Chapter IV

Speaking Subalterns

The different thematic concerns such as the privileged mother goddess, the appearance of male-heroes, the female/male power struggle, the marginalisation of "womankind" and the new awareness among mothers to rise and act beyond the norms prescribed by "mankind," analysed in the preceding chapters, exhibit a progressive trend towards the revitalisation of female power and the release of the creatrix's hibernated possibilities. Just as all kinds of mystifications, mythical assumptions and euphemistic ideologies of female-dominant societies of pre-historic times were questioned and demystified by "mankind," all kinds of "sacred" beliefs and norms of male-dominated societal structures are now being questioned and broken, as a part of the process of decolonization. This chapter attempts to analyse some of the folk legends of Ireland and Kerala in the light of an awareness of the discourse of female subalternity. The term "discourse" is here used in the sense of linguistic and other signs by which the dominant in every society establish, wield and sustain power. "The term subaltern is used to denote the entire people that is subordinate in terms of class, caste, gender and office, or in any other way" (Ranajit Guha, Subaltern Studies V. 203). The analysis of folk legends initiates a meaningful context for identifying female subaltern figures in the works of Yeats and Edasseri. Patriarchal discourses have portrayed and projected even the wisdom, nobility, knowledge and talent
exhibited by women as sinful deviations and aberrations. Marilyn French points out that the words "witch" and "wise woman" were interchangeable in sixteenth-century Scotland (163). Wise women who were healers and herbalists were sometimes called "blessing witches" (163). Women who exude confidence, self-sufficiency and vigour are positioned as scapegoats for channelling the dominant male community's jealous anger and violence. Jean Franco remarks that "when a woman managed to become a militant, she was often forced into traditional gender role and classified as either bitch or seductress" ("Beyond Ethnocentrism" 512). Franco finds that the strategically inferior status confers scapegoat position to females:

Women could not be story tellers in the age of reason except as witches; as such, they were made into scapegoats. Witches were bearers of the irrational and the archaic, hated and feared since they worshipped a power that was outside the realm of official religion and culture. (511)

S.K. Ghosh indicates that in the Indian context, also, women were hunted as witches when there were epidemics, droughts or such calamities (256-57). When the ancient legends of the oral and subaltern discourses were retold in the dominant male discourse many changes were effected. The goddesses and queens were turned into vampires and witches. Susan Bassnett observes:

Successive feminist studies of early matriarchal societies have shown how the shift to patriarchy was characterized by a radical change in the depiction of
female deities. So from the all-powerful goddess who controlled the passage into this world and out of it, we end up with a series of wicked witches, debauched queens, unstable wives and cruel lovers... the relegation of the once powerful Irish goddess figures into a position of inferiority links up with the Judeo-Christian conception of woman as being responsible for the fall of Adam and mankind. (120)

Regarding the gradual intrusion of male discourse into creation myths, Joseph Campbell finds four distinct stages—the world born of a goddess without consort, the world born of a goddess fecund by a consort, the world fashioned from the body of a goddess by a male warrior-god and the world created by the unaided power of a male god alone (*Masks: Occidental* 86).

The tales of humbling, humiliating, taming or punishing women in Irish and Kerala legends give room for an interpretation from the standpoint of women as scapegoats of male discourse. They have been falsely accused and victimised. Queen Meave, the pre-Celtic Irish goddess, often identified as the major mother goddess Mother Right, has been given derogatory epithets such as "fierce," "ruthless," "proud" and "jealous." Cuchulain is the most prominent among the Irish male-heroes. In legends associated with Cuchulain, Meave is derided. The inconsistencies or contradictions in the legends betray the fact that Meave's narratives have been retold in accordance with patriarchal assumptions. Such a narrative is analysed below. It is called
"the humbling of Meave." Meave, of Connaught, is a fierce queen. She is ruthless and proud and very quick in her descent upon the lands of those who would not do her will (Hull 78). She is humbled by Cuchulain (167). After her defeat, Fergus, her advisor, says to Cuchulain: "A woman’s lead we followed in this war, fighting against the bands of our own kith with kin, to gratify a woman’s jealousy" (169). Fergus ascribes the sin of jealousy to the stubborn, adamant and powerful woman. But, a scrutiny of the words of the cattle-keepers in the same legend shows that, in fact, it is the men-folk who are jealous. There is a quarrel between Queen Meave and her spouse King Ailill. Meave at first surpasses her husband by the possession of the horned bull which later goes over to the cattle of the King (81). The keepers remark that it is strange that so powerful a bull should be under the dominion of a woman (81-82). Fergus, the so called well-wisher of the queen, and the cattle-keepers share the view that the upper hand should be wielded by men. The bull going over to the side of man signifies the transference of power from woman to man. The loss of the superior bull is the loss of dominance. If Queen Meave retains power, she would have retained the bull also. This becomes clear when the above legend is placed beside the Greek myth of King Minos and the divine bull. It is required of King Minos to offer a bull sacrifice at the close of his eight-year term (Joseph Campbell, Hero 94). But he breaks the convention. He displaces the bull-sacrifice by the offer of seven Athenian youths and maidens (94). Having royal, male power, Minos retains the bull. In the Meave-legend, in the
ideologically mystified discourse, the bull is reported to have changed sides out of its own will. In the Irish story of the goddess Macha, men’s jealousy at the nobility or superiority of woman is presented unmasked. It is also a question of "possession," the possession of superior knowledge. Macha curses the men of Ulster who ridicule her for the only fault that she is a woman who is superior to or nobler than them.

For in the days gone by by the goddess Macha, one of the three fierce goddesses of war and battles, had visited Ulster as a mortal maid, to bring aid and comfort to one of the nobles of Ulster who was in sore distress. And the king and people had reviled her, because they saw that she was not as one of themselves, for they liked not that a woman greater than themselves should take up her abode amongst them. They made game of her swiftness of running beyond any of them. For they knew not that she was one of the great gods, and they were jealous of her, because they felt that she was nobler than they.

