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**EMOTIONAL CONDITIONING OF WOMEN IN CULTURAL SOCIETY  
BASED ON THE DEPICTION FROM SELECT STORIES OF SHASHI  
DESHPANDE'S THE INTRUSION AND OTHER STORIES**

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the emotional conditioning of women in patriarchal cultural societies through a close reading of selected short stories from Shashi Deshpande's *The Intrusion and Other Stories*. Drawing from Nancy Chodorow's Object Relations Theory and psychoanalytic feminist theory, the study analyses how Deshpande's protagonists, including Hema from "A Wall is Safer" and unnamed narrators in "Death of a Child," "An Antidote to Boredom," and "The Stone Women," internalize guilt, emotional labour, and societal expectations. The paper argues that these internalized behaviours reflect a gendered emotional framework constructed and perpetuated by patriarchy. Despite moments of introspection, Deshpande's women often remain psychologically unresolved, which reflects the lived experiences of many women today.

**Keywords:** Shashi Deshpande, emotional conditioning, emotional labour, patriarchy, feminist psychoanalysis, relational identity, Indian women's writing

**Introduction:** In patriarchal societies, emotional labour and suppression are not simply social expectations imposed on women—they are deeply ingrained mechanisms through which gender roles are sustained and normalized. These conditions become a silent, yet powerful, part of women's lived realities, often going unnoticed precisely because they are framed as natural expressions of femininity. Emotional labour—the expectation that women manage not only their own emotions but also the emotional well-being of those around them—is one of the most pervasive, yet least recognized, forms of gendered oppression. It is in this nuanced space of psychological and emotional subjugation that Shashi Deshpande situates her feminist narratives. Rather than focusing solely on visible or physical forms of violence, Deshpande draws attention to the quieter, internalized forms of suffering that women endure—forms that are often considered too ordinary to challenge. Her female characters are not always overtly victimized; instead, they are emotionally conditioned to serve, sacrifice, and suppress their personal desires in favour of maintaining harmony within the household and society.

This paper seeks to explore how this emotional conditioning operates in the lives of women through an analysis of selected stories from Deshpande's *The Intrusion and Other Stories*. Through characters like Hema in "A Wall is Safer," the unnamed mother in "Death of a Child," and the narrators in "An Antidote to Boredom" and "The Stone Women," the author reveals how these women have unconsciously internalized patriarchal expectations, often mistaking them for personal values. Drawing on Nancy Chodorow's Object Relations Theory, which emphasizes the relational nature of female identity development, this paper argues that Deshpande's protagonists perform invisible emotional labour without acknowledgment or reward. These women struggle with guilt, emotional dependency, and a deep-seated inability to assert autonomy—issues that Chodorow identifies as rooted in the early psychological conditioning of girls to prioritize relational roles over individuation. The analysis will demonstrate that Deshpande's fiction not only critiques the social conditioning of women but also offers a psychoanalytic lens through which to understand the emotional cost of conformity in a patriarchal world.

**Research Objective and Methodology:** To analyse how emotional conditioning, as portrayed in Shashi Deshpande's *The Intrusion and Other Stories*, shapes women's identities through internalized guilt, relational roles, and suppressed autonomy, using Nancy Chodorow's Object Relations Theory.

This study adopts a qualitative textual analysis methodology to critically examine the emotional conditioning of women in Shashi Deshpande's *The Intrusion and Other Stories*. Grounded in psychoanalytic feminist theory, the analysis draws specifically on Nancy Chodorow's Object Relations Theory, which provides a framework for understanding how women's identities are formed in relation to others—particularly through caregiving roles and emotional dependencies shaped in early childhood. The theory is employed to interrogate how Deshpande's female characters internalize patriarchal norms, especially around emotional labour and self-sacrifice.

The primary texts selected for this study—"A Wall is Safer," "Death of a Child," "An Antidote to Boredom," and "The Stone Women"—are analysed through close reading, focusing on character interiority, narrative voice, and symbolic representations of guilt, relational dynamics, and suppressed autonomy. These stories are chosen for their nuanced depiction of internal emotional conflict and their alignment with the theoretical lens being applied. By examining the psychological and emotional dimensions of the protagonists' lived experiences, this method aims to uncover how deeply embedded patriarchal expectations govern not only the characters' behaviour but also their self-perception and emotional responses. The qualitative approach allows for a rich, interpretive engagement with the texts, foregrounding the subtle yet pervasive forms of emotional subjugation that are often normalized in both literature and society.

