

PRESS RELEASE for publication on 13th January 2006

Gujarati Lexicon:
An Appreciation by a Gujarati Journalist.

In last eight hundred years or so Gujarati dictionaries have made a great leap forward. Thakkur Sangram Singh may have compiled the first dictionary of Gujarati language in 1280. In modern times, after the poet Narmad had compiled his Narmad Kosh, many Gujarati dictionaries have been created. Gujarat Vidyapith's publication of Sartha Gujarati Jodni Kosh is regarded as a most comprehensive collection of Gujarati words and phrases. Following this progress throughout the course of 20th century, at the beginning of new millennium with the aid of information technology Ratilal Chandaria now offers Gujarati Digital Dictionary to global Gujarati language community.

Chandaria's Gujarati Digital Dictionary has its basis in following well-known sources such as Gujarat Vidyapith's publication Khissha Jodni Kosh (Pocket Dictionary), Vinit Jodni Kosh and Sartha Gujarati Jodni Kosh; Keshavram Shashtri's (edited) Brihad Gujarati Kosh in two parts; Pandurang Ganesh Deshpande's Gujarati to English and English to Gujarati dictionaries; Narhari Bhatt's (edited) Angreji-Gujarati Vinayan Shabda Kosh, Prabodh Pandit compilation Phonetic and Morphemic Frequency of Gujarati Language; Shantilal Shah's (Damkakar) compilation Virudharth Shabda Kosh as well as Ishwar Dave's Thesaurus. This Gujarati Digital Dictionary will fulfil the language needs of present and future generations. It is the only digital collection that derives from a wide range of Gujarati language sources.

In the fifth edition of Sartha Gujarati Jodni Kosh, highly respected dictionary compiler Maganbhai Prabhudas Desai has said, 'There is a vast field for serving our language. What we need are people willing and able to work in this field'. Someone who has achieved this goal is Ratilal Chandaria who has been the architect of Gujarati Digital Dictionary. In order to see this project through over the years, he has devoted his mental and material resources to develop this project. As leading industrialists of Gujarati Diaspora, Chandaria family have created a multinational business empire and Ratilal Bhai has spent two decades to complete his digital project.

Although Ratilal Bhai himself had not benefited from schooling and higher education, after years in Africa and settlement in London, through his own efforts he studied Gujarati words with meticulous care. His unique and notable contribution is this digital collection of Gujarati words and phrases. Nearly sixty years ago in 1946, after buying an old Gujarati Remington typewriter, he had taught himself to type in Gujarati. Since these early days he believed that Gujarati language must benefit from advances in modern technology. Ratilal Bhai has made full use of information technology in his Gujarati Digital Dictionary. Words and their varied forms have been digitised in this lexicon. The Digital Dictionary has an easily usable Gujarati spell-checker. Making of this spell-checker is Ratilal Bhai's major contribution. Those who use Gujarati

language know that Gujarati spelling is not that easy. Even Gujarati linguists confirm that rules of spelling in Sartha Gujarati Jodni Kosh do not aid correct spelling of Gujarati words. In this context, there is no doubt that the Gujarati spell-checker will be a real blessing to many users. Printers of Gujarati language will find this immensely helpful. No Gujarati language resource can match this Digital Dictionary. For Ratilal Bhai, its inauguration is a fulfilment of a long cherished dream.

Gujarati Lexicon has impressed the President of Gujarati Sahitya Parishad Dhiruben Patel. With Ratilal Bhai in mind, she says, 'You have already accomplished a task for Gujarati that should have been undertaken by Gujarat state, universities of Gujarat and institutions like Gujarati Sahitya Parishad. Dhiruben Patel has also provided a forum for an assessment of this unique dictionary by asking noted scholars like Vinod Adhvaryu, Kulinchandra Yagnik, Rasendra Pandya, Babulal M. Shah and Chandubhai M. Shah.

