

Davadasi Cult: A Sociobiological Mortality

Jyotsna Bapat

Department of Sociology, University of Bombay, Kalina, Bombay 400 098, Maharashtra, India

KEYWORDS Polygyny. Position of Women. Matriarchal. Sociobiology

ABSTRACT Since sperms are cheap while ova are expensive, because only eight hundred ova are produced by a human female in her life time, while a few million sperms are produced by a male in his life time sociobiology argues that a differential sexual strategy will be followed by the males and females of Homo sapiens species. Males therefore maximize their genetic fitness by being polygynous, while females maximize their genetic fitness by being monogamous according to the dictates of sociobiology. Anthropologists have stated that this is indeed true, seventy-five percent of world's cultures according to Murdock (Freedman 1979), are polygynous in order to accommodate the basic male instinct. The paper argues that this basic assumption of sociobiology, namely the unequal sexual expression among sexes, is only a partial truth, viewed from a male perspective. There is historically ample evidence to substantiate that females are equally polygamous and social institutions to accommodate polyandrous females have evolved, just as institutions to accommodate polygynous males have historically existed. Oriental cultures had such institutions. In these cultures polygynous patriarchy emerged to accommodate polygynous males. It must be noted that in spite of these social Institutions polygynous males were a minority. It is therefore logical to assume that in such civilizations polyandrous matriarchies would exist to accommodate females. Because both these are population strategies adaptive to polygamous persons. A historical reconstruction of the Devadasi cult in India is used to substantiate this point.