**Analysis and Discussion:** The female characters in the selected stories of the collection have all fallen prey to the unfortunate trap of emotional conditioning of women to subjugate them into performing according to their societal expectations in a patriarchal environment. It isn't portrayed in a blaring stance, of all the injustices against these protagonists.

The character of Hema from "A Wall is Safer" isn't depicted as being abused or hurt because of grave matters that can be seen, like domestic abuse or marital rape. This also contributes to the very reason the audience cannot see a moment of realisation being experienced by Hema. Throughout the story, her character has been shown as adjusting to her life as she lives it. This begs the question to analyse the interior monologue that keeps fluctuations in Hema's mind. Deshpande wrote "For some reason I think of the cry of the new-born. A triumphant assertion of being. Of existing. And I also think of how there is no difference between the cry of a female baby and a male one. When does it become a virtue to stifle that cry? I don't know the answer to this question" (120).

This is a prime example of the emotional conditioning that women are, somehow, taught without an actual realisation of it happening because of the fact that it is normalised to benefit the patriarchy. Easily accessible invisible labour for domestic spheres, where the due credit is barely acknowledged; and when it is acknowledged, it is only criticised to perfect the act, is considered to be just another learned behaviour or responsibility. The lack of space provided to women within a family is often unspoken and unattended.

This conditioning interferes with the ability to form an individualistic identity as it suffocates, clouds and ridicules the mere idea. The women who do form their own individual identities are then labelled as "rebellious" and easily blamed, then discarded from respectable society. They are declared unsuccessful as wives and mothers if the emotionally conditioned devotion is witnessed to be doubted or questioned.

Hema's character was tangled into her own thinking and yet the guilt was ever present even as she questioned her condition. With the previous quote, she questioned the state of her being, for 'stifling her cry' and yet she was unable to remember one such event from her past that could've been definitive of learning this virtue. It insinuates that even when women are labelled as emotional creatures, and the act of crying is considered a feminine trait, it is women who have to muffle their issues for the comfort of others in a patriarchal structure.

Chodorow's concept of Object Relations theory in women is used to analyse such phenomenon from the short stories, wherein it was said, "... in any given society, feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does (In psychoanalytic terms, women are less individuated than men; they have more flexible ego boundaries)" (44). This is witnessed in the silent sacrifices that Hema makes for her family, it might not be life threatening, but it does leave her with a sense of unfulfillment at the same time. There were moments of longing to gain herself a small freedom to be able to, 'be one of those women who carry their work about with them'

(Deshpande 121) but she realised the helplessness of longing for that dream, when she had responsibilities to her family. Hema kept the suppression of her desire for autonomy unaccounted for, and in consistency to Chodorow idea of women's desires being secondary to emotional needs of other (Later discussed for "An Antidote to Boredom" as well.

The significance of her identity remained conflicted with her responsibilities as a devoted housewife, and a doting mother to her children. After internalising these patterns which lead to suppressed individuality, Hema was unable to recognise her own suppression. Which wasn't outright, but her compromise was visible even in the guilt of her husband when she mentioned, of being a housewife, and Vasant went quiet, uncomfortable and changed the subject which ironically was of the fence, symbolically trapping her around the boundaries of household chores.

Deshpande has depicted it through Hema's inability to come to terms with her taxing emotional labour. It is through the narrative where moments of recognition become unresolved with tension in the headspace of the protagonist. Where one moment she was lamenting over becoming self-effacing and then her denial of having her individuality suppressed. This makes the short story (in fact the collection) even more synchronous with reality and lived experiences.

Emotional labour becomes central to a woman's existence, as in Hema's case it is evident, that she became conditioned to care for the entire household, manage everyone's routine lives and adjust her own routine, moulded around her family members. She is unable to turn her nurturing nature to herself. It portrays that women's relational identities leave little to no room for self assertion.

Chodorow's Object Relations theory supports the argument presented in the narrative that this relational orientation, building an identity based on the relation to others, implies that autonomy often comes at the cost of internal conflict and guilt.

