1. Bharelo Agni in English Translation: A Justification

A number of reasons compel a translator to render R. V. Desai’s Bharelo Agni in English. The novel’s undiminished appeal among readers over decades, its historical theme, its range of interesting characters, the debate about the novel’s character Rudradatta and the novel’s setting of Gujarat during the 1857 uprising—these are the reasons that make Bharelo Agni’s English translation interesting to those who cannot read the original. In addition, for a community of translators, the challenging act of translating a long work, giving scope to discuss the process, is a rich reward. Thus, this work is for readers to enjoy a classic Gujarati novel in English, and for fellow translators to critically appreciate the efforts.

Desai’s works have enjoyed popularity even after decades of publication. In the early decades of independent India, the knowledge of Desai’s work was considered essential among the educated class. This work includes an introduction to R. V. Desai, informing readers about an important literary craftsman, who carved his space in the Gujarati canon, when K. M. Munshi dominated the literary scene. His oeuvre consists of surprising works, one being a study of prostitutes. Many of Desai’s works have achieved the status of classics, Bharelo Agni being one such work. The novel interweaves the theme of India’s first war of independence with a passionate love story, forming a fine blend for wide appeal and longevity.

The novel’s historical theme and description of nineteenth-century life makes it an informative read. Readers find reference to some issues like the purpose behind the introduction of railways, judiciary and English education by the British and their actual benefits to the native populace. These debates find space in newspaper columns even today, often leading to speculation about how much of the modern technology would have entered India and when if not through British; and what would have been the status of India’s regional and classical languages if English language had not dominated the scene. Thus, the novel remains relevant even today. The novel often compares the British rulers with the Mughal to bring out the differences. Furthermore, Desai, unlike a nationalist, presents a fair view of the uprising, exposing the selfish motives of those who had rebelled against the Company Sarkar. Any reader, interested in getting a general idea about the uprising, a significant chapter of Indian history, without drudging through prosaic historical books, can do so by reading the English translation of Bharelo Agni.

The novel has a number of characters—scholarly, heroic, wicked, clever, romantic, loyal, treacherous, condescending Englishman, friendly Englishman and so on. This variety makes the world of Bharelo Agni real and believable. What animates the novel most is Rudradatta, the old, sage-like guru. His ideas of using non-violence as a political force raise a critical question: Could ideas of non-violence exist in the nineteenth-century India? The debate has raged for decades in Gujarati literary academia. All readers who would read the novel in English can also begin a stimulating conversation about this issue. What could be the sources of non-violence? How Indian was/is Gandhi’s non-violence? Can someone before Gandhi
devise non-violence as a political force from Jain/Buddhist tradition? The novel raises these questions for an academic debate.

Most Indians believe that Gujarati people did not participate in the uprising, that they collaborated with the British and lived quietly through the troubled times. If that is the case, then Bharelo Agni could be its writer’s absolute imagination. Although this doctoral work is about the translation of a novel, some readings brought out surprising discoveries about the role of Gujarat and Gujaratis in the 1857 revolt. The struggles of irrepressible Vadher community and its leaders can be the subject of historical study and fiction both, in English or any other language. Similarly, the role of Vadodara’s Gaekwads, as mentioned in the novel, becomes symbolic and informs us how the powers friendly with the British could thrive in the colonial times. Such issues also make Bharelo Agni relevant today.

If the reasons mentioned above make Bharelo Ani’s English translation significant for readers, the process of rendering the work in English is fascinating for translators and scholars of translation studies. Although the original is written in the language of a city dweller, the length of the work opens up numerous opportunities to discuss how the translation is negotiated. Why certain words are transliterated? Why some words are translated in spite of being impossible to translate? Where has the translator taken liberty with the text and to what extent? These questions fascinate scholars of translation studies and this translation gives ample space to discuss them.

That the novel has been always in print, that it has been read and re-read by generations of readers all over, including in the Gujarati diaspora, that it has been prescribed in the syllabus of Gujarati departments in universities and colleges even today should be mentioned as obvious facts to support its claim as a classic. Thus, these reasons warrant a good translation of the R. V. Desai’s novel Bharelo Agni.

2. **On Translation: Claiming a Literary Work**

Bharelo Agni lends itself to English translation because of its urban language, bereft of rustic words and expressions. Desai, who lived most of his life in Vadodara, writes in the language that he heard among educated city dwellers, avoiding the vocabulary of remote places or the parlance of a particular caste.

This, of course, does not mean that its translation is easy. Translating a long Gujarati novel into English compels one to search for apt English expressions for numerous Gujarati words and phrases, making the translator hammer out a work using the elasticity of language and its nuances.

Translation is an act of claiming a literary work as one’s own. Translator makes his claim on the original work by various means. First, the entire process of comprehending the original text is subjective; in addition, the words, sentence structure and sentence arrangement that the translator chooses are not final choices.
even for the same translator. The translator keeps interrogating the original text: What exactly do I understand in this sentence? What precisely could be the meaning of the sentence/dialogue in the context? And, how honestly and effectively I can communicate the meaning that I have understood in the translation? The focus shifts from ‘What does the writer mean here?’ to ‘What is my interpretation of the text?’ The translator’s understanding of a text is influenced by the translator’s knowledge of literature and language, and, most significantly, by the translator’s place and time.

This, however, does not mean that the translator can distort the original, but within an overarching sphere of the original work’s message and structure, the translator enjoys wide scope of making changes, which would liberate him from being obsessed with the original writer’s intent at every small step. Thus, translation is an honest communication of the text’s meaning, as understood by the translator, in another language. The emphasis on ‘the meaning as understood by the translator’ assigns importance to a cultivated sensibility that develops after the experience of reading literature.

Another means by which the translator makes a claim on the literary work is by making small changes in the original. A translator makes decisions at the paragraph level, about changing sentence sequences; at sentence level, about the syntax to make the sentence clear and effective; and, at word level, about its aptness. He adds or omits words for making his rendering lucid and appealing. Therefore, every translation possesses its special significance; therefore, every generation re-translates important texts; and therefore, a translated work is a specific version of the original, a work through which the translator has made his claims on the work.

Because of the changes a translator makes continuously, the act of translation demands a sustained application of critical thinking, making literary translation a challenging and rewarding activity. Translation produces new knowledge, making a text available to readers who cannot access the original. These two aspects, the involvement of critical/analytical thinking and production of new knowledge, grant the act of translation the status of a research work.

3. **Translating Bharelo Agni**

For the first twenty-five chapters, Desai has given a clipping of poems as an epilogue. All these poems are metered and rhyming, making it difficult to translate them in English. One choice in this case would be to insist that the translation of the poems is also in rhyming lines, however contrived they may turn out to be. This choice could
sacrifice clarity and readability, and hence, not preferred in the translation of *Bharelo Agni*.

Another choice is to translate each line of the original, without making efforts to make the lines rhyme. The translated version would have all the images, similes and metaphors, but not in a rhyming language. The second type of rendering conveys the essence of the poem, which, along with the imagery, sets the tone for the chapter’s incidents. If one makes the choice of the latter method, how does the reader of the translation learn that the epilogues are in verse? To address this question, one can take the help of typesetting and keep the verses in italics. This second method is applied in translating *Bharelo Agni*: the verses are translated line by line and image by image, rendered in English without using rhyming words, and then kept in italics. The verses are few in the novel and they give opportunities to take liberty with the original to make the English rendering effective. Following are a few examples of the epilogues in English translation:

- सूना आ सरोवरे आयो; 
  ओ राजहंस! 
  सूना आ सरोवरे आयो! (Desai, 52)
  - *King of swans, come over to the desolate lake!  
  Visit once the lonely waters standing still.*

The original poem is a repetition of one line, addressing the ‘king of swans’. The translation, taking liberty with the poem, adds the image of still and lonely water, thus making the poem picturesque and giving a dimension to Kalyani’s loneliness.