Then Macha cursed the men of Ulster. (Hull 79)

Though the jealousy of man is described without any mask, male-prejudice and ideological mystification can be seen in picturing Macha as "one of the great gods." In male discourse no woman can be nobler than or superior to man.

Elisabeth Bronfen observes that irrespective of cultural values, "the death of a woman helps to regenerate the order of society" or "to eliminate destructive forces" and that "when the
topos of martyrdom serves as model for the narrative, then the
death of the innocent, virtuous woman...appears inculpatory as
well as edifying" (Over Her Dead Body 219). The legends that
relate the origin of various village goddesses and the sites of
their worship, as delineated in the subaltern discourse of folk
songs in Kerala/India, exemplify Bronfen's assertion. The
presence of female scapegoats accounts for the favourable
reception still accorded to these legends. Many of the folk
songs in praise of local goddesses of North Kerala relate the
tales of the victimisation and assassination of innocent women
on false pretexts (Vishnu Nampoothiri 7). Brothers murder
Makkam, believing the gossips of their wives. A woman is burned
to death by the local king in the story of "Thottunkara
Bhagavati" [The Goddess of the Canal Shore]. She is later
defined as the presiding goddess of the locality.
Kumpakappalathi is murdered by her brothers. An alienated maid
is constrained to kill herself in "Muchilottu Bhagavathi," another local legend in praise of a village goddess. "Ponnamma
Kadalunkara Naduvazhiyum" (Ponnamma and the King of Sea Shore]
narrates the pathetic story of an innocent, low-caste, labourer-
girl who becomes the victim of the local king's wild revenge
(Appunni Nambiar 9-28). Ponnamma is a very poor, beautiful girl.
She refuses all the clandestine sexual advances made by the local
landlord and king. Insinuated by the King, another labourer-
woman accuses Ponnamma of adultery and heresy. A trial in public
is arranged to interrogate and persecute Ponnamma. She is
chained to a mango tree. The inquisitors burn a part of
Ponnamma's head and breasts. Still, she pleads innocence. She expresses her protest in a violent manner, challenging the king openly to have sexual intercourse with her partly burned physical body. Then she runs and jumps into a well and dies. The accuser repents and she declares that Ponnamma is pure and virtuous. The people praise Ponnamma and call her Poomatai Daivatal, a tendermother-deity. When the persecution is going on, Ponnamma finds fault with the country's presiding male deity, Muthappa, for falsely accusing and victimising her. Ponnamma's favourite deities, which appear in her songs, are goddesses of the mountain: Pootam and the Snake. They are deities of liminal status and are worshipped by tribals and other low caste people who reside in the periphery of the society. Her aspersions against a male deity and her association with discarded female deities suggest that her tragic story is an example of the male-dominated society's mechanism of making a female "subaltern" a scapegoat. Ponnamma the silent, soft and helpless young woman is the target of the violent anger of the local landlord, an anger generated in him by his unsatisfied lust. The female subaltern's voice pleading innocence has been lost in the louder and fiercer collective voice of interrogation and persecution. One is reminded of Nietzsche's observation that "the philosophy of the sacrificial animal is always sounded too late" (Nietzsche 155). Following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's construction of the subaltern ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 284,294), Ponnamma can be seen as a subaltern at three levels: She is poor, black and female. She is black in the sense that she belongs to one of the
lowest castes, namely, pulaya. That community is outside the four-caste system prevalent in Kerala (India). Being an agricultural worker, she is poor. The local king, who wants to punish her for not welcoming his adulterous advances, belongs to the "dominant indigenous groups at the regional and local levels" (Spivak 284). But, in the present analysis, the stress falls upon her position as a female subaltern. The persecution takes place upon the falsified and alleged notion that she has broken the taboo of chastity. In fact, it is the local king who has tried to break the taboo. But he goes scot-free, as in all male-dominated societies. In the ballad, the people mention the possibility of burning the bungalow of the local king as a retribution for the crime he has committed. The territory of his physical body remains intact in spite of the fact that his foul and criminal hand has been proven beyond doubt. To force the poor, weak, female subaltern to admit her "guilt," there has been a mass or communal attack upon her physical body. The sin of adultery is based on the taboo of chastity. The taboo of chastity is one of the effective institutions established and maintained by patriarchy to suppress, control and humiliate women. As Marilyn French puts it,

The seal or guarantee of a woman's submission to "masculine" requirements has traditionally been chastity--that is, virginity before marriage and fidelity after it. A woman who exhibited all the other proper inlaw qualities but had deviated in this one regard was condemned totally and without possibility of redemption. (French 81)
Speaking about the status of women, in the context of the origin of private property, family and state, Engels finds that the institution of monogamy reduced the power and status of women (101-103). The taboo of chastity or virginity was established as an inevitable accessory of monogamy and patriarchy. "Sex restrictions on women before marriage do not normally develop until male control of the state and of durable property make them the masters over women, imbued with notions of legitimacy and feminine chastity" (Gough 113). Sarah Kofman in her reading of Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive analysis of Sigmund Freud, remarks that

the taboo of virginity appeals to a natural teleology, to an unjust nature (or mother) who, in one way or another marks her preference for men and that the taboo recognises the cultural rules which have the sexual subjugation of women as an aim. (116)

Freud attempts to demonstrate that a certain degree of sexual subjugation is necessary to contain the threat of polygamous tendencies and to maintain the civil institution of marriage (Kofman 116). Disagreeing with Freud, Sarah Kofman affirms that the taboo of virginity is meant to fix the instability of feminine oscillation, to make her capable of resisting new impressions, to incite her to sacrifice her sexual interests to man’s advantage (117).

