According to Sri Aurobindo, one needs more a consecrated vision than a mere intellect, to comprehend the sanctity of motherhood. It is indeed, a blend of nobility and humility in a complex harmony, the value and the validity of which are noteworthy and communicable. Its very endurance and verification bears a testimony to its authenticity. Motherhood, the higher form of yoga is an idealization of the cosmic existence of God. As the synthesis of love and wisdom, true motherhood overcomes all obstacles to be the means of spiritual conquest for the eternal through its enriched devotion. Motherhood has not been viewed in the right perspective. Mother in its modern connotation varies widely from its archetypal significance. This paper analyses Motherhood in its right context.

According to Jung, the Great Mother is a derivation of the mother archetype. In the Platonian sense, she is somewhere in a place beyond the skies. She is a prototype and a primordial image pre-existent and supraordinate to all phenomena in which the maternal is manifest in the broadest sense of the term. So, like any other archetype, the mother archetype appears in infinite variety of aspects (2).

According to Sankhya Philosophy, Prakriti is the elaboration of the mother archetype, which contains three gunas: sattwa, rajas and tamas. In Jung and Christianity, Wallace expresses Jung’s view as follows: “These are three essential aspects of the mother: her cherishing and nourishing goodness, her orgiastic emotionality and her stygian depths” (110).

This finds an explanation in Mother Archetype. The mother archetype is a good example according to Jung. Dr.C. George Boeree states Jung’s explanation of mother archetype in Biography on Jung (2).

The mother archetype is a particularly good example. All of our ancestors had mothers. We have evolved in an environment that included a mother or mother-substitute. We would never have survived without our connection with a nurturing-one during our times as helpless infants. It stands to reason that we are “built” in a way that reflects that evolutionary environment. We come into this world ready to want mother, to seek her, to
recognize her, to deal with her. So the mother archetype is our built-in ability to recognize a certain relationship, that of “mothering”. Jung says that this is rather abstract, and we are likely to project the archetype out into the world and onto a particular person, usually our own mothers. Even when an archetype doesn’t have a particular real person available, we tend to personify the archetype, that is, turn it into a mythological “story-book” character. This character symbolizes the archetype. The mother archetype is symbolised by the primordial mother or “earth mother” of mythology, by Eve and Mary in western traditions, and by less personal symbols such as the church, the nation, a forest, or the ocean. According to Jung, someone whose own mother failed to satisfy the demands of the archetype may well be one that spends his or her life seeking comfort in the church, or in identification with the “motherland”, or in meditating upon the figure of Mary, or in a life at sea. (p4)

The child to the mother is what the seed is to the mother earth. Its helplessness renders the presence of mother indispensable. She is the life-supporting system in an alien dangerous and inhospitable world. According to Bowlby, the most essential part is the mother should be lastingly there. But, Neumann contradicts. His statement is expressed thus in Archetypes in Practice:

“It is not the personal individual, but the generically maternal that is the indispensable foundation of the child’s life...... In this sense she is anonymous and transpersonal, in other words archetypal” (1973, p.21). As far as the young infant is concerned, the mother’s personal characteristics provided that she lives with her child ‘in accordance with her archetypal role’ (p.24). It is on the basis of this mutual participation that all mothers and children work out their own particular variations on the archetypally composed themes. Gradually with the emergence of the child’s ego-consciousness, the mother’s functions of cherishing, nourishing and protecting lose their anonymous features and ‘personate’ as the attributes of ‘Mum’. The relationship with mother is described as the primal relationship. For it is the nucleus around which all human communities revolve. Consistent and appropriate mothering instills Erikson’s ‘basic trust’ which lends the child a positive thought about the relationship has social and political implications. Confidence in the mother is similar to the confidence in the society she represents. Love rules this primal relationship and the Jungians term it as Eros. Love of life depends on this great affair. Bowlby’s words are quoted at this context in Archetypes in Practice. “It is as if”, wrote Bowlby, ‘maternal cares were as necessary for the proper development of personality as vitamin D for the development of bones’ (1951). Just as children suffering from vitamin D deficiency grow up with bowed and distorted limbs, so children deprived of a mother’s love develop rickets of the soul” (11).