- सनेही ना सोलां आऐ, साहेलडी!  
  उसना भेकल भारों डड़े बते,  
  हैथां हेत तो सतावे, साहेलडी!  
  अशाकी वेंट भारी घेगी जोळे. (Desai, 76)
  - *My friend, I dream about my beloved;  
  loneliness burns my heart!*  
  - *My friend, love has turned into a tormenter;  
  hope, like a vine, grows long but wilts soon after.*

The obvious change in this poem is in the second line, where, in the original, the poet says ‘my heart’s loneliness is in flames’; whereas, in the translation, the line is rendered as ‘loneliness burns my heart’. This alteration changes the imagery, but does not change the meaning and effect of the poem. The last line has two
additions. A literal translation could have been ‘hope’s vine has grown and then dropped to the ground’. Apprehending the meaning of the phrase તે અમલ માત્ર વધી લે તે વૃક્ષમાં આશા બધરી, કાય કાય સમ મોટી કરી, ઘૂમી આગ નિલા ધીકની રહી. (Desai, 91)

- Death’s kingdom is burnt and destroyed, yet, a pinch of ash hopes for a new blaze.
  Once again, the cinders throb with desire, a fire within rages without a flame.

The original English version recreates the imagery present in the original without changing it. The original word તેમણે is interpreted as ‘desire’. The word can be interpreted as ‘fire’ as well, but by choosing to see it as ‘desire’, the poem can be well applied to the particular chapter’s incidents, where some native rulers still wish to topple down the Company Sarkar even after losing their power long ago. This is an example of how interpretation of a poem, without distorting it, helps in rendering an effective translation. In this case, calling ‘તેમણે’ a ‘desire’, also helps in avoiding a repetition of the word fire, flame or blaze.

A ghazal (Desai, 150-1) is also translated similarly, in italics without rhyming lines. For translating metered and rhyming verses, this method seems to be ideal. The readers may not enjoy the translation as a poem, but they can grasp the message of the poem and understand its thematic relevance in the novel.

While translating an Indian text, one comes across three types of words. First, those for which we easily get equivalent words in English. Such words make the translation possible. Second, the words that the translator chooses to retain as in the original language, transliterating them in English. The translator makes this choice either because an English equivalent would seem unnatural in the flow of the text or because the original word provides the translation a distinct cultural flavour, a kind of taste and aroma of the setting. If these words are translated, using the best suitable words, the English version would seem contrived. If the intention is to convey the words for the sake of flavour of the original, the translator retains the original words even when the right word or almost right word is available in English. The third category of words are those that are transliterated because they cannot be translated into English. Their translation would either distort the meaning or
completely falsify it. Ideally, such words should be just transliterated, and the reader can later refer to the glossary or footnotes where the word is explained. The fourth category of words poses utmost difficulty to a translator: They are the words that can neither be translated nor can be retained by transliteration, for such words lend to multiple interpretations that depend on the context for their right understanding. To translate them, the translator makes a compromise, and, considering the context of the original, chooses the best possible English expression. Rarely, the translator explains the word in a phrase or a sentence instead of writing one word there. The glossary, too, is of little help in understanding the words because these words have multiple meanings. Some words belonging to the second, third and fourth category are discussed here with examples.

While making a choice of retaining a number of Gujarati words in English translation, it is assumed that the translation is meant for the pan Indian audience, the readers familiar with Indian culture. For the same reason, the Gujarati words are not given an appearance of unfamiliarity by writing them in italics. The practice of writing Indian words in italics make them unduly eye-catching, giving them a special status on the page. In this translation, easy readability, which the normal fonts would help achieve, is given importance. For those who do not have knowledge of India or Indian languages, and for those who fail to understand a Gujarati word or phrase, a glossary is attached at the end of the novel. The glossary lists 138 Gujarati words explained in English.

Examples of these Gujarati words are as follows:

- ‘Arei, how sad!’ uttered old, selfless Rudradatta.
- ‘Arei, Shankar, where had you gone in the middle of the night?’

‘Arei’ is an exclamation expressing shock, surprise, sadness or disappointment. In the first example, the sentence could have read ‘Oh, how sad!’ but the Gujarati interjection is common enough among Indian readers to know its meaning, and retaining it sounds natural in the dialogue. In the second example, the interjection is used as a salutation. In this case the sentence could have read, ‘Hey, Shankar, where had you gone in the middle of the night?’, making the sentence sound strange in the mouth of the speaker.

- ‘Dadaji, is he our relative?’
- She did not fear a ghost as such, but she did shiver to think about her dadaji’s ghost.

‘Grandfather’ would definitely be an awkward choice in these sentences. ‘Grandpa’ has familiarity and fondness both, yet either of these words would place the character of Kalyani many miles away from the readers. The familiarity of ‘dadaji’
sounds most natural in the novel. The word occurs thirty-two times in the novel, either as a direct address to Rudradatta by Kalyani, or in Kalyani’s talks and thoughts.

- ‘See what I shall do. I shall wear a mukut on the head and play bansuri.’

The above sentence is from Gautam’s dream, where Kalyani pretends to be Krishna. No sensible reader would appreciate this rendering, ‘See what I shall do. I shall put on a crown and play a flute.’ The use of the words ‘mukut’ and ‘bansuri’ immediately evokes the picture of Krishna in the readers’ minds. This, precisely, is the intended effect in retaining Gujarati words.

- Mangal was preparing dal-bati in a corner of the campsite.

Not only does this sentence sound natural in English, it also helps in conveying the right visual image and aroma of the food. A complete English sentence could be as this: Mangal was preparing lentil broth and wheat-cakes in a corner of the campsite. The Indian soldiers in Afghanistan, thousands of miles away from home, cannot think their food as ‘lentil broth’ and ‘cakes’. Such a translation would make the soldiers unfamiliar to Indian readers. It is likely that the readers’ first response would be that the characters, who are in a faraway land, are eating exotic foods.

Some other Gujarati words used in the translation for these reasons are as follows: Bapji, Bhagawan, Bhai, Bhajan, Dhoti, Dhyan, Jai, Kirtan, Mala, Padari, and Puja.

Of these words, ‘padari’ for the Christian priest Johnson, should be discussed further. Throughout the translation, in descriptions, the word ‘priest’ is used for Johnson, but whenever the characters refer to the priest in dialogues, they call him ‘padari’ or ‘padari sahib’. This use seems more natural in the speech of characters that belong to the nineteenth century.

One factor that greatly helps the translator’s wish to retain Gujarati words in the English version is the common use of some Indian words in English speech and writing. Even the English-English dictionaries provide meanings and etymology of such words. Most of these words are used in English literary or journalistic writing in India, and some of these terms are commonly used in India and abroad because they are associated with religion. Such words are now accepted English words, as is the tendency of English that has made its lexicon an ever-expanding hotchpotch of many tongues.

Following Gujarati words of Bharelo Agni are accepted English words, that is, they find a place in English-English dictionary as head words, and hence could be easily kept in the translations: amrit, guru, huzoor, karma, kazi, kismet, mantra, maidan, naik, pundit, rani, sahib, sarkar, sadhu, serai, sigri, thana and yogi.

