perhaps also to the results which time and practice will soon point out more distinctly, to decide how far a greater or less number of distinctions will afford the just medium sought. For Tibetan words, in which the sound and spelling often differ so widely, the detailed transliteration is also given for each of the words explained.

To attain, at a no too distant date, a system sufficiently uniform to spread rapidly and facilitate the comparison also of aboriginal² languages and dialects, is perhaps of more importance, than to evince too great minuteness in the choice of the forms to be used in the transcription. That a perfect uniformity should be generally

¹ Also for names to be written on maps I find it desirable not to have added to the letters too many distinctive signs, they being easily overlooked when happening to coincide with the lines of shading on the map.

² Observations of this nature, which are pregnant with interest for the historian and ethnographer, are of necessity generally made at places far distant from each other; a uniformity in the system used is accordingly of so much the greater importance.