

The IHC South Asian Religions and Cultures Research Focus Group in collaboration with
Film and Media Studies, Global Studies, and Religious Studies Present

*The Indian Ramayana
and Its Regional Performance Traditions*

Paula Richman
Religion, Oberlin College



Maya Krishna Rao playing Ravana in the Disgusting Rasa (Photo by Thyagarajan. Courtesy of Maya Rao.)

Friday, May 6 / 3:00 pm / 2135 Social Sciences and Media Studies Building

In this talk Paula Richman will provide a brief survey of the major performance traditions in which the Ramayana narrative is enacted in different regions of India, including Kerala, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Assam. She will then provide analyses of two examples of how specific sets of theatrical conventions shape the representation of familiar characters. The 1954 Tamil mythological drama, “The King of Lanka” starring Manohar, begins and ends as a conventional *bhakti* narrative but depicts Ravana as a father whose worry about his daughter’s welfare leads to his death. The 2019 female Nangyarkuttu solo dance of Kerala, “Ahalya” starring Usha, departs from the convention that the female solo be based on a Sanskrit Kudiattam text by drawing its narrative from a Malayalam text. Richman will conclude by exploring the circumstances under which two acclaimed performances may transgress the expectations for the performance and considering the implications for actors, actresses, audiences, and experts in the tradition.

Paula Richman is the William H. Danforth Professor Emerita of South Asian Religions at Oberlin College. Her publications on the diversity of the Ramayana tradition include four edited volumes, *Many Ramayanas* (1991), *Questioning Ramayanas, a South Asian Tradition* (2000), *Ramayana Stories in Modern South India* (2008), and *Performing the Ramayana Tradition: Enactments, Interpretations, and Arguments* (2021), co-edited with Rustom Bharucha.



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