

SPECIAL ISSUE



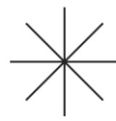
SAYYID AL-SHUHADA

MUHAMMAD ASHRAF KHAN

SEHRAI



**THE REVOLUTIONARY
RESURGENCE**



Ashlal

The phrase “Ashlal,” which translates to “beloved Ashraf” or “dear Ashraf,” is a term of endearment used by Syed Ali Geelani for Shaheed Ashraf Sehrai when he first asked his mother and brother to send him to Sopore to look after the Madrassa. This kick-started his journey, which left a great legacy of Ashlal. Therefore, this profile will be started with the same name.

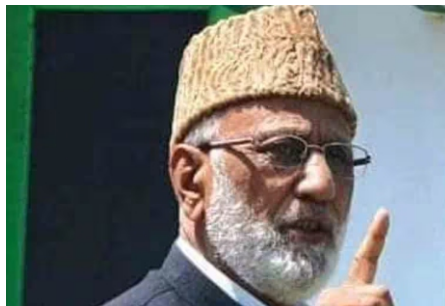
The meaning of the term is explained to the audience. In the cultural context of Kashmir, it is common to abbreviate names and add the suffix “-lal” as a signifier of affection and closeness. The suffix “lal” is akin to saying “dear” or “beloved,” making it a special addition that transforms a regular name into one that conveys warmth and affection.

In Kashmiri culture, it is customary to shorten a person’s name as a familiar or affectionate gesture. For example, Firdous becomes “Fir,” Javid becomes “Jajj,” and Ashraf becomes “Ash.”

The suffix “-lal” is added to these shortened names. This suffix expresses affection, fondness, or importance of the person to the speaker. Here are some examples: Firlal is from “Fir”; Jajlal is from “Jajj”; Ashlal is from “Ash”; Mamlal is from “Maam or Muhammad”.



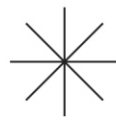
A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ASHRAF SEHRAI



Ashraf Sehrai was born on March 23, 1944, in the Tikkipora village located in the Lolab Valley of Kupwara district, which is situated along the Line of Control in northern Kashmir. His father, Shamas-ud-din Khan, belonged to a family that had migrated from the Swat area of Pakistan before the partition of the subcontinent.

Sehrai's educational journey began in his native village of Tikkipora, where he attended primary school. His early academic promise was evident, and he moved on to Sogam High School for further studies. There, he demonstrated his intelligence and shy nature, excelling particularly in debates and discussions that spanned religious and political topics. This intellectual prowess earned him a scholarship, or Wazifa, in his 10th class, recognizing his command over Persian, Arabic, and Urdu languages. He passed his matriculation exam in 1959.

After completing high school, Sehrai pursued higher education at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), earning a Bachelor of Arts (Honors) in Urdu. Earning prestigious Urdu degrees, Aadebe Mahir and Aadebe Kamil further enhanced his academic credentials. During his school years, he was fondly taught by Kashmiri Pandit teachers, including Gopi Nath Kaul, who taught him English and left a lasting impression on him.



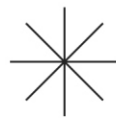
Sehrai's introduction to Jama'at-e-Islami, Jammu, and Kashmir came early through his family. Established in 1946, the organization reached his village in 1948 through his elder brother, Muhammad Yousuf. In 1949, then five, Sehrai's two elder brothers joined Jamaat-e-Islami as its basic members and started visiting the organization's district office in Kupwara. They contacted the Jamat's district head (Amir-e-Zila), a young orator named Syed Ali Geelani with extraordinary motivational skills. Whenever Geelani would visit Lolab, where he had relatives, he would visit Sehrai's house to meet his newly christened Jamati brothers. Influenced by his brother and his high school headmaster, Ghulam Mohammad Sherwani, Sehrai grew up in an environment deeply infused with Islamic teachings and political discussions.

After Sehrai appeared in his class 10 examination, Geelani came to his house and asked him to teach at a Jamat-run seminary in Sopore till his results were out. "I was unsure if I could teach as I was too young," recalls Sehrai. "But he (Geelani sahab) convinced me and my brothers."

Before Sherai left for Sopore to join Jamat's Darsgah, the seminary formally, his widowed mother took Geelani aside and said: Yih haz chuiie hawal (I am putting him in your custody). "Since that day he is with me as my friend and companion," said Geelani.

