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Kalmu the Devta: Life after His Lynching

In Epilogue of the 1972 edition of his Hindus of the Himalayas, Gerald Berreman analyzed a spectacular ascending of Kalmu, a son of his blacksmith friend in Sirkanda Village, from a goat-herding boy to a miracle worker who drew thousands of worshippers in Northern India. He concluded that Kalmu the Devta was a vehicle of God without message, predicting an uncertain future of the impression management master. In the next three decades, Berreman closely followed the Devta’s life up until his death in 1986 and beyond, writing a series of drafts explaining extraordinary life events of this untouchable shaman. They included his near-fatal lynching committed by the upper-caste villagers, his rebirth as a famed holyman in the lowland, and a rise of his two-tiered, whitewashed stone tomb erected in a foothill village. In this paper, as a witness to Berreman’s last two visits to the Devta’s tomb, I share stories and photos of Kalmu’s lifeways that lie outside and beyond his expectable statuses and occupations. He thereby escaped many of his untouchability. By opting out of his Lohar occupation, however, he incurred unfamiliar, unpleasant, risky, even dangerous, consequences. This paper, which I put together from Berreman’s unfinished manuscripts, is a tribute to memories of my beloved husband Gerry.