The next category is of those Gujarati words that are transliterated in English because they are not translatable. These words are either culture specific or they are proper names. A translation of these words would provide either partly wrong, or in
some cases, completely wrong interpretation. A few examples of such words are as follows:

- His long hair and beard added weight to his appearance. He had a club that had the shape of a snake and two skulls, like those kept by the aghori sadhus.

In this sentence, if, instead of ‘aghori’, one writes an ‘ascetic’, the English word would fail to convey the fear and disgust associated with the word aghori. Besides, aghori is also a proper name of a cult of ascetics. Hence, the term is transliterated in English.

- The members of the royalty had also learnt that Rudradatta observed aparigrah.

‘Aparigrah’ is a kind of penance. Its observer neither receives gifts from anyone nor collects wealth for personal use. If translated as ‘renunciation’, it would distort the meaning because a renouncer gives up family and society to pursue spiritual or religious goals. To understand the full meaning of the word, the reader can refer to the glossary.

- That cave had a brahma-rakshas in it.

This is another culture specific term, impossible to translate. A ‘brahma-rakshas’ is a Brahmin who indulges in wicked acts or violates what is sacred. The ghost of a wicked Brahmin is also called ‘brahma-rakshas’. In the sentence here, Rudradatta says that a brahma-rakshas lived in the cave, referring to his own life as a soldier, when he indulged in warfare and violence.

- The man did a namaskar to the guru.

The act of namaskar, bringing palms together in front of one’s chest, is a gesture of paying respect. No English equivalent word would convey this entire action and its significance, compelling one to retain the word in transliteration.

- Fixing her gaze to the ground, Kalyani accepted the bracelet and hid it in her sari’s palav.

If one stubbornly insists on translating the word ‘palav’, the sentence would read as follows: Fixing her gaze to the ground, Kalyani accepted the bracelet and hid it in her sari’s loose end. A woman often uses sari’s palav to cover her head; a toddler clings to mother’s palav for emotional security; and, as in the novel, a woman uses her palav to keep small things safely. Sometimes she uses the palav to hide something in its knot. The word’s emotional significance cannot be communicated by the phrase ‘sari’s loose end’.

Other words that are retained in Gujarati because they are untranslatable or because they are proper names are as follows: Agnihotra, Agni-Samskar, Arati, Ashram, Badshah, Bajoth, Bakul, Bawaji, Bhil, Brahmachari, Dakshina, Darshan, Hundi, Magdal, Nawab, Padmasan, Palash, Panchyat, Pranam, Ras-Garaba, Rayan, Rudrakshmala, Sandhya, Sandhyapuja, Sashtang, Shrdh, Shrimant, Tilak, Vanaprasthashram. These words are explained in the glossary.
The fourth and the last category of words is that of few words that can neither be retained in Gujarati by transliterating them, nor can be easily translated in English. These words are few, but pose a challenge to the translator. The translator cannot retain and transliterate the words because of the following reason: These words have multiple meanings and their context decides in what sense they are used in a sentence. Hence, the translator has to convey the sense of the word in translation by using more than one word; often, a different equivalent is used for the same word at different places. Such a translation can bring out all the possible connotations to help the reader understand the text. Since the original word often has multiple meanings, if the word is retained by transliteration, the reader is left to interpret the word. In this case, the glossary, too, does not help because the word has a volatile meaning, which needs to be grasped according to the context. A few such words that occur in Bharelo Agni are as follows:

- ધર્મ(ધરમ): The most common understanding of the word dharma is ‘religion’, as in ‘Which is the dominant religion in India?’ (ધર્મ શ્રેષ્ઠો મૂળ ધર્મ કયો છે?) The other meaning, close to the first meaning is ‘faith’. Here, faith is not about naming a religion (that is, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and so on) but about holding something sacred, considering something or someone worth reverence. Following is the example of such a use: ‘We don’t use cowhide for anything. It is a matter of faith.’ (ધર્મ ની વાત છે.) One more meaning of the word is ‘good, beneficial or merit-earning deed.’ For example, ‘He has done many works that have benefited people, like helping out the downtrodden.’ (છે જેમ કે, દલીલોને જ્યદ્દી કરવી.) Another possible meaning of dharma is ‘duty’. This can be one’s duty as a father or son, this can be one’s duty as a professional and this can be one’s duty as an individual. ‘As a policeman, it is my duty to protect you all.’ (તમારા સૌની રાજખ્યા કરવી છે જેમ કે, પોલીસ ચાકસ તરીકે મારે ધર્મ છે.)—this is an example of the fourth meaning of the word dharma. In certain contexts, the duty also means a ‘sacred duty’.

The word Adharma is not always the opposite of all the above meanings. For example, adharma would not be an opposite of ‘religion’, the first meaning for the word and also of ‘faith’, the second meaning of dharma. Adharma, however, is a contrast to the two meanings of dharma: ‘good, beneficial or merit-earning work’ and ‘duty’. That is, adharma can mean ‘violation of the sacred’, ‘a sinful or wicked deed’ or ‘a failure of duty’.
In Bharelo Agni, we find the following examples of these two words:

- ‘पृथ्वी नक्षत्री बनावें अप्राणश्च धर्म है.’ (Desai, 71) This is translated as follows: ‘...it is, in fact, [Brahmins’] sacred duty to destroy the Kshatriyas.’
- ‘अधममां ज कपनी सरकारी नाश धारणों छ...अधम जे करें ते नाश पांशें.’ (Desai, 71) This is translated as follows: ‘Such sins will bring the Company’s downfall...Yes, all sinners will be destroyed one day.’

- संस्कार: This word also lends itself to interpretation according to its context. It could mean culture, civilisation, ritual, belief, creed, upbringing or training of an individual. Instead of leaving it to the reader to understand the word, the translator would prefer to find an equivalent according to that particular situation and make the reader’s work easy.

- ‘...अङ धर्में कैलिका नाशनों सन्य रखतां तथो अस्वस्थतानुः निवारण नक्षता करता, परंतु हिंदी संस्कारनु भएत अपमान करता केलि.’ (Desai, 65)

In this instance, हिंदी precedes the word संस्कार. The word हिंदी, which means ‘of Hind’, that is ‘Indian’, is an adjective qualifying the noun संस्कार. Hence, the sentence refers to a wider culture that is prevalent almost everywhere in India. The translator first has two options to translate संस्कार: culture or civilisation, two general terms. The novel’s context, however, focuses on one person’s feeling of being hurt by the white men. If that is the case, the translation of संस्कार should be made a little narrower, so that its insult would make a person feel humiliated. With this consideration, the translator has two choices: ‘beliefs’ or ‘creed’. Of these two words, ‘creed’ fits in the best because the word also conveys a sense of ‘rigidity’. Someone, who strongly values his creed, can definitely feel humiliated by the violation of that creed. Eventually, the sentence is translated as follows: ‘...when they touched a religious person’s food, they were not protesting against untouchability—in fact, they were rudely slighting Hindi creed.’

- ‘तु मने आदर्शमां बनावें?’
  ‘ना...हे...ये तो संस्कारनो प्रकर्ष हे.’
  ‘तो मने अया संस्कार मने आप.’
In this case, Lucy, a Christian woman, wants to become a follower of Aryadharma. Responding to her wish, Tryambak says that to be a follower of Aryadharma is a matter of संस्कार. At first, the translator is inclined to think that by संस्कार, Tryambak implies ‘the status given to someone by birth’; yet, reading the next line makes it clear that for Tryambak, Aryadharma is not something that a person inherits. That is why he asks what Lucy will do after receiving the संस्कार. Hence, the choice here is not of one word, but of a couple of words that would explain संस्कार. In this context, संस्कार is something that can be given to someone, that can be learnt by someone like Lucy, and can be practised for life later. The translation of this passage is given below:

‘Will you help me become a follower of Aryadharma?’

