Chapter III

The Victim's Joy among the Holy Flame

In spite of the shift from matriarchy to patriarchy, as detailed in the previous chapter, the goddess/male victim pattern of sacrifice continues to exist in the form of archetypes which, undergoing various metaphorical and metonymical displacements, appear especially in alter/native and marginal discourses. As part of such an alternative discourse, Yeats's and Edasseri's works appear to have opted for what Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak in a different context calls the "choice of the cultural female sphere rather than the colonial male sphere" (Spivak, Outside 184). The female deity/male victim pattern is evoked along with the identification of the motherland as the goddess and the martyrs as the male victims. Yeats's short story "The Binding of the Hair" (UP 390-93) and the poems "Parnell's Funeral" (CP 319-20), "Easter 1916" (CP 202-205) and "The Rose Tree" (CP 206) contain the atavistic resurgence of the archetype. Edasseri's "Vandippinammaye" [Hail the Mother] (EK 13-14), "Palippin Matavine" [Protect the Mother] (21-23) and "Bharata Puzha" [Bharata River] (123-125) also portray the motherland/martyr figuration. In Yeats's "The Cap and Bells" (CP 71-73) and "Vision in the Wood" (312-13) the pattern of female deity/male victim is combined with the beloved/lover theme. The revival of themes from legends characterises these poems. In the context of Yeats's anti-colonial stance, such themes can be read as transformations of the motherland/martyr pattern. If the
"mothers" in all the above works demand and receive sacrifice, the mothers in Yeats’s "The Ballad of Moll Magee" (CP 25-27), "A Cradle Song" (45), "Leda and the Swan" (241) and The Countess Cathleen (CP1 3-50) sacrifice themselves. Edasseri’s "Bimbisarente Edayan" (EK 577-81), "Poota Pattu" and "Kavile Pattu" (370-378, 504-514) also delineate the sufferings of mothers. The discussion of mothers as the sacrificing and the sacrificed leads to Jean Franco’s reading of the rebellion by "mothers of the Plaza de Mayo." Breaking the conventions and customs instituted by male domination these mothers resort to direct and rebellious action. Starting from the analysis of mothers who play traditional roles of sacrifice, this chapter ends with the discussion of subversive mothers who widen the possibilities of motherly sacrifices.

In the poem "The Cap and Bells" by W.B. Yeats (CP 71-73) a fool immolates himself at the feet of his beloved queen to realise her. One night, when the owls begin to call, the Jester enters the garden of the young queen and bids his soul rise upward and stand on her window-sill:

But the young queen would not listen;
She rose in her pale night-gown;
She drew in the heavy casement
And pushed the latches down. (72)

Next morning, when the owls call out no more, he sends his heart to her in the form of a sweet song: "But she took up her fan from the table/And waved it off on the air" (72). Then the
Jester decides to offer himself for arresting her attention and winning her love:

'I have cap and bells,' he pondered,
'I will send them to her and die';
And when the morning whitened
He left them where she went by. (72)

The Queen accepts the sacrifice. The queens in *A Full Moon in March* and *The King of the Great Clock Tower* place the lovers' severed heads in their bosoms. The Queen, here, lays the cap and bells upon her bosom under the cloud of her hair. Her red lips sing a love song. The cap and bells are symbols of the Jester's special skill in creation. Like the poet-swineherd hero of *A Full Moon in March*, he is courting an unresponsive queen. His loss of the cap and bells is like the decapitation suffered by the heroes of *The King of the Great Clock Tower* and *A Full Moon in March*. It causes death and it is a symbolic castration. The Queen accepts the Jester's offering and sings. She is the mother of the star child. When the dead lover-son is reborn as the star child, she opens both door and window and is united with the heart and soul, now dismembered and purified (Webster 112-113).

The symbolic castration connects this poem with another poem by Yeats, "Vacillation" (*CP* 282-286). Jeffares discovers (*NC* 301) an allusion of castration in the latter and comments upon the phrase: "He that Attis's image hangs." In the procession at the festival of Attis, the priest used to hang the god's image on the sacred pine tree. Attis was a vegetation god who castrated himself when Cybelle, the earth mother, drove him to frenzy, and
his devotees castrated themselves at his March festival. Ellmann suggests (*Identity of Yeats* 172) that Yeats identifies the poet with the priest, himself castrated like the god because he conceives of the artist as forced to sacrifice his life for the sake of his art. For its sake he becomes one with Attis. The devotee hanging the image of Attis rejects normal experiences. In "The Cap and Bells" the fool renounces his normal and artistic experiences to realise his mother goddess, the Queen. The castration-sacrifice performed by the Jester, offering his cap and bells, is basically the same as removing one's hair completely and offering it at the feet of the deity. This is one among many forms of castration offerings. Hair is the symbol of masculine faculty for creation. In Palani and Rameswaram, famous South Indian temples, the full shaving off of one's head is practised. Leelavathy in *Varnaraji* remarks that breaking one's own head, cutting one's own hair and lying prostrate are symbolic castration (251). In her opinion "The self-decapitation in myths is displaced by the wounding of one's own head by the devotee in rituals" (251).

"Her Vision in the Wood" (*CP* 312-13) presents a woman who has become too old for a man's love. She finds a wounded man, all blood and mire, carried by a troop: "a troop/Shouldered a litter with a wounded man" (*CP* 312). Every member of the troop curses the woman who in her passion has fatally wounded the man. The speaker of the poem, the woman, is the beast who has torn the man. He is her "heart's victim and its torturer" (*CP* 313).
Unterecker argues that the poem can be best understood if one bears in mind the assertion in the last stanza (Reader's Guide 238) that the troop who carry the litter have brought "no fabulous symbol." Those who mourn the lover's tragic plight had "unintentionally" called her to the sacred spot to be a witness to the symbolic death of torn Adonis; and she, by the symbolic wound she has given herself, is able to participate in the ritual (238). The bringing of the woman to the sacred spot is not unintentional. The ritual pattern of mother goddess/slain god is perceived here and it is realised only when the male god is slain at the spot which is sacred to the goddess. John Vickery observes: "The sacred wood in which the blood-letting and vision take place is probably the grove of Diana in which the goddess rules as a fertility deity" (223). The sacred marriage of Diana and her consort Virbius was observed there. It is the setting to which the old woman might return "when she is no longer invited to participate in such mimetic rituals" (224). The impotency of the goddess's old age should be interpreted symbolically, not literally, as the loss of power of female goddesses. The pictures delineated in the poem remind one of the typical portrayal of witches or vampire-goddesses in the folklore of Kerala. A powerful mother goddess becomes a marginalised witch. Edasseri Govindan Nair in "Poota Pattu" ("The Ballad of the Pootham") gives the typical picture of a witch:

    In the profound vacuity of the vault of midnight,
    When magic lamps are lit in bright array,
    She waits on the sides of lonely paths
Combing her locks and smiling sweet
She lures the straying young men coming that way
And sits them on top of the tall palm trees
Which, to their spell-bound eyes,
Look like seven-storeyed mansions!
While youngsters sleep in her embrace
She tastes their warm saltish blood with glee.
And throws their hair and bones
On the rocks behind the pariah’s hillock.

