



CENTRUM FÜR ASIEN-
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TRANSKULTURELLE STUDIEN
SÜDASIEN-INSTITUT



**UNIVERSITÄT
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A woman observing Chhath Puja in Delhi November 2021 (Image: Brahma Prakash)

Myth Eating the Feast

by Dr. Brahma Prakash

*The Problem of Mythical Appropriation of
Harvest Festival in India and its Ecological
Alternatives*

Monday, 31.1.2022, 6 pm

Room 010.00.01

Join Zoom Meeting

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83601052817?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83601052817?pwd=UDIIVi9FU1ZYdjBzRksvL0xzMW10dz09)
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Meeting ID: 836 0105 2817

Passcode: 351314

Dr. Brahma Prakash is a Baden-Württemberg Fellow at the South Asia Institute and an Assistant Professor of Theatre and Performance Studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is the author of *Cultural Labour: Conceptualizing the 'Folk Performance' in India* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

On 13 January 2020, when the Education Minister of Malaysia described Pongal as a “Hindu religious festival”, there was an uproar among the Muslim communities of Malaysia. They claimed that it is a Tamil Harvest festival and has nothing to do with religion. They wanted to celebrate the Pongal harvest festival as part of regional and cultural identity than a religious identity. It is to be noted that the festival is increasingly claimed as a Hindu festival in local Indian media.

In this paper, I would like to reflect on a particular cultural phenomenon in which local and regional cultural practices such as folk performances and harvest festivals are increasingly appropriated in the dominant Hindu religious myths, often supported by tangible and intangible heritage projects. What does happen when local (post)harvest festivals such as Onam, Pongal, Chhath and Sama-Chakewa are claimed and appropriated under the Vedic myths? How does it impact the festival's relationship with the local culture, communities, and ecology? What does happen to festival ecology in relation to its body and materiality?

The paper examines the hegemonic role of Hindu myths in changing the body and ecology of harvest festivals in north India. I study Chhath Puja of Bihar, one of the most popular post-harvest festivals of this region to explore this connection. Against the notion of cultural heritage based on the dominant pasts and hegemonic claims of identities, perpetuated by mytho-politics, this paper contemplates on a model of cultural heritage based on the shared sense of future with ecological concerns at the centre— heritage as a value that will save us in the future.