

# SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES:

By Jean Stevens

An endangered species—the South Asia Studies program—is being sheltered on the Columbia Campus. Only a dozen of its kind survive in the entire country. A couple of years ago there were 100. Next year, federal funds will go to only five.

Started in 1965, the UMC South Asia Studies program has gained considerable stature and respect in spite of its youth. But if the program is young, so is the faculty. The program's director, Dr. N. Gerald Barrier, could be mistaken for one of his students; there's the electrified bush of reddish hair and beard, the energy with which he leaps around, coping with administrative details and preparing his history lectures.

Rodney Moag believes a young faculty is one reason for the program's success. The 13 faculty members—drawn from many disciplines—are enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and able to establish a good rapport with students. All have been to India. In fact, Moag and his wife, Rachel, met in India as Fulbright scholars. They teach Indian languages—Hindi, Urdu, and Malayalam. Moag's Malayalam

course is the only one offered by any university in the United States. Such classes obviously have a limited enrollment potential. Not so with Dr. Peter Gardner's course in anthropology. Twenty-three students signed up the first time his course was offered. The next semester 103 enrolled and 60 were turned away. In all, 43 courses—including literature, culture, civilization, political science, social science, and social work—are available in the South Asian program. Some of the titles conjure up contemporary images of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Ceylon, and Bangladesh. Others are redolent of temple bells, tigers, incense, and mysticism. The whole is a 3-D picture of the South Asian way of life.

Graduate student Jeffrey Perrill, a product of the program who now teaches Indian Civilization, believes, "It's valuable for students to be exposed to Asian values and traditions. They can better understand the world around them and deal with it as intelligent voters. Also, there's value in knowing about other cultures to simply appreciate art, religion, literature."

The program awards certificates of specialization to students at all academic levels, combined with degrees in other disciplines. (Perrill, for example, earned an MA in history with a South Asian specialization.)

The great strength of the program, its interdisciplinary nature, is most readily seen at the undergraduate level. Soft-spoken, lanky Perrill says many students enroll because of their "interest in the occult or mysticism, or they've been to India and want to fill out their experience, or it just sounded interesting. Out of my course enrollment of 106, only three are history majors and a half-dozen are anthropologists. The rest? Engineering, nursing, animal husbandry, teaching, journalism, you name it. But our future also lies in secondary schools: High school classes in world history concentrate about 95 percent on Europe; yet Asia has a preponderance of the world's population!"

Even so, South Asian Studies remain an endangered species. Next year, the Office of Education, the federal agency through which grants to the programs are made, is cutting the number of South Asian centers by more than half. If the Mizzou program is one of those eliminated, it's doubtful that the University will be able to take up the slack. It isn't that the administration isn't sym-



Dr. N. Gerald Barrier, director of the South Asian Studies program, is himself a Renaissance man: historian, semi-professional musician (guitar), and supplier of Asian books to universities around the country. He lives on a farm not far from Ashland.

## HOW HIGH A PRIORITY FOR





Students in an elementary Hindi-Urdu classroom find themselves confronting the teacher, Rachel Moag, sitting on a rug, surrounded by Indian tools and clothing, statues of gods, maps, and posters. The message, of course, is knowledge; the technique: cultural immersion.

pathetic—just two years ago the University allotted special library funds to buy a newspaper and rare book collection for the program. But, with a financially strapped University reassessing all of its programs, it's a matter of priorities. And the South Asian Studies priority probably can't rank high enough. The interdisciplinary activities may be greatly reduced.

It would almost seem as if the press for technical and career-oriented people is overwhelming the old liberal education philosophy, the cross-discipline learning-for-learning's sake that once exemplified what a university was all about. In fact, one reason Barrier offers for the lack of big

foundation money is that the foundations are "more into birth control programs, agricultural development, things like that." The age of the Renaissance man and scholar seems much eroded.

Yet, supporters of the program intend to survive in one form or another. Their inclination to adapt to whatever the future brings truly reflects that South Asian philosophy they seek to teach. By Western standards, success is at the top of the ladder whose rungs, in an academic context, might be dollar amount of grants or departmental status. But from a Brahmin's point of view, success can be had on any spoke of the wheel. And as a wheel turns, who's to say who's on top? □

## A GOOD, LITTLE PROGRAM?