("The Ballad of the Pootham" 56)

In Yeats’s poem, the woman stands in rage: "At wine-dark midnight in the sacred wood,/Too old for man’s love I stood in rage/Imagining men” (CP 312). Her rage is the outcome of her sense of the loss of power. It is not just anger directed towards the impotency of old age. She no longer gets the blood of young men. Though she stands in the wood waiting for the men to come along she can only imagine them. Nobody comes towards her. Moreover, people have begun to curse the beast that inflicted a deadly wound upon the man on the litter. She is constrained to join the mourners to shower malediction upon the victimiser. She has to satisfy her lust for blood by tearing at her own body so that she can see whether blood runs in her veins. She cannot suck blood from the lips of lovers as she did in the past.

As in "The Cap and Bells," in this poem too the overtones of castration/sacrifice are embedded. Unterecker opines that the ancient lovers are momentarily revitalised by the blood which
flows down their loins (Reader’s Guide 238). Yeats is careful in lines eight and nine that there can be no doubt about the place in which the lady wounds herself. Stan Smith in W.B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction observes that the woman thinks that she can assuage the greater pang with a lesser one by masochistically tearing her body with her nails, drawing her blood so that "its wine might cover/Whatever could recall the lip of lover" (99). What this summons up instead is a sadistic vision of a wounded man, carried in by mourning women like the dying Adonis, gored in his sexual parts by a wild boar. She delights in his pain, as the dark, brooding sensuality of the last stanza makes clear, a femme fatale delighting in her heart's torturer now in her power (99). The revitalising power of the blood of sacrifice, indicated by Unterecker, is the underlying principle of the sacrificial rituals of goddesses' temples in India as well. David Kinsley remarks:

the underlying intuition or perception in these cults seems to be that these goddesses, who are associated with fertility, must be periodically re nourished. In order to give life, they must receive life back in the form of blood sacrifices. (146)

The self-laceration resorted to by the woman in "Her Vision in the Wood" is also linked with the gradual decay of female centrality and power. Powerless to incise others and bathe in the blood of others, she is forced to wound herself and draw blood. In this aspect the woman in "Her Vision in the Wood" is like the goddess in Edasseri’s "Kavile Pattu."
In A Full Moon in March and The King of The Great Clock Tower, "The Cap and Bells" and "Her Vision in the Wood" the mother goddess/victim and beloved/lover motifs are intertwined. In Yeats's "The Binding of the Hair" (UP 390-393), the theme is further complicated by the element of patriotism. In "Parnell's Funeral" (CP 319-20) and "Easter 1916" (CP 202-205) the motherland/martyr son pattern is interwoven with the mother goddess/slain hero motif. In "The Secret Rose" (CP 77-78), the beloved/lover pattern is dominant. "The Rose Tree" (206) is an exhortation for martyrdom. In "The Binding of the Hair," the lover-poet propitiates the young and wise Queen Dectira with his tales and songs. When the enemies come to attack their motherland, Aodh, the court poet, inspires her men-at-arms with stories of anger. A "mournful beauty" hovers over his tales. He compares the gleam of a sword to the brightness of the Queen's eyes and "the dawn breaking on a morning of victory to the glimmering of her breast." Aodh has to go to the battlefield at night. Just before that the Queen makes a request to him, taking him by the hand, to sing a song before the morning. He promises that he will sing "two little verses" (UP 392) before the morning even if he cannot return from the battlefield. Though the battle is won by the Queen's army, Aodh does not return. The Queen goes to the battlefield. From a nearby bush comes a sweet tremulous song. It is exuded by the severed head of Aodh, hanging from the bush by its dark hair. After completing the recitation of the promised song, the head falls from the bush and rolls over at the feet of the Queen. The design of mother
goddess/male victim is evident here. Aodh's salutation to her as "the Rose of my Desire" (392) links the story with "the Rose Tree" poems. The Rose in Yeats stands for the beloved and the motherland. The decapitation and song relate the story with the plays, A Full Moon in March and The King of the Great Clock Tower.

Charles Parnell was an Irish landowner and a reputed leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party. He later lost leadership because his relationship with Mrs O'Shea made him an object of allegations and attacks. Even the majority of his own followers repudiated Parnell. It has been believed that this caused his premature death. Jackson has argued that Parnell was hounded to death (399). In "Parnell's Funeral" (CP 319-20), Yeats presents Parnell as a sacrificial victim. Andrew Parkin remarks: "By a dramatic shifting of the scene from the historical into mythic times, Parnell is seen as a sacrifice" (40). The last two lines of the first stanza of the first part of the poem: "What is this Sacrifice? Can someone there/Recall the Cretan barb that pierced a star?" (CP 319), and the second stanza as a whole allude to a goddess killing her victim:

Rich foliage that the starlight glittered through,
A frenzied crowd, and where the branches sprang
A beautiful seated boy; a sacred bow;
A woman, and an arrow on a string;
A pierced boy, image of a star laid low.
That woman, the Great Mother imaging,
Cut out his heart. Some master of design

Stamped boy and tree upon Sicilian coin. (319)

A. G. Stock observes that Parnell’s fate gives Yeats an insight into the meaning of the myth of the Cretan Mother Goddess and the barbaric rite of human sacrifice (215). Yeats notes the Mother Goddess whose representative priestess shot the arrow at the child, whose sacrificial death symbolized the death and resurrection of the Tree-Spirit or Apollo. She is pictured upon certain Cretan coins of the fifth century B.C., as a slightly draped beautiful woman, sitting in the heart of a branching trees (Auto 578). She goes back to the very earliest form of the religion of Crete and is the Tree as Mother. She is also Artemis (578). The Cretan Jupiter made an image of his son in gypsum and placed the boy’s heart in the part of the figure where the curve of the chest was to be seen. It had been kept by his sister Minerva and a temple was built to contain the image. There were festivals and noisy processions that followed a basket in which the sister had hidden the heart. Images were made with a chest cavity to contain the heart of the sacrificed (578). Jeffares observes that Devonshire farmers and labourers used to observe the ceremony of sacrificing a boy to the Apple tree to get better fruits (NC 341). A Mother Goddess or a queen slaying a male victim or her suitor and bathing in blood to revive her fertility or preserve fecundity is a universal theme in different primitive rituals. Brenda S. Webster finds Yeats’s poem “The Cap and Bells” and the plays A full Moon in March and The King of the Great Clock Tower as connected by the theme of a queen or mother goddess who accepts
an offering or oblation like self-castration or decapitation of her suitor or son (112-113). "Parnell’s Funeral" has the theme of a son’s ritual death at the hands of his mother. The poem makes Parnell the son and Ireland the cruel mother (138). Identifying one’s motherland with a goddess who demands the martyrdom of her worthy sons is a theme which is found in many anti-colonial works. For instance, R. Viswanathan argues that in John Millington Synge’s tragedy Riders to the Sea, Maurya is the symbol of the Archetypal Mother, of the Irish racial imagination, who has sacrificed her children for Irish independence (Anvayam 33). Viswanathan adds that in Malayalam poems, the Archetypal Mother manifests as Goddess Durga (33). Analysing the poem "Narabali" [Human Sacrifice] by P. Kunhiraman Nair, Bhanumati Amma notes that the nationalistic feelings are transformed into masochism when the romantic poet assimilated them as personal emotion (350). The poet Kunhiraman Nair (1905-1978), a contemporary of Edasseri Govindan Nair, wrote "Human Sacrifice" at a time when nationalistic feelings were mounting very high in India. The poem presents a dilapidated Durga temple, emblematic of pre-Independence India, with the Goddess demanding human sacrifice. Similarly, David Kinsley refers to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s Bengali novel Anandmath, written in the late nineteenth century when the Indian Independence movement was beginning to become powerful, where Kali, the angry and sorrowful goddess, represents the motherland (181). Innumerable devotees have to be sacrificed to quench her thirst for blood. In other
words, numerous martyrs have to shed blood and give up life for reviving the motherland from the foreign yoke (181).

