Chapter 2

Critical Appreciation of Vyathana Vitak (The Afflicted)

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Critical Appreciation of *Vyathana Vitak* (*The Afflicted*)

**Defining the Genre: Character Sketch**

“A character sketch is a genre in prose like biography, autobiography, diary and dossier.” (Patel, *Amar* 7) A character sketch is description of a person, alive or dead. The depiction of a person’s life, culture, society, time and ethnography are important in a character sketch. A character sketch is also known as *pen portrait*, *pen picture* or *portraiture*.

M H Abraham identifies character sketch as *character*, a literary genre. “It is a short, and usually witty, sketch in prose of a distinctive type of person. […] It describes a person in such a way that a reader feels as if he/she has met the person. It contains description, direct quotation, accounts of the person’s habitual ways of doing things and stories about events that reflect the person’s character.” (Abraham 32). But it is brief and does not have a detailed history of a person’s life as it is happens with a biography. It also avoids construction of plot.
The character sketches became very popular during the European industrial revolution. Now, the character sketches are in fashion in journalism.

The genre of a character sketch is very close to other genres like short story, novella, memoir, essay, and biography. But, unlike novella, a character sketch is more realistic. In a novella, it is not necessary that a narrator is always a writer while a character sketch is always narrated by a writer. A novella is primarily intended to impart aesthetic pleasure while a character sketch is intended to present a character with whom the writer has come in touch. A memoir is another form close to a character sketch but a memoir is mostly about a person who is no more alive while a character sketch can also be about a person who is alive. A memoir is mostly about a popular personality while a character sketch can be of a common person.

An essay is another genre which comes close to a character sketch. In fact, before 17th century in the West, the term essay itself was being used for the genre of a character sketch. While an essay focuses on a subject objectively and analytically, a character sketch is always developed focusing on a person subjectively. And there also are many similarities between a biography and a character sketch too. While a biography is more detailed and researched account of a person, a character sketch is more based on personal impression and attachment. A biography gives an account of a person’s whole life, while a character sketch is mostly about an event or two of a person’s life. There are also similarities between the two different genres of a caricature and a character sketch. A caricature is an exaggerated description of some of the striking characteristics of a person while a character sketch is a factual presentation of a person. In the same way, a character sketch is considerably a distinct genre from other genres such as monograph, autobiography, diary and dossier.
Character Sketches in English Literature

The genre was first introduced by a Greek scholar and author Theophrastus, Aristotle’s student, in second century BC. He wrote a lively book entitled *Characters* which has been translated into many languages and thrice into English (Howell (1824), Isaac Taylor (1836), Professor Jebb (1870)). “The work contains thirty brief, vigorous and trenchant outlines of moral types, which form a most valuable picture of the life of his time, and in fact of human nature in general.” ("Theophrastus") They are the first recorded attempt at systematic character writing. Later on, many writers including George Eliot have taken inspiration from him which is particularly visible in her book of caricatures, *Impression of Theophrastus Such* (1879). It is Eliot’s last published writing and most experimental, taking the form of a series of literary essays by an imaginary minor scholar whose eccentric character is revealed through his work.

Though not in strict sense, Geoffrey Chaucer can be considered the first character sketch writer after Theophrastus. Chaucer’s *A Canterbury Tales* gives us the picture of the European life in his days through the various characters.

They are, written upon one plan, each with suggestion of the outward body and its dress as well as of the mind within. [. . .] La Bruyère in France translated the characters of Theophrastus, and his own writing of Characters in the seventeenth century followed a fashion that had its origin in admiration of the wit of those Greek Ethical Characters.’ (Morley 11)

Character Sketches had been written during the Renaissance also. Thomas Harman wrote *A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors, Vulgarly Called Vagabonds* (1566). “It is one of
the fundamental texts for rogue literature. It contains twenty four character sketches.” (Morley 11) The character sketches immerged out of the mood of the age. The desire for exploration had motivated the writers to record the age through the characters of that time. We can find character sketches in Ben Johnson’s ‘Cynthia’s Reveals (1600) as well.

In seventeenth century, Joseph Hall wrote a very important work of character sketching Characters of Virtues and Vices (1609). Then appeared Characters or Witty Descriptions of the Properties of Sundry Persons by Sir Thomas Overbury. It is believed that the characters were written before the Characters of Virtues and Vices but published after the writer’s death in 1614. The characters became so popular that within a span of a few years, its thirteen editions were out. Later, a few new characters were also added to it. In 1615, John Stephens, a young lawyer, published Satyrical Essayes, Characters, and Other. In 1628, John Earle published Microcosmography or A Piece of the World Discovered, in Essays, and Characters with fifty four characters. It throws light on the manners of the time. “He analyses varied social and moral types, ranging from the plain country to the pot poet, with wit, sympathy and insight.” (Morley 15) Afterwards, these characters have appeared in many editions with updates. Nicholas Breton’s Characters upon Essays, Moral, and Divine appeared in 1615, and a set of characters called The Good and the Bad or Description of the Worthies and Unworthies of this Age in 1616. It is interesting to note that Breton and many others have personified the human qualities and traits such as love, patients, peace, wisdom, knowledge so on and so forth in the character sketches. In his second collection of characters, Breton has created pairs of character contrasting each other like A Worthy Knight and An Unworthy Knight, A Worthy Gentleman and An Unworthy Gentleman etc. In 1618, Geoffrey Minshull came up with Essays and Characters of a Prison and Prisoners. In 1626, Henry Parrot gave
Cures for the Inch; Characters, Epigram, Epitaphs by HP. The Characters in this little volume are of a Ballad Maker, a Tapster, a Drunkard, a Rectified Young Man, a Young Novice's New Younger Wife, a Common Fiddler, a Broker, a Jovial Good Fellow, a Humourist, a Malapert Young Upstart, a Scold, a Good Wife, and a Self Conceited Parcel Witted Old Dotard.