Another exhibit of such, is seen through the protagonist of "Death of a child" wherein she was, on a tangible level, allowed to make her own bodily choice but still haunted by the guilt of the same. It is through the generations of learning such empathy and emotional burden, inherently, that causes this guilt at the mere act of prioritising oneself. The protagonist felt as though she should feel the guilt, the sickening feeling, as it was her choice that made her choose herself over her phantom connection to her child. With one of the quotes near the end of the short story that said,

There is a hollow feeling within me. I'm filled with strange thoughts. Where have I heard that, after an amputation, a person continues to feel the amputated limb? It itches, it hurts, it exists. Now, like a phantom limb, my child seems to cling on to me. Now, when he does not exist, he asserts himself. I am conscious of a piercing pain in the place he had filled. Grief becomes real. I swing, like a monstrous pendulum,

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between grief, guilt and shame. Guilt conquers. I welcome it and shoulder the burden with a masochistic fervour. (Deshpande 50)

With Chodorow's concept, since her relation to the unborn child was given more importance in the realm of her identity, to the protagonist it felt like losing a part of herself. This affirms the relational orientation of women's individuality. The guilt and grief becomes one with the emotional capacity and empathy within a woman's mind. This is inherently, socially and culturally driven to aid easier functioning of the deep rooted patriarchy in Indian as well as western society.

Primarily since Deshpande focused upon the Indian context, the narrative is central to being frustratingly unresolved. It is witnessed, like reality, most of these narratives start and end with the same emotional state of mind, even as it goes through a rollercoaster of questions and doubts, if anything the guilt overpowers any of the self realisation about their suffering. Here, the protagonist in "Death of a Child", struggles to wrap her head around the necessary decision she had to make to not feel suffocated or compromised.

The narrative here as well depicts, much like Hema's character, the protagonist's inner conflict with herself to either be domestically fulfilled or create a space for herself. It is well known that women are either sanctified or vilified, which perpetuates fear in women for the roles and responsibilities they are given to perform without error. It pushes them to take the limited allotted spaces for their existence in a respected society. "I can feel his eyes constantly, accusingly on me. He thinks me callous. When I kiss and fondle the children, I can feel him wonder—how can she?" (Deshpande 47). With this quote, it is justified that women are judged for making choices solely benefiting themselves, they are considered to be sacrificial, fair and have a motherly instinct.

Chodorow also made a remarkable note that, Women's mothering is socially constructed and reproduces itself through the structure of family and society. This reinforces even Butler's gender performativity which is clearly supported in the narrative of these stories.

The protagonist wouldn't have felt the burden of not acting a certain way if 'Mothering' wasn't socially validated for women to perform. The cycle becomes psychologically never ending and normalised, which in turn conditions women for emotional labour. Even as she expressed her care for her existing children, her husband doubts her actions and intentions, even as she has been a devoted and caring mother. But because she prioritised herself over an unborn child, she was considered selfish whereas a mother is deified and selfless, ever doting. Much of the stereotype also emerges from the promoted misconception that a woman's first and foremost duty is to be bred.

If, instead of being used as a tool to practice patriarchy, these social constructs of gender and gender roles were placed to create an equal society, the condition of women and their silent sufferings wouldn't be as widespread as they are, in the current scenario.

“He is sitting with a faraway look on his face and I am aware of a fierce envy. He can get away—from me, from the children, even from himself. I can never get away, not even from my own body. I am tied to these things in a way he never will be” (Deshpande 47).

This instance, where the protagonist is acknowledging that men have been given the liberty to function independently and be detached. Their identity doesn't stem from relational orientation, supporting Chodorow's concept of boys forming their identity through separation from their mother figure. This early act of building their world view individualistically stands in stark contrast to how girls form their identity by relating to their mother figure. This is Chodorow's direct criticism of Freud and his oedipal complex. Even in general society, a man is celebrated if he even plays a decent role of caretaking as a father, that seems to satisfy the expectations (or the lack thereof) placed upon ‘family man’ (Chodorow 175).

Emotionally there can be minimal contribution, at best, if they financially provide or compensate for no participation in emotional upbringing of their child. Which is why the husband of the protagonist in “Death of a Child” repeatedly used the word ‘manage’ when referring to raising a child. As it could be managed easily by him, if there seemed to be no important role of a father to play, whereas it felt paralysing to the protagonist since she wasn't allowed to picture her life in isolation to the institution of marriage and family, to be the primary caregiver to their children. Here, again there is the use of the concept of Chodorow Object Relations theory.

This is what Chodorow means by women's internalisation of caregiving identities makes it hard for them to make clear cut decisions when those decisions seem to go against their culturally prescribed roles (51). The narrator can't categorise her action because she can't emotionally detach from the internalised identity of ‘mother’. Her psychological landscape is unstable because she's acted outside the framework of female sacrifice and maternal duty.