The question raised by A. G. Stock in his reading of "Parnell's funeral" deserves greater attention: "Is fact an image of myth or myth of fact?" (215). The historical fact is that Parnell, a patriotic hero, died a premature death in 1891. A mother goddess accepting the sacrifice of a son is the myth. Kathleen Raine has also asked a similar question: "Is there not also the implication that the death of Parnell would have the efficacy of every ritual sacrifice?" (228) The second part of the poem is the answer given by the poet. If Parnell was slain to pave the way for stronger leaders like Valera, Cosgrave and others, the sacrifice is justified. In myths, mother goddesses receive sacrifices for revivification or regeneration. The old god is killed to beget a better and new god. When Bhadra Kali tramples upon the prostrate body of Lord Siva, out of the dead body of Siva, a vivified, young Siva originates (Kosambi 2-3). "A Woman Shot an Arrow at a Star" and made it fall down. But a child, later, saw the star lying in a cradle (Auto 373). Hence, it is clear that the mother goddess/victim myth gives birth to the new myth of the motherland/martyr. The first myth has historical basis in the power wielded by women in matricentral societies; the second in the attainment of liberation for the erstwhile colonies. The realisation of Irish freedom in 1922 proves the efficacy of Parnell's sacrifice. John Vickery finds the poem related to "Her Vision in the Wood" as it moves the
experience onto a mythical level (226). In the poem, Yeats defines the archetypal nature and ancestry of the tragic hero (226). A tragic hero like Parnell as the dying god is necessary for the survival and flourishing of any community or nation (226). John Vickery indicates that the line "What is this sacrifice?" suggests that the falling star symbolizes a deliberate ritual act as well as a fortuitous event and the act necessarily partakes in some measure of the scapegoat sacrifice in which the dying god is involved (227). Like the priest-consort or the dying god who risks his life by entering the sacred grove of Diana at Nemi to pluck the wisdom or the golden bough, Parnell has entered the sacred grove of Ireland: "Through Jonathan Swift's dark grove he passed, and there/Plucked bitter wisdom that enriched his blood" (CP 320). Parnell has committed his life to a violent religious devotion and pre-ordained fatality. The golden bough Parnell plucks is the knowledge not only that he has become the defender of the sacred grove of Ireland but that he has embarked on a mimetic ritual enactment of the dying god myth in which he will be confronted by the violence, treachery, envy, and hate of those around him. Despite the bitterness that comes with the loss of communal anonymity, the acceptance of a public role, and the submission to a fatal necessity, this wisdom also strengthens and invigorates him. (Vickery 231-32) Parnell is a scapegoat or surrogate victim. As Rene Girard puts it, "The surrogate victim dies so that the entire community,
threatened by the same fate, can be reborn in a new or renewed cultural order.... he bestows a new life on men" (Violence 255).

As in "Parnell’s Funeral," the word "sacrifice" occurs only once in "Easter 1916" (CP 202-205). But the crux of the poem is contained in that word:

Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.
0 when may it suffice?
That is Heaven’s part, our part
To murmur name upon name,
As a mother names her child
When sleep at last has come
On limbs that had run wild. (CP 204)

The picture of a mother who has sacrificed many of her sons is presented as in J. M. Synge’s play Riders to the Sea which projects Maurya, the mother who weeps over the sons she has sent to the Mother Sea to die. Maurya sacrificed all her sons; she could not do more. But the demanding sacrificial deity will not be satisfied. Coming back to "Easter 1916," the word "stone" reminds one of the druid stones on which sacrificial rites were performed in ancient Ireland. The stone symbolizing the sacrificial deity never felt the blood bath sufficient or sufficing. The speaker of the poem raises the question as to when the sacrifices will suffice. The sacrificer and the sacrificed may change places and positions. But, sacrifice has been a part or factor of any system from pre-historical times. In political terms, mother Ireland immolates her children to
move the stone-hearted colonisers and awaken their good sense. The phrase "stone-hearted" means that the martyrs have become so because they had only one purpose in life, that is martyrdom. Yeats in EI uses the stone as a metaphor:

They no longer love, for only life is loved, and at last a generation is like an hysterical woman who will make unmeasured accusations and believe impossible things, because of some logical deduction from a solitary thought which has turned a portion of her mind to stone.

(314)

And Jaffares has this to say on Yeats's use of the stone as a metaphor:

... hearts enchanted to a stone were Yeats's symbol for those who had devoted themselves to a cause without thought of life or love. The stone was a symbol of how politics had affected, in particular, Maud Gonne.

(NC 192-93)

In his opinion "a stone of the heart" refers to "Maud Gonne's long service given to revolutionary ideals" (193). In the context of this study, the changeless position of "stone in the midst of all" subscribes to a reading related to the eternal and transcendent phenomenon of sacrifice. In "The Rose Tree" (CP 206) the tree stands for Ireland. The motherland demands the red blood of her children. Just as the mother goddesses need periodical blood bath, the rose tree too needs watering:

"But where can we draw water,"

Said Pearse to Connolly,
"When all the wells are parched away?

..................................................

There's nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right Rose Tree." (CP 206)

The motherland/martyr son pattern is evident here. Jeffares remarks (NC 194-95) that the Easter Rising of 1916 was a gesture by dedicated men prepared to die for their beliefs, which were based on the idea that the nation needed to be redeemed by blood. Pearse regarded the position of Ireland as one of enslavement, and thought this worse than "shedding blood." Pearse once wrote that "bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing" (qtd in Jeffares, NC 194). He thought that it would take "the blood of the sons of Ireland to redeem Ireland" (194). Jeffares has quoted the Irish ballad, "Ireland's Liberty Tree" (NC 194-95), which harps on the theme of sacrifice:

Let each son of Erin contribute
Whate'er in his power doth lie,
The pure blood of Ireland's Martyrs
Gave it strength, and it shall never die.

The idea of sacrifice and its transformation, political martyrdom, during the days of national freedom struggle, are embedded in the Irish consciousness. This fact is recognised by Alice Curtayne who quotes George Russel's lines addressed to Pearse and MacDonagh: "Life cannot utter words more great/Than life meet by sacrifice." (198) And in UP (214) Yeats quotes from Maud Gonne's speech: "I have given all my heart to Ireland and I will give her my life also if events permit me." Another
sentence quoted from Maud Gonne's speech is this: "For centuries she (England) had reached forth her arms to seize and to strangle her, but she has forgotten that the blood of martyrs is the eternal seed of liberty" (UP 214).