By 1960, he was officially admitted as a member (rukun) and subsequently managed a madrassa in Baramulla for nine months starting in 1963. In December 1963, Kashmir was literally on the edge after the mysterious disappearance of Moh-e-Muqaddas (holy relic) from Hazratbal shrine. Within days it created a storm of sorts as around fifty thousand people, carrying black flags marched towards the shrine. To

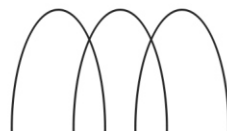


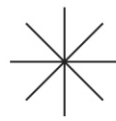


press the government for the relic's recovery, Mirwaiz Mohammad Farooq formed Moh-e-Muqadas Majlis-e-Amal, an amalgam of different parties, including Jamat-e-Islami and other religious parties. At first, their aim was to ensure the return of the holy relic, but once it was returned in January 1964, a part of the amalgam started supporting Sheikh Abdullah's boycott call against Congress in Kashmir. "The boycott call was so effective that local Congressmen couldn't even move out of their homes," recalls Sehrai. "When Mir Qasim's mother died, almost nobody attended her funeral."

His political activities eventually led to his arrest on March 13, 1965. He was imprisoned in Srinagar Central Jail for about 20 months. After Sheikh Abdullah gave the call for the social boycott of Congress workers and its sympathizers in Kashmir, he proceeded on Hajj, the Mecca pilgrimage, with his wife and friend Afzal Beigh. From there, he went to Egypt, England, and Algeria, where he met Chu-zu-Lai, the first premier of the People's Republic of China. This enraged Delhi as Chu-zu-Lai had invited Sheikh Abdullah to China, apparently at the behest of Pakistan. On May 8, 1965, after Sheikh Abdullah landed in Delhi, his passport was seized, and he was arrested and sent to Ootacamund Jail. "Given his popularity, his arrest in Delhi led to widespread protests across Kashmir," recalls Sehrai. "Many protestors died in police action. I remember five people were killed in the Sonawari area alone."

As protests spiraled out of control, G M Sadiq, who was now reduced to Chief Minister instead of his original title of Wazeer-e-Aazum or Prime Minister, ordered the arrest of all political and social activists, including Jamaat-e-Islami cadre. This second wave of arrests brought Geelani to Central Jail,





Srinagar cemented their bond and created a lifelong camaraderie.

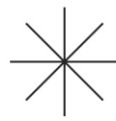
At 21, when Sehrai first stepped inside the Central Jail Srinagar, he had no idea he would be kept for such a long time. “I had just packed a few clothes when I was arrested,” recalls Sehrai. “But my main companion inside was my books.”

One book in particular that influenced Sehrai during his early years of incarceration was *Zar-e-Gul* by Pakistani author Kausar Niazi. “I had bought this book from Baramulla. And with ample free time in jail, I had almost memorized it,” recalls Sehrai.

Influenced by its poetic narration style, once Sehrai finished reading the book, he took a pen and inscribed on its last page: Sehrai. “I wrote it without any particular purpose. It was just a way of expressing myself,” recalls Sehrai. Sehrai, which loosely translates into someone who is a wanderer. Or someone whose life is full of struggles, was soon going to become Mohammad Ashraf Khan’s permanent identity. A few days later, Shah Wali Mohammad, a teacher from Sopore who once taught Sehrai, and was jailed for his affiliation with Jamaat, visited Sehrai’s prison cell as per routine. During the conversation, he started flipping through the pages of *Zar-e-Gul*. He stopped at the end of the book and read Sehrai word loudly and asked: is this your nom de plume (pen name). “He then went to Geelani and told him that Mohammad Ashraf Khan is now Sehrai.”

Once out of prison (Sehrai in November 1966; Geelani and Moulana Saaduddin in March 1967), Jamaat-e-Islami started picking up threads of its existence. In order to reaffirm its cadre that everything is hunky-dory and Jamaat stands firm, both in resolve and ideology, a large *ijtemah* (congregation or





seminar) was organized in Srinagar's Batamaloo. It was decided during the seminar that Jamaat will bring resolutions on certain key issues concerning Kashmir. Each resolution will be followed by a talk by an expert for fifteen minutes. Sehrai was asked to talk about the Kashmir issue after a resolution is presented. "I was too young to discuss such a sensitive issue," recalls Sehrai. "So, I refused and proposed Geelani's name instead. But they didn't listen and said you must do it at any cost."