Chodorow says women are shaped by a relational identity so they define their emotional world by their connection to others – particularly their children or partners. She writes, “Girls emerge with a stronger basis for experiencing another's needs or feelings as one's own” (167). This is echoed in the protagonist's sense of emotional responsibility for the life she didn't bring into the world where guilt is the very expression of identity.

Moreover Chodorow says this ability for emotional relation leads to the development of flexible ego boundaries in women: Women are less individuated than men (57). This flexibility while making women empathetic also makes them vulnerable to emotional over identification. The narrator even after making an autonomous choice is still trapped in guilt because her sense of autonomy has not been psychically consolidated.

In *An Antidote to Boredom*, Deshpande gives us another woman whose emotional life is shaped by relational dependency and psychic accommodation. The story unfolds not through

big events but through small revelations about emotional absence and the hunger for connection. Her loneliness isn't because she's isolated but because her marriage is emotionally flat. Deshpande in this story portrays, "No I was never lonely now. As I moved about the house doing my chores, I stored up jokes, little bits of my day" (62).

This sentence shows the protagonist's conditioned habit of investing in the relationship even when she doesn't get any validation back. She internalises her emotional world to share it with her husband, not for mutual pleasure but as a subconscious offering to keep the relationship going. According to Chodorow, women in patriarchal societies equate self-worth with caregiving capacity. So collecting "jokes" and "little bits" of her day isn't a personal diary of experience but emotional labour. She stores these fragments to bridge the emotional gap in the marriage, to reinforce the conditioning to prioritise relationship maintenance over self-fulfilment.

This is also a mental compromise, as the protagonist has to reframe her experience for someone else's benefit. It shows how little emotional autonomy she has – her stories are not for herself but for someone else to consume. Chodorow's Object Relations Theory (46) explains why this feels natural to the protagonist – she has been taught to understand herself in relation to others. Her worth comes from the emotional nourishment she provides not from her own experiences. So Deshpande captures the subtlety of internalised servitude masquerading as love.

We found ourselves going to the school twice a week, the same time, the same day, knowing fully well that our children didn't really need us any more. Yet I would pretend to myself it was Rahul I went to see. With a kind of guilt and shame at making use of him, I would rush up to him, rumple his hair, stay with him for a while, and then, with a throbbing heart and pulsing excitement, go to the courtyard where I would find him waiting for me. (Deshpande 63)

Here we can see how the protagonist constructs a relational alibi, in the instance her role as mother, while also simultaneously attempting to acquire emotional satisfaction through her affair. The "guilt" she experiences from "making use" of her son as an alibi constitutes her internalized moral codes surrounding motherhood. As mothers, women are socialised to be unconditionally committed to their sons, and thus they feel shame whenever they depart from that ideal by allowing the possibility that they may be using their caretaking role for their own agenda. Chodorow comments on that reality when she says that mothers create identities that are entangled in their care-giving role and the boundaries between care and self-interest become uncertain. "Boundaries grow weak and strong, are some-times between whole self and whole mother (or other object), sometimes include parts of the mother within the self boundaries or exclude parts of the self as outside. Qualities of the mother are in-trojected and become part of the self-image and qualities of the self are projected outward." (Chodorow 73).

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Her self-deception (“I would pretend”) and concurrent emotional buzz represent a more complex interaction between repression and desire. Rather than stigma it, Deshpande illustrates her act as a deeply felt attempt to assert agency within the societal boundaries that constrict it. The protagonist’s desire is not simply for another man, but rather for reciprocity, affirmation, and vitality. But because she is relationally oriented, she cannot fully claim this desire; it will always be obscured by duty, softened with guilt, and dictated by the patriarchal standards related to a virtuous and benevolent mother.

It is to notice how extensively accepting the social norms are when a man cheats and usually the women are told to look after their husbands and stay for the sake of family, where it is normalised and justified to be biologically in the nature of a man. Whereas it is self punishing to a women to look for getting their emotional needs fulfilled outside of marriage. The mere act of companionship becomes taboo. And the guilt follows the very being of the protagonist as seen in this instance.

There was witnessed a deep emotional neglect of the protagonist with these lines “nobody had cared what I wore, how I dressed. My husband denied me nothing; but there was not one sari with associations. Not one sari that was special to me because of we had done together, something he had said to me” (Deshpande 64).

