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Einladung zum Vortrag

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The Construction of a Cultic Center through Narrative

The Founding Myth of the
Village of Puttaparthi
and Sathya Sai Baba

Freitag, 5. Juni 2015, 15h c.t.

Seminarraum 1, Bereich Tibet- und Buddhismuskunde
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Myths centered upon termite mounds are a characteristic of India's pastoral and tribal areas. My case study is the founding myth of Puttaparthi (lit. "multiplier of termite mounds"), a village in the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh. This site has become very popular being the birthplace and ashram location of Sathya Sai Baba (1926-2011).

The legend portrays an originally prosperous village named Gollapalli, the "village of cowherds" who tended beautiful cows. The story goes that the violent reaction of one cowherd towards a snake sucking the milk of a cow brought the snake's curse upon the village and triggered its decline.

I will first present the local understanding of the Puttaparthi myth and then explore two other interpretations: a pastoral one and a Purāṇic one. Finally, I will illustrate Sathya Sai Baba's own retelling and appropriation of the tale. The multiple readings of the myth exemplify its suitability to a plurality of recastings that constitutes its strength.