PROJECT VEER GATHA: INSPIRING TALES OF VALOUR OF SELFLESS SACRIFICE AND COURAGE

Our soldiers, seamen and airmen valiantly guard our borders every day to uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation and ensure we breathe the air of freedom. They willingly make the ultimate sacrifice when called upon to do so in order to uphold our values and protect our citizens. To honour their steadfast dedication and acknowledge their brave acts, Gallantry Awards were instituted. The Gallantry awards are symbolic of a soldier's selfless sacrifice and heroic valour in the battlefield.

After independence, three awards - Param Vir Chakra, Maha Vir Chakra and Vir Chakra, were instituted by Government of India on 26 January 1950. Later, on 04 January 1952 three other Gallantry Awards were instituted namely- Ashoka Chakra Class- I, Ashoka Chakra Class-II and Ashoka Chakra Class-III later renamed as Ashoka Chakra, Kirti Chakra and Shaurya Chakra respectively. These awards are divided as War Time and Peace Time Awards respectively.

An online portal dedicated to the gallantry award winners, bestowed since Independence, was launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in 2017. The online portal, http://gallantryawards.gov.in, has a comprehensive database comprising of text, photos, videos, recordings of both written and oral records of all the awardees since 1947 that is regularly updated.

Gallantry Award Portal Website

Source: https://www.gallantryawards.gov.in/

Since its launch in 2017, the portal has undergone several transformational changes. The Hon'ble Prime Minister had articulated the vision of the government as nation-building, where every individual is involved. As a diverse country with multi-ethnicities and cultures, the essence of plurality in India is bound with the thread of nationalism. To ignite a spirit of patriotic fervour among the citizens of the country, the Ministry of Defence conceptualised and developed the Gallantry Awards Portal Project (GAP). The vision statement identified in initiating the GAP project is -

"To transform India into a strong nation by enhancing patriotic and civic consciousness of our citizens, using digital technology."

The project aims in enhancing the cause of nation-building by honouring the valiant soldiers of our Armed Forces and civilians by bringing the stories of their heroic deeds and sacrifices to the nation through digital technology. The research and content development domain of the portal is currently managed by United Services Institution of India; a national security and defence services think tank located in New Delhi.

The portal currently has accounts of more than 4000 awardees, of which there are 21 Param Vir Chakra's, 212 Maha Vir Chakra's, 1327 Vir Chakra's, 97 Ashoka Chakra's, 486 Kirti Chakra's and 2122 Shaurya Chakra awardees. To engage with the citizens and help imbibe the spirit of civic consciousness, the portal has conducted various events and competitions like

quizzes, selfie competitions, video, caption and photo of the week contest. Another weekly event of the portal is National Cadet Corps (NCC) Statue Cleaning Drive. The NCC has undertaken the task of statue cleaning of gallantry awardees all across the country, the videos and photos of these activities are shared on the portal.

To ensure that citizens enjoy a user-friendly experience and engage in the portal various unique features have been introduced. Gallantrypedia is a feature in the portal, wherein the citizens can share stories/images/videos of any awardee, available with them. Other features like E-books and E-Magazines featuring the histories and biographies of the awardees are also available. A visitor to the site is also provided the opportunity to pay a tribute and take a pledge. Another unique feature of the portal is the Virtual Museum which enhances the aesthetics of the portal. It gives the users a life like experience by navigating them through the galleries, which is informative and also serves as a visual treat. To keep the citizens abreast of the activities and enrich their knowledge about the gallant heroes, updates are also shared through the official social media handles.

To honour the acts of bravery and sacrifice of the officers / personnel of the Armed Forces, other lawfully constituted forces and civilians, gallantry awards are announced twice in a year – first on the occasion of the Republic Day and then on the Occasion of the Independence Day. In order to disseminate the details of bravery acts and the life stories of these brave-hearts among the students, it has been proposed by the Ministry of Defence that school students may be motivated to do projects/activities based on our gallantry award winners. Accordingly, the Project Veer Gatha 1.0 was organized from 21st October to 20th November 2021. During the felicitation event on 12 August 2022, Hon'ble Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh remarked;

"All entries were different in terms of language, creed, and custom. But there was one thing that everyone had in common, they had their own beloved country - India. They were all bound by one thread, and that thread was patriotism."