The practice of describing one's nation as a mother or mother goddess, a feature common to the works written during the days of freedom struggle, is also evident in Edasseri. The poem "Vandippinammaye" (EK 13-14) exhorts Indians to bow down before the motherland who has been blessed with various natural sources and beauties and whose fame and glory rests on spiritual mentors like Sri Krishna, the Buddha and Sankara. "Palippin Matavine" (21-23) addresses the brave fighters and brothers in India to unite and liberate the motherland from the foreign yoke. She can become a model and ideal before the colonised countries of the world in their liberation struggle. Poverty, backwardness and different victimisations from which the Indians suffer are the result of foreign domination. "Chantuvum Otenanum" (42-43) presents Chantu and Otenan, two of the heroes in the ballads of North Kerala, who are remembered as two glorious flames that still illuminate the unknown and dark areas of the past. In a colonial context, marked by the suppression of the natives by local landlords and British rulers, Chantu and Otenan are projected as the native heroes who fought for the downtrodden. The folk songs in praise of Chantu and Otenan still survive in Kerala to fan and console the poor farm labourers who suffer the fire of paddy fields and the hot anger of the aristocrats. The mothers are exhorted to sing the glorious deeds of the heroes:
Sing mothers, the ambrosial tale of heroes
Devoted to safeguard the suffering lot.
Plants in the paddy fields nod their heads
Listening to the songs on heroic sacrifices.
Lessons of the songs suit the plants
That offer their golden heads tomorrow.
Weeding out our weakness and
Feeding the mantras of fight,
You, the mothers ever
Shower welfare for Kerala. (42-43)

The mothers are further requested to sing heroic songs to rouse
the young. The songs are strong enough to inspire them to fight
against injustice and shed blood to remove inequality.
Recollecting the ancestors who donated everything at the feet of
the Heroic Goddess, the motherland, is considered auspicious and
virtuous. The goddess of the landlords reddens her lips with
the life-blood of the poor. Heroes in the past and the stories
about them reveal the greatness and glory of heroic death, which
should inspire the Keralites to battle against injustices and
inequalities like colonial subjugation and feudal exploitation.
"Bharatapuzha" [Bharata River] (123-125) a poem in seven stanzas
has the national liberation movement as the source of
inspiration. The first stanza compares the flow of the river to
the fall of demons at the hands of the fierce war-goddess, Durga,
who slew Mahisha. The river runs in a violent manner with,
haughtiness and pride. She fells down the trees on her banks.
The second stanza personifies the river as a young blooming
beauty who is an object of joy to the onlookers. For a time she and her shores welcome romantic lovers. Love-lorn animals find paradise in her banks. But this is a thing of the past. Her banks are now bereft of all romance. The tragic and terrible modern period finds its face reflected in the river. Keralites perceive the flooded river as dangerous. Imbued with the spirit of freedom struggle, Keralites find themselves encouraged by the river's violent and passionate current. The river is as terrible, turbulent and trembling as the bloody axe of Parasuraman, the legendary founder of Kerala, an apostle of violence and change, who killed many kings and rooted out certain kingly clans. As a male-hero he once murdered his own mother. The hectic and accelerated current of the river is compared to the sacred sabre which falls upon sinners' heads like thunder. The river is presented to be a fierce and "possessed" war goddess who exhorts the young to give up romance and indolence. They have to rouse themselves up and wage a dedicated battle to bring in a brave new world of equality and justice. In other words, the motherland-goddess is demanding young martyrs' blood, as in Kunhiraman Nair's "Narabali," Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Anandmath and Yeats's "Parnell's Funeral" and "Easter 1916."

Thus the variations of the mother goddess/male victim theme continue to exist as archetypes. The pattern surges to the surface in alternative discourses. Since male domination is the order of the day, the mothers in everyday life act as scapegoats or occupy the victim position. The following analysis shows the
various aspects of motherhood as a sacrificial institution, as inscribed in the works of Yeats and Edasseri. Among the works analysed below Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* and Edasseri's "Bimbisarente Edayan" demand particular attention. *The Countess Cathleen* is a nationalistic text which presents the Countess as a self-sacrificing mother goddess. "Bimbisarente Edayan" foregrounds the delusions of mothers in rearing up their children and it discusses the various significations of sacrifice. "The Ballad of Moll Magee" (CP 25-27), "A Cradle Song" (45), "The Song of the Old Mother" (67), "the Heart of the Woman" (57-68), "Adam's Curse" (88-90), "Leda and the Swan" (241), "Among School Children" (242-45), "Blood and the Moon" (267-269), "The Crazed Moon" (273) and "The Mother of God" (281-82) present mothers as figures of sacrifice. In "The Ballad of Moll Magee," the poor fisher woman requests little children in the street to desist from throwing stones at her. Dispossessed of everything dear in life including her baby and her husband, Moll Magee cannot suppress her grief and be silent. So she mutters as she goes along the street. Considering her to be a mad woman, children fling stones upon her. Her job was salting herrings brought home by her fisherman. One day, a day's hard and continuous work made her very tired. She lay near her baby and immediately fell headlong into sleep. The next morning, it dawned upon her that her baby had died. The husband sent her away from his house. He did not care to realise that "A weary woman sleeps so hard!" (26) The neighbours, in general, were not ready to give her a haven and offer comfort and consolation. She could not offer any
resistance to their utter callousness. A kindly neighbour gave
her supper and calmed her saying that her man would come back to
take her to his home. But, till the time of speaking, she has
been moving around without the doors of welcome. The calamity
that happens here is the untimely death of the child. The sin or
the crime of this "unnatural" event is conferred upon the head of
Magee by her husband and society. It is her position as a mother
that has made her dejected and marginalised. If married life is
real partnership, the responsibility of looking after the baby
should be equally shoudered by the husband and wife. The joys
as well as sorrows should be shared jointly. Ever since the
establishment of male domination, shames fall upon women.
Francis Bacon in his essay "Of Parents and Children" quotes
Soloman's saying: "A wise son rejoiceth the father, but an
ungracious son shames the mother" (90). The society is not
willing to give shelter and food to the woman discarded by her
man. Instead, they shower curses and throw stones of accusation
as if she were a prostitute or criminal. During the pre-
historical periods when there had been woman-centred structures
and communes, when there had been only male consorts, not
husbands, babies had been looked after and reared up by women in
a clan jointly. An individual woman could not have been found
fault with for a child's death or disease. The general and
universal loss of power and domination has assigned a scapegoat
position to women.
Magee's words, "I went away in silence" (CP 26), foreground the helplessness and powerlessness suffered by a mother in modern societies. "A Cradle Song" brings out another aspect of the pathetic plight of motherhood:

I sigh that kiss you,
For I must own
That I shall miss you
When you have grown. (25)