Sati or widow sacrifice, which was prevalent in India, especially North India, is an extreme example of the ideological and material discursive practices of the victimisation of women
in patriarchal societies. Spivak argues that the establishment and retention of the rite have been a transgression of the sanctions for self-sacrifice in the Hindu Dharmasasthra [The Sustaining Scriptures] (299). The institution of sati is related to the taboo of chastity as a pure and chaste wife is expected to keep its sanctions to the utmost degree even at the cost of life. The influence of sati is so pervasive and deep-seated in the Hindu consciousness that some stray revival of the ritual still happens. Sati links the victimisation of women at the social level and the practice of sacrifice and martyrdom at the ritual and religious levels. After the sati-ritual, the place will be transformed into a temple, the woman is canonised as sati-Mata [sati-mother-goddess], and the ashes from the pyre are strewn in various places which become sacred centres of pilgrimage. In the analysis of folk songs and ballads in praise of local goddesses of the North, as in the case of sati-ritual, the victimised women become deified as local goddesses. Bhatnagar observes that unlike Christianity, there is no official promotion of the ideas of martyrdom in Hindu religious scriptures (210). Spivak also shares the view: "The general scriptural doctrine is that suicide is reprehensible" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 299). But the victimised women are identified as local goddesses and accommodated as incarnations of the Great Mother Goddess. They are portrayed as such in subliminal discourses of folk tradition and are invoked in prayers. Speaking about the Kannaki legend in Kerala, Chummar Choondal remarks that the legend has various versions in folk songs (17-34). The motif of a victimised woman
who is ready to suffer everything to avenge her lord's blood is common to all. Kannaki is identified as an avatar of goddess Bhadra Kali. As the epitome of supreme female selfless immolation, Kannaki's act of tearing out one of her breasts and throwing it at the city of Mathura and setting it aflame have impressed the writers in Kerala. The Kannaki legend has been retold to drive home the ideal lesson of chastity:

Even the gods pay honor to the wife
who worships no one save her husband
Kannaki, pearl among all women of the earth,
is now a goddess, and is highly honored
by all the gods who dwell in paradise. (Adigal 143)

Prince Ilango Adigal's *Shilappadikaram* [The Ankle Bracelet], a Tamil epic of third century A.D., exemplifies the practice of retelling and appropriating well-known and influential legends and attuning them to the male-dominant ideology.

Like the Kannaki legend in Kerala, the legend of Deirdre has made a deep impression upon the consciousness of Ireland (Hull 194-240; Curtayne 7-9). It has also various versions but all of them delineate Deirdre as a victim of male royal power. Deirdre is also extremely devoted and loyal to her lover, Naisi, for whose sake she suffers innumerable ordeals. The miseries of Kannaki are explained away as those of an incarnation of the goddess who suffers for the sake of humanity by acting as a model to be emulated by mortals, especially women. In Irish legends, Deirdre is often dubbed "Deirdre of Contentions" in the sense that she will be the cause of quarrel among the men of Ulster.
and the death of Usna’s sons. The selfless devotion of a suffering female for the sake of her spouse is common to Kannaki and Deirdre legends.

Deirdre, in Yeats’s play of the same title, is completely dedicated to her lover-husband Naoise. When the play opens, there are musicians who act as the chorus. The story of Deirdre’s life, previous to what happens in the play, is summarised by the chorus:

Some dozen years ago, King Conchubar found
A house upon a hill side in this wood,
And there a child with an Old Wretch to nurse her,
And nobody to say if she were human,
Or of the gods, or anything at all
Of who she was or why she was hidden there,
But that she’d too much beauty for good luck.
He went up thither daily, till at last
She put on womanhood, and he lost peace,
And Deirdre’s tale began. The King was old.
A month or so before the marriage-day,
A young man, in the laughing scorn of his youth,
Naoise, the sun of Usna, climbed up there,
And having wooed, or, as some say, been wooed,
Carried her off. (CPI 172)

In King Conchubar’s palace, preparations are on for a feast or some ceremony. The walls of the house are decorated. Fergus enters. He requests the musicians to sing in praise of love. Naoise and his queen Deirdre will come there. The musicians are
not prepared to believe the words of Fergus, who tells them that King Conchubar has no grudge towards the young lovers. The musicians have certain suspicions regarding the King’s plans. Dark-faced men with strange, barbaric dress and arms pass by the doors and windows of the rest house. The chorus express their anxiety that the passing of the dark men portends murder. The credulous approach of the wise old man of the Deirdre legend, that is, Fergus, is contrasted with the realistic reading of the chorus. Later, a messenger from the King arrives and he invites Deirdre and Fergus but not Naoise. The King catches Naoise in a trap and he is slain. Deirdre kills herself. Fergus and many native labourers assemble before the palace of the King and shout. They want to take revenge upon the king. The King calls them traitors and declares that all his actions have been the privileges of a king.

Conchubar is a high king. In relation to him, all the other characters in the play occupy subaltern positions. "Fergus is throughout only a trusting and generous man who cannot believe bad about anyone until it is too late" (Nathan 141). He is associated with the natives and the labourers. It is through Fergus that Conchubar has brought Naoise and Deirdre to his land, assuring them that the high king has pardoned them. But when the King, through his messenger, invites only Fergus and Deirdre and calls Naoise a traitor, Fergus finds that he has been betrayed by the treacherous, selfish, jealous and revengeful old king. Fergus thinks that he can offer some resistance to the high king:
I'll call my friends, and call the reaping-hooks,
And carry you in safety to the ships.

