

Institute digitally preserves Bhagvad Gita

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

Bangalore, June 6: The National Institute of Advanced Studies has developed a cost-effective system of digitally preserving ancient manuscripts in libraries in the country.

The institute, which developed cost-effective techniques to digitise information in Indian libraries following increasing alarm over the neglect and damage of rare manuscripts, has recently completed an experiment with digitising ancient manuscripts of the Bhagvad Gita. Nias now hopes to spread this technique to various libraries in South India to store

Plans to popularise method in India

ancient literature and at archives all over the country.

Instead of scanning each page of a manuscript and storing it as a computer graphic, Nias has used digital video camcorders to record manuscripts as binary code on digital video tapes. reports, Ms Sangeetha Menon and Mr George M. Williams from Nias have said in the *Current Science* journal. The data on the digital video tapes are then downloaded onto computers using a special cable and card. Subsequently, the manuscripts are

transferred to compact discs where they can be preserved for over 50 years.

Currently the ancient manuscripts in Indian archives are stored on paper or micro film. The manuscripts on paper, which are characteristically yellow in colour and crumble on touch due to their age, are in danger of being lost since there are no backups available for many of these manuscripts.

The microfilm storage method has a life less than five decades.

and initial investments on setting up a microfilm lab is close to Rs 10 lakh.

With most libraries, archives in the country being ill financed, it is time to look at digitising ancient manuscripts especially when initial costs are only around Rs 1 lakh or less, according to the Nias representatives.

According to the authors of the paper on the new methods for preserving ancient manuscripts, India should immediately begin a 10-year project of digitally copying

all ancient manuscript using the digital video camcorders or a high resolution digital still camera with extra large memory.

The help of private companies should be readily sought in the project to preserve national treasures, the researchers have said in the journal.

During the digitisation of the manuscripts of the Bhagvad Gita from the Osmania University central library, the Chennai Adyar library and other libraries in the South, the researchers found that at 75 per cent of the institutions, both paper and microfilm manuscripts were in a highly vulnerable condition.