This quote demonstrates the emotional erasure embedded within the protagonist’s marriage. She has the material support, but does not have shared memory and emotional support. The sari (which can represent femininity, culture, and emotional relations) becomes void in the protagonist’s life. When Chodorow describes neglect, it is not simply the labelling of abuse; Deshpande illustrates that suppression through lack of emotional participation is equally stifling. The protagonist’s desire to belong is a desire for a narrative that allows for her to not be erased.

While we can draw on Chodorow’s theory to read the void as a result of women being socialized to be emotional responders, the protagonist finds herself without the feedback of emotional responses. When the protagonist turns toward symbols to find emotional substitutes, it does not matter, because the symbols fail her, too. She cannot find purpose in mere material comfort, for her identity needs relational meaning. The quote indicates that for women who are emotionally conditioned, the value of objects comes in their emotional resonance; that resonance was never present in the marriage. Deshpande uses the absence of emotional resonance in/around domestic settings to emphasize how emotional poverty constitutes a quiet, yet powerful, form of violence.

The protagonist was not satisfied with the way her husband treated her, it turned her bitter and she still thought of him before acting on any of her fantasies of causing him discomfort from his usual routine as expressed with “I had said bitterly. ‘No, there’s no guilt. Why should there be? As long as his world isn’t disturbed, at least obviously, he doesn’t care. Sometimes I feel like shocking him, shaking him out of his lethargy by screaming in his ears”



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(Deshpande 64-65).

This outburst exposes the protagonist's escalating frustration with the imbalance of emotional labour in her relationship. Her husband's disregard marks a representation of privilege – one of the privileges that men gain from the patriarchal society which enables him to detach emotionally while remaining the benefactor of another's unceasing emotional investments.

The protagonist's fantastical desire to "shock him" shows her desperate intent to disrupt the monotone feeling of emotional stagnation and to become visible in her current circumstances. The sense in Chodorow's conclusions that women have the potential for less rigid ego boundaries in this situation can really be seen in this relationship-the protagonist is emotionally bound to her husband while he remains emotionlessly distanced from the relationship itself. (46)

While this quote exposes a characterological turn in the protagonist's experience – forging from passive endurance to the edge of stating an assertion -the assertion stays with fantasied potentials, never to be replaced with a true action in the real world. This illustrates that emotional conditioning has a powerful hold on her.

The protagonist is still bound up in fear of disturbing a patriarchal balance of the situation. Deshpande creates a character who recognizes their own emotional repression, yet fails to actualize any sort of revolution. This story serves to highlight a space that depicts the quiet revolution of emotional awareness that many women can identify with yet rarely discuss.

In *The Stone Women*, Deshpande investigates how women's experience of self gets shattered by patriarchal demands and emotional suppression. The nameless narrator is faced with a symbolic universe—the prehistoric carvings of emotive, sensual women—who live in direct contrast to her own stifled life. One of the most turning points in the novel is when the narrator describes her husband's emotional management of her actions; "he says. 'One day,' he's challenged me, 'let's see if you can control yourself just one day.' I've stopped listening to film songs, I try to crush the tunes whenever I know they're there, but they're always biding their time, waiting to spring out, taking me unawares" (Deshpande 142).

This is a reflection of internalized surveillance by which women hold themselves up to scrutiny—an effect of long-term emotional conditioning. Chodorow's theory of the relational self assists us in grasping this better. Women, brought up to define themselves emotionally and behaviourally in terms of their relationships, tend to internalize guilt over their pleasures and self-definition. Their ego boundaries are fluid, defined to embrace the needs and desires of others. As Chodorow states, "Feminine personality comes to define itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does" (44).

This repression of personal desires, including the appreciation of music, becomes representative of how deeply the emotional autonomy of the woman is repressed. The requirement to repress even innocent, solitary pleasures shows how patriarchal domination does not always happen in the form of physical violence but in the forms of silent mediation of pleasure. In Chodorow believes, this is so because girls come to experience themselves as less differentiated than boys, as more continuous with and related to the external object world. In this narrative, the music is the metaphorical object world—something that the narrator has to suppress in order to create harmony within her relational dynamic.

The narrator's fascination with the temple sculptor, and the woman is telling me about herself now. 'My grandchild,' she says, tenderly passing her hand over the sleeping child's hair. The child stirs and her voice drops a decibel. There's such an air of ease and comfort about her, it's as if she's in her own home, conversing with one of the families suggests a yearning for an unshackled identity.