My name has still some power. (CP 189)

In fact, he leads the people to the palace of the King. Naoise is a prince far inferior in rank to the high king. His brothers were murdered by the high king. Since the commencement of his cohabitation with Deirdre, he has been fleeing and wandering lest the high king should capture them. Upon the strength of the credibility and good will of Fergus, Naoise, with his love, Deirdre, come into "the middle of the power" (186) of the high king. Contrary to the expectation of Fergus and Naoise, there is nobody from the King to welcome and look after them in the rest house, among the dark woods. Their disappointment and anxiety force them to scold Deirdre whenever she raises doubts and exhibits consternation. They stress upon her subalternity as a woman and the stigma of being born and brought up in an uncivilized hillside in the wood. Naoise notices that entering the rest house she becomes pale with fear: "Your colour has all gone/As't were with fear, and there's no cause for that" (178). The assurances given by Fergus and Naoise are not convincing to her. Fergus ridicules her when she doubts the promises of Conchubar: "It is but natural/That she should doubt him, for her house has been/The hold of the badger and the den of the fox" (179). Fergus suggests that they can spend time by playing the game of chess till the messenger from the King comes. The chessboard is ominous in the sense that, certain years ago, the lovers, Lugaidh Redstripe and his love, had waited for their
murder in the rest house. They played chess using that chess board:

It is the board
Where Lugaidh Redstripe and that wife of his,
...............................

Played at the chess upon the night they died.(179)
Deirdre comments that such "casual accidents" should be taken as omens (180). Moreover, there has been nobody to welcome them, and:

An empty house upon the journey’s end!
Is that the way a king that means no mischief
Honours a guest? (180)

Naoise reminds Deirdre that "such words and fears wrong this old man" (180), that is, Fergus, "Who’s pledged his word" (180) to them. Moreover, "we must not speak or think as women do" (180). After the conversation with the musicians, Deirdre understands that the King’s plan is to kill Naoise and make her his bride. Deirdre says to Naoise that she has heard terrible mysterious things (184). Fergus and Naoise are not ready to consider her thoughts. Instead, they find fault with her. Fergus says:

You have been listening
To singers of the roads that gather up
The stories of the world.(184)

Naoise even asks pardon to Fergus for the sake of her words:

I ask your pardon for her:
She has the heart of the wild birds that fear
The net of the fowler or the wicker cage.(184)
Deirdre’s position as a female subaltern is imprinted in her reply-question. She expresses her protest: "Am I to see the fowler and the cage/And speak no word at all?"(184). Naoise indicates her lack of the faculty of discrimination and argues that it owes to her upbringing in an uncivilized region:

You would have known,
Had they not bred you in that mountainous place,
That when we give a word and take a word
Sorrow is put away, past wrong forgotten.(184)

Deirdre poignantly asks Naoise whether she has to remain silent and believe the words of her husband and the old man, Fergus, even when death might be the probable outcome of such obedience. Naoise retorts that she has to remain silent and obedient "Though death may come"(184). Deirdre still argues that Naoise has foreknowledge of their imminent destruction as he has spoken about the paleness of her cheeks on entering the empty rest house. Deirdre asserts her position as a woman and refutes Naoise’s charge that she is mocking at him. Naoise finds himself in a precarious position in the wordy battle and he is unable to answer her properly. So, he resorts to the characteristic male argument that a man cannot trust a woman:

What woman is there that a man can trust
But at the moment when he kisses her
At the first midnight? (185)

Deirdre exposes the falsehood and ambivalence in male discourse by using an ironical repartee:
Were it not most strange
That women should put evil in man's hearts
And lack it in themselves? (185-86)

Since there is danger to their life in Conchubar's land, Deirdre suggests that they should run away from it by the sea. Fergus alleges that Deirdre is trying to evoke jealousy in Naoise: "Fool, she but seeks to rouse your jealousy/With crafty words" (186). Deirdre is firm in her decision to try to escape from the place. Fergus uses the trump card of male discourse. He alludes to the Deirdre legends in which she is stigmatised as the cause of quarrel among men which brought death to many. Even at the time of the birth of Deirdre there was a prophecy that she would launch discord among the men of Ulster: "Men blamed you that you stirred a quarrel up/That has brought death to many"(186). In the analysis of Irish legends, it is seen that females are depicted as the victims of male discourse. Identifying the source and cause of quarreling men not in themselves but in a woman like Deirdre is another example of the discursive practices of patriarchy. It is inscribed in Fergus's words: "Men blamed you"(186). Here, the genuine doubts regarding the powerful king's plans and the anxieties related to the scope of the life of the lovers and the readings of Deirdre pertaining to such problems cannot be discarded and refuted. So Fergus and Naoise try to silence her. But she succeeds in raising her protest. Fergus winds up the discussion and imposes the resolution that as they have come "into the very middle of" Conchubar's "power" "under his very eyes"(186) they have no
choice but to believe the promises given by him. Deirdre recognises that it is her physical beauty that has made her and her lover victims of Conchubar's wrath:

Under his eyes
And in the very middle of his power!
Then there is but one way to make all safe:
I'll spoil this beauty that brought misery
And houseless wandering on the man I loved.(186)

She wishes: "O that the creatures of the woods had torn/My body with their claws!"(187) Deirdre's plight invites comparison with that of the low-caste, beautiful girl Ponnamma who resists a king's lusty advances. Deirdre has also a caste stigma as she is born and brought up in the woods. For saving the life of her spouse, Deirdre is ready to destroy her identity as a female beauty. She thinks that she can avail the assistance of the wild wanderers for making her ugly:

These wanderers will show me how to do it:
To clip this hair to baldness, blacken my skin
With walnut juice, and tear my face with briars. (186)

This is a gesture of supreme sacrifice as far as women are concerned. They usually "labour to be beautiful" (CP 89). Deirdre has also been, to do her "husband's will" (CP1 178), willing to decorate her body. Deirdre deifies herself to the status of Kannaki, towards the finale of the play. When she finds that her husband is no more alive, Deirdre under the guise of going to perform the funeral rites pertaining to her deceased husband, leaves the King and kills herself. Such a possibility
she has foreseen when she takes a knife from the wanderers. Leonard E Nathan remarks:

Deirdre is the centre of the action because it is she, not Naisi, who has the heroic choice between some self-willed gesture that will preserve her heroic integrity or a debasing submission to another's will. (141) Nathan, who finds supernatural components in Deirdre, finds her self-immolation "a superhuman gesture" (142). Her mysterious birth and her upbringing by a witch or goddess make possible such a reading. Her association with the wanderers, her idea of being beautified or uglified by them, her belief in them when they hint at the King's plans, and the fact that the underprivileged native people head a procession of protest when her lover is killed, all give room for identifying Deirdre as one among the discarded, wandering and dispossessed tribes and their goddesses or queens. Fergus, in Irish legends, is a native king whose power is later usurped by Conchubar. Fergus commands the faith of Deirdre's lover. Deirdre's subalternity and scapegoat status are effected through the colonisation of the poor native tribes who have been pushed back to the mountains by the new settlers like Conchubar and through patriarchal colonisation which establishes the king's unquestionable territorial power over his kingdom and over the physical body of the females. The play ends with the words of King Conchubar in which he asserts his unquestionable territorial authority:

I, being King, did right

In choosing her most fitting to be Queen,
And letting no boy lover take the sway. (CP1 203)

A similar verdict is uttered by Raman in Edasserı’s poem "Varadanam" (EK 480-87). Quoting Smruti [Remembered Laws], he says that kings have the right to marry or possess any girl (487). Raman utters this when he weds a low-caste, servant girl Kubja to the young King Krishnan. As a senior wiseman, he approves and vindicates the alliance. "Varadanam" [Boon Donation] has many points of comparison with Yeats’s Deirdre. Krishnan is a conqueror or usurper-king like Conchubar. As a boy-hero or prince he miraculously subjugated Kamsan. The mountain-born Deirdre is made a queen by Conchubar. The deformed hunchback Kubja is transformed into a beauty queen by Krishnan. Deirdre is ridiculed because of her female subalternity and birth-stigma. Kubja is humiliated in spite of her transformation. Kubja by her caste and class is a poor female subaltern. She narrates her pathetic plight before Krishnan and Raman. When Raman says to her: "O little girl, / Let you live as the charming/Ornament of the palace of Mathura" (483), Kubja replies:

Live, live, everyone tells me,
As if life were desirable.
A servant-girl to live her life
With the grandeur of a goddess?
Royal mothers have honoured me
Through their spotless generosity,
Leaning against which, how long
Shall a servant shine? (484)
As Deirdre puts Naoise in an awkward position in their wordy battle, Kubja checkmates Krishnan. Krishnan and his elder brother Raman are playing chess. The dilemma he faces is reflected in his moves on the chessboard. When Kubja stands before him and narrates her life story, Krishnan cannot make moves on the chessboard with his usual vigour, concentration and initiative. His moves become weaker; and Raman has to remind Krishnan:

"Krishna, take away the queen;
Haven’t you noticed my move;
A pawn to the knight’s square?"

Kubja stood near Krishnan
As a lingering threat.
As the feeling of being
Attacked hooked on to him,
Did those angling eyes get entangled
With the doubled rooks?
Losing pieces one by one,
Krishnan reaps defeats. (484)

Krishnan feels himself responsible for transplanting Kubja. Kubja had an identity and livelihood as a servant girl, standing at the door of the courtyard of Lord Kamsan. Her duty was to enbrocate Kamsan’s body with saffron and sandal. When Krishnan assassinated Kamsan, she lost her job. Krishnan removed the hunch on her back and she became an elegantly shaped woman. But, because of her caste and class stigmas, society is not prepared
to post her safely anywhere. She is neither a servant girl nor a high-born damsel:

The servants regard me a princess;
The princesses a servant
Driven out by everybody;
I have fallen into evil days. (484)

Like the transplanted Deirdre, the transformed Kubja expresses her protest. She is not a passive Asian subaltern woman, but, like the heroic mothers in "Kavile Pattu" and "Poota Pattu," she voices her grievances and breaks the traditional concept of woman. The three levels of subalternity—caste, class and gender—do not prevent her from speaking. Such a transition—the passive, silent woman to a protesting, speaking one—is inscribed in Krishnan’s words:

Time plays havoc with me;
Results hostile await my deeds.
Why do the fruits vicious
Come from the plants virtuous? (486)

Krishnan tries to mystify the change of time by describing it as one of misfortune, and he glosses his act of appropriating Kubja by speaking of his good intention. But it is not difficult to see the whole thing as part of the process of alien invasion or colonisation, a process by which the natives are dethroned or uprooted from their habitats and natural positions. Edasseri in his introductory note to the poem says that the process of transplanting a human soul is a difficult one (EK 480). It has
become difficult in modern times as the transplanted subalterns are aware of themselves as well as of the diverse aspects of appropriation. No longer passive, or silent, they have started to raise protests, when in the name of enlightening, educating, improving, developing or civilizing they are placed in awkward positions. Edasseri has indicated this change (*Kunkuma Prabhatam* 13-14). He observes that a modern writer would portray his Sita asking Sri Raman to prove his own chastity by entering a fire altar. Family, the basic unit of society, has so far been built on false assumptions which are recently being eroded (13-14). To Edasseri, feudalism, caste system and patriarchy are interrelated. Such a system has begun to crumble down. Raman is aware of the winds of change. He says that Krishnan is not a hero. Krishnan neither wins nor loses any game. Every game is stalemated by him. Kubja is neither destroyed nor uplifted. Krishnan’s action is interpreted as one that has placed Kubja in an ambivalent position. In a previous period the removal of the hunch on her back would have been praised as the new King’s act of grace or God’s boon. Raman finds that their game of chess also ends in stalemate—neither Raman nor Krishnan can win the game:

Raman finding the game stalemated
By Krishnan’s move, ordained thus:

"Heroes seek joy in triumphs and defeats,
But, Krishna, you find delight in stalemates."

