

Veer Gatha 4.0 An Unprecedented Success

Introduction

Project Veer Gatha was instituted under Gallantry Awards Portal (GAP) in 2021 as a part of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' to commemorate India's 75th year of Independence. It aimed to disseminate the details of acts of bravery of the Gallantry awardees and the life stories of India's bravehearts among the students, so as to raise the spirit of patriotism and instill the values of civic consciousness.

The project provided a platform to the school students across the country to undertake creative projects based on Gallantry Award winners. As part of this, the students framed different projects through various mediums like art, poems, essays, and multimedia on the Gallantry Award winners. The best projects were awarded at national level by Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Ministry of Education (MoE).

The project has been coterminous with Republic Day celebrations each year. Veer Gatha has gained a phenomenal success with 8 lakh participations in Veer Gatha 1.0 conducted in 2021-22, 19.5 lakhs in Veer Gatha 2.0 conducted in 2022-23, and 137 lakhs in Veer Gatha 3.0 conducted in 2023-24. Hon'ble Raksha Mantri Shri Shri Dharmendra Pradhan had last year commended Veer Gatha as 'Heralding of a revolution amongst the students of India'.

The Vision

Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi has articulated a visionary approach to nation-building. He passionately called for nation-building to evolve into a collective national movement, urging every individual to be actively associated with it. As reiterated time and again—For India, "This *Amrit Kaal* (Golden Age) is ongoing" and "This is the period in the history of India when the country is going to take a quantum leap".

In alignment with the PM's vision, the MoD conceived Project Veer Gatha under the aegis of the Gallantry Awards portal, the foremost online platform of MoD. The Gallantry Awards portal is being run by a dedicated team under the Centre for Military History and Conflicts Studies at the United Service Institution of India, India's oldest think tank, which was established in 1870.

Unprecedented Participation

Aligned with the Republic Day celebrations by the MoD, in coordination with the MoE, Veer Gatha 4.0 for the year 2024-25 saw a total of 176 lakh entries from school students belonging across 36 states and union territories.

At the school level, various projects and activities were conducted from 16 Sep to 31 Oct 2024. Project Veer Gatha 4.0 presented a variety of thought-provoking topics for essay and paragraph writing. The students had an opportunity to write about their chosen role models, particularly focusing on Gallantry Award recipients.

They were also encouraged to explore the inspiring lives of freedom fighters, the 1857 First War of Independence, and the significant role of tribal uprisings in India's freedom struggle.

This diverse array of topics not only enhanced the quality of the entries, but also deepened participants' understanding of India's rich historical and cultural legacy.

The project involved schools conducting activities at the local level, nationwide interaction programmes by Gallantry awardees (both offline and online), and the submission of top entries

via MyGov portal. The MoD bridged the gap between the armed forces and the civilian population by organising the interactions of the children with the Gallantry awardees in various schools across the country. Interactive sessions have been a commendable part of the project where students got to interact live with the heroes they have heard of or read about. Their engagement extended beyond physical visits, with many armed forces members connecting with schools through video conferencing, narrating their stories of bravery to inquisitive young minds and providing them with a unique source of both inspiration and education, offering first-hand narratives of courage and sacrifice.

The school-level activities concluded on 31 Oct 2024. Following evaluations at the state and district levels, nearly 4,029 entries were submitted for national-level evaluation, where top 100 entries were selected as 'Super 100' winners. They were divided into four categories with 25 winners each: Preparatory Stage (Grades 3-5), Middle Stage (Grades 6-8), Secondary Stage (Grades 9-10), and Higher Secondary Stage (Grades 11-12).

With participation of 45 lakh students, Uttar Pradesh (UP) achieved the top spot in the list of number of students' nomination during Veer Gatha 4.0. UP not only crossed its last year's figure of 39 lakh participations but also surpassed Delhi, which had the highest nominations from students last year. Delhi secured the second position with 18 lakh nominations, followed by Bihar with 13 lakhs. UP has set a new standard in the Veer Gatha Project, not only enhancing students' respect for bravery but also fostering their creativity and motivation.

