

Portraits of Patriots

*Nikhil Matalia**

Art has the power to heal and an initiative called “Portraits of Patriots” is a one of its kind unique projects led by Hutansh Verma which came into existence in May 2014. Hutansh Verma, a Delhi-based artist, never thought that a frank remark made by his father would one day blossom into a project that will bring honour and smiles to the families of Indian army soldiers killed in action in various places across the country. Artist Hutansh Verma makes portraits of Indian soldiers killed in action and then personally gifts them to their families free of cost all over India under this initiative. Currently, under his initiative, over 165 portraits have reached such families and many such portraits are ready to be delivered to the families. He keeps such soldiers alive through his artworks. The portraits that he delivers convey a message that the soldier in the portrait is a hero and they are getting the respect that they deserve. Also, the bonding, warmth, oneness, and the happiness that it fosters in the family members matters a lot.

Hutansh says “This initiative was my father’s idea. He knew my love for painting. One day, while he was watching the news of an Indian army soldier who was killed in action in Jammu and Kashmir, he suggested that I should make portraits of these soldiers and gift it to their families. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Gujarat to Arunachal Pradesh, I have travelled all over India to deliver the portraits. I have met so many families and the most common thing that I found in all of them was that via



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that portrait they all felt that their son has come back home again. It's a very emotional moment for these families”.



Hutansh chooses a few photographs, in consultation with the families, and then he starts the journey of a making the portrait. His first portrait was of Veer Captain Vijayant Thapar, after he researched upon Kargil War (1999). “When my father saw it, he asked me to get in contact with the family and when I did, the family told me that

it was like seeing their son again in person” he says. He adds “initially, I thought I will courier the portraits to the families but again it was on my father’s advice that I decided to go and deliver them personally. I also wanted to pay my respects and tributes to guardians of India. As reports about my portraits spread through social media, many families, Indian army and even friends of such soldiers have approached me to make the portraits. My wife and my younger brother also travel with me and help me in this initiative. The blessing of the families is all I want in exchange of the portraits. The money for travel is through self-finance mostly but I also get donations occasionally. I plan my visits on holidays / weekends and it takes around 24-30 hours to make a portrait, depending on the quality of the individual’s photograph. I feel a deep sense of personal connection with not only the portraits but also with all the families,” he adds

He tells of an incident that “on completing a portrait of Param Vir Chakra awardee Late Captain Manoj Kumar Pandey, I was unable to go and give it to the family because of financial constraints. I wrote about this on my social media pages. A generous man, who never disclosed his identity, reached out to me, and offered me a sponsored trip. So, I believe if you are on a way to do good, things will eventually fall into place on their own,” he says.

Many times, families of the veer soldiers say their son has again returned back when they saw their smiling portraits. One of the other aim of this initiative is to ensure that families should never feel that the sacrifices of their kids are forgotten by the country. Each of his portrait is painted in the background of Tiranga and the black and white picture of the veer soldier of Bharat. The message is to have oneness with the families and to remember their brave sons. There is lot to talk, to listen and to say rather than just monetary assistance to such families. Soldiers had sacrificed their lives for the nation just to see the tricolor fly high. They deserve every bit of respect for their bravery.

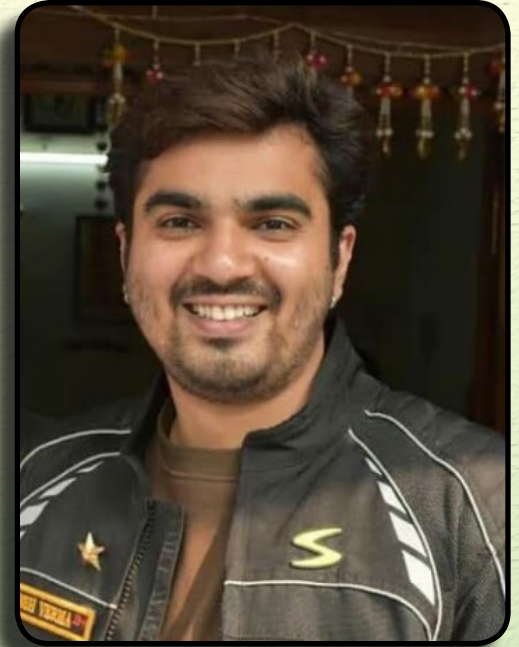
Hutansh believes that if you want to do something for a soldier then be an Indian worth fighting for. So, that’s how Hutansh pays tributes to the Guardians of Bharat and also expresses his gratitude to Indian Army for being always there. He also urges everyone to at least simply smile and salute if they see a soldier or a convoy of soldiers as a mark of respect to them. At last, he wants to say that "you don't have to wear a uniform with stars to serve the country" but actions taken at an individual level can also help serve the country in every little way.

Jai Hind...

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About Hutansh

Hutansh Verma is born and brought up in Delhi and currently, he is an art teacher at the Manav Rachna International School, Noida. He is a postgraduate in fine arts and from his childhood, art is his passion. He is also an avid motorcyclist and loves riding almost as much as he loves his art. He is married and currently lives in Ghaziabad with his mother and younger brother. He has covered numerous parts of India while carrying out his mission of delivering portraits of soldiers who are killed in action across the country.



Hutansh with The Indian Army Chief General Bipin Rawat, who later become 1st CDS of India

Reviewer Speaks

This article on Hutansh Verma by Nikhil Matalia, extolling his zeal to rekindle the joy of life in the families of brave sons of India who gave the supreme sacrifice, in defence of this nation, is indeed a wonderful eulogy paid to Hutansh Verma by Nikhil.

The article portrays the selfless service by this young artist which is truly stuff of legends and a page out of scriptures of patriotism, bravery and love for India. Hutansh's mission is unique in its aim and in execution, wherein he brings alive through his artistic talent, the brave who has fallen in the line of duty. By presenting his art work to the family of the martyr, he not only is showing his respect to the brave in the portrait but also praising and rejoicing the contribution of his family for imbibing such noble values which made the soldier pay the supreme sacrifice, without batting an eyelid. In doing so he also glorifies the rich ethos, traditions and customs of the Indian Army and of India.

Hutansh's noble service to the nation is indeed worth emulating by all young citizens of this country and his contribution must get nationwide recognition, inspiring the young generation. It will motivate the youth of this nation to not only don the "OGs" and if not, to seek and reach out to the families of the martyred soldiers and give them solace, happiness and help, to assure them that the nation has not forgotten them and that the supreme sacrifice of their son/ husband/ father is indeed treasured and celebrated.

Nikhil too has done a yeoman service to not only Hutansh but also to the nation by penning this patriotic act of young Hutansh Verma, in a bid to awaken and inculcate patriotism in the reader, expecting from them little selfless acts in nation building.

Well done Nikhil and let this be the beginning of many more josh inspiring write ups from your pen.

Jai Hind. ☐☐☐

*Col. RNG Dastidar
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