A mother has rights only over the sorrows and diseases of the child or only when it is a small child. The speaker of the poem, a mother, admits that she has to abandon all claims of ownership when the child becomes a grown-up. "The Song of the Old Mother" presents an old mother's grievances. Being a mother, even if she is old, she has to work hard from morning to night. The young lead a life of dreams. They even raise complaints over unreal imperfections or slight inconveniences: "they sigh if the wind but lift a tress" (67). A metaphorical reading of the poem brings the submerged victimised mother's figure to the forefront. By kneeling before the hearth and blowing her own life and infusing breath, the seeds of fire are made to glow. The embryo of fire in the logs of woods in the oven or the impregnated life in the seeds is treated or handled with patience and perseverance. The mother negates herself while providing all facilities for the young so that they can enjoy life. In "The Heart of the Women," the speaker has to bid farewell to the warmth and security of her small house of prayer, rest and her mother's care. She has to enter into the open, wide, new world
of sorrows, gloom, problems and storms. In her mother's house, she played the role of a parasite feeding on the host. Now, she has to protect her husband by providing him the warmth of love and physical comfort. Her hair has to shield him from storms. Her eyes dewy with worries have to watch the entire world of dangers. Here, the woman is rehearsing the role of her future motherhood. "Adam's Curse" says that a woman has to labour to appear beautiful. This is not talked of at school. Women beautify and embellish their bodies and adjust their voices and words to attract men so that they can become mothers. The fifth stanza of "Among School Children" says that if a mother could imagine the shape of her child in old age, she would not have tolerated all the agonies of motherhood:

What youthful mother, a shape upon her lap
Honey of generation had betrayed,
And that must sleep, shriek, struggle to escape
As recollection or the drug decide,
Would think her son, did she but see that shape
With sixty or more winters on its head,
A compensation for the pang of his birth,
Or the uncertainty of his setting forth?

(CP 244)

"Leda and the Swan," "Blood and the Moon" and "The Crazed Moon" present the different stages of self-immolating motherhood. "Leda and the Swan" envisages the torments of the initiation ceremony of becoming a mother.

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her rape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast. (241)
The adjectives "staggering" and "helpless" point to the fact
that Leda is a victim of the Swan's fury; an inexperienced and
innocent girl is here converted to a mother by subjecting her to
a physical/sexual attack. Stan Smith observes:
Yeats's sonnet...presents the rape from the point of
view of the woman, the victim. The distress of Leda is
emphasised by the double question which takes up the
whole of the second quatrain, where the verb "push" and
the noun "rush" stress the intense brutality of the rape
in contrast with the weakness and terror of "those
terrified vague fingers." (114)
In "Blood and the Moon" and "The Crazed Moon," Yeats delineates
the idea of woman immolating her virginity, including the loss of
grace and glory, through the images of moon. The moon is
womanhood in Yeats (NC 284). In "Blood and the Moon" there is no
stain of blood or sacrifice on the moon: "no stain/Can come upon
the visage of the moon/When it has looked in glory from a cloud"
(CP 269). In "The Crazed Moon," the moon has trodden on the
mountain's head in all her glory and virginal pride in the past.
Now she is crazed: "Crazed through much child-bearing/The moon is
staggering in the sky" (273). The metaphoric significance of
moon as mother is obvious because for the poet "we" are "the
children born of her pain." The loss she suffers can be understood when her present plight is contrasted with her glory
in the past. Like Leda, she staggers now in the sky. Once every foot obeyed her glance and every man danced to propitiate her. Children wondered at her irresistible radiance. "The Mother of God" shows that the pain of motherhood is not less even when the child happens to be a divine one. An ungracious child shames the mother.

What is this flesh I purchased with my pains,
This fallen star my milk sustains,
This love that makes my heart's blood stop
Or strikes a sudden chill into my bones
And bids my hair stand up? (282)

The heroine of The Countess Cathleen (CPI 3-50) is "the prototype of the self-sacrificing mother who gives all she has to feed her hungry children" (Brenda 38). Brenda adds that the folk heroine Ketty O' Conner becomes Yeats's Countess. "The story of Ketty's sacrifice gratified Yeats's longing for an ideal mother who would satisfy his needs whatever the cost of herself" (41). Norman Jeffares and A.S. Knowland also refer to the French story as one of the sources of Yeats (CCP 5). In the French story the Countess Ketty sells her soul and dies but she saves her peasants from poverty, hunger and death by her supreme motherly sacrifice. The usual interpretations of the character and personality of the Countess are based on the personal life of Yeats and his relationship with Maud Gonne:

The Countess was like Yeats's early interpretation of Maud Gonne's character. He told her that after they had met in London in 1891 (the year he first proposed
marriage to her) he had come to understand the tale of a woman selling her soul to buy bread for her starving people as a symbol of all souls who lose their peace or fineness of soul or beauty of spirit in political service, but chiefly as a symbol of her soul that seemed to him incapable of rest. (CCP 509)

Yeats has said: "The Countess herself is a soul which is always, in all laborious and self-denying persons, selling itself into captivity and unrest that it may redeem God's Children" (Letters 319). Quoting "my Countess Cathleen... was once the moral question, may a soul sacrifice itself for a good end?" from Yeats's diary of 1909, B. Rajan remarks: "The Countess may resemble Maud Gonne in reckless generosity" (24). These are the perspectives of biographical criticism. In the making and modelling of the Countess there are profounder sources and undercurrents. Harold Bloom observes: "The Countess is moved in her sacrifice by pity" (118). The Countess resembles Christ rather more than she does Maud Gonne (119). "The Countess like Christ dies for sinners" (Gill 29). In her supreme spirit of sacrifice the Countess is similar to the Magnus Martyr but she is not a father-figure. When a drought or famine or such calamity occurs, when the ordinary people or the superstitious folk find it humanly impossible to solve, their desperate and irrational part of the mind conceives as a panacea a very generous mother goddess. In India, texts celebrating the Mahadevi [The Great Goddess] relate a myth concerning a great drought that resulted in a dreadful famine. In desperation the Brahmins [the priestly
upper class] approached the goddess and begged her for relief. The Devi obligingly appeared in a form having many eyes. Seeing the pitiful condition of her creatures, she began to weep. She cried for nine nights, causing heavy rains to fall on the earth from her eyes. The rivers again flowed, the lakes and ponds were filled, and life once more returned to the earth in abundance. In this manifestation she is called Satakshi (She who has one hundred eyes), Sakambhari (She who bestows vegetables) and Annapurna (She who is full of food). (Kinsley 143)

The Countess is the Goddess in her auspicious form. By selling her soul to the demons, she allows herself to be eaten by the starving Irish. The Goddess in her powerful and dreadful form demands the blood of others as sacrifice; in auspicious form she becomes the sacrifice. The Goddess in her fierce and destructive aspect manifests as the Queen in A Full Moon in March and The King of the Great Clock Tower and as the Mother Goddess in "Parnell's Funeral," "Easter 1916" and "Her Vision in the Wood."

The Countess is also modelled upon the Irish local and topical variety of the charity woman of which the universal and archetypal figure is the Great Goddess of the ancient matriarchal period.