‘No, how can I? It is a matter of one’s culture, education and training.’

‘You can definitely give me all that is required to a follower of Aryadharma.’

‘What do you want to achieve by doing all this?’

‘I will marry you.’

संस्कार is translated as ‘culture, education and training’ because culture can be acquired by living with fellow people for long; education can be acquired by learning required texts and values; and training can be acquired by learning certain practices with discipline. This is an interpretation of the text and word, and hence, subjective.

- नाटो युमिने एक बनावता की खादनी खाड, आपा आर्यावर्तने एक बनावतो को संस्कार, आर्यावर्त्तना पांतोने नोमा पडी जातां आटकवे छ.

(Desai, 195)

In this sentence, the use of the word संस्कार is unambiguous. The writer is referring to the set of beliefs, religions, literatures, festivals and so on that have united Aryavart. The translator can safely say that संस्कार here means civilisation:
A mysterious hand keeps the universe together; similarly, an old and unfathomable civilisation keeps Aryavart together, preventing it from falling apart in small provinces.

It is tempting to translate संस्कार as ‘civilisation’ in this example. The issue at stake here, however, is about one’s readiness to sacrifice life for the sake of something. Hence, ‘civilisation’ feels like a diffused phenomenon. It is not something to which we feel so strong an emotional affiliation that we would sacrifice our life for it. In this context, संस्कार should be something for which people feel a sense of possession; it should be precious and worth dying for because of its purity. The sentence is translated in English as follows:

So long as religion is considered the soul of cultural heritage, people will always be ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of religious beliefs.

‘Cultural heritage’ for संस्कार provides necessary nuances, signifying something that has been passed on for generations and hence immensely valuable, worth sacrificing one’s life for it.

Following is the list of some other words translated according to their contexts. In the brackets are given some possible translations of such words. सत (devotion/passion/the power of faith/ fervour of truth), भारतीय (the essence of a Brahmin/the qualities of a Brahmin/ Brahminhood), अग्रंथीपत (arrogance/arrogant obstinacy/unruly behaviour), धमु (corrupt/impure/fallen), धर्मसूत्र (crusade/a battle for values/ a battle for truth), तप (long and consistent efforts/ extreme hard-work / an ascetic’s disciplined, solitary life to seek enlightenment), सम (१. तुम्हे मारा सम्म. / २. तुम्हे सम ६वेश.)(My oath to you. / I will bind you with an oath./If you don’t do what I say, I will die.)

In this discussion of words, four words deserve special mention. One is the word हरी, which presents a question to the translator: Why has Desai preferred हरी to ‘हारतीय’? If he had written ‘हारतीय’, the choice of English translation would be
obviously ‘Indian’. Since Desai has opted for ‘વધતો’, the translation retains the word in English. ‘વધતો’ literally means ‘belonging to Hind’. Probably, Desai has used the word because the novel is about nineteenth-century India, and he must have thought that the term ‘ભારતીય’ was not used in those days for Indians; nor did Indians think about themselves as ‘ભારતીય’, belonging to one country. Another possibility is that Desai refers to those who lived in the northern parts of India by the word Hindi, and thus, he is making a distinction between the northerners and those who lived across the Vindhya, in the south. By the way, four times in the novel, Desai uses ‘ભારતપંડ’, which is partly retained as ‘Bharat’ in the translation.

To refer to ‘વિપગત’, ‘વિલીય’, or ‘અલબી’, throughout the translated text, two words are used, ‘uprising’ or ‘revolt’. The word ‘mutiny’ is avoided because it conveys the perspective of the people who are in power: when the power-holders face protests, they see it as a ‘mutiny against the establishment’. A mutineer is a ‘wrong doer’; he is an ‘offender’ for the establishment; he is a disturber of peace, the peace that is beneficial to the powerful. On the other hand, the people who protest against the rulers call their fight an ‘uprising’ or a ‘revolt’. An uprising is for ‘our rights’ and a ‘revolt’ is against ‘injustice’. Both these words suggest a fight against a power that is unjust. It is a struggle for rights, making it a fight for values, referring to the point of view of the victims. And hence, the chosen words in the translation are ‘uprising’ and ‘revolt’.

One more related discussion is about the skin colour of the ‘Hindis’ as mentioned by Desai. In the novel, Desai has written ‘ધીમે ભારતીય’ or ‘માણસ ભારતીય’ when he refers to Indians’ skin tone. If this is literally translated as ‘black’, the translation can cause confusion even for Indian readers. The adjective ‘black’ is firmly associated with Africans and Afro-Americans in literary writing. Hence, the obvious choice is to describe the Indians as ‘brown’ in the English text, even when the Gujarati text does not make that distinction.

One word used in the translation deserves a tangential mention here, at least as an aside. The word is ‘albeit’, a Middle English word that has derived from the phrase ‘although be it’. The word is used in literary and formal English as a conjunction, synonymous with ‘although’. It is amusing to know that this word is indigenised in Gujarati as ‘અલબી’. A usage example of this originally English word is as follows: ‘ફૂલ આગળ લખી જતો કલ્લો, અલબી ધારી પીડીએ.’ In the translation of the novel, the
word occurs in the following sentence: ‘...people became sensitive and conscious, albeit in a different way, to the glory of Hind’s culture.’

An interesting fact worth mentioning is about ‘pandy’ (also pandee), a word found in almost all reputed English dictionaries. The Oxford English Dictionary explains the word as follows:

[From the surname Pae, the title of a Jōt or subdivisional branch of the Brahmins of the Upper Province, which was very common among the high-caste sepoys of the Bengal army. One of those bearing the surname was MangulPae, the first man to mutiny in the 34th Regiment.]


Thus, the 1857 uprising in India, which provides a backdrop to Bharelo Agni, has given a word to English language, and Mangal Pandey has found a place in the explanation of the word’s roots. It should be noted, however, that ‘pandy’ is not used anywhere in the translation.

It is already mentioned above that one vital factor of the process of translation is in making small changes like additions, omissions or re-arrangement of words or sentences. These changes do not in any way change the plot of the novel or the significant meaning as apprehended by the translator, yet such changes can bring clarity and effectiveness to the language of the translated text. This is the area of a translator’s freedom; this is the sphere of ‘play’, where the translator applies his literary sensibility to make changes to the text, moulding the translation. By making such alterations, the translator makes a claim on the translated text, making it his/her translation. The translated text does not remain just a writer’s work, but it also becomes a translator’s work. This is the reason why, as readers, we prefer to read a particular rendering of a classic.

Examples of a few such changes made in Bharelo Agni are as follows:

- In the novel, the ashram’s students refer to Kalyani as ‘Bharat’s deer’ (Desai, 03), an allusion to a mythical tale. The Puranic tale is about Bharat, an ascetic, and his love for a foal. His attachment to the beautiful deer was so strong, in spite of living a life of renunciation, that he was borne as a deer in his next life. Similarly, Rudradatta has a strong bond with Kalyani, in spite of living a simple life of a scholar and teacher. Because of these connections, the translation retains the allusion ‘Bharat’s deer’. The mythical story and its significance are explained in the glossary.
On the other hand, describing physical health of Rudradatta’s students, Desai writes, ‘विद्यार्थीं सुक्त सुदामा नहींति’ (Desai, 09). Here, the reference is to Sudama, Lord Krishna’s friend, who lived in penury and was, hence, thin. The reference to Sudama has no other purpose but to provide an alliterative adjective in Gujarati. The comparison does not allude to any event of a mythical story as does the example of Bharat’s deer. Because of this reason, the English translation reads as this: Rudradatta’s wards were not a bunch of scrawny young men.