“In 1629 appeared sixteen sketches entitled Micrologia, Characters or Essayes, of Persons, Trades, and Places, offered to the City and Country by R. M. The characters of persons and trades in Micrologia are: a Fantastic Tailor, a Player, a Shoemaker, a Ropemaker, a Smith, a Tobacconist, a Cunning Woman, a Cobbler, a Toothdrawer, a Tinker, a Fiddler, a Cunning Horse Courser.” (Morley 140) Richard Brathwaite wrote a collection of twenty four characters Whimzies or A New Cast of Characters published in 1631. Wye Saltonstall too gave a collection of character sketches Pictures Loquentes or Pictures Drawn forth in Characters. Saltonstall's Characters were the World, an Old Man, a Woman, a Widow, a True Lover, a Country Bride, a Ploughman, a Melancholy Man, a Young Heir, a Scholar in the University, a Lawyers Clerk, a Townsman in Oxford, and others. He also added few more characters to its second edition. He has also written some separate characters like Of a Projector (1642), Of an Oxford Incendiary (1645). His several characters were included in Lord North's Forest of Varieties published in 1645. Another fourteen characters, some of individual persons, were published in the Characters and Elegies, by Sir Francis Wortley, Knight and Baronet published in 1646. John Cleveland, a Cambridge scholar as well as poet, wrote three character sketches in the earlier days of his troubled life. In 1658, he came up with Satyrical Characters and Handsome Description in Letters and Essays and Characters in 1662-63.
The great author Samuel Butler’s *Remains*, two volumes were published by R Thyer in 1759 which consist of around 120 characters. Goldsmith gave a collection of 119 letters in *The Citizen of the World* which also consists of many character sketches published in 1762. “The character sketches are a series of whimsical or satirical comments on English life and manners, with character sketches and episodes strung on a slender thread of narrative.”(Drabble 250) Some of its popular character sketches are *Man in Black* and *Beau Tibbs*. “The characters of seventeenth century gave generalized but detailed descriptions of the behavior and appearance of a class or type. They were on the whole short, succinct, pointed and less discursive than the essay.”(Drabble 190)

William Hazlitt, essayist and literary critic, has given a very important work in the genre of character sketch. He has written *The Spirit of the Age* or *Contemporary Portrait*, a collection of the character sketches of 25 men. The character sketches were first published in a periodical *The New Monthly Magazine* in 1824 and published in a book in 1825. The character sketches include ‘thinkers, social reformers, poets, essayist, and novelists, many of whom Hazlitt was personally acquainted with or has encountered. Equally important poet Wordsworth also has written *A Character of the Warrior* in verse in 1806. In 1868 appeared P Nimmo’s *Books and Authors: Curious Facts and Characteristic Sketches*. In 1871, the John Keble’s pupil C M Yonge drew his vivid character sketch in *Musings over the Christian Year…with a Few Gleanings of Recollections of Keble*. John Keble was a professor of poetry at Oxford and starter of the Oxford movement.

Thomas Hardy too wrote a few character sketches under the title *A Few Crushed Characters*, first published in a periodical in 1891. Later on, these character sketches were included in his short story collection *Life’s Little Ironies* under the same titles. Issac Disraeli has also given a
collection of the characters of the important literary figures entitled *Amenities of Literature* first published in 1845. While in 1918, Margaret W Newinson published *Workhouse Characters and Other Sketches of the life of the Poor*. “It consists of a series of fictional portraits which are presumably inspired by reach characters.” (Morley 204) The very influential Victorian writer Thomas Carlyle has sketched many characters in his works. All these sketches have been collected and published in *Pen Portraits by Thomas Carlyle Found in his Works and Correspondence* by R Brimley Johnson in 1896. The greatest essayist G K Chesterton has written twelve biographical essays or mini biographies of very important figures in *Twelve Types* published in 1902. These mini biographies can loosely be considered as character sketches. In 1924, Richard Aldington edited an anthology of character sketches entitled *A Book of ‘Characters’ from Theophrastus, Joseph Hall, Sir Thomas Overbury, Nicolas Breton, John Earle*.

Though the genre of character sketch has flourished less in compare to other literary forms but it has been an important part of the English literary and cultural history. The character sketches have also been important in the development of other genres of prose or fiction. The sketches are an important record of the lives of the time in literary figures. Studying a character equally means studying the people of the particular time. Not only have the character sketches given accounts of the people but also aesthetic pleasure out of the literary creations of the people. Though it is mostly based on the facts but the writers have been taking liberty to tint the characters with some sort of imagination as well. A good character sketch balances both factual details as well as aesthetic pleasure.
**Character Sketches in Indian Literatures**

Like other literary genres such as poetry, novel, drama, essay, diary, novella, biography and autobiography, a character sketch too is a genre derived from the West. This genre is being cultivated in almost all the Indian languages but has been developed less in Indian English literature. As the character sketches became very popular during the industrial revolution in the West, in India too, the genre was largely employed in 1930s during the independence movement as well as the industrial revolution. In India, the genre was first introduced in Bangali literature and it then prevailed in other regional literatures. The Bengali writers Indranath Banerji, Telokyanath, Saradbabu have given good number of sketches.

The prominent Hindi writers Padamsinh Sharma, Banarasidas Chaturvedi, Ramvruksh Bonipuri, Mahadevi Sharma, Munshi Premchand are some of the literary figures who are known for their sketches. Janardanprasad Dwij is an important contributor of character sketches along with other genres. Charitrarekha is his collection of character sketches. “His pen portraits published in Jagaran were delightful as well as analytical.” (Datta 1124) Another Hindi writer known for the genre is Mahadevi Varma. “Of her prose works Shrinkhala ki kadiyani (The fetters) deals with the plight of Indian women, Atit ke chalchitra (Glimpses from the past), Smriti ki rekhayen (Silhouettes from memory), Path ke sathi (Fellow writers) and Mera parivar (My kith and kin, dealing with her pets) are collections of pen portraits.” (Lal 4502) “Ramvilas Sharma too has given sketches in Viram Chinha. Krishna Sobati has published Hans Hashmat, a compilation of pen portraits of writers and friends.” (Lal 4127)
The Punjabi writer Gurbakhsh Singh delineates characters sketches in *Merian abhul yadan* (My unforgettable reminiscences, 1947). But it was Gargi Balavant who established the genre in Punjabi literature with his collections of characters sketches. According to Datta: “Gargi’s pen portraits *Nim de pattee* (leaves of Neem, 1961), *Surmevali Akh* (The eye with aloe, 1977) and *Kaudianwala sap* (The cobra, 1980) are free and frank portrayals of his contemporary literary giants.” (1372). Another Punjabi character sketcher is Kulbir Sinh Kang who has published three collections, “*Badlan de rang* (The colors of cloud, 1966), *Pathar likan* (Lines on stone, 1975) and *Pakkian ittan* (Burnt bricks) in which he has given about two scores of portraits of his contemporary writers.” (Malhotra 408) The Urdu writer Ishmat Chaghtai has also given character sketches. “Her *Mera Dost Mera Dushman* (1955) [My Friend My Enemy, 2001], a selection of her non-fiction writing Essays, commentaries and pen portraits of well known contemporaries, is an interesting reflection of the artistic, political, and social mores of her time.” (Dev 212) A Kannad authors two have given sketches. Navaratna Rama Rao has written *Kelavu Nenapugalu* (Some Reminiscences, 1954) and D V Gundappa has written *Jnapaka Chitra* in eight volumes. “The letter represents portraits of eminent men of his time, vividly evoking a vanished era.” (George 182). Another Kannada author A N Murthy Rao has published a collection of character sketches *Chirragulu Pathragulu* which has also received the Sahitya Akademi Award. A Konkani writer Dattaram Sukhtankar has given village character sketches in *Manni punov* which also won Konkani Sahitya Akademi award in 1978.

