

INITIATIVE

Virtual repository at your fingertips

Tap into the National Digital Library for a great reading experience

■ ASWATHI PACHA

Imagine having a collection of six million books at home. The National Digital Library (NDL) is aiming at making this a reality. With the new NDL app for Android, users can read over 7.2 million books in 70 different languages. The National Digital Library of India, hosted by IIT Kharagpur and sponsored by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, is a single window portal to integrate the digital repositories of India. The subjects range from computer science, philosophy, and religion to literature, agriculture and fine arts.

Humble beginnings

"NDL started as a pilot project in April 2015 by MHRD. From a humble beginning on a PC to demonstrate the proof of concept, it is now a full blown project; making educational content available to the entire nation at their fingertips. NDL is "open" and "inclusive." Anybody can register and start using NDL," said Prof. Partha Pratim Das, professor in-charge and overall coordin-



ator of the project at IIT Kharagpur.

Some of the content available on the repository includes NCERT textbooks, textbooks of 8 state education boards, JEE, GATE and UPSC

question papers, papers/theses from Indian Institute of Science, Indian Statistical Institute, IITs, IIMs, IISERs. Publications from the laboratories of Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) and

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) can also be accessed online.

"There are over 2.5 lakh entries on cancer. The convenient filtering system allows you to choose the subject

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area, language and file type. Though there are many books, the number of research articles is limited – only open access journals and research articles are available. It would be helpful if we can get access to paid journals too," says Alekhya T. Kilambi, Research Scholar at Tata Memorial Centre, Mumbai.

Though scholars are a bit disappointed, students seem to be on the optimistic side. "Children these days don't like going to the library. So we brought the library to them. They can read over three lakh pieces under literature section. Kids are more inclined towards audio-visuals for stimuli as opposed to the written word. So we also have some of the best-loved tales and short stories in the form of digital resources such as audio-books," says Shreyoshi Ghosh, ID Executive (Media & Communication) IIT Kharagpur.

"We have also started a social media campaign called #NightTimeRead which is live fiction at night," she adds. The campaign was launched on June 3 on the NDL India Facebook and Twitter pages. Each post carries a synopsis of a short-story along with the link to the content.

"We all love a good read before we go to sleep. #NightTimeRead is an endeavour to bring a little bit of fiction and folklore back into the lives of our users this summer vacation. It promises to present some bone-chilling, heart-pumping, tear-jerking, laughter-loving indigenous and foreign literature just as the stars come out! We are also hoping the short audio-book format will intrigue more people to experience these incredible stories," said an official from NDL India.

The app has a few bugs like unexpected crashing and inability to download PDFs. If properly organised and updated frequently, NDL has immense potential to help the student community and bring the reading culture back to the younger generation.