(*EK* 486)

Raman, as the King’s elder brother and advisor, reminds Krishnan
to note the change of time. Fergus in *Deirdre* leads a procession of protest to the palace of King Conchubar. Here, even the servant girl, Kubja, in spite of her delicacy and humility, has become audacious enough to indicate the irresponsibility of the new ruler of her native land. While narrating her life, she admits that the advent of the new King has set many slaves free. Though Krishnan rules Kamsan’s Kingdom for a time, he soon abandons it as if it is a piece on the chessboard to be picked up and thrown away:

O Compassionate one, you broke
The chains on the world’s feet.
You played a while with this land
And then threw it away like a piece
Captured from the chessboard
While at play with your brother. (482)

Kubja, at first, accepts the "improvements" Krishnan makes on her body, recognising the newly acquired territorial power of the new ruler. But, later she raises her protest:

The boon your grace donated, alas!
Became a curse in disguise.
What shall I do if the *sandal*
Turns to be a stinking wood in my hand?
Death was accorded to Pootana;
The sap of kindness to me.

But, now, I feel jealous of the deceased. (485)

Raman effects a conciliation between the assumptions of the old system and the claims of the new situation. He does not abandon
the term God. Yet, he admits that man is also significant. He points out the responsibility of Krishnan in accommodating Kubja and weaving the cloth of life, using the fibres of God and man:

Krishna, you transplanted this climber;
Are you not bound to raise
A hosting bower to this vine?
Mixing the threads of God and man
Is woven the carpet of social life. (486)

A note of protest or revolt by native subalterns against male royal power is common to "Ponnammayum Kadalunkara Naduvazhiyum," Deirdre and "Varadanam." In the first one, the burning of the bunglow of the local chief is mentioned by the low-caste natives. In Deirdre, native labourers led by Fergus come to the court of Conchubar and shout. In "Varadanam," Kubja raises her complaints to Krishnan. Raman, present there, solves the problem by marrying Kubja to Krishnan. In the other cases also an open rebellion does not take place. But, in all cases, the natives are not willing to accept the ruler's postulations and practices without a voice of protest. The subalterns do not remain completely silent. They speak. Another problem which crops up in these three works is the subaltern female's offer of her physical body to the male royal territorial authority. The low-caste, native beauty, Ponnamma, is adamant in not allowing her body to be occupied by the local chief. When the inquisitors have partly burned her physical body and made it ugly and terrible, she offers it to the chief. In fact, she challenges him to occupy her. When Deirdre learns from the wandering
musicians that Conchubar has a plan to kill Naoise and possess her, she thinks in terms of uglifying her body. Even earlier, she has a premonition that the jewels and other embellishments she has are all for the King's sake. She has to appear beautiful and attractive before Conchubar. So she must "set the jewels on my neck and/For one that's coming" (CPI 178). "Look at these rubies on my hair and breast/It was for him, to stir him to desire,/I put on beauty, yes, for Conchubar" (185). Neither the local chief nor Conchubar thinks in terms of an ideal life-partnership with the respective girls. The local chief wants only to enjoy Ponnamma and throw her away. Conchubar, being old, is incapable of offering a satisfactory life to Deirdre. His intention is negative in the sense that he wants to possess her by making her dispossessed of her young princely lover. The local chief also desires to dispossess Ponnamma of her reputation and physical loveliness. The local chief and Conchubar have destructive purposes. They do not want the beautiful native territories to be occupied or enjoyed or possessed by the natives or those who deserve them or those who are naturally capable of possessing them. The local chief's plan is unlawful and that of Conchubar is unnatural. The Krishnan-Kubja relationship is neither unlawful nor unnatural. Krishnan never has any intention of destroying or dispossessing Kubja. After he kills King Kamsan, as part of the process of occupying the new kingdom, he effects many changes in its institutions. Some of those who occupied certain posts in the previous structure are forced to abandon them. Kubja had the job of smearing Kamsan's
body with saffron. Krishnan, as the new owner and occupier of the territory, has worked out changes in her physical body. Kubja has developed an attraction towards the young handsome prince. Kubja's own words show her affinity or desire. The coming of Krishnan and his friends to Kamsan's palace is "A warming lovely sight for all" (EK 481). Kubja compares the charm of Krishnan to that of a lotus-bud (482). Krishnan is unlike Conchubar who is a jealous, revengeful, selfish old man, "willing to expend enormous energy and make dishonourable compromises to gain his object" (Nathan 141). Krishnan's attitude towards Kubja is unclear and ambivalent. Though he has improved her physical territory, he has no intention of occupying or enjoying it. He has abandoned the kingdom after a while. When she comes to the court, where Krishnan and Raman are playing chess, Krishnan feels uneasy and distressed. His uneasiness at her presence shows that Krishnan desires her, though he cannot accept her. The reason for his awkwardness and ambivalence is the caste- and class-oriented stigma upon Kubja. It cannot be removed even by a king or god:

A hillock can be turned into an umbrella;

Kubja into a graceful maiden;

Yet a servant girl--even God failed

To change her into a non-servant. (EK 485)