In Indian English literature, one can find character sketches in Tagore’s works. R K Narayan too has created character sketches in his Malagudi stories. Licio Rodrigues has given a very remarkable sketch of *Pader* (Baker) of a Goan traditional village. Srinivasa Sastri has written
Thumb-nail Sketches (1946) which consists of pen portraits of political leaders. C P Ramaswami Aiyar wrote Biographical Vistas: Sketches of Some Eminent Indians in 1968. But, it was Khushwant Singh who gave recognition to the genre with his collection of character sketches entitled Women and Men in My Life (1995). A Tamil writer Bama too has sketched characters of dalit women in Sangati (1994) which has been translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom.

**Character Sketches in Gujarati Literature**

Unlike Indian English Literature, Gujarati literature has a good trajectory of the genre of a character sketch. As has been said earlier, the genre came to India or Gujarat from the West in 1930s. A character sketch is known as Rekhachitra, Charitra Nibandha or sometimes, Charitra in Gujarati. It was Narmad who first introduced this genre into Gujarati. He has written short character sketches primarily with the intention of passing the great souls of religion, society and literature to the new generations. Though these sketches are lacking in literary qualities, they have served as a valuable account of the history and Narmad has become the predecessor of the genre in Gujarati literature. Afterwards, Narsinhrao Devetiya gave a collection of illustrative essays Samaran Mukur which contains many character sketches of literary laureates, thinkers and social revolutionaries. His time and life has been recorded in these character sketches. In the Pandit Age, one of the greatest creative writers Nahinalal has given many character sketches in Apana Sakshar Ratno Vol 1-2 and Chitradarsh.
But, it was Swami Ananad who first explored and developed the genre systemically. He has contributed to the genre both quantitatively and qualitatively. His sketches are unique in style compared to his predecessors and contemporary writers. His character sketches collections are *Dharati Nu Loon*, *Kulkathao*, *Santona Anooj* and *Nagharol*. The writer and translator Mulshankar Bhatt has collected his best of the character sketches and published as *Dharati Ni Arati*. Sawmi Anand has sketched characters of those with elevated life and the people who have created a deep impression in his life. Some of the very popular characters are *Ghanima*, *Mahadevbhai Desai*, *Vamandada*, *Dr. Mayadas*. He has recreated the world of ascetic and saints. His language is featured with short sentences and dialects.

Another equally great writer, Kanaiyalal Munashi too has portrayed characters which have been published in *Gujarat Na Jyotirdharo*. Lilavanshi Munshi has also given a collection of short character sketches entitled *Rekhachitro Ane Anya Lekho*. Another important collection of sketches is *Gujarat Na Mahajano* by Batubhai Umarvadiya. Kishansinh Chavda too has given many character sketches. Character sketches by various writers can be found in a collection *Satyakathao* compiled by Mukund Parashary.

Unlike Swami Anand’s character sketches of common men, Vadilal Dagali has portrayed the famous people in his character sketches. His *Thoda Nokhajiv* is a collection of the character sketches of famous people across the world like Churchill, Tito, Charlie Chaplin, Naheru, Gandhi and many others. Dagali took the genre to the next level with the variety of characters and the treatment of language. The eminent writer of the Gandhian era, Umashankar Joshi too was prolific with character sketches. His collections *Haday Ma Padeli Chhabio* and *Ishamishida Ane Anya* are the very important works for the genre in Gujarati.
literature. He narrated the lives of the people whom he has met and was influenced by as well as the profound literary and historical figures.

In the tradition of Sawmi Anand and Joseph Macwan comes Anirudh Brahmbhatt’s collection *Naamrup*. He has depicted the lives of the people with a different level consciousness. Instead of the broad life span, he focuses in a particular incident or event of a person’s life. He has narrated the lives of his twenty friends from his childhood to college. Another prolific writer Raghuvir Chaudhari has sketched the lives of the twenty five eminent literary figures collected in *Saharanî Bhavyata*. The collection includes the character sketches of the writers like Umashankar Joshi, Jayanti Dalal, Sundaram, Yashavant Shukla, Pravin Joshi, Ravaji Patel and many others. Another writer, Dlip Ranpura gives twenty one character sketches of the people of the different strata of the society in *Vaat Ek Manasani*. He has developed the characters which resembles a novella. In another collection of character sketches *Vandaniy Hadayrspa* by Ramanlal Shah portraits the lives of the inspirational leaders as well as sages. Another distinct collection is *Katch Na Jyotirdharo* by Govardhan Sharma. It gives accounts of the important people of Kutch along with their social life, culture and ethnography. Ramesh Jani has also given a similar collection of characters entitled *Apana Jyotirdharo*. The character sketches were first published in a periodical *Janma Bhoomi Pravasi* in 1969. It’s a collection of twenty five character sketches of the great historians, literary laureates, social activists as well as political leaders.

