

# Vardi Ka Samman: Beyond The Threads



**Akshi Kohli\***

Sewaj Neesim Foundation is a registered NGO working for the cause “Vardi Ka Samman”. The NGO addresses the long standing issue of what should be done with the uniforms once they have served our soldiers and need to be retired. Afterall, the uniform is the living saga of a soldier’s unwavering commitment, selfless sacrifice and unilateral patriotism, the *raison d’etre*. But as we all know, most things in life exist only for a finite period of time. Such is the case with the uniforms of our braves, as well. The uniforms are not just a piece of clothing they represent a myriad of emotions. And to honour these uniforms and the emotions attached with them, Sewaj Neesim Foundation came into being on 22 December 2020.

The mission of the NGO was set as following:

- Honoring the uniforms of the forces by graceful disposal.
- Upcycling old uniforms into useful products to donate to the underprivileged.
- Contributing to a better environment through the process of Upcycling.
- Generating employment for the locals.
- Honoring the theme of 'Make in India'.

Founded by Maj Gen Ashim Kohli, SM\*\* (retd) along with his daughter Akshi Kohli, the NGO commenced operations with high spirits soon after the registration. In the beginning, as the country was battling with threats of COVID-19, the NGO was working with determination to ensure relief to those in need. With the collaboration from IIT Delhi backed organisation SWATRIC, the first lot of uniforms were collected and converted into face masks with filters for protection from the lethal virus. The masks were then

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\* Co-founder  
Sewaj Neesim Foundation

distributed for free to those in need, like residents of the local slums, orphanages, old-age homes and other NGOs supporting those with special needs. Needless to say, the efforts were appreciated and it was all the encouragement that was required to further our efforts for the cause.

Once the waves of COVID receded and life started getting back to normal, the NGO decided to expand product range to meet the requirements. We started making school bags for children. Our school bags have been distributed to children belonging to the Economically Weaker Section across the country. From the high mountains of Dras in Ladakh to hills of Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu. From small green villages in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland in the far east to the dry deserts of Rajasthan and Gujarat in the West. Wherever we could reach we ensured the children received their school bags. We are grateful for the support of the Indian Army, Navy and the Airforce for supporting us in our cause.

As the time progressed, the NGO decided to put more efforts into the cause of gracefully retiring the uniforms of the armed forces. So far, the uniforms were being upcycled into new products. As the NGO grew so did the scope of work and therefore, under the cause of Vardi Ka Samman, came into being a new purpose Har Katran Kuch Kehti hai.

Dedicated to our cause, we wanted to ensure that not even the tiniest piece of the cloth from the uniforms, coming to us from our brave soldiers, should have to be discarded. To do so, even the little scrapes and bits of cloth left over from the process of upcycling, is now being used to make toys for children.

Not only that, with further collaborations between Sewaj Neesim and SWATRIC, these Katrans (leftover pieces of uniforms) and even those uniforms that cannot be upcycled due to various reasons are being recycled to make entirely new piece of fabric. Making sure to give them a new lease of life before they truly have to retire.

Since our inception we have received awards and recognitions for our work as well. The most recent being the Veteran Achiever Award presented to our Founder, Maj Gen Ashim Kohli (retd), by the Chief of Army Staff in 2024.

In 2023, At the Precedential Awards ceremony, Sewaj Neesim Foundation proudly received an award by Padma Sri And Arjuna awardee Dr. Deepa Malik for its achievement in Community Impact and Environmental Sustainability.

The NGO aims to keep expanding its work and reaching out to more people in need while honoring the services of the brave soldiers of our nation by giving their uniforms a new lease of life and the respect it deserves. We appeal to everyone to support us in

any possible way that they can to help us ensure Vardi Ka Samman. Our products can be bought for donations and they are also available as souvenirs and memorabilia for personal keep at various war memorials, including Delhi, Leh, Jaisalmer. Jai Hind.



*Pictures by Author*