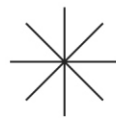
A shy young man who was hesitant to speak in front of elders finally talked about the Kashmir issue for fifteen minutes, leaving everyone in the audience spellbound by his oratory skills. "When I was called on the stage, Geelani Sahab introduced me as Sehrai. Afterward, everyone knew me by this name only," recalls Sehrai. "In a way, Geelani created my identity, both then and now."

Later that year Geelani, who was the editor of Jamaat's mouthpiece Azaan, a monthly magazine, asked Sehrai to gather views from first-time participants at the Batamaloo seminar. Sehrai talked to a number of people, collected their views in a single article, and started it with a couplet: Ek walwala i taza diya mainey dilon ko (I have given new enthusiasm to hearts). Everyone liked this article, especially Geelani, who asked him to continue writing for Azaan.

Apart from the editorial that Geelani used to write, everything from commissioning articles, designing, printing, and writing a dedicated column about happenings in Pakistan titled Safa-e-Pakistan was done by Sehrai. "My column was about political and social developments in Pakistan," recalls Sehrai. "It was widely read and appreciated."

In 1969, Sehrai started publishing a monthly magazine



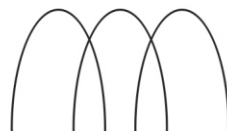


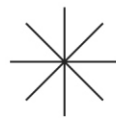
titled Tulu (sunrise), from Sopore on behalf of the local Jamaat office. Within a year of its publication, Tulu started getting letters and submissions from as far as South Africa. But in late 1970, Tulu stopped publication after it ran into trouble with local socialists for calling Pakistani poet Allama Iqbal a non-socialist personality. "It was a huge controversy that saw G M Sadiq backed socialists writing against us," recalls Sehrai. For the next few months, Sehrai and Geelani wrote long columns to defend Tulu's special issue, which they had dedicated to Allama Iqbal a few months back. Their job was to defend both Jamaat and Tulu and counter socialist propaganda.

Their main target was Ghulam Nabi Khayal, who had written long pieces in monthly Chinar, trying to expose Jamaat and its "false" claim over Allama Iqbal. Also, Geelani and Sehrai targeted a woman writer named Ashia Bhat. "It was a fake name that local socialists had created to criticize Jamaat and its cadre in various publications," claimed Sehrai. When the controversy refused to die down even after six months of writing articles and counter-articles, Sehrai wrote a postcard to Deoband-based Maulana Amir, explaining his situation. "He wrote an article in the next issue of Tulu in which he criticized Ashia Bhat and others. It was a hard-hitting article, but sadly it failed to keep socialists quiet," recalls Sehrai.

As the "Iqbal controversy" kept Sehrai busy most of the time, a few Jamaat workers in Baramulla felt alienated. They started lobbying against Tulu, saying it kept Sehrai away from other party-related works. "That was not true. I used to manage both things finely," said Sehrai. "But they didn't listen. And finally, in 1971, Tulu was closed." A few months before Tulu stopped publication, Sehrai and others were jailed once again.

Sehrai continued his involvement with Jama'at-e-Islami





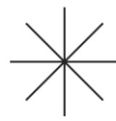
deeply influenced by Geelani's mastery of Quranic and Hadith studies and the literary works of Maulana Abul Ala Maududi. Over the years, Sehrai has remained a staunch supporter and close associate of Geelani, referring to himself as "a shadow of Geelani" from their initial collaboration in 1959 up to the later years of his life.

In November 1986, Sehrai, was released from Central Jail Jammu after serving one year of detention under the Public Safety Act (PSA) for expressing views on the freedom of Kashmir. By then, the ground situation in the valley had significantly changed with the formation of the Muslim United Front (MUF). When the 1987 elections were announced, Sehrai found himself at his home in Kupwara. His release and Syed Ali Geelani's were considered a "goodwill gesture" following the Rajiv-Farooq accord, which paved the way for elections. Sehrai recalls being kept in Jammu jail at the insistence of G M Shah, then CM of Kashmir, who feared potential trouble if Sehrai and Geelani were incarcerated together. Geelani, due to his health condition, was lodged in Srinagar jail.