Almost all the Gujarati writers have written the importance of their mothers in their lives. Hence, Dipak Mehta’s edited a collection of character sketches *Matruvandan Vol 1-2* is specifically devoted to the character sketches of mothers. It includes the character sketches of almost all the prominent Gujarati writers’ mothers. Apart from the above, many other writers
have given character sketches like Rambha Gnadhi’s *Santono Sang Karia*, Mahebub Desai’s *Mahek*, Rajanikumar Pandya’s *Zabakar*, Mhulika Trivedi’s *Jagat Ni Mahan Mahilao* among many others.

**Character Sketches in Gujarati Dalit Literature**

The dalit writings prominently merged with the genres of autobiography and poetry. With its development, it has become more inclusive in terms of genre as well as the subjects. Today, dalit writers are exploring and contributing in all the areas of literature but the personal narratives have always remained dear to them. As a part of it, they have considerably explored as well as contributed in the genre of character sketch too.

The prominent name is Joseph Macwan who hasn’t only enriched Gujarati dalit literature but also Gujarati mainstream literature. Apart from Macwan, almost all other Gujarati dalit writers too have contributed in the genre of character sketch. Some of the character sketches are Harish Mangalam’s *Adhuru Rekhachitra: Jethabha*, B N Vanakar’s *Mara Bha*, Arvind Vegada’s *Bapaj Maru Sarvasva*, Mohan Parmar’s *Mari Ma*, Madhuvir Solanki’s *Dr. Babasaheb Ni Indipen* and many more. Several anthologies of dalit character sketches too have been published like Chadu Maheriya’s edited *Madi Mane Sambhare* (1994), Bhagirath Brahmbhat’s *Gujarati Dalit Nibandh* (2013) and Manilal Patel’s edited *Joseph Macwan Na Pratinidhi Rekhachitro* (2008).

Among the important character sketchers in Gujarati literature, Joseph Macwan is an important contributor. He has been appreciated as the best character sketcher by the Gujarati
critics as well as the readers. He has portrayed the common men or dalits from his own life with intensive human sensibility. His character sketches are very much autobiographical in nature. He has given not less than eleven collections of character sketches. In fact, he started his literary career with a collection of character sketch itself. His collections of character sketches are:

- Vyathana Vitak 1985
- Vahala Na Valakha 1987
- Mari Bhillu 1989
- Janamjala 1990
- Jivatar Na Nata Rang 1994
- Manas Hovani Yantrana 1995
- Na Ye Chand Hoga 1996
- Ram Na Rakhopa 1998
- Lakhya Lalate Lekh 2004
- Nimbhade Nipjela
- Dharati Jayan Dhinga Manekh

Among all these character sketch collections and other literary works, his Vyathana Vitak is a very important and well known literary piece.
Critical Appreciation of Vyathana Vitak (The Afflicted)

After writing a few novellas, Macwan stopped writing. Meanwhile, he read literature widely and experienced life deeply. After sixteen years, he again felt like writing and the first literary piece he produced was *Vyathana Vitak* in 1985. It’s a collection of nineteen character sketches of the people he had lived with. *Vyathana Vitak* has been awarded by Gujarati Sahitya Akadami as well as translated into many Indian regional languages by National Book Trust. It has been widely appreciated by readers and critics.

*Vyathana Vitak* opened up a new vista for the genre of character sketch. Here, the sketches are not only the biographical details but also artistically created alive people. Macwan has portrayed the characters which are sometimes very close to a short story. The acclaimed critic of Gujarati literature Achyut Yagnik calls his sketches “the stories of suffering, each focusing on a central character” (xviii). In fact, his many character sketches have also been rewritten and published as short stories like *Pannabhabhi, Ghar No Divo*. He further says that “the collection was celebrated by everyone – the literati, the critics and above all the general reading public” (xviii). Appreciating his character sketches, Rita Kothari says,

Josephbhai was a community archive, storing in his narratives the life and times of the Vanakar community he belonged to. Painting with words the aspirations and tragic losses of the untouchable Satiyo, the reaped Heta, the elegy singer Hazel, he created a vivid ethnography of a region, people and caste. People who touched his life – Jeevikaaki, Patak Kaka, Pannabhabhi, Bhavan Bhagat – inhabited his literary landscape and became through *Vyathana Vitak*. . .(ix)
“He has also helped in getting free from the artificial literary chase of the West in terms of modernism, post-modernism by the Gujarati writers. He has created the character sketches which have grown from this land itself.” (Patel, *Joseph* 03) He connected literature with its people. His character sketches have also been important in reflecting the dalit life with their wretched condition, their culture, their struggle for bread, their determinations of self respect, their sacrifices for self identity and their ethnography. His character sketches are not only literary contribution but also historical and cultural documentation. “His characters are even being studied by the researchers of sociology.” (Ranapura 13) He has clearly taken the side of ‘art for life sake’ as against ‘the art for art sake’.

He has set his characters on the real life experiences as these character sketches are so dramatic in nature that even imagination cannot make it so. After reading each character, one feels as if he/she has really met the person. The collection consists of the women characters of writer’s mother, aunty, grandmother, sister-in-law Ladubhabhi, Heta, Jivikachi, Lakshmi, Hejal Padamani, Shamali, Ruthabhabhi, Gajara Modhabole, Ashima, Pashi, Dahi etc. and the male characters like Pashalo, Somakaka, Bhavan Bhagat, Magan, Khushalkaka or Patak Kaka, Jethakaka, Major, Ukamal, Goradhan, Jasyo Nepado, the Priest, Nayano Bajiyo, Peeru Bhagat etc. All the characters are distinct from each other but connected with the common thread of suffering and misfortune. The very beginning of the collection shows the helplessness and misfortune of the author.

I am a motherless child now but once I had no less than three mothers. They had filled my life with different indistinct colors of motherhood, humanity and compassion! But they have all gone forever in a way that kills a desire for life. I am
left behind with such an inclination for a mother which pinches me every day.

(Macwan 1)

In the first character sketch ‘A Time When I Had Three Mothers!’; the author talks about the loss of his mother in his very childhood itself. His father remarries within a few months of his mother’s death. The love and care of a mother to a child is given to him by his aunty, but she too leaves him behind and goes away when she becomes a widow. His step mother has never even looked at him with warmth and affection. It is Ladubhabhi, belonging to further lower caste, who looks after him and gives him the love and care of a mother. But, when she too commits suicide out of the agony for her daughter Heta’s rape and forceful marriage, Joseph is left alone without the warmth and support of a mother in his very tender age. In the same year, his grandmother, brother and uncle too pass away. The character sketch gives account of his ill-fatted childhood.

