

## A GREAT LEVELLER

**How the IITs' NPTEL online programmes are contributing towards democratisation of knowledge.**

The noughties use of the Internet and web-based multimedia resources revolutionised the field of higher education. NPTEL (National Programme for Technology Enhanced Learning), a joint venture of the IITs and IISc, funded by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, is a significant addition to this domain. Phase I of NPTEL was launched in 2003, and the objective was to provide e-learning through free online web and video courses.



NPTEL is the world's largest curriculum-based science and engineering content repository with hundreds of courses in video formats, many of which are subtitled and transcribed. A distinct feature is that every course is peer-reviewed in order to ensure that it maintains a standard.

All these videos are currently available in three formats for free downloads: flv, mp4 and 3gp.

It was in 2008 the first MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) course was developed by George Siemens and Stephen Downes. The concept became so popular that the New York Times called 2012 the “year of MOOC.” Today, MOOC has become widespread as a valuable medium for online learning.

The IITs’ foray into MOOC (the term was coined by Dave Cormier of University of Prince Edward Island) began in 2014, under the web-based services scheme of NPTEL, with almost 40 courses completed and over 20 ongoing courses.

Unlike all other MOOCs, NPTEL offers proctored exams and certificates.

The NPTEL-MOOC is open for free registration. Lectures can be viewed on youtube , and participants can watch the lectures at their convenience. Each course runs for a specific duration, at the end of which proctored exams are conducted at different cities.

All successful candidates get an NPTEL certificate.

### **Literature and film**

My personal experience with NPTEL-MOOC has been quite enriching. Among the many NPTEL courses I have offered, the two very recent ones include Literary Theory and Criticism and Film Appreciation, with a duration of twenty hours each. Participants included literature/media students and faculty from across the country, along with freelance filmmakers and writers.

While the former courses encompassed the entire spectrum of literary theory and criticism starting from Plato till date; the latter focused on traditions in Indian and world cinema. According to one participant, “Subscribing to this course exposed me to some new concepts in Film Studies and also about world cinema traditions. It is indeed an enriching and memorable online academic experience.”

Till date, NPTEL has enabled more than 1,000 faculty members from over 30 institutions to anchor all the courses. The coordinators are fully aware of the challenges ahead. The more immediate questions are regarding the nature of the education map that can be created for people to charter their own career paths; also, there is a need to work with many professionals and education service providers and institutions on a one-on-one basis.

As Phase III of the NPTEL ends, Professor Mangala Sunder ( IIT-Madras, Department of Chemistry) National Web Courses Coordinator for NPTEL Phases I -III (2003-2015), observes, “When three students, one every year, used NPTEL video contents from a remote college in Andhra Pradesh in the years 2006-2008 to clear GATE and get M. Tech Admission in IITM, we knew we had to a lot of work on popularising the programme. NPTEL will hopefully remain an ‘educational service rendered with humility.’”

The author teaches film studies, literature and popular culture at IIT-M.

By

AYSHA IQBAL VISWAMOHAN