A day before Sehrai and Geelani's release, Abdul Gani Lone (People's Conference) was also set free. Despite Sehrai and Geelani's objections, MUF decided to participate in the elections under pressure from the Ameer-e-Jama'at, GM Bhat. However, tensions arose within MUF when Lone demanded specific seats, leading to his expulsion from the alliance. According to Sehrai, this rift significantly contributed to MUF's failure in North Kashmir.

He was instrumental in launching Jel's student wing, Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba (IJT), and also became its founding president, first Naazim-e-Aala. IJT has played a pivotal role in the resistance movement.



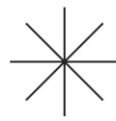


Sehrai had freshly stepped out of the Central Jail Jammu in 1986 when Jama'at fielded him as Muslim United Front (MUF) candidate from Kupwara. Previously, Jel had fielded him against Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah from Ganderbal. Standing against “the lion of Kashmir”—apparently devoid of opposition—was itself a display of Sehrai’s fearless conduct. “Apart from the odd campaigning gimmicks of MUF, including dressing their candidates in shrouds, flaunting firearms, or invoking djinns to woo voters in their rallies,” says a senior scribe, “it was Sehrai, whose fiery speeches—conveniently mixing religion and politics—were getting noticed in the local press. His oratory skills would simply turn you into his captive audience.”

After the 1987 elections were rigged, with most MUF leadership and their polling agents dragged to dungeons, Sehrai assumed the role of a captain whose immediate challenge was to steer clear of the ship caught in the political tempest. As a caretaker of Jama'at’s Batmaloo office, Sehrai would talk less like a romantic and more of a realist, rubbishing the claims that “rigging prevented massive mandate to MUF”. In case of fair polls, he believed that MUF could’ve emerged as the reckoning opposition with around 20 seats only. Once left battered in a crackdown by the Farooq Abdullah government, Sehrai strongly resisted the post-1987 poll events in Kashmir. His criticism of the Shimla Agreement finally sent him back to jail.

During the campaigning, Lone reportedly resorted to baseless propaganda against Sehrai. Despite offers from PC and NC to contest on their tickets, Sehrai refused and campaigned independently. After the election results, MUF leaders were arrested, leading to a leadership crisis within





Jama'at.

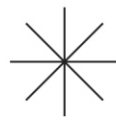
Even among the insurgents of yore, Sehrai commands respect for lifting the prison mood with his scholarly take and authority on Iqbaliyat. "I remember when we were rounded off after MUF elections," said a former Al Jihad commander, "we were badly tortured and had reached to a point of breakdown. It was then that most of us found Sehrai Sahab around us, who would quote the Prophet's (PBUH) life example. His words helped us sustain and brave that harsh jail period."

Geelani and Sehrai were elected as acting Ameer-e-Jama'at and Secretary General, respectively, during a meeting at Ghulam Nabi Nowsheri's house. They confronted the authorities regarding the closure of the Jama'at office, which was eventually reopened. Tensions further escalated when Geelani demanded an inquiry into alleged malpractices, leading to a confrontation with NC workers and subsequent arrests. Meanwhile, the Janta Party offered support to dissolve the government and form an alliance with MUF, which was later rejected.

Sehrai disagreed with MUF's declaration of Kashmir's accession to India during a press conference and issued a statement reflecting Jama'at's position. His response was praised by Jama'at's supporters. However, his stance led to a rift within MUF, culminating in Jama'at's expulsion from the alliance. Following his release, G M Bhat attempted to assert his authority over Jama'at, leading to a confrontation with Sehrai. Sehrai later declined Bhat's request to rejoin Jama'at's office.

MUF's elected MLAs finally resigned in July 1989, except for Abdul Razaq Mir (Bachru), after armed resistance began in Kashmir. During Jama'at's statewide convention of



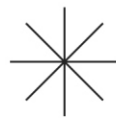


Arakeen (basic members) in Baramulla, G M Bhat, then Ameer-e-Jama'at, was openly criticized for "failing" both the Tehreek (movement) and the Tanzeem (party). Dr. Ghulam Qadir Wani, the brain behind MUF, described Bhat's tenure as "depressing and discouraging for Jama'at," according to Sehrai's recollections.