Macwan’s crucial contribution to Gujarati dalit literature is his depiction of the dalit women who are in doubly subjected: first of the patriarchal society and another of the caste based discrimination. The second character sketch of Vyathana Vitak, is ‘Lakshmi’s Fate’ where the central character is Lakshmi. Once in the Bilimora Bus Station, the writer ran into Lakshmi, his childhood friend Magan’s wife, after twenty years. It is there that she learns that her husband Magan has passed away and she feels that she has become a widow in true sense. She had been married first to Magan and she also loved him very much. Macwan narrates her regret as,

She stared at me for a few moments. Her tears did not stop to wait for anything.

Immediately, she dashed her both hands together on a close pole and smashed her
glass bangles. Blood came out from her right hand wrist but, without taking care of it, she wiped out her *chandalo* from her forehead. (Macwan 19)

She then says to Joseph with her trembling lips,

> At last, even if you meet, you meet to give the news of my widowhood! What a fate!

(Macwan 19)

In ‘Mercenary Jivi and Plightful Pani’ the author has drawn the pictures of two dalit women. Here, Jivi and Pani both are examples of triple oppression and marginalization of patriarchy, caste and economic condition. This sketch is about a mother-in-law Jivi and a daughter-in-law Pani with a focus on Jivi. Jivikachi was Macwan’s aunty and his close friend Magan’s Grandamother and Pani was Magan’s mother. Along with the problems of the dalit women, the sketch also depicts the drawbacks of dalit community and in that way, it becomes a mirror to the society.

In ‘The Salt of the Earth’, Macwan draws the inhuman practice of untouchability and the caste based discrimination withing the downtrodden castes. He accurately creates a picture of the separate residences of the lower castes like *Bhangi*, *Vanakar*, and *Chamar*. Macwan has drawn the harsh picture of untouchability at the common well where the people of *Bhangi* and *Chamrar* castes have to keep distance from the well and beg for water from the people of *Vanakar* community. But, above all, it gives a very ironic picture of the priest of the church. To everyone’s surprise, the priest who is supposed to have transcended the material life too believes not only in caste based discrimination but also in punishing those who would take even a slightest liberty with the caste rules.
In the sketch *My Companion Satiyo*, Macwan recollects the days of his childhood and his friend Satiyo. He depicts the days when he used to sing prayers and his friend Satiyo used to play tambourine. But, Satiyo never used to participate in classroom activity. Rather, he always used to come in the class late and sit at the last seat. Others too didn’t talk to him ever because he was a *Bhangi*. Here, through Satiya, Macwan depicts the mental trauma of those who are oppressed and discriminated in the name of caste.

We both used to remain ahead of all in the prayer but, in class, his place always used to be at the end. There was a long wooden box of maps at the end of the class. Satiyo used to sit there only because he belonged to *Bhangi* caste. His father used to sweep the ground of the school. Many times, when we would go out in the recess, he would also see him cleaning the streets. How can his son sit equal to others? (Macwan 55)

Macwan also expresses his regret for the still prevailing caste based discrimination in this sketch,

Today, Satiyo has gone and the bench too might have dissolved in the *panchmahabhoot*. The neem tree, under whose soothing shadow, Satiya’s little palms used to create the beats and melody on the tambourine and sing with his pleasant voice, has been cut down. But, the efforts for removing caste discrimination started long ago, haven’t succeeded yet even after thirty eight years of independence. (Macwan 56)

Another much appreciated character sketch of ‘Bhavan Bhagat’ highlights the good side of the dalit community. This character sketch has been included in Manilal Patel’s edited book *Joseph Macwan Na Pratinidhi Rekhachitro* as well as Bhagirath Brambhat’s edited book
Gujarati Dalit Nibandh. Bhavan Bhagat is adept in all the thirty six arts. Macwan was much influenced by him and he has learnt a lot many things from him. The construction of the character creates the exact picture of Bhavan Bhagat in a reader’s mind. When Macwan makes Bhagan Bhagat narrating a story to the children, we come to know Macwan’s ability to tell a story as well as his dexterity of using language. Writing about Bhavan Bhagat, Rita Kothari says, “Bhavan Bhagat was a community archive.” (ix)

In the female category, the next two characters are of two women from different castes but with the same downtrodden status. The barber Ruda’s wife Hezal is equally beautiful and a good singer. Looking at her, no one can believe that she could have any problem in life. But, she too was not devoid of suffering. On one hand she was a wife of a lower caste hence uneducated and on the other hand she was very beautiful with an ability to sing well. Moreover, she was barren. Taking benefit of her innocence, a doctor in her village rapes her. She cannot live in the village after this incident hence she runs away leaving her loving husband and family behind. Like Hezal, Shamali is another pretty and impressive woman. Describing Shamali, the author says,

Her splendid beauty used to actually blossom at the well. She was so exuberant and joyous that everybody present on the well would be laughing. Many liked her company and therefore used to come to the well when she would come there. The well seemed lifeless without her. When she was there making fun, even the work of drawing water from the well always used to become joyous. The women never stopped praising her, “Shamali! You draw away our all stress and tiredness.” (Macwan 84)
But, the happy life of Shamali could not last much longer. Her naïve husband dies while trying to save her from an attack of a wild male buffalo. And the young beautiful Shamali passes her whole life with the reminiscences of her husband.

Macwan has portrayed vivid characters from a range of lower castes. Among the other, one of the lower castes is Mal. Mal is a nomadic caste whose profession is to perform an acrobatic shows from village to village. In one of the groups of the Mal community, Ukkamal is the leader and a hero. The writer depicts his skills, his self esteem and his bravery. But, his happy life too proved to be a short lived. Soon the advent of industrialization and urbanization snatch away their bread and butter and they have to move in a city to either work in the mills or circus. There too they face caste based discrimination and at last losing all his hopes from life, he gives up his life.

Another woman character sketch ‘The Ocean’ depicts a long painful and dejected journey of Ruthbhabhi. Ruthbhabhi lives in Mumbai. It is she who shows the writer an ocean first time in his life. She serves as a teacher but her drunkard husband and, later on, an unfaithful lover bring a tide of suffering, pain and humiliation in her life that turns her mad.