Raman settles the problem by passing the verdict that kings have the right and privilege to possess precious stones and beautiful maidens without bothering about their origin or clan: "Smruti approves kings/To possess pearls and girls/ Minding not the place
and race" (487). The deep-seated caste consciousness and the presence of related taboos in the Indian Hindu societies are revealed here. Though in Deirdre Fergus and Naoise make use of the stigma of low birth upon Deirdre to silence and defeat her in argument, such a caste stigma is not as deeply ingrained in the Irish consciousness as in the Indian. When Deirdre tells Conchubar that she has to attend to Naoise’s funeral rites, customary to their wanderer caste, Conchubar tries to contradict her: "It is not fitting/You are not now a wanderer, but a queen,/And there are plenty that can do these things (CPl 199). Belonging to different nations, Conchubar and Krishnan offer a contrast in class or caste consciousness. Krishnan seems to be a victim of caste consciousness which has been the ideological construction of the dominant classes in India of which Krishnan himself is a member. The contrast between Conchubar and Krishnan is also reflected in the distinctive use of the images of chess in the respective works. Chess portends murder in Deirdre. Krishnan’s restlessness, as well as his bias, his cautious and crafty nature, is presented through the moves on the chessboard in "Varandanam." There is also a contrast between Deirdre and Kubja in their attitudes to the kings. Kubja has no aversion towards Krishnan. She finds nothing unlawful and unnatural in her connection with Krishnan. The changes Krishnan has effected on her body are not remembered bitterly by her. Because of her caste-class inferiority and the consequent subaltern position, Kubja does not suggest a cohabitation with the King Krishnan. The narration of her strange life-history, projecting Krishnan’s
responsibility in dispossessing her of her livelihood, can be taken as an indirect indication of her desire for an alliance with Krishnan. Krishnan has to rescue her from the limbo. Under the circumstances, the only way out for Krishnan is to marry Kubja. Unlike the local chief in "Ponnammayum Kadalunkara Naduvazhiyum" and Conchubar in Deirdre, Krishnan is not personally revengeful or vindictive. Social discursive practices have persuaded him to transplant Kubja and inhibit himself, at first, from possessing her. Raman removes the social hurdle and Krishnan marries Kubja.

Like Deirdre and "Varadanam," Edasseri's "Vivaha Sammanam" ("Wedding Gift," Malayalam Poetry Today 52-55) presents a female subaltern who raises her protest. The editorial note to the publication of this translation has this to say:

The poem is in the form of a dramatic monologue. The elder sister speaks to her younger brother as she gets into the pond. She tells the brother that her intention is to pluck a lotus flower to be given as a present to her younger sister and her bridegroom. Actually the bridegroom had earlier deceived her. Her plan is to drown herself. Her corpse shall be the wedding gift to the new couple. (52)

The Elder Sister registers her protest through self-sacrifice or suicide. The bridegroom, with whom she was in love, has broken his promise to marry her. Instead of her, he has married her younger sister. At the personal level, the act of suicide is a lady-love’s revenge towards the lover. At the gender level, it
is a woman's protest against certain patriarchal values and norms. The breaking of the promise of marriage casts no shadow or stigma upon a male member of the society. But the female partner may be forced to spend her entire life as a spinster. The presence of such a daughter in the house is a "prolonged heart-burn" (53) to the mother. The society, as it exists in the countrysides of Kerala, will turn its violent vituperation against the mother's inability to upbring the daughter properly and marry her to somebody in time, thus, in the process, awarding scapegoat status to the mother as well. And she, in turn unable to resist societal attack, may turn her anger against the spinster-daughter. The Elder Sister expresses this, when she describes the mother's mechanism of blaming her for anything and everything:

As we started a while ago,
Lighted wick in hand,
Didn't mother say, "Can't this girl
Have her holy immersion after dawn?"
"Too much of anything, remember,
Will come to nothing," she added.
Each movement of her daughter breeds
Callous suspicion in the mother's mind.
Bathing early denotes harlot's ways,
Lying late is but a false pretence.
Visit the temple, or visit it not,
Your action meets misinterpretation.
Life to the mother, a prolonged heart-burn,
To the poor daughter a crown of thorns. (53)

The younger sister, who has replaced the elder and occupied the space as the wife of the latter's former lover, may also direct her violence against the elder. The Elder Sister imagines that when others do miss her the next morning, they will not seek her but, instead, they may utter cruel words:

If late, who all will not come seeking,
Are not quarrels, cruel words, their way of life?
"Has not that wretched girl bathed and moved up?"
Mother can speak only in such a tone.
"She has been pampered too much," such will be
The judgement, most certain, of your sister young
When thus the elders' anger strikes flame,
Careful you be not to contradict. (54)

The only person who offers her sympathy and space is the brother, who is a helpless, powerless, small child: "Your sister can hope for a smile/From no lips but thine" (54). Deirdre and Kubja find themselves ill-placed, the Elder Sister, here, discovers that she has no space to occupy or even exist. Deirdre can abandon Naoise and live a wretched life with the old King Conchubar. Kubja manages to marry Krishnan. But to the Elder Sister mere existence is a problem. Hence, she resolves to kill herself by drowning:

Till this day I felt needless fear
To plunge into the irretractable;
Only today I've gathered strength
To slip down alone beyond my depth. (52-53)
Neither Deirdre, Kubja nor the Elder Sister remains passive. From their female subaltern positions, they raise their protests. They speak to some male members of their respective societies--Deirdre to Fergus, Naoise and Conchubar, Kubja to Raman and Krishnan, and the Elder Sister to her brother.