In July 1988, Hakeem Ghulam Nabi, from Shopian, replaced Bhat as Ameer-e-Jama'at. Both Sehrai and Geelani became members of the Shura (Advisory Council). On August 15, 1988, Hakeem called a Markazi Shura Ijlaas to elect new office bearers. "I wrote a letter to Hakeem Sahab telling him to take serious note of what had happened at Baramulla. I also told him that I don't need any position in the new setup." However, Sehrai was elected Secretary General of Jama'at by a majority vote. Sehrai worked for 6 months in this position".

Meanwhile, Rajiv Gandhi visited Pakistan to meet Benazir Bhutto, who, in order to please her Indian counterpart, had Kashmir-related banners removed from Islamabad. "Rajiv told a dinner meeting hosted by Benazir that the Kashmir issue was solved as people came out in large numbers to vote recently (1987 J&K state elections). Benazir didn't mention the 1987 election rigging even once, infuriating people in Kashmir." Sehrai, as Secretary General of Jama'at, issued a press release criticizing both Rajiv and Benazir. "This presser was widely carried by both local and international media." Sehrai had criticized the Shimla Agreement, terming it as a way to promote the status quo, turning the Line of Control into a permanent border. "Infuriated, the government ordered my arrest." Angered, Hakeem wrote a letter to Sehrai and asked him to back off from his statement; Sehrai refused, leading to his arrest again in the spring of 1989.

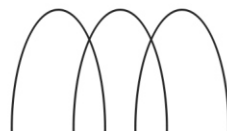
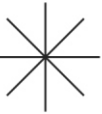


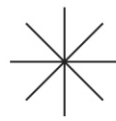


After his release from jail, he continued his political activities, particularly during the challenging period of the 1990s. After Jamaat was banned in 1990 and most of its top leadership was jailed, Sehrai is credited with single-handedly managing the affairs of Jamaat during a crucial time. He made some difficult decisions alone, which later proved correct and favored the resistance. This earned him the nickname “crisis manager.” While nothing about his work and activities from 1990 to 2003 could be traced, he was always active whenever out of prison. A detailed profile of Sehrai will be compiled in a separate project.

Rifts began appearing within Jamaat in the early 2000s over the issues of armed resistance. On one side, the then-president of Jamaat-e-Islami, Gulam Muhammad Bhat, wanted to distance Jamaat from armed resistance and the freedom movement completely. On the other hand, Syed Ali Geelani, a stalwart and former president of Jamaat, had his own credibility among the masses and Jamaat and opposed GM Bhat’s decision. Ashraf Sehrai, another stalwart in Jamaat, enjoyed huge respect and honor and supported Geelani. Sehrai mentioned in one of his interviews his reasons to part ways from Jamaat and forming a new party,

“There was only one difference. The Jama’at actively participated in the freedom movement, and many of its cadres and associates were killed by the Indian forces, and some were forced to migrate, particularly during the Ikhwan regime. But in the late 1990s, a group in the Jama’at started objecting to its active participation in the movement, which was neither acceptable to Geelani Sahab nor to me. One day, at a session of Majlis-e-Shoora, a senior rukun of the Jama’at remarked that ‘Geelani Sahab and Sehrai Sahab have made our life



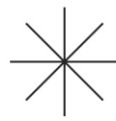


difficult.’ That was the immediate cause for us separating and forming Tehreek-e-Hurriyat under a formal agreement with the Jama’at.” These differences eventually led to the formation of Tehreek-e-Hurriyat on August 7, 2004.

It is pertinent to mention that while Geelani is solely credited with the formation of Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, Sehrai never claimed any credit due to his selfless devotion to the cause, but history must acknowledge his role where it is due. Therefore, it is important to give him credit for co-founding Tehreek-e-Hurriyat. Sehrai always called himself a student and shadow of Geelani; therefore, he never appeared at the front nor claimed any leadership. However, it would be a grave injustice to his life and legacy to invisibilize his contributions, which are huge. Sehrai played a crucial role at every moment of resistance during his 60 years of service to the freedom movement. After the formation of Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, Sehrai ran the affairs of the party. He was responsible for organizing the cadre, assigning roles and responsibilities, looking after literature and narrative, and forging policy and strategy. The only thing he would do with Geelani was to discuss and seek his approval. While Geelani was the leader, Sehrai was the foot soldier of the resistance.

