CENTRE FOR ASIAN AND TRANSCULTURAL STUDIES

SOUTH ASIA INSTITUTE

UNIVERSITÄT HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT SEIT 1386

The Medical Anthropology Forum presents

What is Āyurveda in the 21st century – a critical appraisal of the new WHO-Benchmarks for the practice and training of Āyurveda

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17:15–18:45 (CET)

In the spring of 2022, the World Health Organisation published two documents titled “WHO Benchmarks for the Training of Ayurveda” and “WHO Benchmarks for the Practice of Ayurveda”. Initially drafted by official representatives of professionalized Āyurveda in India, these documents underwent several rounds of consultations incorporating the views of Āyurveda-proponents from countries around the globe. Meant to serve as a standardized norm and reference for individual national legislation, these two Benchmarks represent an important milestone in the continuing evolution of Āyurveda.

In the past 40 years or so Āyurveda has found an increasingly broader foothold outside South Asia, especially in Europe and North America. This globalization of Āyurveda went along with variations in form and content of what constituted Āyurveda. So-called “New Age Ayurveda” (Zysk 2001) in North America was perceived to be quite different from the professionalised Āyurveda practiced in India as well as from the tradition recorded in classical āyurvedic literature. In recent years we notice that notions and slogans of “New Age Ayurveda” find their way into India while on the other hand medical practitioners in Europe are increasingly including Āyurveda into their form of “Complementary and Integrative Medicine” and thus professionalizing it. The publication of these “WHO-benchmarks” happens at a time when Āyurveda-practitioners in India are campaigning hard for the right to practice modern biomedicine while in Europe and North America medical professionals turn to Āyurveda as an alternative to modern biomedicine.

The two benchmark-documents are forceful expressions of what Āyurveda should and can be in the years to come. They combine constant reference to the āyurvedic tradition with the exigencies of a professionalised medicine. Based on an analysis of the contents and context of these WHO-Benchmarks we will discuss the question: What is Āyurveda in the 21st century?

Venue: **South Asia Institute, room 010.01.05**

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