Omission of the reference to Sudama helps the reader to read the novel without an interruption. If the sentence is translated as ‘Rudradatta’s students were not thin like Sudama’, it would have forced the reader to refer to the glossary unnecessarily. Besides, the comparison to Sudama’s physical state does not make it an effective simile in English.

- The following example is about the re-arrangement of sentences in a paragraph. The paragraph as written by Desai in the following manner:

  Thus, both preachers were introduced to each other. Johnson’s ideas about Rudradatta turned out to be wrong. Gradually, the Christian missionary became fond of Rudradatta. To everyone’s surprise, Rudradatta began teaching the Geeta to the Christian; subsequently, Johnson’s respect for the old man grew. They both often discussed religion, and if Johnson’s knowledge of Hinduism astonished Rudradatta, what Rudradatta knew about the Bible amazed Johnson. The priest passionately argued in support of his religion, but Rudradatta never spoke against Christianity. While teaching the Geeta, he often quoted the Bible that had incidents or messages similar to the Hindu text. If all Brahmins become like Rudradatta, the efforts to promote Christianity would be pointless, thought Johnson. It was unlikely that Rudradatta knew English, yet he was familiar with significant details of the Bible.

This paragraph focuses on Rudradatta’s catholic thinking and knowledge. It proves that Rudradatta is a well-informed guru, not a fanatic Brahmin like many other that the priest has met. Hence, the sentence arrangement for the last two sentences is changed in the English translation, which reads as follows:

...The priest passionately argued in support of his religion, but Rudradatta never spoke against Christianity. While teaching the Geeta, he often quoted the Bible that had incidents or messages similar to the Hindu text. It was unlikely that Rudradatta knew English, yet he was familiar with significant details of the Bible. If all Brahmins become like Rudradatta, the efforts to promote Christianity would be pointless, thought Johnson.
A comparison of both the paragraphs reveals that the last sentence in the translation concludes the paragraph succinctly, reflecting the priest’s change of attitude towards Rudradatta. The re-arrangement of sentences makes the paragraph more effective.

- One example that combines addition of words and re-arrangement of sentences is as follows. Desai writes about Rudradatta’s train of thoughts in the following manner,

‘अजूं निःक्ष्णा’ उददत्तन्यः कदयमां पडधो विचयो।
‘तत्त्वं साक्षे एक जय अथ अौं नवाहं शी? उददत्तन्यः सिंह विभागः धपावुं चू अौं तेः माने तो जोठा केम किलवाय?’
‘माही देख गृह थास; मंडेरों में आश्रय दीघो!’ (Desai, 133-134)
Confusing the reader, Desai presents the thought process in inverted commas; the exclamation mark also add to the perplexity, misleading the reader to treat the dialogues as spoken words. Besides, after these dialogues, Desai has written a long commentary, further complicating the situation. The reader wonders if the commentary is Desai’s thoughts or Rudradatta’s. To make the passage clear, the translation adds a sentence (‘He continued with the dialogue in him mind.’), omits the inverted commas and re-arranges the dialogues in one paragraph:

All in vain, Rudradatta’s heart echoed. He continued with the dialogue in his mind, I am not surprised by what Tatya is doing. What else can he do, anyway? And, if he believes that he has been following my path, is he wrong in believing so? It was my mistake to believe in those royal ruins of princely states when I was young.

Thus, the passage sounds more coherent in the translation.

- The following is an example of how the translator has to add a few words to make the meaning clear in the translation. The original Gujarati text, which is Mangal Pandey’s dialogue, is follows:

‘जैने भरतं विचार आवे तेनी बाज्जां च सूं लेख है? आ यायें गोराणे जूनो, अथ विहं श्रव पल्ल तमाने गकसाधी रहां हे. तमारा करतं आ बूमिमां पडळा मूलटेर्क वधारे वीरत्वर्यां हे.’ (Desai, 204)
This is translated in the following words:

‘You all want to keep planning a revolt. Your plans are fickle. If you think about death, you fail to fight. Look at these white soldiers. Their death scares you. I think
the dead white officers had more courage than you all. They did not wait to plan out strategies.’

Mangal Pandey speaks these words when other soldiers accuse him that he has ruined the plot of revolt. Reading the Gujarati text repeatedly, it becomes clear that Mangal justifies his reckless action of killing the white officers by arguing that the other Indian soldiers have become apprehensive because of thinking too much about the revolt. Mangal declares the white officers to be more courageous than the Indians because they began the fight right away, not pondering long over preparing a scheme. Mangal disapproves detailed planning, as the leaders of the revolt keep doing. To highlight this interpretation in translation, two sentences are added: One, ‘If you think about death, you fail to fight.’ Two, ‘They did not wait to plan out strategies.’

The translator often has to rely on his sensibility and his experience of reading literature to interpret the text and bring out the meaning. This method, however, best works in translating prose and that too in stories of direct narration like Bharelo Agni. If applied to poetry or to texts known for their complexity, the translation could succumb to the sin of simplifying the literary work and eliminating nuances.

4. **Translation: A Perpetual Evolution**

After discussing how the translator establishes a claim on his rendering of a literary text by making various types of changes, this discussion shifts to a significant attribute of the translation process. During the long process of translating Bharelo Agni into English, some of the novel’s passages were translated twice in a gap of six months. While making the second translation, the first English rendering was kept out of sight so that the original text could be approached afresh. This was an experiment to observe how one looks at the same text differently after a gap of a few months; and, it was an experiment to note how one chooses words and structures sentences to render the same passage in English on two different days. The results of the experiment are as follows: After the original Gujarati passage, two different renderings (namely, A and B) appear in English. The third English version (namely, C) is the version that is the final translation.

1. पुजारावणी असफल जगृतिनां व युगां मेलनि व युगकीर्ष चलवणण चलावणा मोटा साधनमुद करतो. मेलामाणे घृपी रीते उक्षरो पोतानूँ कम करता, दोनां बांधता अने गुपत योजनायो घडता. उद्दा मेलामाणे घृपी बाजूना जळालार न होय अहै अने भें वे वे नहीनुं. मेलामाणा स्वरूप उपरथी तेघो भिडिता करी शक्य के आ मेलामाणे को गूळ योजनानु घडतर घडत छ. आमुं
A fair was a significant instrument to trigger an agitation in those days, when people did not have a sense of being subjects of a state. The agitators held meetings, looked for like-minded people and secretly plotted their next action. Rudradatta knew about these activities. He had concluded that a thick plot was being designed in the fair that year. Hindustan was one civilisation; hence, certain festivals were celebrated all over on the same day, animating people everywhere.

In those days, as people did not possess a distinct consciousness about the overall political and social conditions, a fair became a medium to initiate an organised movement. The instigators secretly worked during such fairs, forming bands of like-minded people and plotting future actions. Rudradatta knew about this activity well and could easily judge from the character of the crowds at the fair that it was a platform for intrigues. Besides, since entire Hindustan possessed a uniform culture, many festivals were celebrated on the same days.

