

Veergatha 3.0 Sees Historic Participation Across the Country

Introduction

In 2021, the Government of India launched the '*Veer Gatha Project*' as a part of *Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav* (Elixir of energy of independence) under which the government introduced several events to mark the 75th year of India's independence. Project Veer Gatha was instituted under the Gallantry Awards Portal of the Ministry of Defence, the content for which is developed and curated by the United Service Institution of India (USI), India's oldest think tank. The Project aims to disseminate the details of the acts of bravery of the Gallantry Awardees and the life stories of these brave hearts among the school students aligning with the value of 'Nation First'.

Project *Veer Gatha* deepened this noble aim by providing a platform for the school students to participate in creative projects/activities based on gallantry award winners. According to the press release from the Ministry of Education, *Veer Gatha* project was launched to inspire school children, to instill a spirit of civic consciousness and to raise awareness about the stories of war and war heroes. The project aims to disseminate details of brave acts and life stories of the officers/personnel of the Indian Armed Forces, Police and Paramilitary Forces and civilians, among the students and thereby instilling a sense of national pride and patriotism.

Students were motivated to do different projects in the form of poems/paragraphs/essays/paintings/multimedia presentations on India's gallantry award winners and the 25 best projects were rewarded jointly by the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Education at a national felicitation program. As part of the project and to increase awareness among school students about the gallantry award winners, the Ministry of Defence, through the Army, Navy and Airforce, organised numerous virtual/face-to-face awareness workshops, seminars and webinars for schools across the country. During these interactive sessions, queries of students were answered, and short videos/presentations/documentaries/brochures and various other resource materials were shared with students.

Veer Gatha 1.0 and 2.0

Veer Gatha Project 1.0 was organised by the Ministry of Defence, in partnership with the Ministry of Education and MyGov at an all-India level from 21 Oct to 20 Nov 2021, for school students of standard III to XII in all states and Union Territories. 8,03,978 students from 4,788 schools across the country participated in the project, making it a huge success. As a second part of the process, a national committee was set up to select a total of 25 students, dubbed as 'Super 25', after several rounds of evaluation and were declared winners. The selected Super 25 were felicitated on 12 Aug 2022, in New Delhi by Shri Rajnath Singh, the Hon'ble Raksha Mantri. They were invited to New Delhi as special guests of the Ministry of Defence and also received a cash prize.

After the overwhelming response and success of *Veer Gatha* 1.0, the Ministry of Defence in coordination with the Ministry of Education launched Project *Veer Gatha* 2.0 from 13 Sep 2022 to 31 Dec 2022. Project 2.0 culminated with the prize distribution ceremony on 25 Jan 2023. Under this edition, various webinars, seminars and workshops were conducted in different schools across the country. Students were involved in interactive sessions with the officers and were enlightened by the inspiring stories of the valour of the bravehearts. Similar to the first edition, under *Veer Gatha* 2.0, students made projects on gallantry award winners. The submission by the students could be made in any of the 22 scheduled languages and English.

One of the most evident aspects of *Veer Gatha* 2.0 was the overwhelming participation. The initiative witnessed a remarkable surge in participation, with a total of 19,53,676 students actively engaging in the program. This involvement extended across 36 states and Union Territories, showcasing the widespread reach and impact of the initiative. An impressive 395 districts actively participated, reflecting the deep-rooted interest and involvement at the local level. Notably, 14,472 schools enthusiastically took part, underscoring the program's effectiveness in engaging educational institutions.

This substantial increase in participation stands as a testament to the successful outreach efforts and the growing recognition of *Veer Gatha* as an impactful initiative, resonating with a diverse audience and making strides towards fostering a sense of patriotism and values among the youth of the nation.

In *Veer Gatha* 2.0, a notable improvement was the introduction of direct dialogues between students and Gallantry Awardees, elevating the program's impact. This enhancement allowed students to engage directly with real-life heroes, providing them with a unique source of both inspiration and education, offering first-hand narratives of courage and sacrifice.

Project *Veer Gatha* has now come a long way since its inception, evolving and expanding with each edition. The third edition of the project, the most recent phase, embodies the continuous effort to honour gallantry and inculcate patriotism among the students of India. This edition is a testament to the growing impact and reach of the project, inspiring a significant number of schools and students across the country.

***Veer Gatha* 3.0,**

Launched on 13 Jul 2023, Project *Veer Gatha* 3.0 introduced a range of thought-provoking topics for essay and paragraph writing. Students were given the option to explore themes such as their chosen role model, particularly focusing on gallantry award winners. Furthermore, students were encouraged to delve into the life stories of any freedom fighter that inspired them such as Rani Laxmibai. The suggested topics also included the 1857 First War of Independence, and the

significant role of Tribal Uprising in the Freedom Struggle. This diverse set of topics not only enriched the content of *Veer Gatha* 3.0, but also fostered a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural heritage among the participants.