Hon'ble Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh present award prize during the felicitation ceremony on 12 August 2022

Source: Photo Division, DPR, MoD

VEER GATHA

The Government of India launched "Veer Gatha Project" as a part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav under which government has been introducing several events to mark to 75th year of India's independence. Veer Gatha project was launched to inspire school children, by making them aware with stories of war heroes and brave hearts. The project aimed to disseminate the details of acts of bravery and life stories of the officers/personnel of the Armed Forces, other lawfully constituted forces and civilians, among the students. The students were motivated to frame different projects in the form of Poem / Paragraph / Essay / Painting / Multimedia Presentation (Enactment Video) on gallantry award winners and 25 best projects were to be rewarded nationally by Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Education. As a part of the project and to increase awareness among school students about the Gallantry Award winners of our country, the Ministry of Defence, through its field organisations, Army, Navy and Airforce, organized numerous virtual/face-to-face awareness programmes/sessions of one hour duration for schools across the country. During these interactive sessions, queries of students were answered and short videos/PPTs/documentaries/brochures and various other resource material were shared with students.

VEER GATHA EDITION-1.0

The Veer Gatha Project 1.0 was organized by Ministry of Defence in partnership with Ministry of Education and MyGov at an all-India level from 21st October to 20th November 2021 for school students of standard III to XII in all States and Union Territories as well as all schools affiliated to CBSE.

The project witnessed huge number of participations of more than 8,03,900 students from 4,788 schools across the country making it a success. Students shared their essays, drawings, poems, and multimedia presentations in the honour of Bravehearts.

Students presenting their artwork on India's gallant warriors during Veer Gatha Project

As a second part of the process, a National Committee selected a total of 25 students, dubbed as "Super 25", after several rounds of evaluation and were declared the winners. The selected Super 25 were felicitated on 12 August 2022, in New Delhi by Hon'ble Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh. They were invited to New Delhi as special guests of Ministry of Defence. Furthermore, they also received a cash prize.
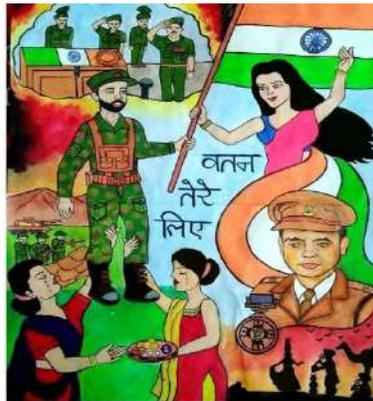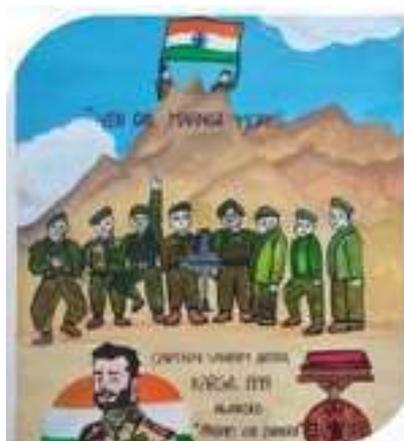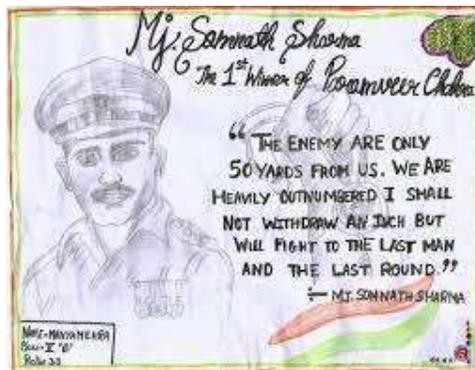
Some student entries from the First Edition of Veer Gatha Project

Out of total participations, a total of 19,123 shortlisted entries were uploaded by CBSE schools on the CBSE portal and 2701 entries were uploaded by the State Boards Schools on MyGov portal. The responsibility to evaluate the entries uploaded by CBSE schools were entrusted to 16 CBSE CoEs (Centre of Excellence) situated at different states in India. Teachers were deputed to evaluate the entries at regional level. Similarly, SCERTs were entrusted to evaluate the entries received on MyGov portal. After CBSE regional level and SCERT level evaluation,

a National Level Committee was proposed by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, who selected the projects of Top 25 students from CBSE and State Board Entries.