Sehrai was often honored for his integrity. Even his arch-rivals in Kashmiri politics and his enemies in the Indian intelligence network honor Sehrai for his character and selfless devotion to his cause. Between the arrival and the beginning of the youthful defiance of Ashraf Sehrai lies the trajectory of the man who always chose workmanship over leadership. In a stockpile of intelligence files, Ashraf Sehrai remains a revered rival. The ruthless state managers respect the man for his unflinching and razor-sharp intellect. He’s known in those files





follower of an ideal leader.”

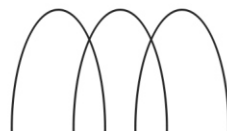
After his election as the leader of the resistance, Sehrai was asked about armed resistance, and here is what he said: Excerpts from the interview:

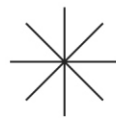
What is your view of the ongoing armed struggle? People claim that a fringe element within it is seemingly creating confusion?

Sehrai: Both the gun and our political struggle are important, and both are playing their part. Our youth spill their blood for freedom. They pick up arms against the tyrant, and Islam also tells us to rise against the tyrant. I believe armed resistance is an integral part of every freedom movement in the world. Look at Palestine; they have Hamas. When India struggled for freedom, there was armed resistance by Bhagat Singh and his colleagues. So, political struggle and armed resistance run parallel in every freedom movement. As for the talk about confusion being created, agencies are out there trying to disrupt the movement, and they won't sit silently.

Of late, we have witnessed black flags being waved, purportedly in support of the Islamic State, at the funerals of some militants. Is it a matter of concern for the Hurriyat leadership?

Sehrai: We don't have any global agenda. Our agenda is simple: that we want Kashmir to be free from Indian occupation. Daesh and Al-Qaida have nothing to do with our movement, and we will never accept them. It could be the handiwork of agencies that are keen to defame our movement and undermine its indigenous character. They are trying to divide us into sects so they can strengthen their roots here. Look at Iraq, Syria, Libya, and other Muslim countries where people have been divided into sects, and see how the enemy is





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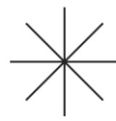
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Sehrai: We don't have any global agenda. Our agenda is simple: that we want Kashmir to be free from Indian occupation. Daesh and Al-Qaida have nothing to do with our movement, and we will never accept them. It could be the handiwork of agencies that are keen to defame our movement and undermine its indigenous character. They are trying to divide us into sects so they can strengthen their roots here. Look at Iraq, Syria, Libya, and other Muslim countries where people have been divided into sects, and see how the enemy is





ruling there now. Daesh is a creation of American think tanks. Some of our youth are influenced by their ideology, but I appeal to them to read the Qu'ran, Hadith, and Islamic literature to understand the rules that Prophet Mohammad has laid down for war and decide for yourself what is right and what is wrong. I want to tell the youth waving black flags that by doing so they are strengthening the Indian occupation in Kashmir. Our enemy directly benefits from this. They show the world that Kashmiris are extremists who deserve to be killed. I strongly condemn what happened at Easa Fazli's funeral; these things are unacceptable to us. Mysterious forces are creating chaos among the masses. Our youth have to maintain discipline for the sake of this sacred freedom movement.

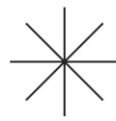
What about Zakir Musa? He recently termed militant groups backed by Pakistan as "armies working under Nimrod's agency"?

Sehrai: Zakir Musa is the light of my eyes. He left everything for the sacred cause. But I want to ask him, who are you benefiting by going towards extremism? Neither yourself nor the freedom movement. We sincerely appeal to him to come back. We aren't extremists; we belong to Ummat-e-Was't (moderate nation). There is no place for extremism in Kashmir's freedom struggle. Who doesn't want to see an Islamic state? But you have to fight against the occupation first. It's better to remain united and fight against the enemy first.

But Zakir Musa asks why Kashmiris should give their blood just to merge with Pakistan?

Sehrai: If Zakir Musa and his comrades don't want to merge with Pakistan, nobody is forcing them to do so. But let them fight the Indian occupation first and then let our people decide what they want to do. It is simple.