In ‘The Labor of Love’, we meet a completely distinct and ascetic character Punjo Major. Major retires from army and returns to his village. After his retirement and his arrival in his village, he doesn’t sit idle but plants sixty two mango trees in the outskirts of the village. He knows well the fact that he won’t be alive to either sit under its cool shade or taste its sweet fruits but still he works hard to leave it behind for the posterity of the village. He works till his death and leaves behind a few mango trees. Another laborious man is Jethakaka in ‘Uncle’s Repayment’. Jethakaka comes to Macwan’s home as a servant to repay the amount
he has borrowed from Macwan’s father. He works day and night but he is never appreciated for it. Moreover, he is not even provided the basic human needs of good sufficient food and warm water for bath at the end of a hard day. He is never given the account details of his wages. But, he suffers all that without ever complaining about it. He is actually a very clever man. He is a good story teller. He also reads the epics and scriptures. He becomes true guide and companion to the writer but he is forced to leave the writer’s home.

In the character sketch of ‘Patak kaka’, writer beautifully blends the comic life of Patak kaka with the tragic life of Khushal kaka. Both are the names of the same person but these names show the journey of a person’s life. Patak kaka who is now being made fun of was once Khushal kaka, a very learned and travelled person. But, he too is not an exception from the ups and downs of life. After disappearing for a long time, once he is found under a tree of the village in a very sorry state. After that, he dies within a day. The character sketch of an ascetic man in ‘I Trust You’ brings to us an altogether new person. The ascetic man seems educated but still roams among the tribal people called Bhil. Along with the writer, others too initially doubt him but gradually they learn about his selfless service to the Bhils. The sketch also throws light on the condition of the tribal or nomadic community who are working in the unorganized sectors without any basic facility and security.

Among all other dalit characters, ‘Jasyo Nepado’ is a different character in the sense that he comes from a higher caste called Kanabi Patel. He was very shy and filthy when he was in the village school with the author. But, when the author accidently meets him in a train, he has transformed completely. He now has become a businessman with the help of one of his uncles in Kalakata. This also serves a character against all other characters wherein even
though the dalits are talented and hard worker, they don’t have much scope to rise in comparison with a higher caste person.

‘The Beats of Tabla and the Rhythm of Life’ narrates the journey of two committed lovers from Pasyo and Lali to Peelu Maharaj (saint) and Lalima (saintly mother figure). The plotting of the incidents of the life of Pasya brings it close to a short story. The lovers Pasyo and Lali elope to have their life together. First, they go to Mumbai but could not stay there for long hence leave it for another place. They wander to many places and finally make an abandoned temple their home in an unknown distant village from their birth place. In their life full of struggle, their love for music and dancing comes to their aid all the time. The writer also has given many songs and hymns in this sketch.

In another accidental incident, Macwan runs into a saint during his visit of the Mount Girnar. Surprisingly, the saint turns out to be Nayno Bajiyo. The writer narrates this accidental meeting in these words.

I went close to him but could not think of what to say. After a few moments, I greeted, “Jay Gurudevjiki!” and put my hands together.

“Jay Bholenath…!” he responded in his slight coarse voice and it again reminded me of my past and I revealed to him what was crippling in my mind, “Nayno Bajiyo, the son of Luli!”

Suddenly, his half closed eyes turned wide open. The sound of the words blew on his existence of last few decades. He was startled and his eyes reflected the efforts to identify me. (Macwan 186)
Nayno was a young son of Lulidosi. He was very idle and also fond of gambling but honest. Once he was blamed for stealing money from Asla’s home. For that reason, he was beaten till he becomes unconscious by the Patels of the village. After the humiliating experience, he had left the village and wanders everywhere. At last, he arrives in the Girnar and becomes a saint. Other harshest lives have been depicted in ‘The Forlorn Hope’. This sketch resembles more with a short story. It depicts the unfortunate lives of a mother-in-law Ashima and a daughter-in-law Pasi. They both become widows one after the other in their young age. After a lifelong drudgery and the disease of arthritis Ashima can do no work now. Hence, all the responsibilities of running home as well as looking after her little son come on a young widow Pasi. They are completely dependent on the landlords for their bread and butter. Hence, she has to work hard day and night. But, they both are still happy with the hope that one day her little one would grow up and they will have their supporter as well as a heir. But, unfortunately, the little son too passes away in a very cold atmosphere when Pasi brings him with her to a farm where she is supposed to work for the landlord. With the death of the little one, all the hopes of both the widows are shattered. This sketch very well depicts the miserable lives of the dalit women.

The most beautiful and equally painful character sketch is of the dumb and deft Dahi in ‘Miserable Life and Unbearable Pain’. Dahi has been neglected for her whole life. On one hand the Almighty has made her beautiful but dumb and deft and on the other hand she was born in the lower caste. It is a saga of the sufferings of a helpless dalit woman.

All the vivid characters are connected with a common thread of suffering, discrimination, oppression. The character sketches are literary and autobiographical in nature. One more character is present among all the characters is the author himself. Through these characters,
the author has portrayed his own life. Macwan has lived with all these characters in his childhood. Now, when he has grown up, he meets them again like his friend Magan’s wife Lakshmi, Jasyo Nepado, Peeru Bhagat, Nayno Bajiyo etc. who trigger his reminiscences which results in these sketches.

Though all the characters are from the almost same region, community and with common cause of suffering, they are distinct in their own ways. Each character is a novel in itself. Hence, we find a range of themes or subjects in these sketches. The collection covers a range of the aspects of a dalit’s life like the shadow of death over life, caste based discrimination, numerous lower castes and discrimination among them, wretched condition of dalits, the ill-fated and triple oppressed dalit women, the struggle of dalit mothers, the misfortune of beautiful young dalit girls, dalits’ helplessness due to their economic dependency on the higher caste people, their social customs like marriage ceremonies, the ceremony of annu, ceremonies of sad occasions, a tension between the Christian and Hindu beliefs, the Charotari dialect, their poems, songs, hymns and dirges, their festivals and ways of celebration, their food and clothes, their limitations and their spiritual ways, culture and ethnography.