VEER GATHA EDITION-2

After the overwhelming response and success of Veer Gatha Edition-1, the Ministry of Defence in coordination with Ministry of Education has now decided to launch Project Veer Gatha 2.0 which is proposed to be culminated with the prize distribution ceremony in January 2023. As per last edition, the project will be open for all the schools in all States and Union Territories. Following the similar steps as earlier, the Ministry of Defence, through field formations of Army/Navy/Airforce, will organize virtual/face-to-face awareness programs/sessions of one hour duration for schools across the country and during these interactive sessions, presentations will be made by the personnel of the armed forces on operation, battles resulting in conferment of awards. As part of the initiative, it is proposed that serving gallantry award winners would visit schools located in their respective stations. The interaction of the awardees with the students is scheduled from **07.09.2022 to 09.11.2022**. The service personnel will answer queries of students. Where possible short videos/PPTs/ documentaries/brochures and other resource material will be shared with students.

As part of this project, the students can again frame different projects on gallantry award winners. Interdisciplinary and art-integrated activities like poem, essay, story, painting/drawing, videos would be considered as project activities. The best project will be rewarded nationally by MoD on the forthcoming Republic Day. The submission by the students can be made in any of the 22 Scheduled languages and English.

Students with their entries after participating in Veer Gatha Project

Project Veer Gatha 2.0 will be launched on CBSE IT platform (for CBSE schools) as well as MyGov Platform (for State Schools) for facilitating larger participation of students from all school boards in the country. Schools will need to register all participating students at the Gallantry Awards Portal of the MoD (https://www.gallantryawards.gov.in). A Unique ID will be given to all registered students. If a student's entry is selected at the school level, the Unique ID of that student will also be filled at the time of submission of entry at the CBSE/MyGov portal. Further, all unique IDs will be sent to MoD. With regard to CBSE schools, information will be available on CBSE website and with regard to schools (other than CBSE), MyGov link will be shared separately.

The Project Veer Gatha 2.0 shall be organized between 13 September 2022 to 31 December 2022. Final 25 best entries, will be selected from each category, collectively from CBSE schools and States and UTs in the following manner –

Classes	Entries to be selected
3rd to 5th	6
6th to 8th	6
9th to 10th	6
11th to 12th	7
Total	**25**

The following topics and categories have been decided by MoD to participate in the second edition of the project-

Classes	Activity	Suggestive Topic
3rd to 5th	Poem/Paragraph/Story(150 words)/Painting/Drawing	i. _____(Gallantry Award winner) has instilled the values of courage, bravery and selflessness in me. I will inculcate them in my daily life by_____
6th to 8th	Poem/Paragraph/Story(300 words)/Painting/Drawing/ Video	
9th to 10th	Poem/Essay (750 words)/Painting/Drawing/ Video	Or
		ii. I will honour my role model _____(Gallantry Award winner) by taking a pledge to _____
11th to 12th	Poem/Essay (1000 words)/Painting/Drawing/ Video	Or
		iii. If you are given an opportunity to live the life of _____(Gallantry Award Winner), what would you do?
		Or
		(iv) _____(Gallantry Award winner) has inspired to join the Armed Forces of India. I will join Armed Forces to_____

The project shall be open for all schools in all states and Union Territories as well as all schools affiliated to CBSE. Schools will need to register all participating students at the Gallantry Awards Portal of the MoD (https://www.gallantryawards.gov.in). Nodal officers from the respective schools will be responsible to get the entries of the student uploaded on CBSE platform or MyGov in case of SCERTs to ensure genuine entries in the competition. This time it's been aimed to make Veer Gatha a family affair wherein the students and their family members will together understand this learning activity.

In the continuation of the Veer Gatha 1.0 Project, all 25 selected entries will be awarded a cash prize of Rs. 10,000 by Hon'ble Raksha Mantri and winners would be invited as special guests for Republic Day Celebration at New Delhi on 26 January 2023.

 Do log into our website at https://www.gallantryawards.gov.in and thereafter do register yourself.

To know more about the Project and Gallantry Award Portal, the following links can be referred:

1. Gallantry Award Portal: https://www.gallantryawards.gov.in
2. Veer Gatha Project: https://innovateindia.mygov.in/veer-gatha-project
3. CBSE: Veer Gatha Project: https://cbseit.in/cbse/2021/veer/index.aspx