The Medical Anthropology Forum presents

Prof. Harish Naraindas
School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University

“What is ‘Global’ in ‘Global Mental Health’?”

This paper is an ethnography of a psychosomatic department in a German Kur Klinik (spa?), where past-life aetiologies are invoked and addressed through art, bodywork, breath-work, exotic music, trance and collective psychotherapeutic journeys that meld the past and the present and the East and the West. This is played out against a large mountain park and a Therme on either side of the Klinik, each of which sport Greek, Roman and Anglo-Chinese motifs in their architecture and landscape. These together function as a formal and para-formal therapeutic resource for patients, who may draw energy through divination techniques from spots in the park, or do aqua gymnastics with their ailing bodies in the Therme. This ensemble is enabled by the therapists, some of whom traverse these several worlds literally and figuratively by interning with Brazilian shamans and Hindu gurus, and fusing them with New Age psychotherapies from California invented by Germans, along with an initial training in Protestant theology. This psychedelic world, paid for by German socialised health insurance and the Beihilfe, challenges us to rethink notions of the global and the local. It asks, among other things, why does “mental health” in the Global South appears to revolve around the material substance of the psychotropic drug, while the quiddity called psychosomatic medicine, which in the German context is a separate discipline divorced from psychiatry, is normatively built on eschewing psychotropic drugs; why in the Global South is “mental health” built on the distinction between superstition (past lives, trance, possession, and other forms of “ritualised” behaviour) and science (psychiatry, rational diagnosis, asylums, psychotropic drugs.), while in Germany (exemplary of the Global North?) the two seem wilfully fused. Why does the Global North proselytise to the Global South to keep the “the vernacular, the non-human, the past and the East” out of the East, and offers the “West” in lieu, while it wilfully imports the “past, the vernacular, the non-human and the East into the West, and proceeds to seemingly meld the East and West in the West? In the light of such a therapeutic melange, what exactly is global in Global Mental Health?

All are cordially invited

Tuesday, July 9

17:15–18:45

CATS, Room 110.02.05