In those days, as people did not possess a distinct consciousness about the overall political and social conditions, a fair became a medium to initiate an organised movement. The instigators secretly worked during such fairs, forming bands of like-minded people to plot future actions. Rudradatta knew about these activities. Observing the crowds at the fair, he had concluded that a thick plot was being designed there that year. Besides, since entire Hindustan possessed a uniform culture, many festivals were celebrated on the same days everywhere.

- 2. Mahavir believed himself to be an independent landlord, resisting every dominance except that of Delhi’s badshah’s. Once, he did not allow the Company’s platoons to pass through his estate. He already had a long history of conflicts with the Company. The Company’s officials presented many versions of the disputes, often adding to Mahavir’s imaginary sins. They declared that Mahavir had
committed a crime by not allowing the Company’s platoons to pass through his estate. According to Mahavir, the Company was an outsider in Hindustan.

2B. Mahavir believed himself to be a free land-holder, independent of any ruler. He was not prepared to accept anyone’s leadership except that of Delhi’s emperor’s. Once, he refused to let the Company’s platoon pass through his estate. Even before that incident, he had offended the Company on several occasions. The list of these crimes was long and varied, which the Company’s administrators exaggerated at will. When Mahavir did not permit the passage of the Company’s soldiers, who, according to him, were the soldiers of alien rulers, the Company’s administrators recorded this as a serious crime.

2C. Mahavir believed himself to be a free landholder. Delhi’s badshah is the sole legitimate ruler of Hind, he often said. Once, he refused to let the Company’s platoon pass through his estate. Even before that incident, he had offended the Company on several occasions. The list of these crimes was long and varied, which the Company’s administrator exaggerated at will. When he did not permit the passage of the Company’s platoon, who, according to him, was composed of the soldiers working for an alien ruler, the Company’s administrator recorded this as a serious crime.

- 3. हिंदुस्तान देश नथी—पंडे छे. तेना विस्तृत विवाव्य, विवाहा नदीप्रकाशी अने हीयां विरविशिष्टे जाणे सृजिनी विवाव्यताना पदार्थपुल न होय तेन मोजनो योजनो पोतानां मसाडी के हे. छतां सृजने एक बनावतां के हाथनी भाग, आफ्ना आर्यवर्तने एक बनावतो को संस्कार, आर्यवर्तना प्रांताने नोणा पडी जतो अटकवे हे. कामीरी पंडे अन्यान्य विवादारींना दर्शने जतो जहूर मली आचाय; एड बंगालीवाघ दातकायनां दर्शने जहूर मली आचाय; स्थानकातो पी जनारी विवादारी उपज्यती आर्य पुजने वाताते करी नक्कां नथी. आर्यवाक्यों ती आज धे. ते नक्कां त्याचे पान लक्ष्यांचे, व्यापारांचे अने यात्राच्या आम्या हिंदां दुरींचा विज्ञान होता. (Desai, 195)

3A. Hindustan is not a country—it is a continent in itself. Its vast landmass, wide rivers and high mountains teach a lesson about the endless universe. Hindustan measures to thousands of kilometer from one corner to another. A mysterious force keeps the universe united. Similarly, the Arya civilisation unifies Hind’s various areas, connecting them so that they are not divided into smaller states. You may meet a Kashmiri pundit in Kanyakumari temple and a Bengali babu in Dwaraka. The Arya culture has resisted space and time, thriving independently. We have railways today,
but even before railway trains, soldiers, traders and pilgrims travelled throughout Hind.

3B. Hindustan is not a country; it is a continent. Its vast landmass, long rivers and high mountain peaks teach lessons in enormousness, taking in miles and miles of earth. The universe is kept together by a mysterious hand; the Aryavart, too, is kept together by its ancient and unfathomable civilisation, preventing it from falling apart in small provinces. A Kashmiri pundit visits Kanyakumari; a Bengali babu often goes to Dwarikadheesh for a darshan. The thoughts of the Aryas living here did not pay heed to place and time; distance did not hinder them. Even when the railways did not connect places, Hindustan’s armies, merchants and pilgrims often and easily moved from one village to another, one town to another and one city to another.

3C. Hindustan is not a country; it is a continent. Its vast landmass, long rivers and high mountain peaks teach lessons in enormousness, taking in miles and miles of earth. A mysterious hand keeps the universe together; similarly, an ancient and unfathomable civilisation keeps Aryavart together, preventing it from falling apart in small provinces. A Kashmiri pundit visits Kanyakumari; a Bengali babu often goes to Dwarikadheesh for a darshan. The Arya thought and culture have resisted space and time, thriving independently of the limitations imposed by them. Even when the railways did not connect places, Hindustan’s armies, pilgrims and merchants often and easily moved from one village to another, one town to another and one city to another.

- 4. નાનાબદું માનવજીવનની કેટલાક પૂર્વબુદ્ધિએ ધકાયું ખશે. કેટલાક સત્તભી અને તત્ત્વોના અંદર તેમાં ઉત્તા ખશે! અને મૃત્યુના સાથે જે મેળવવા મહત્વપૂર્ણ છે?
  અમે લેવાં તો કુદરત કે ઈશારન નાહીં, ઇદારો અને પાંગલ ગાઢાં. મૃત્યુના સાથે સમાધાન મળવાની એક મહાચાલ ક્રમચાલ કરી રહ્સે?

4A. The short span of a human being’s life is a result of numerous unseen forces and a synthesis of many elements. Everything vanishes with death! If it is indeed so, God or nature might be mad, immature or wasteful. A life that is forever wrapped up with death would be a huge waste. Is this acceptable? When someone dies, a universe dies with the person. Who else but a devil would enjoy the sport of
eliminating a universe along with a person? No, this is not possible. Even blind nature might be preserving the essence of a human being’s life somewhere.

4B. Our short life is made with the help of numerous forces and elements. And, with death, all that vanishes with the human body. If this is true, God and nature both must be insane, immature or wasteful. If life ends with death, it would be a huge waste. Is such a waste fair? The world ends with the death of a person. Who else but a devil can have fun out of this destruction? This could not be so, and hence, even blind nature must be carefully keeping the essence of life somehow somewhere.

4C. Our short life results from a combination of numerous forces and synthesis of many elements. When someone dies, everything vanishes with the human body! If it would be true, God and nature both could be insane, immature or wasteful. If life ends with death, it would be a complete waste. Is such a waste fair? When someone dies, a universe ends with that person’s death. Who else, but a devil would enjoy the sport of eliminating a universe along with a person? A devil cannot be the force behind our life and death, and hence, we can say that blind nature must be carefully preserving the essence of our life somehow somewhere.

- 5. जेंकसन ने सहज संतोष धारी. तेने ध्यान आयवा दाखुं. बीजो प्यालो पीता ते संपूर्ण शुद्धिमा आवी गयो. तेसे गौतम सामे बिजूं. चंडवारशी प्रकाश वेटी राहीं हता. तेसे गौतमने ओळण्यो. कपनीना शिक्षणो पराजज तेना समर्पणमां आवी. काळी यामडीनो विज्ञ ये धारी वज्हत गोरी यामडीनो असह वरजग बनी जय चे. येवरे राजज करवा मोडेला गोरायोने काळा भेड़वारीहोनी स्वाच्छ अंगना देखरना अपराध सरणी लाजे चे. जेंकसन ध्यायो नी; पोताणांधी ज्यावां के केम तेनी अने शंका बिघें. गौतमने असाराने ते पाणी पीती हतो. मृत्यु पामटुं जवन अक्षांक तेना देखकं जवमुं. पाणी पोतपते तेसे दाँवे रहींने कमरे बराबरी कटार काळी अने गौतमने अगर तेना सारंभारोने काळी जवर पहले ते पहलां, अत्यंत बल करी ये कटार गौतमनी छतीमां ओसी हीं. (Desai, 321)

5A. Jackson felt better. He became a little conscious. With one more glass of water, he was conscious enough to recognise people. Jackson looked at Gautam, and recognised him in the dim moonlight. He remembered that the Company’s troops had lost the battle. White men often find a brown men’s victory unbearable. The white people, whom God has sent to rule over the world, think that the brown people’s wish to be free is a crime. Jackson was injured in the battle; he doubted if
he would survive the injury. Leaning on Gautam, Jackson sipped water. Although he was on the verge of death, he suddenly experienced a burst of strength. Holding the vessel with one hand, he pulled out a dagger with another, and thrust it in Gautam’s chaste before anyone could stop his attack.

