Mumbai: The Indian Institute of Technology Bombay is taking its first steps towards a system where anyone, anywhere can access audio-visuals of important lectures delivered on the campus or even learn how to set up an experiment. The system, pioneered by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's revolutionary open courseware programme, aims to ensure that even students who do not study at IIT will have access to its vast pool of knowledge.

Since late December 2004, IITB's IT school, the Kanwal Rekhi School of Information Technology (KReSiT), has used the democratic principles of open source technology to make cutting-edge information available to all those interested through its portal 'ekalaya'. Its 'eGuru' programme offers online mentoring to students at technical institutes across the country, especially those from small towns.

IITB in association with open source provider Red Hat, has also launched a scholarship programme for students across South Asia, who can sign up online for open source projects and seek advice. "It was the academia, like the students and professors at MIT, who led the open source revolution in the US," said Venkatesh Hariharan, head of open source affairs at Red Hat.

"Open source is a new social phenomenon here," said KReSiT's founding head and internationally renowned open source expert Dr Deepak Phatak. He is "a product and company agnostic" who feels there is a need for both proprietary and open source applications. Which is why, Phatak has invited Microsoft, the number one bad guy for most open source believers, to join 'ekalaya'. "My primary identity is of an Indian with responsibility of making affordable knowledge available to 100 crore people. Not being able to pay should not mean not having access," he added. The IT school has also been working on promoting educational animation, by putting the software tools it needs in open source, so that experts can use animation to teach. Films are being made on sought-after courses including robotics and experimental chemical engineering, which too will be made available on open source.

To widen the initiative, IITB has started videotaping, editing and then releasing short films on in-house work-