

When brothers share a wife



Polyandry is a form of polygamy whereby a woman has several husbands. In Tibet those husbands are often brothers, which is why it is most commonly called " Fraternal Polyandry". The eldest brother is normally dominant in terms of authority, that is, in managing the household, but all the brothers share the work and participate as sexual partners.

Goldstein's article focuses on the overlap between the domestic group, defined as those individuals that live in a single household together, and the kin group, or people who view themselves as relatives, within a certain Tibetan society near Limi, Nepal. According to the article, the idea of polygyny - the taking of more than one wife by a single man - is practiced by consanguine brothers for primarily economic reasons in addition to reasons of tradition. Because of the time requirement of the subsistence economy, a man setting up a monogamous household would find it difficult if not impossible to farm, manage the animals, and care to his husband duties.

The article concludes by discussing the decline of polyandrous marriages, and even goes so far as to describe that the practice may be completely gone within a single generation's time. Discussion Item: The article makes me curious how often persons from a more industrialized region paying visit to a tribal or otherwise remote region and exposed to social elements different from that which is typically seen in their own culture judge the people whom they are visiting, or conclude that their practices are " uncivilized", " barbaric" or " disgusting" without stopping and taking the time to think critically about the economic, political and social reasons behind the practice, as well as the ramifications of changing.