The important aspect behind the success of this collection is the employment of the common man’s language. Macwan has spoken less and has made the characters speak more in their own language of Charotari dialect and that is what makes them alive on the pages. Macwan has beautifully used the idioms, proverbs, sayings and the words and phrases used by these people in the routine conversations. The writer has also reflected specific tone and speaking style of the people. That is why Kothari opines that “it is an outcome of a formidable and receding tradition of orality, incidentally produced as written literature.” (x) Translating the
language of *Vyathana Vitak* has been, that is why, the most difficult task. Some of the examples of the language are as below,

The deep calmness of water had defeated the spirit of Ladubhabhi’s life. I saw my mother’s face in her washed out face. The despair of my inner soul did not wait long. My another mother – real mother – once again had gone leaving me orphan behind. First time, my head embraced to her breast and did not get any response. (Macwan 17)

As per my knowledge and experience, the proverb “if four women gathers, they even destroys happy families” proved wrong at the well. (Macwan 86)

Don’t create havoc. Life is not going to end now. We can meet and speak our hearts if you come on a particular day. (Macwan 91)

Sometimes, one feels that one needs a different dictionary to truly enjoy this text. Explaining the language of Macwan, Achyut says,

Joseph Macwan’s literary world is ‘a departure from the Gujarati official literary linguistic register’ which was created by the Gujarati writers in the Post-Gandhian era. Macwan bridges the spoken and the written world which was also aspired by Gandhi. (xiii)

The language has made the characters more alive and dramatic. Moreover, writer has made the text more colorful by using the poems, songs, hymns and dirges which are part of the dalit community. When the writer’s mother was ill, he used to sing her poems.
We are the ushers of the sun; we are the caller of the dawn,

The sun comes on the rainbow chariot, Arjun rides the chariot.

Walking forth with the scepter, the songbird of effulgence. We are. . .

The bumble bee with lure, humming whole day.

Wandering here and there does not return home even at the dusk. (Macwan 4)

Joseph used to sing prayer with his close friend Satiyo when he was in his village school.

We have jumped in the ocean of life with your name!

Save or get us drawn or keep dangling a mid is your game;

Oh Ram, I am not to worry about it. Oh Ram! (Macwan 54)

Bhavan Bhagat and Peeru Maharaj are the bearers of spirituality. The Bhakti tradition of devotional songs gives them great strength to overcome humiliation and oppression. They express themselves in hymns as:

Oh! The ascetic one, oh the recluse, the lover of humanity;

You have mortified this mortal life!

You were much enchanted by a body,

You liked the earthly things much,

You didn’t see the love behind.
Oh! The ascetic. . . (Macwan 66)

The world is engrossed in praying to the Almighty,

This mortal life can also achieve the immortality. (Macwan 168)

In water, a fish is thirsty,

It makes me laugh that

The fish is thirsty in the water! (Macwan 168)

The nomadic castes like Turi, Taragada, and Mal who entertain the people with their performances also have their own treasure of songs and poems. The author has beautifully used these songs which make the text an important documentation of the dalit ethnography.

The acrobat player Ukkamal sings songs as a part of his performance like:

My lord Krishna won the battle,

He brought an end of Kans’ arrogance,

He lost his life due to his malign acts,

His was not bravery but hollow act. (Macwan 99)

While performing Bhavai the Turi players sing the below mentioned songs.

My beautiful doll plays,

My doll plays on the belly of Patak Kaka!
The cheater doll plays . . . !

Patak kaka, get the song cut

Otherwise Khanbhai will rule,

The song will be cut only if you pay ten rupees,

And if you don’t get the song cut, we will scorn on you! (Macwan 144)

On the sad occasions of demise, marashiya (dirge) are sung, sometimes by professional marashiya singer. Hezal Padamani, a very good singer, sings marashiya when her young friend’s husband passes away.

The variety of songs and poems sung on various occasion depicts the richness of the dalit culture. The hymns or devotional songs are very popular in this community. Its connection can also be traced to the Bhakti Tradition. By recording this cultural beat, Joseph not only has worked as a writer but also as a historian and social researcher.

The narration too is another important aspect that makes these character sketches lifelike rather than just biographical details. The descriptions of scenes create visual pictures for the readers. Another important aspect is the dramatic events which make the sketches breathing. There are many dramatic incidents which one cannot even imagine. The writer meets his close friend’s wife Lakshmi after twenty years in the Billimora Bus Station. The unclaimed and unidentified dead body in the I P Mission Hospital turns out to be Ukkamal. When Macwan goes to Indore, he runs into Ruthbhabhi after many years. While travelling in a train, he suddenly finds his school friend Jasyo Nepado in his elder age as his co-traveler.
While roaming in the mountain of Girnar, he suddenly comes across a saint who turns out to be his villager and friend Nayno Bajiyo. When the writer stays at one of his friend’s village in another state, he finds his childhood friends Pasyo and Lali there. The incidents are so dramatic in the writer’s life that the collection becomes naturally realistic fiction without taking much aid of the writer’s imagination.

The text is also an authentic documentation of the double oppressed condition of dalit women. In compare to the Savarn women, the dalit women have to suffer more because of the hierarchies of patriarchy and caste. A dalit woman falls in the last rung of the Indian social structure. Macwan has observed this well and depicted their lives skillfully in almost all of his works. He can even be called a feminist writer or a dalit feminist writer as in many of his works like Charushila, Mari Paranetar the protagonists are women and the half of the sketches of Vyathana Vitak are also exclusively on the dalit women. The women characters of the text vary from each other but are connected with a common string of inhuman oppression, discrimination and marginalization at the hands of patriarchy and caste. Macwan deals with a range of women characters like mothers, mothers-in-law, daughters, daughters-in-law, aunties, wives and friends. Almost all the sketches of Vyathana Vitak have women characters but around ten out of nineteen character sketches are exclusively about women.

He has depicted the plight as well as the strength of the women. They have to work day and night. They have double responsibility of taking care of home, children and earning as well. Obviously, they cannot spend their money on themselves. They are bound by the social decorum. They are married at a young age and don’t have choice to select their husbands. They cannot participate in the panch. They have to bear with dominating, drunken husbands, sons and fathers. They are exploited sexually by the men specifically by the higher caste men.
in the work places. The barnyard in the text becomes a symbol of helpless and exploitation of the women. Macwan has narrated the condition women in the sketch ‘Lakshmi’s Fate’ as below.

