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HISTORICISING THEATRICALITY

**THE TRAGIC TONE BEYOND
TANATUNATAKAVEDI**

Speaker

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Historicising Theatricality: The Tragic Tone beyond *Tanatunatakavedi*

Practices termed as *Tanatunatakavedi* (theatre of the roots) are often framed in theatre historiography as articulating postcolonial resistance against the hegemonic practices of Western/colonial theatre. The canonical Malayalam and Sanskrit productions of the significant playwright-director from Kerala, K. N. Panikkar, has been conceived as a productive site for such a framing. This working paper analyses how assumptions about theatricality, and in certain cases the absence of the cleft in the mundane effected by theatricality, is at the heart of these claims. Analysing existing scholarship as well as theatre discussions centred on the early productions of Panikkar, the paper foregrounds the need to historicise theatricality both as an object and discourse in the period of 1960-80s. The

paper shows how it is precisely by the elision of the force of discourse of theatricality and the opening out of the socio-political in the region that an imagined national is instituted. Rather than conceptualising theatricality as a transcendental phenomenon, the paper attempts to think through the historical valence of theatricality. The paper ends by looking at an alternate potentiality by analysing P.K. Balakrishnan's study of the trilogy of Ramayana plays by Srikanthan Nair. While the frame of *Tanatunatakavedi* is excessively centred on pre-defined forms, structures of feeling and communities, the paper shows how an interpretation of the sonic theatricality, wherein tragic is registered as a critical tone, brings forth a newness that troubles the existing worlds of sovereignty and power.

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Dr. Ameet Parameswaran is currently Assistant Professor, Theatre and Performance Studies at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University. He has published articles in journals including *Performance Research*, *Theatre Research International*, *Studies in Theatre and Performance*. His monograph is titled *Performance and the Political: Power and Pleasure in Contemporary Kerala* (2017; Orient Blackswan) and has recently co-edited along with Dr. Silvija Jestrovic the special issue 'Worksites of the Left' in *Studies in Theatre and Performance* (2019). His areas of research interest include political theatre and performance, performance historiography, theatrical/performance exchanges, region studies; body, technology and performance.



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