5B. Having taken water, Jackson became conscious enough to make sense of the surrounding. He stared at Gautam. The dim moonlight helped him recognise who was holding him. He remembered that the Company’s army had lost the battle. The brown men’s victory can often be intolerable to white men. The white men, who believed that they were sent by God to rule over others, found it blasphemous of brown men to demand freedom. Jackson was wounded in the battle; he doubted if he would survive for long. Leaning on Gautam, Jackson sipped some more water. His weak body received momentary strength. Still holding the mug, he pulled out his dagger, and before Gautam or his assistants could act, stabbed it in Gautam’s chest.

5C. Jackson felt better and became conscious enough to make sense of the surrounding. He stared at Gautam. The dim moonlight helped him recognise who was holding him. He remembered that the Company’s army had lost the battle. The brown men’s victory can often be intolerable to white men. The white men, who believed that God had sent them to rule over others, found it blasphemous of brown men to demand freedom. Jackson was wounded; he doubted if he would survive long. Leaning on Gautam, Jackson sipped some more water. Although he was on the verge of death, he experienced a burst of strength. Holding the mug with one hand, he pulled out a dagger with another, and, before Gautam or anyone else could act, thrust it in Gautam’s chest.

The comparison of the three versions proves that they all convey the same ideas in different words. Each passage contains some changes, yet conveys the essential meaning and emotion in the translation. Therefore, one cannot doubt the loyalty of any passage to the original. The final version, that is the ‘C’ version, however, is the one that is most lucid, and hence, pleasing to read.

This experiment raises some important questions about the process of translation. If one of these passages is translated again after a year, could it be more lucid and effective than the preferred version (C) presented here? If one translator can come up with different renderings of the same passage over a period, how different would be the translations of the same work by two translators? If this is the case, can there be a final version of the translation?

Translation is a perpetual evolution, always amenable to change, forever succumbing to different understandings of the original text, and to a vastly different choice of words to express ideas. Hence, even if the translator remains the same, his translation, after a period, will not be the same. We cannot have the final translation of any literary text. This should not be considered a failure of a translator or
translation itself; in fact, this volatile and forever evolving nature of translation provides scope for perpetual re-interpretation of the original and ceaseless play of words while translating.

**SomeWords to Fellow Translators:**

It would be a pleasure to know that other translators would work on bringing out R. V. Desai in English. Desai’s work strongly reflect the struggles of his times, especially Gandhi’s many messages. More of Desai’s works in English will prove how Gujarati literature was not always immersed in formal innovations inspired by western literary theories, as is believed by many, but it has a vast oeuvre that engages with society at large.

Translators should have refined sensibility and an experience of reading literature in its various genres. If they possess these qualities, they can take liberty, albeit within limits, with their translations. Translators must not be obsessed with the ‘loyalty to the original’, but their talents should focus on presenting a certain conscious interpretation of the work. This would empower the translators and liberate them from the tyranny of the original’s meaning.

Although my work is a translation of a regional-language book into English, it should be emphasised that these days, all the translators should focus on learning Indian languages, over above their mother tongue. This will create a vibrant communication among Indian regional languages. Today, our focus on learning English and other foreign languages has created a situation where we rely on an English translation to translate a book in other regional languages. For example, we cannot get a translator who can render a Kannada work in Gujarati; but, dozens of translators will be able to translate the same Kannada work from its English version into Gujarati.

Our intellectual dependence of English reflects our intellectual poverty. This situation should immediately addressed by instituting many language-learning centres in universities. English Departments can take a lead in this, and the students of English Departments must take interest in learning Indian languages, as their knowledge of English will play a vital role in acquiring a new Indian language. This change will not only prepare a generation of multi-lingual translators, but this can commence an era of genuine scholarship in Indian universities, Our knowledge of Indian languages will open up doors innumerable knowledge resources, and free us from our dependence on English for new ideas; not to mention this change will build cultural bridges among language communities.
A GLOSSARY OF THE GUJARATI TERMS USED IN THE TRANSLATION

Aghori: A class of mendicants who wander about naked and eat anything however disgusting it may be.

Agnihotra: The duty of an Agnihotri; the keeping alive of the sacrificial fire and offering oblations to it. Agnihotri is a Brahmin who keeps and worships the sacrificial fire in his house.

Agni-Samskar: Performance of funeral rites over the dead body of a Hindu; cremation of a corpse.

Amrut: The nectar of immortality.

Aparigrah: To observe a penance by which the person does not accept a gift from anyone, nor does he collect material objects for personal use and pleasure.

Arati: The ceremony of waving lamps before an idol in order to remove the effect of evil; the prayer song sung at that time. Also, to receive the warmth of the lamps on palms and then touch one’s head to receive God’s bleslings.

Arei: An expression of shock, sorrow, disgust or surprise. It is an exclamation, but not always so.

Arya: A person born in a noble family; a respectable person. Also the ancient invaders of India who were the ancestors of the modern Hindus.

Aryadharma: The religion that grew in Aryavarta; Vedic religion; Hinduism.

Aryavarta: The tract of land between Himalaya and Vidhyamounatin-range which also included parts of Sindh and Punjab in Pakistan.

Ashram: A school with students lodging; a hermitage.

Babu: (derogatory) A government servant; a term to address any Bengali man.

Badshah: An emperor; a great king.

Bahadur: Brave.

Bajoth: a footstool.

Bakul: (Also known as Borasalli): (mumusopelengi) A flowering tree; common English name Bullet Wood; Sanskrit poets write that the tree blossoms when young women throw mouthful of wine on it; its lightly fragrant white flowers are used to make garlands.

Baniya: An individual of a particular caste, whose members are traditionally traders, shopkeepers or moneylenders.

Bansuri: A flute.

Bapji: A respectful address for an elderly male or a saintly figure.

Bawaji: An ascetic.

Bhagawan: God.