The owners of the yards are very cunning. It’s a play for them to savor and play with beautiful women as they like! And they don’t count anything for the reputation and honor of lower castes. “What honor do they have? We can rob anybody we like!” And unfortunately, this is how it was. An owner or a son of an owner indicates to a headman for whosoever they like. And the wife of the headman working under the owner convinces the indicated person. It is the fact that if they want to work there, they have to surrender themselves to the malign desires of an owner. If anyone denies to cave in, they will be tricked or expelled. And the helplessness after being expelled or tricked pains more. (Macwan 31)

Dalit women have to bear double oppression. On one hand they are exploited in the name of while on the other hand, they are exploited in the name of patriarchy. In the same sketch, Gordhan’s atrocity on his wife is an evident to it as given below.

Gordhan used to express his dominating husband attitude fully on Pani. Whenever he would come drunk, he would lose control over his senses and Pani could not save herself from his beating. Moreover, he would not even realize when to stop. In such a situation, only the old woman could stop him but she always liked the atrocities on Pani to such an extent that she never came in and stop Gordhan. That event of atrocity used to stop only when Panibhabhi, being tired-frightened-exhausted, would hide herself somewhere or some elder neighbor would stop him. (Macwan 46)
Women have been imprisoned in the social rules and decorum. There are different sexual behaviors for man and women. For a woman, falling in love is like inviting a lifetime punishment. The way Macwan has presented the poor and exploiting condition of dalit women is true for the whole nation. The wretched condition of dalit women has been confirmed by Lakshmi Holmstrom in her introduction to Bama’s *Sangati*.

Within the community, the power rests with men: caste-courts and churches are male-led and rules for sexual behavior are very different for men and women. Hard labor and economic precariousness leads to a culture of violence…” (xvii)

But, along with the exploited and oppressed condition of the dalit women, Macwan has also captured their purity and spirit of life. Macwan depicts Lakshmi’s courage to beat the barnyard owner on his attempt to rape her, the dumb and deft Dahi’s generosity for her co-wife, Shamali’s love for his naïve husband, Hezal’s purity, Ladubhabhi’s motherly love for Heta and Joseph, Karuna’s service of her father-in-law Bhavan Bagat, and the choices of widowhood by the mother-in-law Kashima and the daughter-in-law Pashi for the love of their children. The depiction of the women sketches brings forth the double oppressed condition of women but it also makes one optimistic seeing the strength and spirit of the women.

The text is also a monumental work from dalit aesthetic point of view. It is believed that ‘dalit literature is the product of dalit consciousness that is shaped by the lived experiences of dalit, peppered by their pain, suffering and feeling of rebel and anger’. (Limbale) Defining dalit aesthetic, Limbale says,

> The aesthetic of dalit literature rests on three things: first, the artist’s social commitment; second, the life-affirming values present in the artistic creation; and
third, the ability to raise the readers’ consciousness of fundamental values of life like equality, freedom, justice, and fraternity. (Limbale)

Reinterpreting the idea of the mainstream literature of Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram, Limbale says,

Human beings are first and foremost humans - is Satyam. The liberation of human being is Shivam. The humanity of human beings is Sundaram. (Limbale)

As per the above explanation of dalit aesthetics it becomes clear that dalit literature is about unprivileged and common men. It is also believed that only dalit writers can articulate the dalit experiences authentically because they have firsthand experiences of the dalit life. Keeping in view this opinion, Macwan is truly a dalit writer. He was born as a dalit and he lived with the dalits. He has used his own experiences and sketched the dalit lives. The text is truly dalit text in the terms of its realistic presentation also. It is believed that a dalit literary text is always based on the realistic presentation than imagination. The text is rooted in the socio-cultural life of the Charotar region. Macwan himself has confirmed that there is no amount of imagination in the depiction of the characters but only ground reality.

Unlike the main stream literature, the feelings of pain, suffering and anger are prevalent in dalit literature. In that sense, Vyathana Vitak fits in the criteria of dalit literature because it is all about the wretched, oppressed and marginalized condition of dalits of Charotar. The text represents not only the pain and suffering but also the strength and spirit of the community. It highlights hitherto unknown culture and ethnography of the dalit community of Gujarat.
The text is also a beautiful blend of materialism and spiritualism. On one hand, the text presents the material painful life while on the other hand the characters’ faith on the Almighty. The characters like Bhavan Bhagat, Peeru Bhagat, Major Uncle are bearers of the spiritual or Bhakti tradition of India.

Dalit literary text is also believed to be interrogative in nature. Dalit literature is intended to question the unequal and discriminating social, cultural, economic and religious systems. Vyathana Vitak too questions the social decorum, the inequality among humans, the further deprived status of dalit women, the economic dependency of the dalits on the higher caste people, the hierarchical social structure, the conversion of dalits to Christianity and many more. It exposes the evil practice of caste that structures the Indian society.

Dalit literature also questions and experiments with the main stream literary canons of styles, themes, techniques, language and forms. The dalit writers extensively use personal narratives. Macwan too has given eleven collections of character sketches. He has experimented with the sketches in Vyathana Vitak making it a single narrative. Like Gita Mahta’s River Sutra and Raja Rao’s On the Ganga Ghat all the sketches in Vyathana Vitak are inter-connected by the subject of particular social strata and the writer’s presence with all the characters. All the sketches together seem to be episodes of the writer’s autobiography.

Dalit literature challenges the traditional idea of a hero. In dalit literature, a common man, the most oppressed and exploited person who sometimes rebels against the society becomes a hero. Vyathana Vitak too depicts the lives of such people. The characters are lower caste people, laborers, double oppressed women and economically poor. It shows the journeys of such people who sometimes overcome the difficult situations but mostly remains victims.
The prevailing *karun rasa* in all the sketches reflects the wretched, oppressed and marginalized condition of the millions of dalits in India. That is why the title *Vyathana Vitak* (*The Afflicted*) is an apt title for the text. The sketches of the collection create a class specific space for the readers. With these nineteen characters, Macwan has explored the lives of those who otherwise would never have been considered to be fit as a subject matter for a literary work.
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