NPTEL – waiting to become a hit among students

"Awareness about the availability of information online seems to be limited among students."

C. Niranjana, a third year electrical and electronics engineering student, had difficulty in understanding a few concepts in digital signal processing. She scouted the Web for information but was not satisfied with what she stumbled upon.

If only the Web had required content, with examples, she would have been happy as it would have helped her better understand the concepts without approaching anyone from an examination point of view, she said.

Arya Murali, a second year computer science student, too had faced similar situations in looking for content on the Web to understand and study topics she could not grasp in the class. The two represent majority of the students in both arts and science and engineering institutions who have very little idea that they can actually get the information, explanation and examples that they are looking for on the internet, thanks to National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (nptel.ac.in).

Most students were, unfortunately, not aware that they could visit NPTEL to better understand what they were studying and also learn courses that were allied with their subjects, said S. Neelakrishnan, Head of Department, Automobile Engineering, PSG College of Technology.

NPTEL, a Government of India initiative, has text, audio and video content on a variety of courses with the aim of easily understanding what they are learning. Most of those contents have been developed by professors in the IITs, IISc or other top institutions in the country. Mr. Neelakrishnan has developed content for automobile engineering.

In top colleges the students were very much aware of NPTEL but not in tier-two and tier-three colleges, where it would be more useful than the top colleges as the students could have free online access to the best of the faculty, said A.M. Natarajan, an academic.

But for that to happen, students should move away from examination-oriented learning to have conceptual understanding of subjects, he said and suggested that colleges could promote NPTEL among students by including it in the list of reference material given to students. Plus, the colleges could also screen the contents in classrooms.

That was happening but in a small way, said P. Krishnakumar, Secretary, Nehru Group of Institutions.

The awareness of it, however, was very limited, intoned Mr. Neelakrishnan adding that the NPTEL or MHRD should undertake an advertising blitzkrieg to take it to students. But those who have used it stand by it. R. Aranganathan, an EEE student, said that the videos that came with graphics helped him understand topics that were taught with texts in classrooms. "It took learning to a higher plane."