Veer Gatha 3.0 signified a pivotal advancement in the project's trajectory. This was achieved through the insights gained from previous editions, addressing inherent shortcomings/gaps that were identified to enhance the project's effectiveness. Initiatives like; broader media coverage, efficient coordination with stakeholders, streamlined information dissemination, and reinforcement of submission guidelines through video conferencing led to the paramount improvements.

A significant initiative in *Veer Gatha* 3.0 was the deliberate engagement of *Bal-Shakti* (Child Power) and *Yuva-Shakti* (Youth Power), the immense potential and vitality inherent in school students. This was achieved through the infusion of inspirational messages, empowering them to embrace the spirit of heroism and patriotism. Additionally, a continuous guidance system was instituted for coordinators, providing ongoing support, and ensuring seamless execution of the project. These refinements emphasise '*Samagrata me Shakti*' (The Power of Inclusivity) within *Veer Gatha* 3.0, highlighting the dedication to enhancing the overall experience, with a specific focus on achieving broader impact and deeper engagement in education. A remarkable facet of *Veer Gatha* 3.0 is its extensive reach, transcending geographical boundaries and institutional affiliations. The project's inclusivity is a profound step towards nurturing a deep sense of patriotism and honouring the gallantry award recipients, affirming its escalating impact.

The project's execution involved schools conducting activities at their level; nationwide interaction programmes by Gallantry awardees in various schools in offline and online modes and the submission of top entries to the MyGov portal. The school-level activities for *Veer Gatha* 3.0 were concluded on 30 Sep 2023.

Historic Participation

Project 3.0 made history with an unprecedented participation of 1,36,87,581 students from 2,42,834 schools, including 32,283 Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)-affiliated and 2,10,551 non-CBSE schools. In the national-level evaluation, 3,891 entries aimed to secure a spot among the top 100. A defining feature of this edition was overcoming of linguistic, cultural barriers, and institutional ties. The outreach extended from Ladakh to Tamil Nadu and from Manipur to Gujarat. The winning entries showcased linguistic diversity, including Urdu, Punjabi, Gujarati, Assamese, Tamil, and Marathi, in addition to Hindi and English. The event facilitated an exceptional 168 interactions with Gallantry Awardees, underscoring an unprecedented level of engagement. *Veer Gatha* 3.0 impact surpassed numerical achievements, emerging as the most geographically inclusive edition. Notably, among the Super 100 Winners, 65 female students emphasised its significant influence, with Odisha leading at eight girls, followed by Bihar with seven. Additionally, two girls from Jammu and Kashmir and five from the North-eastern region of Manipur made noteworthy contributions.

The earlier editions of *Veer Gatha* had a limited number of 25 winners at the national level. With the significant expansion of winners to 100 at the National level and four winners each at

District level and eight winners each at State level in *Veer Gatha* 3.0, the current edition opens up more opportunities for recognition and validation of the remarkable efforts exhibited by students.

The Third Edition has thus contributed to its wider outreach and motivation for the students to participate in *Veer Gatha* 3.0. The Super 100 at the national level, were jointly felicitated by the Shri Rajnath Singh, the Raksha Mantri and Shri Dharmendra Pradhan the Education Minister on 25 Jan 2024. Each winner received a cash prize of INR. 10,000, a medal and a certificate. The event was graced by prominent personalities including the Chief of Defence Staffs, the three Service Chiefs, the Defence Secretary, Secretary (Higher Education), and Param Vir Chakra awardee Subedar Major and Honorary Captain Yogendra Singh Yadav.

Conclusion

In a break from tradition, Shri Rajnath Singh handed over the podium to one of the winners Sushri Barnali Sahu, a student of Class 11, DAV Public School, Cuttack, Odisha to address the gathering on his behalf, a gesture that struck a chord with the students assembled for the event. “Even though Ms. Barnali hails from a non-Hindi state, she read out the speech fluently. Her exceptional effort was appreciated by the Raksha Mantri and other dignitaries present at the event”, the Defence Ministry said in a statement.

Veer Gatha Project 3.0 is not only a celebration of bravery and sacrifice but also a testament to the creativity and patriotic spirit of the nation's youth. The increase of participation from the students from 8 lakhs to 19 lakhs and now to 137 lakhs serves as a reminder that the stories of gallantry award winners continue to inspire and shape the future of India.

End Notes

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