Bhai: Brother.
Bhaiya: A man belonging to Uttar Pradesh.
Bhajan: A prayer-song.
Bhakti: Devotion.
Bhang: Hemp; cannabis plant; an intoxicating drink made of hemp; bhang was a common remedy for many ailments like indigestion, diarrhea, asthma and physical weakness; it is believed that Lord Shankar loved bhang, and hence it is a favourite drink of ascetics; bhang was commonly taken in India in the nineteenth century; even today, it is taken in rural India either as a remedy for common illnesses or out of habit.
Bharat or Bharatkhand: Hindustan; India.
Bharat’s Deer: A reference to the Puranic story of Bharat, a king of the solar dynasty. After ruling his kingdom for a long time, Bharat became a sage. Living in a forest as a sage, Bharat became attached to a foal, a young deer. The beautiful animal became an obsession for him; and, as he died thinking about the deer, he was borne as a deer in his next birth. The phrase ‘Bharat’s deer’ is used to describe anyone that is one’s weakness.
Bhil: Aboriginals who live in hills and forests.
Brahmachari: One who observes brahmacharya. Brahmacharya is a period of life in which one observes abstinence from sexual intercourse and focuses on learning.
Brahmarakshas: A ‘demonlikeBrhamin’; a Brahmin that has become a ghost; a Brahmin, ignoring the duties expected of him, indulges in immoral activity.
Brahmarshi: A rishi-like Brahmin.
Brahmin: An individual of the priestly caste, the highest one, among the Hindus.
Brahminism: The belief system that observes the caste order, considering the Brahmins as the highest caste.
Chaitra: The sixth month of the Vikrama calendar, corresponding to March-April.
Chandan: Sandalwood; a paste prepared from Chandan.
Chhabili: An attractive woman with winning manners; in the novel, Lakshmibai’s pet name.
Chhatrapati: A king.
Dadaji: Grandfather.
Dakshina: A gift; money given to Brahmins or priests for their services; any charitable donation.
Dal-bati: Meal consisting of lentils and thick roti made of wheat.
Darshan: Visiting a temple to pray in front of God’s idol.
Darshanshastra: A common term for the six schools of Hindu philosophy.
Dharmashala: A caravanserai; a traveller’s lodge built as a work of piety. In India, such lodges were often built within temple premises and were used by pilgrims.
Dhoti: A white garment worn round the waist and tucked in behind by men.
Dhyan: Meditation; concentration; attention.
Drona: The guru of Pandavas in Mahabharat.
Durva: Grass used in religious ceremonies.
Durvasa: The name of a rishi, who was prone to extreme anger.
Dwarkadheesh: Lord Vishnu.
Ghazal: A lyric poem with a fixed number of couplets and a repeated rhyme, typically on the theme of love, and normally set to music.
Guru: A teacher.
Gurudev: A respectful address for a teacher; it implies that the teacher is like God.
Guruji: A respectful address for a teacher.
Hari: Lord Vishnu or Krishna.
Hundi: A bill of exchange; a cheque.
Huzoor: A powerful person; a respectful address for a man of authority.
Hindi: Indian
Jai: Victory.
Jangabar: Zanzibar
Kamadhenu: Indra’s cow that granted every wish requested of her.
Kamaru: Asam
Karma: Deeds, good or bad, that can affect one’s life.
Kazi: A judge among the Muslims.
Kirtan: A prayer song.
Koel: Indian cuckoo.
Krushna: Another name of Draupadi.
Kshatriya: One of the castes, known as a warrior caste.
Kurta: A loose robe worn by men and women, though the design varies according to the gender of the person wearing it.
Magadal: A thick wooden club used for physical exercise.
Maharaj: An address used for a king; it means ‘a great king’.
Maharani: An address used for a queen; it means ‘a great queen’.
Maharashtri: A person speaking Marathi or belonging to Maharashtra.
Maharshi: A great sage.
Mahatma: A great soul.
Mahudo: also Mahua or Mowra: bassialatifolia: A kind of butter-tree with edible flowers; an alcohol distilled from its flowers.

Maidan: An open space used for as parade ground, playground or for holding events. 

Main meri Jhansi nathidungi, kabhinahi!: ‘I will not give up my Jhansi! Never!’

Mala: A garland.

Malwa: A region of central India with fertile land.

Mantra: Chanting; incantation; spell; charm.

Maulvi: A Muslim scholar or jurist.

Mukut: Crown.

Naik: A low ranking officer in the army.

Namaskar: A greeting uttered while pressing palms together before the chest or face. The word means ‘I bow to you’.

Namaz: A ritual prayer prescribed by Islam, to be observed five times a day.

Narmade Har: A tribute to river Narmada and Lord Shiva.

Nawab: A native governor of a region in the Mughal Empire.

Padari: A priest.

Padmasan: The lotus position of yogasana.

Palash: also Khakhro or Kesudo: (buleafondosa): A tree; when its flowers are boiled in water, they ooze reddish-yellow colour, which is traditionally used to play Holi.

Palav: The loose end of a sari.

Panchayat: An assembly of arbitrators; it is a traditional system to solve social or economic problems in rural areas.

Pundit: A scholar or a guru; the term is also used for a priest.

Pandurang: A name of lord Vishnu or his avatar. The word means ‘one with a fair skin’.

Parashuram: A rishi mentioned in Purana; he is considered to be the sixth avatar of Vishnu; according to legend, to take revenge for his father’s murder, Prashuram eliminated Kshatriya from the entire earth; he massacred Kshatriyas twenty-one times.

Patel: The hereditary headman of a village; an address of respect for a farmer; an owner of land.

Peshwa: A leader or a minister; a hereditary Brahmin chief minister of a Maratha kingdom.

Pindharis: A notorious class of robbers.

Prajapati: A name of God Brahma; a king.

Pranam: To bow in respect; reverential salutation.
Prayag: The place of pilgrimage where the Ganga, Jamana and the invisible Saraswati meet; Allahabad.

Puja: An act of worshipping.

Pujari: A priest at a temple.

Rani: Queen.

Raosahib: A term of respect for a man of southern parts of India.

Ras-garaba: A traditional dance performed to worship mother goddess Amba.

Rayan: (mimusopshexandra): A tree that has tasty and nutritious fruits.

Roti: Chapati; bread.

Rudrakshmala: The seed of a plant (eleocarups lanceolaties or ganitrus). The seed is sacred to Shiva and is used to make a rosary.

Sadhu: An ascetic.

Sahib: A term of respect used for an elder or a superior at a workplace.

Sai: A fakir.

Salam: A salutation; to bow to someone with respect.

Sandhya: A morning, noon or evening prayer offered by Brahmins.

Sandhyapuja: See Sandhya.

Sarkar: Government or administration.

Sashtang: Respects paid by prostrating the body.

Shastra: Scriptures; systematic presentation of knowledge of any field.

Shesha: A mythic snake with many heads. According to legend, Shesha carries earth on his head.

Shivaratri: The night of the fourteenth day of Magha (fourth month of the Vikram calendar), sacred to Lord Shiva.

Shradh: A sacrifice performed for the salvation of the dead ancestors.

Shree: An honorific prefix to the names of respected men, gods or welfare organizations.

Shrimant: Wealthy; a prefix to the names of kings or rich men.

Sigri: A small, portable stove.

Subhadra: Krishna’s sister, who was Arjuna’s wife.

Suryadev: Lord Sun.

Tapasvi: An ascetic who observes mortification.

Tapasya: The practice of religious mortification.

Thana: A military station or a police station; a camp.
Tilak: A pigment mark on forehead; the mark is made on forehead after participating in a religious ceremony; members of every sect does a different type of tilak, which becomes an identification mark.

Triveni: Another name for Prayag (Allahabad).

Tulasi: Basil plant.

Vaishya: A caste, commonly engaged in trading.

Vanaprasthasram: The third stage of life according to the Hindu tenets in which a Hindu man becomes a renouncer.

Veda and Vedanta: Ancient sacred texts of Hinduism.

Vrindavan: A village of shepherds near Gokul; an idyllic place.

Yadav: One belonging to the Yadu clan.

Yajna: A ceremonial sacrifice or offering made to win God’s favour.

Yogasutra: Patanjali’s renowned treatise on Yoga.

Yogi: One who practices yoga; an ascetic.