Twitter Thread by Arhaan



Arhaan
@arhaan54



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[THREAD]

"Buried my heart in a pit " A broken father & a desolate graveyard.

Ather's(17) father talked to The Kashmir Walla.This is his story in his own words. Full statement on what happened from beginning to till today . ■

The oppression dies —at last. The oppression has to end.When I'm alone in my room, I can see Ather. He walks in from the doors or comes from the window. I can see him playing on the lawn. I was trembling and couldn't control myself, and on the fourth day since his killing, ++

I paced towards our ancestral graveyard — to dig a grave for my only son. That empty grave is to remember Ather. And I'll wait till my last breath for his body.

On 30 December 2020, just past 12 pm, I reached home to a group of people waiting outside my home.++

I rushed inside, anxious. "Your son has been martyred in Srinagar," my elder brother told me. But how did it happen so quickly? Munna, as we called Ather belovedly, was at home when I left for work the day before, on 29 December. When he spoke to his sister that he would be ++

going to Srinagar with a friend, he told us, "I'll return soon. Even if we stay for the night, don't worry." I trembled because he wouldn't go to Srinagar, just like this. He would not even go to Pulwama, the nearest town. ++

His phone rang switched off. Though he had informed us that his iPhone might die because he forgot the charger at home, I was worried. When he didn't return that night, I woke up at 6 am; hiding from everyone, I stayed inside my blanket and kept calling him discreetly. ++

It was still switched off.
But now, my brother told me we were running out of time. I boarded a family vehicle with Ather's mother and reached the PCR (Police Control Room) in Srinagar. ++

My son was lying inside the PCR but the police personnel at the gate didn't allow us. "I'm his father. I want to see his face," I pleaded. I pleaded more. And more. But they didn't allow me, saying, "Wait till the higher officer calls them."
++

I stood outside and cried in helplessness. After one hour, they allowed me to go inside. Ather was lying on a trolley outside the complex. He was stripped naked, draped in a blanket, put inside a body bag. I wanted to hug him, press him close to my chest. ++

As I kissed his forehead, they pushed me back and took him away. They didn't touch him; one personnel got into the vehicle, another just dumped the body bag on the floor — the floor where we keep our shoes — like he was an animal. ++

"At least put him on a seat," I shouted. But they pushed me outside and drove away. When the vehicle came on the main road, I lay bare on the road. To pass, they will have to drive over my body. Police personnel dragged me away. "Kill me!" I screamed at them.
++

This was my son. His body was my right. Even if a Pakistani or an Indian dies at the border their bodies are returned. But in my own country, I have no rights — not even over the body of my son. ++

Ask a father about the pain; what did those monsters lose? Ask a mother who raised her son with her sweat and blood; who kept him in her womb for nine months and fed him. Ask her about this pain. ++

They talk of Rayees Kachroo — the man who was killed three years ago. There should have been at least a report in the police station, or army personnel would have come to tell me something. For a minute, I didn't know what he was doing — they knew? ++

They have so many agencies like CID [Criminal Investigation Department], they would have come to me that teach your son. How did he become a terrorist in two hours, as these forces call him?++

Ather Wani, Kashmir Srinagar encounter, Mushtaq Wani, Kashmir, Srinagar encounter
Inside the room of Ather Wani in Bellow, Pulwama. Photograph by Umer Asif for The Kashmir Walla.
We drove towards Sopore, in Baramulla district (north Kashmir), ++

in the same vehicle in which I had come from Pulwama.I had heard that that's where they take them to bury, in graveyards.Ather's mother boarded another vehicle and chased the police.I was only half-way when they called me to say,"Ather is being taken to Sonamarg."I drove back.++

Sonamarg has wild animals; what if these people would just dump my son in the snow and a wild animal takes him away from me? I cannot trust this country anymore. ++

I found my family stopped at Gund camp at 4:30 pm. There, CRPF [Central Reserve Police Force] and police stood with batons in their hands. And they stopped us also. For the sake of humanity,I asked them as a father to know where my son is buried? ++

I cried — and cried with his mother, but they didn't allow us.
The CRPF personnel were laughing at me. My Kashmiri brothers, who were there on duty, laughed at me. ++

They took the batons out. I was ready to be killed. I asked them to kill me, and bury me next to Ather."Or shoot me," I told them."But I won't stop."After two hours,I left for Sonamarg, about twenty-three kilometers away, with Ather's mother, sister, and grandmother, on foot.++

I reached a village, in darkness. I told the villagers everything and asked for a vehicle till Sonamarg. They were frightened of the forces too. Giving me a car, they said, would unleash the government forces on them tomorrow.
++

I asked the females to stay in the village and I turned back towards the Gund camp to arrange a vehicle. After a few more pleads and half an hour, I was given a vehicle. I drove with my brother and picked the women en route.++

Near 7:30 pm, I spotted the police vehicle in Sonamarg on the road. I sighed that I reached on time. I asked for permission: "Can I see my son now?"++

As asked, I and my brother picked up Ather's body and put him on a wooden slab — eight-inch wide and seven feet long. There was no vision — we were denied any light. Shivering in cold, I switched on the flashlight of my phone and hugged Ather tightly.++

I took off my pheran and his mother cleaned his body: a grave wound behind his ear, still bleeding; two bullet shots on his chest, at heart; hands bruised with rope, and the skin of his nose and face were peeled off. He was so brutally killed.++

"Read the janaza if you want, but hurry," the personnel insisted.

I held my son's corpse on a shoulder and started climbing a small hill, covered in snow. It was so dark that I couldn't see who else shouldered my son, other than my brother, to the grave.
++

But the wooden slab was small and my son would slide down, again and again. I held Ather by his shroud; I was afraid my son would fall down. ++

The only light bulb in nothingness lightened the grave that wasn't. It was a pit,dug by JCB [Excavator].How could I bury my son here,I wondered."That is how we do it"the personnel said."If U talk loudly,the army will beat u up." But what would I be afraid of?I was already dead.+

When the women were crying on the road, I entered the pit and my brother lowered the body. Ather was bleeding a lot; the shroud was stained. As I buried the piece of my heart, Ather opened his eyes and looked at me. I put my hand over his eyes and said, "Close them, son." ++

They shut the light and asked us to leave.

My heart knows how I buried him in the snow — just three graves in nowhere. I felt like my heart would come out of my mouth. If I go back, I might not be able to identify the grave. I never got the time to mourn my son. ++

Sonamarg is a famous tourist spot. Those tourists should also have a look at the scenery of graves of my son and others. They should see what is happening in our Kashmir. It was such a beautiful place, they have made it a graveyard. ++

Every night, before I go to sleep, I think about how to live the next day? I'm scared in my own room. I swear on my son, I'm scared of sleeping. Of waking up.++

All I want is his body. I want a grave to sit next to and cry, mourn my son. Return the body and I will bury him in the death of a night, in silence. There will be no procession, I promise.
++

Or kill my family in a fake encounter and bury us near my son, in Sonamarg — because they can't give us justice.
++

Alongside Ather Wani, two more youth from south Kashmir — Aijaz Ganaie and Zubair Lone — were also killed in the alleged gunfight. Their families have claimed their innocence too.

#ReturnTheBodies

END

Read full details this article ■■
https://t.co/HaKFP6OQOj

> #FirstPerson | As I buried the piece of my heart, Ather opened his eyes and looked at me. I put my hand over his eyes and said, \u201cClose them, son.\u201d
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>
> — The Kashmir Walla (@tkwmag) January 17, 2021