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DINESH WAGHMARE
SECRETARY, DEPT OF
SOCIAL JUSTICE & SPECIAL
ASSISTANCE, GOVT OF
MAHARASHTRA

E-TRANSFORMATION OF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME

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Scholarship is a critical tool to facilitate further education for the eligible students, especially those who are from social and economical backward classes in the state, and bring them on to the mainstream development track. The department of social justice strives towards achieving this through various development schemes both for the individuals and the community. This article describes the journey to transform the scholarship programme in the state of Maharashtra, a paradigm shift from the manual mode to the electronic medium.

Digitisation - Need of the Hour

'Justice delayed is justice denied' could not be more true for the students from the Scheduled Caste (SC), Other Backward Castes (OBC), and other economically and socially deprived classes who were eligible for the post-matric scholarships. Even though the department of Social Justice and Special Assistance had allocated the funds for these scholarships, the manual system created lots of delays, not only in the disbursal but also the receipt of the same. There was dependency on the colleges for the data. To add to this, there were many cases of fraud which neither helped identify the 'correct' eligible candidate(s) nor helped the 'right amount' reaching the student on time. Monitoring and tracking was another challenge since the information required was not available in a timely manner. The department, committed to deliver the benefit to the citizen, conceptualised the 'e-Scholarship' initiative as the need of the hour to solve this situation.

Overcoming Challenges

To realise this initiative, we needed to get a 'buy-in' from the stakeholders in this process which included the IT department, vice chancellors and heads of educational institutions, bank officers and the department officers. We also needed to understand the challenges and loopholes involved in such an initiative. The department also faced resistance from many sectors especially those who had a mala fide interest. However, we were able to have positive dialogue with all the stakeholders. We also got a lot of encouragement from the Hon'ble Chief Minister and Hon'ble Social Welfare Minister for this initiative.
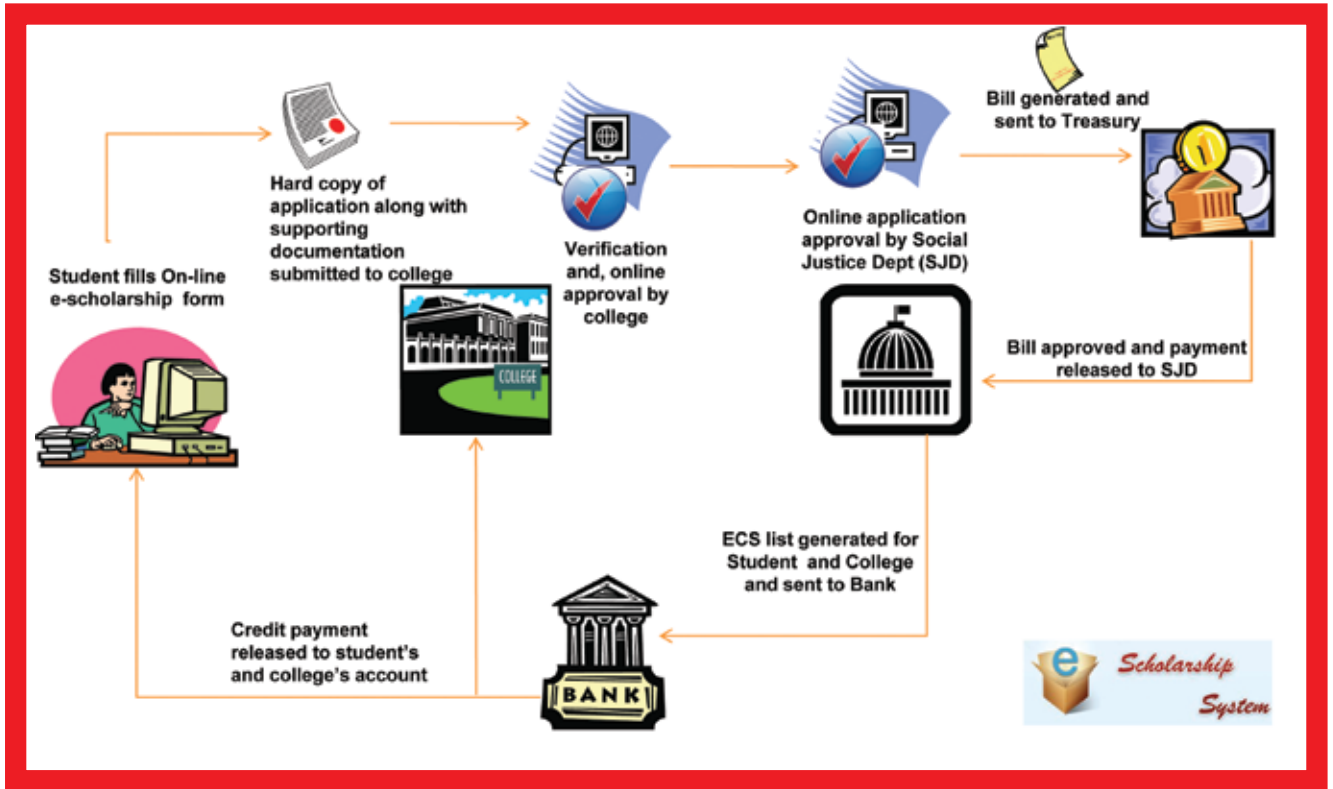
'e-Scholarship' – The solution

To achieve the challenging task of transforming the delivery mode of the scholarships, we selected Mastek Ltd., a leading IT solutions player to design, develop and implement the 'e-Scholarship' solution for the state.

The solution automates the scholarship application process, the sanction and disbursal procedures across the 35 districts under the seven divisional officers in the state. Under this new automated system, the students have a zero-balance account in a nationalised bank where their monthly allowance is credited directly. The student also receives an SMS alert from the system informing him of the same. The solution user-interface is available in English and Marathi. Apart from enabling granting procedures, the solution also caters to processes of scholarship suspension, renewal and cancellation. The system

-"The solution automates the scholarship application process, the sanction and disbursal procedures across the 35 districts under the seven divisional officers in the state"

also provides the department with MIS to monitor and analyse the scholarship distribution and disbursement. The department officials have been provided the necessary training on the system. Online help is available to colleges and students.

Delivering the Benefits

The solution has manifold benefits to the department, educational institutions and the students. Over 32 Lakh students in the state will now receive their funding directly in their bank account via wire transfer from the department; they will not have to depend anymore on colleges for that. Approximately ₹11 crores was disbursed to 30,000 students within a month of the launch of the online system. We expect an estimated ₹1700 Cr. to be disbursed to 18 Lakh students across 11,500 colleges in the state in one year.

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identify the eligible students faster and disburse the grants into their bank accounts directly in a timely and transparent manner. Chances of error and fraudulent scholarships claims will be lesser. Decision making will be faster due to availability of the accurate and timely information provided by the system.

Way Forward

This is just the beginning. The system

will see continuous enhancements to cater to the needs of the state. Maharashtra is a trend-setter in various sectors. Through various other initiatives such as caste validity etc., we are moving forward steadily towards online systems. We will realise the vision laid out in National e-Governance (NeGP) plan to provide services to the citizens and businesses in a transparent, efficient and timely manner. **e**gov