

“a”, “u”, and “i” are considered in Sanskrit the three fundamental vowels, which can be short or long;

“o” and “e” are intermediate vowels. They are formed originally of the two others, viz. “o” from “a” and “u,” “e” from “a” and “i” (as still in some of the modern Romanic languages, e. g. “j’aurai” in French); in Sanskrit they are always long vowels, but phonetically they are as little diphthongs as in the French example here quoted.<sup>1</sup>

The mixed vowels “ö” and “ü” are formed by the lips being in the position of “o” and “u”, and the tongue in that of “e” and “i”; “a” and “ä” are but collateral sounds of “a.” Being simple sounds, they all can occur either short or long. In Hindostáni (as in Sanskrit) mixed sounds are not to be found; “a” and “ä” may occasionally be met with, but chiefly in foreign words or in local dialectic modifications.

In Tibetan we often heard mixed vowels, particularly the “ü;” though this is not received in the Tibetan alphabet, we reproduced it by the European letter “ü” where we had heard it pronounced so.

#### *Vowels of imperfect formation.*

Such vowels presented themselves in most of the languages we had to transcribe;<sup>2</sup> we used for them the sign ˇ, chiefly combined with “a” and “e”.

Phonetically every vowel<sup>3</sup> may occur imperfectly formed, but in Hindostáni the imperfect vowel is generally an “ä,” being originally a short “a” in Sanskrit, to which in many cases we can actually trace it back. The sign of imperfect formation makes “ä” and “ě” similar to the open “u” in “but” or “e” in “herd.” In the native spelling these vowels are not in general written separately; it is, however, in many cases difficult to decide, whether the pronunciation of such words gives a very short but

<sup>1</sup> As an instance to show how the vowel system may differ in other languages, I quote for comparison some of the modifications of the Greek. Here o and ε appear, at least in the formation of the diphthongs, as collateral forms of ä, as in αυ, ου, ευ; αι, οι, ει. ω and η are considered as differing from o and ε, not only in quantity, but they are represented by separate letters.

In order to distinguish all the modifications of vowels existing, the number of signs required would be much greater; but on this point we refer to what has been said above, page 149.

<sup>2</sup> The Tibetan letter ࠨ which we represent by the *spiritus lenis* is often rendered by “a,” but in Tibetan it has also a consonantal character.

<sup>3</sup> As an analogon I may quote the vowel-sound “i” inherent to the Sanskrit letter ऋ ri which in southern dialects also becomes “Ru,” as in “Rishi,” an inspired sage, which becomes “Rushi” in the dialects of Southern India.