

Robillard et al.'s comments on the literature on polyandry on page 224 of Chapter 11, Eclampsia/Preeclampsia, misrepresented our knowledge of that important institution. They wrote:

It is of note that among 565 cultures described (Deliège, 1996b), only two polyandric cultures have been reported: the Toda in southern India and the Nyinba people in Nepal (Deliège, 1996c). Interestingly, in these two groups, polyandrous unions occurred obligatorily, with brothers of the same family (adelphic polyandry) marrying the same wife. Conversely, inside the small high caste of Nayers in Kerala, South India, reproductive unions occurred with apparently total free polyandry. In addition to explanations of low polyandry as a means of ensuring male parental care or patriarchal control of women's fertility, an absolutely free systematic polyandry might have been noticed to contribute to higher preeclampsia/eclampsia risk and thus lower fertility.

Actually, it is well known the polyandry is found not only among Toda and Nyinba as they mention, but also among other Tibetan groups in Northern Nepal, including those in Limi, Chumik, Mustang, Dzinga and Nubri, Northern India (such as those in Lahul and Ladakh), and throughout traditional and contemporary Tibet (Goldstein 1971; Goldstein 1976; Goldstein 1978; Ross 1984; Levine 1987; Crook et al. 1994; Samal 1996; Jiao 2001; Childs 2003).

Tibetan polyandry is predominately fraternal, with brothers sharing a wife who joins their family. However, this is not "obligatory" as Robillard et al. state. To the contrary, it is typical of land-holding families who use it to prevent the fragmentation of the land among the brother and to concentrate labor in the family unit. It is very rare among the poor Tibetan families who have little or no land, since there is then nothing to conserve and less need for a concentration of labor (Jiao 2001). There is a large literature on Tibetan fraternal polyandry; interested readers may begin by looking at the website of the Center for Research on Tibet in the section labeled Tibetan Marriage and Polyandry (<http://www.case.edu/affil/tibet/tibetanSociety/marriage.htm>).

Finally, Robillard's categorization of the practices of the Nayar in India as polyandry is questionable. Among the Nayar, women have sexual alliances with multiple male partners, but those partners do not live with the women, nor are they responsible for supporting any offspring a woman bears. The woman lives in a household together with her maternal kinsmen. Thus there is no marriage in any normal sense (a couple residing together, cooperating economically, sharing sexual rights in each other and rearing and educating children), and this is more analogous to a single mother in the West having multiple sexual partners than to Tibetan polyandry (Gough 1959).

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