Bowlby’s analysis declares that children reared in institutions bereft of love are retarded in physical, intellectual and social development compared to children reared in the normal set-up. In the former case, children are also easily susceptible to physical and mental disease. The damage is beyond restoration. Many workers have pointed to an association between institutional care, maternal deprivation, and the later development of an ‘affectionless character’ with its feeble superego and disagreeable penchant for impulsive antisocial behavior. Such characters, once formed, are often beyond redemption since their inability to make human relationships deprives the therapist of his most important instrument. Thus, you can provide an orphaned child with ‘mothering’ by paying caretakers to feed him and keep him clean and warm; but should you fail to provide him also with the Eros-experience of a lasting relationship with one loved mother figure you risk exposing him, at best, to a future rich in psychopathology and, at worst, death (p96).

Loss or absence of mother means lack of love, which has a great impact on the child’s future. The woman—substitute, if only she plays an archetypal role, can fulfill the emotional and psychic needs of the child. Otherwise, the child, in future, will suffer from agoraphobia and severe obsessional neurosis. Even in mammals, the separation causes agitation, depression and at last, final recovery. The anguish is deep in humans. The continuous negligence of the child by the mother turns it increasingly self-centred and his outward happiness and sociability will be superficial. The psycho-analytic theory describes it in three stages: protest, despair and detachment. Love of mother, love of world and love of self are essential for the stable development of the ego-self axis. The mother thus provides a ‘secure base’ for the child in its progress towards individuation and autonomy. Only a secured child can explore the environment and trust the world. In the domain of the spiritual life, the term Mother signifies the celestial energy. The western culture has severed our minds from soul. For, it focuses on power, control, conquest and not relationship. Man has lost his balance. The image of Great Mother with all its mythological tradition is returning to consciousness. The image re-connects us to the dimension of the instinctual soul. The power and numinosity of the Great Mother provide us the will and energy to restore the wholeness and balance to our image of God as well as ourselves. This new
The ethic of responsibility is the need of the hour and our planet. The Great Mother awakens our understanding that we are her integral part. The realization means an inner journey to the self. The revelation that all cosmic life is a divine unity dawns upon us. This vision is a great boon to humanity and a remedy for all modern evils relevant now.

In India Vedas and Upanishads contain hymns in praise of the Goddess. The Taoist tradition worshipped her as Prakriti. Without losing sight of the One, they were able to realize the difficulty of bringing their nature into harmony with the deeper harmony of life. The ethos of modern culture has not lent feminine dimension to Godhead and thereby we have lost our balance and wholeness. There is a need now to restore our lost union with nature and soul and that is why the image of Great Mother is reappearing (8).

Just as how the presence of the mother lends comfort, so the Great Mother image heals, consoles, sustains, encourages, awakens trust and containment because it reflects our personal experience in the Mother's womb and the earliest human relationship. The symbol has its impact on human consciousness. The oldest and the most enduring symbol is the image of Great Mother. She is immense in her cosmic form. She is an ancient symbol. We live in her, even without our knowledge. She is unfathomed. She is the spinner of the web of our life and thereby we stand connected to the cosmos.

According to the mystical writers, Mercy and Justice are the motherly traits in God even though major religions portray God as a Father figure. Nikamanda Maha Desika's hundered slokas in Daya Chathakam illustrate this. Only Mother's Infinite Mercy makes the Lord to descend as Avatars. She is Daya in the heart of the Lord and averts His anger towards the devotees. She is the Wisdom essential for an ardent spiritual aspirant. She forgives sany sin but devotes the job of punishing to the Lord. But, as an epitome of Mercy, She intends that the punishment only purges and uplifts the sinner (4, 6).

Devi Mahatmyam too echoes this aspect of the Divine Mother. She is both Mahamaya and liberator. In quelling the ego of the Asuras, Madhu and Kaitabha, even the Gods surrender to the Mercy of the Divine Mother. Mother's slaying is likened to the process of spiritual awakening. It rouses the demons to their real form. When Devi's spear penetrates their heart, the spiritual awakening dawns. Ego blocks the flow of Grace. Slaying means the mental eradication of internal forces obstructing the right knowledge. For, spiritual awakening is feasible only with the experience of great pain. This transformation is the real manifestation of Mother's Grace. Devi Mahatmya portrays it thus: “when battling evil, the devi confers her grace even upon evildoers (4.18.23). Instead of annihilating the wicked, without hope of redemption, she purifies them by the touch of her weapons so that they may attain the higher worlds (4.19), even though they may have committed enough evil to keep them long in torment (4.18)”(7).

Grace always redeems. Hence, the Hindu cult does not advocate eternal damnation or annihilation. The demons experience Mother's salvific grace. Whenever the higher self defeats our baser impulses within, we become open to greater awareness. Mercy includes comforting those in misery, bearing the wrongs patiently, forgiving and, praying for others.