Chandrakant Bakshi had once said, 'All directions are open for making of a Gujarati dictionary but are the Gujaratis ready to undertake this task?' Today, those who work in Gujarati language field find it difficult to locate proofreaders who have proper understanding and knowledge of the Gujarati language. Book publishing also faces a similar difficulty, as do leading institutions, schools, colleges and universities. All these bodies will greatly benefit from the use of Gujarati Digital Dictionary. Simply by using their computer keyboard and click of their mouse, users will be able to check meaning of Gujarati words and learn how to spell them correctly. They will be able to find opposites and thus use the language more effectively with greater ease.

Institutions of Gujarat state, various government departments and those voluntary and educational institutions that deal with the field of language and literature will be able to work with greater speed and ease. This Digital Dictionary will contribute to the development of Gujarati language. It also has the merit of assisting those Gujaratis who live in distant lands away from their towns and villages in Gujarat.

Gujarati Digital Dictionary is sourced from more than 2,500,000 words with regular addition of additional words. English to Gujarati part has 32,034 words whereas Gujarati to English section has 49,936 words. Gujarati to Gujarati dictionary has 149,709 words and there are 5,144 opposites along with 15,694 conventional expressions. As the editor adds more words and expressions, the Dictionary is a constantly expanding resource. Kishor Raval who edits the Internet Gujarati Magazine Kesuda www.kesuda.com <<http://www.kesuda.com/>> confirms that this dictionary is a special gift for the computer users of Gujarati. Now this dictionary is available on the World Wide Web at www.gujaratilexicon.com <<http://www.gujaratilexicon.com/>> and one can access it from any part of the world.

For our languages, varieties of fonts, with different keyboard mappings present a problem. Gujarati Lexicon uses Unicode, which makes it easier to read the script. For correcting errors, one does not have to wait for a new edition of the

software as one can correct errors as one finds them. For writing Gujarati, the lexicon provides a keyboard. With the click of a mouse, it is easy to use this keyboard. Simple instructions enable individuals to use it effectively and easily.

Kishor Raval writes: 'Most people know what a thesaurus is. For those unfamiliar with it, it is a source to find similar words and their opposites'. Once you use it for searching a particular word, it offers you many different meanings and opens a venue for thinking and using words properly.

It is worth looking at first three paragraphs of a letter that Ratilal Bhai Chandaria sent to a circle of his friends on the last Diwali celebrations.

'This month I am now eighty-four. I had to have a by-pass surgery two years ago. Then things were going on well for me but now I face some difficulties as the early 20th century body has worn out parts. As no new parts are available, one has to live carefully to avoid unexpected accident. But can anyone ever predict that 'accident' of mortality?

Fortunately my computer has a healthy 'brain'. However, my own memory plays tricks with me. As a consequence, I sometimes forget old things that are important. New things come but the memory tends to reject them. The manual asks you to keep the memory active, engaged and fully conscious, but at times, what it churns out seems redundant, useless and wasteful.

2005 has been a very fruitful year. The new dictionary is now complete and open to all on a global website. Recently I have come across a group called Utkarsh. They have created a Gujarati operating system. Their work is such as to make one proud. Negotiations are going on to allocate them the task of looking after the Gujarati Lexicon projects so that I can be free from it.

In association with Utkarsh, Gujarati Dictionary, spell-checker and their operating system will be published on a compact disc. Through the distribution of this unique software, Gujarati Lexicon project will invite donations from users to fund improvement in digital use of Gujarati language.

We also announce that we commit ourselves to extend and modernise this software in future.

Please contact Chandaria Foundation or Utkarsh for the details of obtaining a copy of this Gujarati software. The contact details are as follows:

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Sometimes people discuss whether Gujarati is a proper language or not. There is a Gujarati proverb that says that the king shapes his people just as the guru shapes his pupils. Following this, one can say the user and speaker of language shape its character and sophistication.

As documented in Sartha Gujarati Jodni Kosh, Rev. Joseph Van Someran Taylor who produced Grammar of Gujarati language is known to have said in 1867 that Gujarati belongs to Aryan civilisation as a daughter of a rich culture that is related to other Indian languages of high stature. Who can say that it is an inferior language?

May Gujarati be blessed and remain a source of truth, learning, knowledge and ethics to blossom as a source of civilised life.

Vipul Kalyani, Editor 'OPINION' London
22 November 2005
Wembley (UK)

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