घुसना — to sneak in

The verb घुसना is so articulate as to be almost a one-word justification for learning Hindi. Its range of meanings, or rather its suggestions and attitudes, is a real challenge for lexicographers, whose various glosses can only hint at what घुसना has to say. Platts has the best shot at it:

H घुसना ghusnā \( ghus\)’ = Prk. घुस, fr. S. घुस=घुस, v.n. To be thrust (in, -men), be forced (in); —to thrust or push oneself (in), to enter forcibly; to rush (in); to pierce or penetrate (in or into); —to enter uninvited, unprivileged, or unwarranted (into or amongst, -men), to intrude; to interfere, to meddle (in):—ghus-ānā, v.n. To come rushing (in, -men); to thrust oneself (in):—ghus-paṛnā (-men), To thrust oneself (in);—to rush headlong or rashly (into a place or an affair):—ghus-kar baṅhnā, v.n. To sit close together.

Platts also finds room for a handful of idioms, listed here and there under their own headwords (but now findable through the new miracle of the global search, unimaginable to Platts back in the book-bound 1880s!)

\( pe\)-men ghusnā (-ke) = pe-men paṅhnā, q.v.:—pe-men lenā, v.t. To gulp down; to endure, to have patience

\( jā\)-ghusnā (-men), To go and enter (into), to go (into); cf. the similar use of the French venir

\( dum\)-men ghusnā (-ki), To creep under the tail (of, as pups under a bitch); to take refuge or protection (with); to dangle or run (after), to follow about, to cling (to, as a child to its mother’s skirt)

ghar-ghusṛū, or ghar-ghusnā, s.m.=ghar-basā, q.v.:—ghar-gayā, or ghar-basā, s.m. One who ruins or destroys a house

Dictionaries never grow old: they just become increasingly valuable as records of our linguistic heritage. Platts (and later, in its wake, OHED) records this sassy offshoot of घुसना —

घुसकी ghuskī ghusktī, fr. ghusnā, q.v.+ak, fr. S. क+इ = S. घुस, s.f. A bold forward woman; a wanton or unchaste woman.

Bahri adds some examples of everyday Hindi phrases, involving more literal senses of घुसना:

घुसना ghusnā vi to enter; कमरे (गौंड, घर, घुरव) में ~ -- (into) a room (village, house, tunnel); छाती में तलवाल घुस गई the sword pierced/entered (into) the chest; यह विचार ठुम्हरे विचार में नहीं घुसता this idea does not enter (into) your brain. पुस आना to come in; पुस बैठना to enter and occupy: वह हमारे मकान में पुस बैठा he entered into our house and occupied it. [vt पुसेंजना]
Thus meanings of घुसना hover around the essential core of entering a place without legitimation or approval — to force an entry through violent action, or guile, or brazen determination; and the outcome is that someone or something ends up in a place where he/she/it has no right to be. The untranslatability of घुसना encourages use of the word in Hinglish — Don’t ghuso in here, yaar! — often with the sense of ‘to stick one’s nose into something’.

Let’s look at some internet headlines, to see how घुसना is being used today. Each one of the following headlines calls for a different verb in English translation: to infiltrate, penetrate, breach, force entry, sneak, and trespass. (NB: my translations here retain the perfective tense of the Hindi, though English headlines typically prefer the ‘historic present’ as in ‘10 terrorists infiltrate…’)

- बिहार के रक्षकौल के रास्ते देश में पुरू 10 आतंकी
  10 terrorists infiltrated the country through Raxaul in Bihar.
- शहर में पुरू जंगली जीव भेग रिक्त में भयभीत हुए लोग
  People were terrified by a wild porcupine that had strayed into the city.
- ताला तोड़कर पुरू चोरों ने उजाड़ जेब रात व नगदी
  Thieves who had forced entry by breaking a lock made off with jewelry and cash.
- महिला बोगी में पुरू गुरु यात्री, जंक्शन पर हंगामा
  Male passengers sneaked into women’s train compartment: outcry at junction.
- भारतीय सीमा में दो जगहों पर पुरू चीनी सीनिक
  Chinese soldiers breached the Indian border in two [different] places.
- लद्झाख के भुमार में किर पुरू डूगन, 7 तंबू लगाकर जमाया ढेरा !
  The dragon [Chinese army] again trespassed into Ladakh’s Chunar, pitched 7 tents and set up camp!

The example below has an ironic twist: here too the subject ended up in a place where he should not have been, although this time it was not intentional!

- पाकिस्तान: घुसना बेदकर जेल में घुसे पंजाब के जेल मंत्री
  Pakistan: the Punjab rail minister found himself in jail after giving bribes.

This last example shows a contrast that Hindi (though not all its cognate languages) generally maintains between घुस्ना (the verb stem, with short ‘u’) and घूस or घूस (a feminine noun with long ‘a’, and meaning ‘bribe’). This distinction runs back to the Sanskrit etyons of the two words: घुस < *घूस ‘thrust in, pierce’ versus घूस / घूस < *घूस्सा ‘a present’, as recorded in CDIAL. However, the noun घूस (with a long vowel) as a name for the rat known in English as ‘bandicoot’ is related to the Hindi verb घुसना (see OHED), and presumably relates to the bandicoot’s unwelcome habit of ghuso-ing into the foundations of buildings (compare English fauna names.
that describe characteristic actions of their species: roadrunner, wagtail, woodpecker, rattler); meanwhile the English word bandicoot comes from Telugu pandi-kokku, ‘pig-rat’.

Most languages, in their demotic moments at least, are quick to exploit any salacious potential in verbs of physical action (think of the vulgar English expression to screw, and the similarly indelicate sense of भर देना in Hindi), and the ‘penetrative’ aspect of घुसना might seem likely to be a case in point; but surprisingly, such usages don’t seem to be recorded…though I look forward to being educated by readers who know better. Just a single such reference justifies my noting this general absence: CDIAL tells us that in Phalūra (aka Palula, Pharura), a Dardic language from the linguistically diverse area of Chitral in northern Pakistan, the root घुस्स् yields a word meaning ‘copulate’. The citation reminds us to look far and wide for the full picture of the history of a word.

OHED guides us towards the meanings of the related transitive verb घुसाना with this succinct entry:

घुसाना ghusānā [cf. H. ghusnā], v.t. 1. to cause to enter or to penetrate; to thrust or to force (into, में); to cram (in). 2. to insinuate, or to introduce (surreptitiously).

And finally, to complete the picture (and not just for the sake of cramming or stuffing yet more information into this article), here is Platts’ entry for the related verbs घुसिड़ना and its causative घुसेरड़ना –

घुसिड़ना ghusiḍānā [caus. of ghusirnā, q.v.;—or caus. of ghusnā;—ghuser˚ = ghusel˚ = ghusāl˚; cf. baithālnā], v.t. To force (into, -में), to thrust (into), to cram, stuff (into); to run or stick (into); to pierce; to insert; to insinuate; to foist:—ghuser-denā, v.t. intens. of and = ghusernā.