

BANGALORE

Digital preservation: NIAS starts with Bhagvad Gita

Sridhar Krishnaprasad

BANGALORE: The National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) has initiated a proposal to use novel digital technology for the preservation of ancient Indian manuscripts, many of which are in poor shape and will not survive more than a couple of handlings.

A pilot study using the technology on manuscripts of the *Bhagvad Gita* has been completed by NIAS Prof Sangeetha Menon, and a visiting professor from California State University, Prof George M. Williams.

It is one of the several NIAS papers that President K.R. Narayan will release at the birth centenary celebrations of Prof K.S. Krishnan, scheduled to be held at NIAS on Tuesday.

NIAS Director Prof Roddam Narasimha told *The Times of India*: "These manuscripts are a national heritage, which we have neglected. Many of them are in a shocking condition. This is the first time that this technology is being put to use for this purpose."

The technology, using digital cameras and select hardware and software, has been put together by Prof Williams. He has no intention of patenting it and plans to make it widely available.

"If we can obtain a grant, the idea would be to train manuscript librarians to digitise the manuscripts. Once that is done, access, whether on CD-Roms or on the Internet, will not become a problem. And preservation will be easier. This is probably the most inexpensive duplication technology devised. It is much better than microfilming." Why was the *Gita*

President in city

The Times of India News Service

BANGALORE: President K.R. Narayanan arrived here on Monday on a two-day visit to the city, his first after he became the President.

Karnataka Governor Khurshed Alam Khan, Chief Minister J.H. Patel, state ministers and senior officials received him at the airport.

On arrival, the President was presented a guard of honour by the Indian Air Force.

Mr Narayanan, who was accompanied by his wife Usha Narayanan, met noted physicist

Raja Ramanna, National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) director Roddam Narasimha, Maj Gen N.K. Paul of NIAS, a delegation from Federation of Karnataka Chambers of Commerce and Industries and former governor of Kerala and Karnataka minister B. Rachaiyah among others.

He attended the dinner hosted by the governor, also attended by the chief minister and his cabinet colleagues.

After attending the birth centenary celebrations of Prof K.S. Krishnan at NIAS on Tuesday, he will leave for Chennai in the evening.

chosen? "For one thing, we both love it. It has the most varied approach to wisdom," said Prof Williams, who has been teaching 'The Song of God' to American students for the last 30 years. He is also a member of the Electronic Publishing Committee of the American Academy of Religions. "And it is a 'safe' text, in the sense, that it is the most likely manuscript that archivists would allow to be freely copied, without fears of commercial exploitation."

Prof Menon, who has completed her doctoral thesis on 'Concept of Consciousness in the *Bhagvad Gita*,' said, "It is one of the three pillars of Indian philosophy, along with the *Upanishads* and the *Brahmasutra*, and we can relate to it at different levels of experience."

For their study, the duo visited

several archives and libraries in South India, including Thanjavur, Hyderabad, Melkote, Thiruvananthapuram and Chennai. The most important thing for India to do, the study says, is to "immediately begin a ten-year project of digitally copying all ancient manuscripts with new technology, and lead the world in the development and use of speech recognition technology."

While phase one of the proposal involves testing the new technology, which has been found to work very well, follow-up phases will include creating a database at NIAS, establishing a National Digital Archive by wide training in the use of the technology, and alphanumeric conversion and speech recognition. The final phase envisions a "live, interactive, comprehensive edition of the *Bhagvad Gita*."