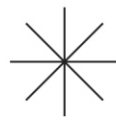


Six days after Sehrai assumed the office of Chairman of Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, his son Junaid Ashraf Sehrai joined the armed resistance organization Hizbul Mujahideen. Junaid was an MBA graduate from Kashmir University from the 2014-15 batch. Kashmir Inspector General of Police SP Pani appealed to Ashraf Sehrai to call his son back from armed resistance. He refused to call his son back and said, which became the historic words, “Why should I call back my son? I am not Be-Zanmeer (a man with a dead conscience) like Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, I am a man whose every drop of blood yearns for freedom.” In another instance, when asked why he wouldn’t call his son back, he replied, “If someone goes for prayers (salah), do you call them back?” This was a response that left everyone dumbfounded. Sehrai meant that, just like salah is an obligation, Jihad too is an obligation.

One year after his election as the leader, the ideological organization of Sehrai, Jamaat-e-Islami Jammu and Kashmir, was banned. Following Jamaat, another resistance organization, JKLF, was also banned. The far-right Hindutva government of India, led by Narendra Modi, was targeting resistance organizations one after the other. The ban on Jamaat made Sehrai’s job even more difficult as an ideological cadre comes from Jamaat. Many leaders and workers of Tehreek-e-Hurriyat were arrested. Finally, Sehrai was put under house arrest before India revoked Article 370 on 5th August 2019. The whole of Kashmir was put under strict military lockdown, and the leadership of Tehreek-e-Hurriyat was in jail.

On May 21, 2020, Junaid Sehrai was martyred during a gunfight with Indian occupational forces in Nawakdal, Srinagar. This was a very tough time for his family. Despite the



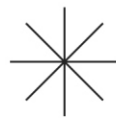


pain, Junaid's father, Ashraf Sehrai, showed great strength and faith. When given a chance to ask for his son's body, he refused. He said that he believes they will meet again in paradise. Ashraf Sehrai insisted that all families should be treated the same way, saying, "Every other martyr is like my son; I will not use my position to get special treatment for my son Junaid." He stood by his principles, demanding fairness for everyone who had lost loved ones. Turned out to be an exemplary leader.

Sehrai was finally slapped with the Public Safety Act on 12 July 2020 and taken to Udhampur Jail in Jammu, 300 km from his home. Weak and ailing, Sehrai was subjected to inhuman conditions inside the jail. He was denied medicine and treatment. Sehrai complained to his family about the harsh conditions he faced in jail. His son complained that his father was growing weak and might face a life-threatening situation. Sehrai complained that during the holy month of Ramadan, he was not provided proper food at Sahoor, so he would mostly fast on water. Since he was not healthy and the doctors had prescribed him only a few foods, inside jail, he was provided with an unhygienic diet, which further deteriorated his health. He grew so weak that he lost all of his eyesight; he was not provided with glasses to read the Quran. Sehrai's weakness was so severe that he was unable to stand on his legs and would take the support of the wall to reach the toilet. Finally, Sehrai died in custody on 5th May 2021.

Although the government declared him COVID-19 positive and declared it the cause of his death, some leaked reports from the government hospital in Jammu showed his COVID report as negative. The family of Sehrai called it a custodial murder. Sehrai's family was refused his body unless





they agreed to sign a paper where the government had stipulated the following conditions:

- The family must accept Covid-19 as the cause of his death.
- His body should be taken to his native village, Tikkipora, Lolab, and he should not be buried in Srinagar.
- He should be buried during the nighttime, and only his immediate and extended family is allowed to take part in the funeral. The number of people taking part in the funeral should not exceed 50.

The state authorities gave clear guidelines that if the family of Sehrai did not accept these conditions, they would not be given the body, and Shaheed Ashraf Sehrai should be buried in Jammu. Sehrai's family accepted the demands and took him to Tikkipora, Lolab, where he was laid to rest under heavy military deployment. The whole area was cordoned by Indian occupation troops, and all major and minor roads leading to his village were seized. After his family buried him at 2:00 am, his family members raised pro-freedom and Islamic slogans. A few days after his funeral, his two sons were arrested and slapped with the PSA and sent to jail. Their crime was attending the funeral of their father. While the Indian state took a written bond from them about their father's funeral, the state broke its agreement by arresting his children.

From Muhammad Ashraf Khan to Shaheed Ashraf Sehrai, he emerged as the most illustrious political leader in Kashmir's history. Unmatched in character, integrity, perseverance, selfless devotion to the cause, sacrifice, bravery, and faith in God, Sehrai stands unparalleled. Kashmiri mothers will not give birth to another Ashraf Sehrai.

Idrees Bhat