Many stories still in rural Ireland about that time centre around the miraculous appearance of food. Of these the most widespread and the most popular is that of the "charitable woman" which occurs with local
variations in widely separated districts throughout Ireland. (McHugh 404)

Because of the maternal affection and generosity exuded by this goddess-like figure, people believed that

Stored potatoes increase until the door of the barn in which they are kept cannot be opened, or the meal-chest is found to be full instead of empty. (405)

There are other legends related to the mysterious manifestation of charity; for instance:

a poor woman boils stones in a pot to quieten her crying children and the contents turn to soup; another fills a bag with sand which turns to meal; others find their wells full of milk. (406)

The observation, by Jeffares and Knowland, that the "starvation is symbolic of the spiritual poverty which is the consequence of men selling their souls to the devils of materialism" (CCP 7) does not help explain the play. The peasants and farmers have started selling their souls to foreign merchants after tasting the bitterness of poverty and dearth. Historical accounts of the famine attest to the fact that the calamity has made an indelible impression on the racial/folk memory of the people. During the past century such experiences [experiences of their ancestors in famine times] have been told and retold around the fire sides of the farming and fishing communities of the districts which bore the brunt of the famine; they have been firmly linked to associations of place, of family and of language, in many places they are as real to the inhabitants today as are the events of
the last year (McHugh 391). A similar view is endorsed by Dudley Edwards:

The Great Famine may be seen as but a period of greater misery in a prolonged age of suffering, but it has left an enduring mark on the folk memory because of its duration and severity. The famine is seen as the source of many woes, the symbol of the exploitation of a whole nation by its oppressors. (Foreword vii)

A. G. Stock shares this view. According to him, "Since the sixteenth century, some kind of violent rebellion against England has happened in every generation" but "the hungry forties," left memories bitterer than all the other starvation events (7). Alice Curtayne remarks that the sickening details of the visitation of the famine are still a nightmare racial memory (165). Relief works were also established--British, continental and American--where men could earn sufficient wages to buy the meal for their families. "But these measures hardly made any impression on the mounting tide of death and disease" (165). In such a state of affairs it is natural that the feverish imagination of the common people revived the omnipotent, omnipresent and all-giving magnanimous Mother Goddess. The Countess is the matron of Ireland true to the ideals of Yeats: "In a battle like Ireland’s which is one of poverty, by making ourselves unpopular to wealth we must accept the baptism of the gutter" (Auto 410). Discussing self-sacrifice with a Catholic priest, Yeats reminded him

of some Norse God, who was hung over an abyss for three
days, "a sacrifice to himself," to show that the two were the not incompatible, but he answered "Von Harmann discusses the question whether the soul may not sacrifice itself, even to the losing of itself, for some good end." I said "That is the problem of my Countess Catheleen" and he said, "It is a further problem whether a nation may make this sacrifice." He must have been thinking of Ireland. (465-66)

The play The Countess Cathleen opens with a poignant report of ill omens and a description of the dreadful famine: "...the land is famine-struck/The graves are walking: (CPI 3). It is reported that "A woman met a man with ears spread out/And they moved up and down like a bat's wing" (3). Two nights ago at a churchyard "A herdsman met a man who had no mouth,/Nor eyes, nor ears, his face a wall of flesh" (4). In a peasant's family the mother, Mary, is talking with her son, Teigu. Mary is anxiously waiting for her husband, Shemus Rua. Something must be brought by him to prepare the meal. Teigu continues describing portends of calamity:

In the bush beyond,
There are two birds--if you can call them birds--
I could not see them rightly for the leaves--
But they've the shape and colour of horned owls,
And I'm half certain they've a human face. (CPI 4)

Mary prays to Mother of God to defend them. Teigu sums up Ireland's plight saying that the whole land squeals like a rabbit under a weasel's tooth. Shemus, the father, returns from
the woods. His hours of search there to fetch something for the
day’s meal has been futile. Beggars hunt him away. He cannot
even beg and get alms. The Countess Cathleen, Oona her old
nurse, and Aleel the singer-lover enter. The Countess Cathleen
had the hope that among the farmers who live in the woods, there
might not be starvation. But, she has to part with the coins
left in her purse, when Shemus informs her: "It is a long
while/Since I've set eyes on bread or on what buys it" (CPl 7).
Evil signs symbolically express the catastrophe of the whole
land. The Countess has passed all that day by starving men and
women. Finding all practical and rational ways of getting food
closed, the imagination of Shemus works in terms of superstition:

There’s something that appears like a white bird,
A pigeon, or a seagull or the like,
But if you hit it with a stone or a stick
It clangs as though it had been made of brass,
And that if you dig down where it was scratching
You’ll find a crock of gold. (10)

But Shemus himself is not certain of either the feasibility of
such a venture or the authenticity of the belief. He tells his
son: "You might be starved before you’ve dug it out (10). The
whole atmosphere and the abject plight of the peasants make the
visitation of Mother Goddess in the auspicious form of a charity
woman absolutely inevitable.

Aleel, the singer and lover of the Countess, who always
accompanies her, when he leaves the house of Shemus, instructs
the house-holders to shut the door before the night lest some
devils may enter the home. He had seen two grey horned owls
which hooted above their heads. Teigu expresses the hope that
all the ill luck suffered by the land might be carried away by
Aleel’s head. In spite of god-fearing Mary’s objection, Shemus
is for welcoming devils from the woods. Shemus does not mind
even if the merchants have heads below their arms and horse’s
tail and feathers of birds. Shemus and such peasants have no
clear idea regarding the exact appearance of the alien merchants.
The merchants travel and work on behalf of their master. Their
policy is announced: "Our Master bids us pay/So good a price that
all who deal with us/Shall eat, drink, and be merry" (12). Mary
is not willing to prepare food for the merchants. Perturbed by
the presence of the foreigners, she thinks that the merchants had
cast no shadow when they sat outside the door. Shemus makes it
clear that the merchants are men like him. The First Merchant
says:

It’s strange that she should think we cast no shadow,
For there is nothing on the ridge of the world
That’s more substantial than the merchants are
That buy and sell you. (13)

They claim that they have come to find out the poor who deserve
their help and give them relief. They are aware of the evils of
mere charity. They have come not for mere unconditional relief
work but for buying the human soul as the bargain for the money
they extend. Their intention is to gain the best out of the
helplessness and the mounting subjection of the people because of
their abject poverty. In other words, the agents of the colonisers want to purchase completely whatever bit of choice, independent spirit and pride the Irish possess. Shemus and Teigu offer their souls for money. But the merchants do not release money immediately. Teigu and Shemus have to be the flag-bearers of the merchants' propaganda. The merchants travel along the length and breadth of famine-struck Ireland in the name of Christian charity.

In the second scene, the steward informs the Countess that half-a-cart load of green cabbage was stolen by the starving peasants. The Countess instructs the Steward to sell all her cattle, gold and other wealth and possessions except the castle and to bring in the bargain ships of meal to save the people. Cathleen declares: "From this day for ever/I'll have no joy or sorrow of my own" (CPI 23). Even her castle will be converted to a refugee-shelter for all the old, ailing and weak among the starving Irish. She affirms: "From this day out I have nothing of my own" (24). Oona finds that Aleel and she are abandoned by the Countess in the enthusiasm for self-sacrifice and social service. It signifies that the Countess has given up even her personal comforts like the old nurse and the singer, her lover. When the third scene opens, the Countess kneels in front of the altar in her own house. Aleel tries to tempt her back to a life of pleasure, peace and rest in the hills. He tries to frighten her by describing ill-omens and predicting her death during those evil days. Prostrating himself before her, Aleel pleads to her
to change her decision of dedicating herself to a life of charity. Aleel tells her: "Let Him that made mankind, the angels and devils/And dearth and plenty, mend what He has made" (26). Even his last request to allow him to stay beside her is rejected. The sacrificial stance has worked a sea-change in her. In the opening scene, the Countess had told Shemus and others that Aleel's music was indispensable for her (8). She, now, makes the parting kiss, not on his hand, but on his forehead. She declares:

I have sworn,
By her whose heart the seven sorrows have pierced,
To pray before this altar until my heart
Has grown to Heaven like a tree, and there
Rustled its leaves, till Heaven has saved my people.