The seven Mothers in K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar's Satisapakam: Saga of Seven Mothers are portrayed as epitomes of Mercy. They comfort those in misery; they are patient in crisis; forgive injuries and pray for the well-being of others (5). The glory of motherhood is Infinite and hence Mother is God- substitute. Manusmriti speaks of it: “From the point of view of reverence due, a teacher is ten fold superior to a mere lecturer, a father, a hundredfold to a teacher. And a Mother, a thousand fold to a Father (Eternal Values, 159).

Motherhood is not merely a physical aspect. Its mental and spiritual aspects are elaborately discussed by psychology and various religions. The physical attainment of this stage has no relevance to the topic except that the aim of marriage of Indian Womanhood is Motherhood. Swami Saradananda in The Tribute to the Holy Mother says thus:

The ideal of motherhood is not a physical fact of becoming a mother by bearing children but a spiritual state. And a woman attains that state when she assimilates to herself and makes part and parcel of her life the ideal qualities of motherhood, the qualities of self-sacrifice, service, without any distinction inspired and permeated by unselfish love for all and imbued with purity, patience, poise, perseverance, fortitude, courage, modesty and unflinching devotion (9).

Swami Sivananda stresses that improper maternal love results in irreversible wholesome retardation whereas an ideal motherhood turns a country self regulated, independent of courts and police stations. Other than Kannagi, the six mothers give birth to children. Their role as earthly mothers is not significant. The mental attitude and the spiritual transformation evolved while they face the life’s challenges lend us a lot of chance to scrutinise the aspect of
motherhood in its universal term. Dr. Padma Srinivasan beautifully puts forth this in the following words in her article on “Saga of Seven Mothers: A Testament of Motherhood”.

The common aspect identified in the life of the seven Mothers is the husband figure who in one way or other fails in his assigned duty, as a life-partner. The Mothers ‘mother’ them to educate the meaningfulness of life here and now, and also nurture the values of justice and tolerance. As such, it is the same story from Devahuti to Kannagi (10).

Saga is indeed a testament of Motherhood. Devahuti, Sukanya, Devayani, Draupadi, Renuka, Damayanti and Kannagi are the chosen mothers. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his Prologue writes:

Thus with their uncanny inner vision
our Seer-poets and Rishis
saw Woman as embodiment of strength
And as Mother of the Race (xxxvi).

Thus, the seven mothers, in exhibiting their strength in crisis raise as mothers of the Race. They attain this maturity, even as a child. The Sociologists define maturity as the ego’s severance from the Self. The consequence may be worldly or divine wisdom. When the ego feels one with the Self, the state is paradisical and it also means affinity with nature and deities. The author projects the Seven Mothers evincing a keen interest in nature. The ego’s severance is mentioned by K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar thus:

Once surrendered, a Power takes control
and only when the Ego
intervenes, the communication halts
and distortion starts its reign (xxxviii).

Again, from the Sociologists’ point of view, in Archetypes in Practice, “The Self, as central co-ordinating nucleus of the total psyche, instigates and homeostatically controls the emergence of the maturing ego, and on this process the whole future integrity of the personality stands or falls (5).”

The Seven Mothers, at one stage, bereft of ego, channelise their husbands to the tune of the Divine. One sample is Devahuti.

Devahuti’s patience and perseverance intuitively guide her in handling Kardama Prajapati. Motherliness enables her to overlook Kardama’s physical ruggedness and to stoop to his conditions even before marriage. Her feeling of oneness with the husband imparts the strength and wisdom essential to aid him in achieving his goal. Though born and brought up in the lap of luxury, what enables Devahuti to live on roots and fruits and to sleep on floor, is her sense of adaptability, simplicity, humility and harmony. Her struggles in feeding and bathing her husband while he is in trance reflect her Immaculate Love, the potency of motherhood. The innate strength and resolve to encounter the hazards spring from the Unconditional Love.

Wisdom, power, harmony, perfection
are but the efflorescence
of the infinitudes of her matchless,
mighty, immaculate Love (xxxix).

Sri Aurobindo comments on it.

Maternity is considered as the principal role of woman. But this is true only so long as we understand what is meant by the word maternity. For to bring children into the world as rabbits do their young- instinctively, ignorantly, machine-like that cannot be called maternity. True maternity begins with the conscious creation of a being with the willed shaping of a soul coming to develop and utilise a new body. The true domain of women is the spiritual (www.searchforlight.org) (1).

Thus by the power of thought and will, the mothers should conceive and create a character capable of manifesting an ideal. Earth’s evolution relies on this sacred duty of womanhood and is the need of the hour.

References