There are passive sufferers too, female subalterns who do not speak out in Yeats and Edasseri. The woman in Yeats's play Purgatory (CPI 681-689) is such a passive sufferer, who becomes the victim of chastity taboo even after her death. The play has a ghost story as its source (CCP 279-80). Male jealousy and chastity taboo are embedded in it. A man in Ireland remains childless for a time. Later, when his wife conceives and expresses joy, the man becomes sullen and suspicious. One day, coming home drunk, he kills the infant. In Yeats's Purgatory an old man is disgusted with his son as he feels that the son is begotten "upon a tinker's daughter in a ditch" (CPI 684). He is also haunted by the memories of his dead mother who married a drunken squanderer. The old man feels that the shade of his mother purgatorially reenacts the horrible past. The act of lust, in which he was conceived, is lived over again. The old man is left wondering whether sensual pleasure or remorse is uppermost in its compulsive repetition. The son attempts to rob the old man and the son is stabbed. The justification for this assassination is that it ends the consequences of the mother's deed upon others. Brenda S. Webster remarks: "By killing his son, the Old Man feels, he has demolished the horrible past and
restored his mother to her first condition as a lady, lovely and bright" (162). A similar defence for the assassination of his mother is made by the male-hero, Parasuraman, in Balamany Amma's (b.1910) Malayalam narrative poem Mazhuvinte Katha (1966) [The Story of the Axe]. Jealous of his wife, sage Jamadagni commands his sons to kill her to safeguard the purity of their clan. She has violated the taboo of chastity, not in action but in thought. Her sons except Parasuraman are unwilling to slay their mother. But Parasuraman raises his axe and decapitates her. He finds in her tearful eyes a little embarrassment as in the case of a sacrificial animal. Jamadagni is eager to grant any boon his loyal son or the "male-hero" demands. Parasuraman’s request is this: "Thou, Righteous Mind,/As virtuous and unfallen as before/Solely shall my mother live in thy remembrance!" (9)

Edasseri was inspired to compose the narrative poem "Pengal" [The Sister] (EK 325-332) by the sight of a girl and her younger brother who wandered in a street for a time. They were orphans. The poet was moved by the motherly feeling exhibited by the not-so-grown-up girl. The poet longed to portray what would happen to those slender beings in the rough and stark realities of the world (325). But, after reading the poem one is more haunted by the cruelty of the male-dominated society in the hands of which the male protagonist, the grown-up brother, then, was constrained to discard and desert his only blood-relative, that is his sister, who had been more than a mother to him.
The poem has two parts. In the first, the pains she willingly suffers to rear up the little brother are presented. When he is four years old, out of mischief and anger, he throws a piece of stone at her, wounding her. The stinky wound persists for a long time, but the scar it has left is one of her "proud possessions" (326). For the sake of the brother she has to desert her beloved and the native village:

"Sister, let us leave this place and go,"
Sobbed her darling brother;
She felt the colourful picture of life
Being torn to pieces. (327)

In that village, there is her lover, who has saved her from becoming a full-fledged beggar. In the second part of the poem, the brother is seen as a well-dressed and wealthy young man of eighteen. To bring him up so, the sister has had to anoint every sharp flint of street life with her blood. She has fed and clothed him at first by begging, later by doing manual jobs and finally, when she becomes a graceful young woman, her enticing smile brings copious dividends. But "Like a pond sunk by bailing and dredging/Lay the muddled tale of her virginity"(330). The brother has come of age to feel the dishonour and derision of his sister's violating the virginity taboo. Initiated into manhood, he utters the male voice of interrogation. She stands up before him like an apologetic sinner begging for mercy. "The young gentleman did not/Raise his face nor moved/His hand to prevent her leaving "(332). For a while, she lingers at the door of his
luxurious bedroom and leaves the house sobbing. The woman, an
off-stage heroine, who appears only as a shade in Purgatory,
Renuka, Parasuraman’s mother, in Mazhuvinte Katha, and the sister
in “Pengal” are passive and silent sufferers and scapegoats at
the altar of chastity taboo.

The legends of Queen Meave and the goddess Macha show the
transfer of power and dominance from ancient matriarchs to the
later patriarchs. In the case of Macha’s legend male prejudice
has established itself. Deirdre’s story shows that the society
has internalised the assumptions and values of patriarchy. In
the folk songs of Kerala the uneasiness felt by the subordinate
class is also perceived. The female figures of sacrifice in
Yeats and Edasseri such as Deirdre and the Elder Sister who
commit self-murder are aesthetically satisfying to a male-
dominant society. Woman’s death looms large in the folk songs of
Kerala. It is praised as martyrdom and sacrifice. In Sati-ritual
also the death of the female is identified as martyrdom. The
marginality and the consequent scapegoat position of women are
inscribed in the legends of Ireland, folk tales of Kerala and the
literary works of Yeats and Edasseri. In the aspect of female
subalternity the works can be read as the continuation of their
respective native legends and folktales. The socio-cultural
climate that makes possible the production and reception of such
texts, in which the females figure as scapegoats, has been
discussed. Such a socio-cultural climate has been the
consequence of successive colonisations—political, social,
religious and "genderic." The analysis of female subalterns and sacrificial postings forms a preface to the problems of colonialism, nationalism and decolonization in Ireland and India because the overthrow of female centrality is intertwined with colonialism. The establishment of patriarchy is a result of the advent of conquerors and coloniser-settlers in Ireland and India. Regarding the settler-colonisation of the patriarchal Aryan Celts, Joseph Campbell opines that when they arrived in Ireland "its order of mythology and morality was of the Bronze Age, of the mother goddess and Mother Right"(Masks Occidental 36). According to him, "even in the late Celtic legends many startling traits are revealed of brazen dames who preserved the customs of that age upto early Christian times. They were in no sense wives in the Patriarchal style "(36). In the case of India, the patriarchal Vedic Aryans made the first attack upon the matriarchal customs and values of Dravidians and pre-Dravidians. In both the nations, the patriarchal, Christian British rulers continued the attack. Since the problem of female subalternity and sacrifice is intimately related to colonialism, the next chapter discusses colonisations and the consequent marginalisation of the Irish and Indian native deities, especially the goddesses. An insatiable thirst for revenge and a passion for recapturing power impart in the native deities an appearance of unappeasability. These deities are the eternal host of the Irish and the Indians.