(27)

In the last scene, the Countess realises that her treasury and granary and everything in her castle have been robbed by the merchants and their supporters. She sells her soul to the merchants to fetch five hundred thousand crowns so that the people would be fed till the dearth goes by. She demands the merchants to set free the souls they have purchased so far. Thus, to feed the hungry children, the Mother Goddess makes the supreme sacrifice of her life. All the Irish reap the benefit of their matron's or matriarch's self-sacrifice and the consequent food-donation. The merchants do not accept Aleel's offer of his soul. Here the Mother Goddess, the Countess in her auspicious
form, does not work out the immolation of her lover. In A Full Moon in March and The King of the Great Clock Tower the Queens behead their lovers. In "Easter 1916" the motherland demands the blood of their patriotic sons or heroes. This is in accordance with the spirit of Patrick Pearse's speech over the grave of O'Donovan Rossa in 1915: "Life springs from death and from the graves of patriot men and women spring nations" (Jackson 394). It is the mother's or the virgin's life that is vivified by the son's or the lover's bloodful oblation. In The Countess Cathleen, the reverse pattern is embedded. The children get vitalised and vigorated by the mother's sacrifice.

Historian and literary critic of Kerala, M.G.S. Narayanan, in his introduction to the selected works of Edasseri Govindan Nair (TK ix-xxxix), observes that the worship of motherhood is an integral part of Edasseri's vision of life (xxi). Scholars researching the origins of the Hindu religion have found out clay or porcelain idols among the remnants of Indus-Valley civilization of 3000 B.C. From pre-historic times Indians have worshipped the beauty and power of Nature personified as mother. Edasseri's religion is such a primitive one (xxi-xxii). Narayanan calls Edasseri's "Poota Pattu" and "Kavile Pattu" the epics of motherhood (xxi). In both the poems the poet has enumerated the extra care taken by the mother to bring up the child. The mother in "Poota Pattu" feeds her child with such an attention that it can be expected only from a mother. She takes pains to keep the child always in good humour.
Nangeli fed him and gave him all,
She played with him,
Sang many a song with him,
And showed the moon to him.
She never left him on the floor
Lest ants pester him;
And she never placed him on her head
Lest lice should pester him.

("The Ballad of the Pootham" 57)

She sleeps only after making the child sleep: "By singing soft
and lulling rhymes./And caressing him on the tender thighs."

When the boy reaches seven years of age, she clothes him properly
and sends him to school.

Nangeli would take much care
To give the boy the best attire,
When he was ready to go
She would fondly dress his hair
And rub his cheeks. (57)

Her anxiety over the safety and security of the child is revealed
in the following lines: "She would eagerly watch/From the
threshold of her house/Till he disappeared from her sight" (57).

On his way to the school, the boy passes a paddy field and climbs
a hillock. Then the Pootam opens the window-slit of her small
house. Pootam is a witch or goblin in the folklore of Kerala.
In socio-historical terms, the Pootam is a discarded or
marginalised mother goddess. The Pootam tempts the boy in the
guise of an enchanting girl. In fact, the boy has been abducted
by the Pootam. When the dusk sets in Nangeli cannot bear her anxiety:

Where’s my boy" Nangeli cried;
The mother searched for the boy
Far and near on the banks of the river.

The mother ran here and there
In the solitary fields.
The soil ploughed anew
Echoes her sighs and wails,
She searched for her boy
Among the sharp stones on the hillside;

She searched the woods and the meadows
And wept when she failed. (59)

Here, the sharp stones on the hillside might have evoked in Nangeli the memories of blood-immolations effected by mother goddesses in the past. The Pootam adopts various tactics to send away the mother and keep the boy in her own custody. The Pootam tries to frighten Nangeli in the guise of whirlwind, a wild fire and a tiger. But the mother stands firm, persistently demanding the boy back. The Pootam attempts to tempt and distract the mother by offering gold ornaments and jewels. The mother even refuses to see them.

She plucked out her own eyes
Which matched the lotus, red and bright;
And lo, offered them to the Pootam
She said, "Restore to me my son, he is costlier far to me." (60)

In "Kavile Pattu" also the mother suffers for the sake of her son. In "Poota Pattu," the mother gets back her son from the mother goddess and he is saved from becoming a sacrificial victim. In "Kavile Pattu," the son is slain as victim but the mother succeeds in redirecting the future violence of the mother goddess towards herself. The agony of motherhood is evidenced by the extreme care taken by the mothers in "Poota Pattu" and "Kavile Pattu" and the battle they have to wage against respective mother-goddesses on account of their sons. Yeats in "Among School Children" called the agony of motherhood "honey of generation" (CP 244). Edasseri in "Bimbisarente Edayan" [The Goatherd of King Bimbisaren] (EK 577-81) says that the gain or the pain of motherhood is a big delusion. Critics opine that a tragic incident in the life of the poet is transmuted into an episode of the poem (Edasseri, Ita Oru Kavi 175-176 and EK xxiv).

The source incident runs as follows: To get practical training in the work of an advocate clerk, Edasseri went to Alappuzha with a distant uncle in 1921. As his father had died, he knew that he could not continue his school studies. He wanted to help his poor mother. After coming to Alappuzha, he did a bit of extra work like coaching school students and thereby he earned a small amount. Extremely eager to extend some help to his old mother, Edasseri handed over the amount to a neighbour and asked him to give it to his mother, who was in his native village in Malabar. Edasseri hoped that she would buy a woolen blanket with the
money. But as ill-luck would have it, the neighbour reached
Edasseri’s home only the day after his mother’s demise. The
shock and agony of this incident haunted Edasseri throughout his
life. In the following lines, in "Bimbisarente Edayan," Edasseri
presents the incident as an episode in the life of the goatherd,
who is the protagonist of the poem:

Is there any end to the delusions of mothers?
Whom do they rear not, letting themselves be preyed upon?
You, she-goat, begot the goat, the goatherd,
the king and others;
Yet, what compensation did you get save your deep sighs?
I too had a mother who sold me to the king.
What she got in the bargain was put in my kit!
When I went to her with a wool to ward off her cold
She lay with a layer of soil covered:
Alas! My life is an unpayable debt! (EK 578)

The poem is a dramatic monologue. A goatherd leads his goats to
the King’s court where he has organised a yaga or sacrificial ritual. On the way, he thinks aloud and gives instructions to the goats. He describes a mother-goat who is very anxious to save her children from falling down. She moves hither and thither. Observing her agony, the goatherd comments on the pain of motherhood in general. Edasseri’s sense of unexpiated sin is presented as that of the edayan. Edayan is the Malayalam word for goatherd or shepherd. It is universalised by placing it in
the context of the discussion of different kinds of sacrifice. The selfless sacrifice of motherhood is contrasted with the selfish, sacrificial ritual organised by the King Bimbisaran. The mother-goat suffers pain to help her progeny survive. The King makes preparations to destroy them in fire. The goatherd thinks that the mother is under a delusion, otherwise she will not undergo the torments and ordeals of maternity. She is ignorant of the fact that her service is unpayable. But it is an instinctual act, indispensable for the continuation of animal life in this world. In fact, it is the King who is under a delusion which is harmful to society. By offering goats he thinks that his sins as a ruler can be absolved. There comes the great apostle of self-negation and non-violence, Lord Buddha. The goatherd fails to read the real intentions of the Buddha when he accompanies him and holds the weak, tired and limping goats in his hands and on his shoulders. As an unlearned and underprivileged man, the goatherd thinks that the Buddha carries the small goats as he is interested in the tender mutton which will be distributed after the ritual in the court.