"But it's not these details in the carvings that amaze me, it's what we're seeing here—the joyous, playful, narcissistic existence of these women. Were they really like this? Could any woman ever have been like this?" (Deshpande 143). And this quote brings out the narrator's inner psychological turmoil. She is confronted with images of feminine liberation and reckless self-confidence that contradict her own experience of emotional or social constraint. Chodorow states that therein lies the crux: because the development of personality in women proceeds through a deeply rooted relational matrix, that very expression of autonomy tends to evoke anxiety or shame. These sculptures look to shatter the beliefs of this emotional conditioning and do so unapologetically, gloriously sensual. The narrator's yearning is for the residue of a self that could have emerged, had it not been trained into submission.

Moreover, the narrator is baffled at the thought that women could have been joyous and playful. She cannot fathom a time when pleasure was permitted as an expression of self for women. According to Chodorow, "the psychological dynamics of the universal social and cultural devaluation and subordination of women" is normalised within the society (50). The narrator's refusal to accept that the joyful female form could be legitimate or historical evidences just such psychic repression.

The narrator in the story concludes her visit to the elderly woman by encountering an alternative vision of womanhood through this interaction; "The woman is telling me about herself now. 'My grandchild,' she says, tenderly passing her hand over the sleeping child's hair. The child stirs and her voice drops a decibel. There's such an air of ease and comfort about her, it's as if she's in her own home, conversing with one of the family." (Deshpande 145).

During this encounter, the narrator experiences a temporary connection to this other female figure who provides a motherly support. Mothering reproduction according to Chodorow involves the transmission of caregiving responsibilities together with emotional

patterns. The older woman naturally provides comfort through conditioned caregiving which developed over many years of practice. The narrator finds this comfort both appealing and foreign because of the distance between showing motherhood and embodying motherhood naturally. According to Chodorow, women develop strong internalized mothering abilities together with psychological enforcement mechanisms that make them derive satisfaction from this role.

This moment of ease functions as a warning although it remains hidden beneath its exterior. The comfort that the older woman experiences exists as a consequence of her complete acceptance of embedded social roles. The narrator's emotional instability indicates that she might not reach this comfort zone without giving up her own identity. Through her work Chodorow demonstrates how motherhood functions as a grounding force but simultaneously becomes the means for psychological domination of individuals. The story finishes by continuing its questioning of female subjectivity which reveals Deshpande's realistic dedication to showing women as complex beings whose experiences remain unresolved. The narrator experiences a moment of maternal grounding and contrasts with the narrator's own restless emotional state during her visit to an elderly woman;

The narrator receives a brief moment of maternal stability which stands in opposition to her current emotional unrest. According to Chodorow, women inherit both caregiving responsibilities and emotional patterns through the reproduction of mothering. The older woman's comfort stems from years of ingrained caregiving practices. The narrator feels both respect and disconnect when observing the natural motherhood of this person, which highlights her struggles to simultaneously perform motherhood and embody it with ease. According to Chodorow, women experience an internalization of mothering abilities. And this internalising leads to emotional conditioning of women to perform femininity in a certain manner according to the societal expectations placed on them.

**Conclusion:** Shashi Deshpande's female characters poignantly encapsulate the lived realities of emotional conditioning within a patriarchal framework, where the boundaries between love, duty, and self-effacement blur into normalized suffering. Through their silent compromises, unarticulated desires, and deeply internalized guilt, these women bear the emotional weight of social expectations that have been naturalized as feminine virtues. Their lives unfold within relational entrapments—defined not by personal agency, but by the needs and perceptions of others. By applying Nancy Chodorow's Object Relations Theory, this paper reveals how emotional caregiving is not only expected of women but is psychically internalized across generations, beginning in early relational development and reinforced by societal norms. The protagonists' repeated emotional labour—whether through maintaining households, suppressing desires, or performing maternal care—illustrates how femininity becomes synonymous with self-sacrifice.

Despite moments of resistance, reflection, or even fleeting emotional clarity, Deshpande's women often fail to actualize liberation. They remain psychologically static,

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unable to fully detach from the roles assigned to them, thereby mirroring the unresolved emotional state of many real women navigating cultural and familial expectations. This highlights that emotional labour is not a peripheral or passive task; rather, it is central to how womanhood is constructed and maintained in patriarchal cultures. In revealing the cost of this internalized conditioning, Deshpande offers not just a critique of societal norms, but a deeply human portrayal of the emotional architecture that defines—and confines—women's lives.

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