The remarkable achievement of the 'Super 100' winners is exemplified by the impressive strength of 66 girl students. Maharashtra leads the pack with eight girl students, closely followed by Bihar and Gujarat with seven, and six female winners from Karnataka. All the five winners from Manipur are female, a remarkable achievement for the northeastern state. The entries received are also reflective of socio-linguistic diversity in the country with entries in Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Gujarati, Odia, Assamese, Tamil, Malayalam, Telegu, Kannada, and Marathi, in addition to Hindi and English, underscoring the richness of India's cultural and linguistic tapestry.

The success of this competition owes much to the indispensable roles played by state and district nodal officers in steering the project to its completion. Amidst all these achievements, it's crucial to acknowledge the commendable contribution of teachers, principals, the Gallantry Award winners from Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force, who have interacted with the students all across the country for their encouragement and motivation to create exceptional works. Whether in the remote villages of Ladakh, the inaccessible regions of Andaman-Nicobar, the northeastern region, or the Southern part of the country, these officers exhibited unwavering determination.

The commitment of various stakeholders displayed throughout the event reflects their shared commitment to excellence and teamwork.

Felicitation Ceremony

The felicitation of the 'Super 100' winners was done jointly by the MoE and MoD on 25 Jan. Each winner was awarded a cash prize of Rs. 10,000. There were four winners in each category at the

district level and eight winners at the state/UT level, who were felicitated at district and state/UT level, respectively.

During the event, Param Vir Chakra awardee Subedar Major Sanjay Kumar shared his inspiring experience from the 1999 Kargil War, urging students to embody the values of bravery, selflessness, and integrity in their lives. “True bravery lies not only in combat but in standing up for what is right in everyday life,” he said, inspiring the young participants.

Speaking on the occasion, MoE Shri Dharmendra Pradhan emphasised that initiatives like Veer Gatha educate school students about the valour and sacrifices of the brave Gallantry Award winners while nurturing the creativity of young minds. He also noted that this initiative would help instill values of patriotism, grit, and national pride, inspiring students to contribute to the nation’s progress.

Shri Rajnath Singh in his address made special mention of a Class 10 student Nemneineng from Manipur, who had lost her parents when she was a child. He commended her perseverance for not giving up her studies despite numerous difficulties and securing a place among the winners. He asserted that a hero works for the upliftment of the nation; whose work gives a new direction to the society. He stated that ‘India’s youth are our future heroes and they will play a major role in realising the PM’s vision for ‘Viksit Bharat’ by 2047’.^[1]

Conclusion

The project, which is a remarkable collaboration between the MoD and the MoE, aims at raising the awareness about Gallantry awardees’ acts of bravery and the life stories of these heroes. The project continues to nurture patriotism and civic values, inspiring young minds to celebrate the heroic acts of India’s Gallantry awardees.

The journey of Project Veer Gatha from edition 1.0 to 4.0 has been unprecedented, expanding the reach of the competition and its scope across the length and breadth of the country.

The participation of 176 lakh students from around 2.31 lakh schools indicates the incredible momentum widespread impact and success of this initiative. The bar is being raised substantively each year not only regarding the number of students participating but also in the quality of their submissions and enthusiasm in participation. It is doubtful if there is any such competition held for schools across the globe. National pride remains the most crucial aspect for the development of any country.

Endnotes

^[1] PIB, Raksha Mantri & Minister of Education felicitate Super-100 winners of Veer Gatha 4.0, 25 January 2025 <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2096077>

Major General Jagatbir Singh, VSM (Retd) is a Distinguished Fellow at the USI of India. Commissioned in 1981 into the 18 Cavalry, he has held various important command and Staff appointments including command of an Armoured Division.

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