Paul Harvey in The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature defines sacrifice as the surrender to the deity of something belonging to the worshipper. He classifies sacrifices into two types--tributary and piacular (379). In the first, the worshipper offers a gift to the deity of something for the deity's use. In the second the immolation is done to expiate some offence. The goatherd in Edasseri's poem promises himself
an oblation which is both tributary and piacular. The sin he commits is the acceptance of money from his mother. The shameful memory of the unfulfilled offer haunts him. He inherits sin not because of a crime committed by anybody in the world. Yet, he feels guilty. Here, the King offers a contrast as he is not worried about the sin he accrues while slaying innocent goats at the yaga. Later, the King gives up the sinful sacrificial ritual not because of any guilty conscience but because the Buddha defeats him in logical argument. Lord Buddha's argument is that one has no right to take or destroy the life of any being as one cannot give or create life. The unrealised offer of the goatherd on the one hand and that of the King on the other are not the same. If performed one would be an act of gift and the other a crime. The goatherd feels pricks of conscience for not giving his gift of wool to his mother in time, something for which he is not morally responsible. Unlike that of the King his attitude towards an offer is not utility-oriented. The King, instead of subjecting himself to real atonement, directs his goatherd to fetch the scapegoat. In the opening lines of the poem, the goatherd addresses the goats: "Walk to the altar, you, sinful goats/The King longs to save you through the yaga" (EK 577). "Bimbisarente Edayan" can thus be taken as a study in multiple aspects of sacrifice. The attitudes of the different characters--the goatherd, his mother, the mother-goat, the King, Lord Buddha--reveal the different shades of sacrifice and gift-giving. Of the different protagonists of real and ritual
sacrifices, the mother-figure stands supreme in the spirit of sacrifice.

The mothers in "Kavile Pattu" and "Poota Pattu" have enlarged or broadened the meaning of the term "mother." Both of them belong to the elite class of their time. In the post-colonial perspective, they are members of the "dominant indigenous groups at the regional and local levels" (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 284). In "Kavile Pattu" the house of the mother is a nalukettu, which means that it has a four-fold structure signifying the upper-caste aristocracy of the members of the house. The lunch the mother prepares for the son also bespeaks their wealth and status in society. The lunch is made of a peculiar kind of rice and it is anointed with ghee, a costly dish in the Kerala context (EK 508). The son lights the lamp of the temple, a privilege possessed only by the high-born in the past (507). The temple either fully belongs to the house or is controlled by the members of the house. But, in another sense, the mother has a subaltern status as she is a female. The mother, Nangeli, in "Poota Pattu" also belongs to the upper stratum of society. Her house is on the bank of a river (372), a central position at that time as the main system of transportation was along rivers and canals. Nangeli’s house is described to be a malika, a bungalow which has an upper storey (372). Only feudal houses had upper storeys. The women of the noble castes had their mobility restricted by traditions and were expected to be largely passive. Here, it may be fruitful to recall Pratibha
Parmen's observation on the image of Asian women who live in Britain as portrayed in the British media:

Women of Asian Origin range from being seen as sexually exotic creatures, 'full of Eastern promise', to being seen as oppressed wives and mothers completely dominated by their men folk, having little or no control in their families. The most familiar image of Asian women is one of a passive woman walking three steps behind her domineering and sometimes brutal 'lord and master'. This passivity is presented as both natural and cultural--the Asian woman is thought to have been socialized into learning appropriate ways of using her 'natural' attributes to please, serve and accommodate her future husband. (259)

Both these conventions are broken by the mothers in these poems. The mother in "Kavile Pattu" at first waits for long. The mother in "Poota Pattu" walks only up to the end of the courtyard, when the son goes to the nursery. Their supreme spirit of sacrifice manifests itself when they break the inhibitions and taboos of aristocratic women of their time by transgressing the limits of the houseyard to find out their sons. For them a noble and subversive precedence had been supplied by Kannaki, the heroine of Ilango Adikal's Tamil epic Shilappadikaram, who went in search of her missing husband. Her husband, Kovilan, was falsely accused and executed by the King of Madurai. Kannaki burned the city of Madurai by her fiery cursing eyes and torn breasts. In "Poota Pattu," Nangeli plucks out her eyes and shows the Pootam
that her son is dearer to her than her own eyes (EK 376). This is modelled upon Kannaki's action of plucking out one of her breasts and throwing it at her enemies. In "Poota Pattu," the Pootam saves herself from the curse of a self-sacrificing mother by giving back her son and reviving the mother's eyesight through a magical boon. Jean Franco gives a recent example of mother's action of transgressing the conventions of female passivity and restricted mobility to fetch "lost" sons and daughters ("Beyond Ethnocentrism" 503-515). Speaking about "the resistance of the 'mad women' of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina," Jean Franco writes:

These women have not only redefined public space by taking over the centre of Buenos Aires on one afternoon every week but have also interrupted military discourse (and now the silence of the new government) by publicly displaying the photographs of sons and daughters who have "disappeared." This form of refusing a message of death is obviously quite different from the quest of immortality that has traditionally inspired the writer and the political leader. The women interrupted the military by wrestling meaning away from them and altering the connotations of the word "mother." To the military, they were mothers of dead subversives, therefore, of monsters. But they have transformed themselves into the "mothers of Plaza de Mayo", that is, in the words of one of them, into "mothers of all the disappeared", not merely their own children. They have
thus torn the term "mother" from its literal meaning as the biological reproducer of children and insisted on social connotations that emphasize community over individuality. (513)

The mothers in "Kavile Pattu" and "Poota Pattu" and Kovilan's wife Kannaki in the legend do not remain passive; instead they go a long way to find out their missing sons and husband. The mothers in Edasseri's narrative poems question the authority of mother goddesses and their practice of kidnapping boys to suck their blood. As mothers they cannot brook the sacrifice of their sons even if the sacrifice is received by mother goddesses. These mothers act, thus, at the cost of subverting their own gender. By risking themselves, the mothers in all these examples--"Kavile Pattu," "Poota Pattu," the Kannaki legend and the "mothers of the Plaza"--have questioned the authority and have, thus, redefined and broadened the meaning of the term "mother" and extended and expanded the possibilities of motherly sacrifices.