

In Defense of the 2009 BDR Mutiny

An anarchist's reflection on the BDR mutiny - Dispelling the myths and conspiracy theories regarding the Bangladesh Rifles' (BDR) Mutiny in 2009 against the Military Brass

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Bloody rebellions can be of 2 types – one which is fermented and cultivated for decades by conscious actors, desiring for a better world and better future, which is propagated by a spirit of brotherly love for the human race, of empathy, of a desire for freedom and liberty.

Of course there is largely a feeling for the hatred of the oppressors and the tyrants but that comes in with a reciprocal want to live a life without oppression and of freedom. It is informed by the fact that such life is denied to them by those people and is largely aimed at the system which create such men. So that hatred is actually largely towards the system and not towards people. Meaning if those same men were to leave their stations of oppression and tyranny, they would be embraced by the revolutionaries as their brothers, as men amongst men. So such hatred is informed by the feeling to create a better world, not of a world where they create structures to emulate the old world of suffering, of prisons where after the rebellion they would create systems to oppress their former oppressors and in turn become oppressors themselves. The cultivators of these types of rebellion do not have a fetish for violence where on the eve of the revolution they drown themselves in the blood of their former masters. Although they know that violence is inevitable, for the current wretched world order is protected by violence by the lackey of the masters, they want their revolutionary violence to be as surgical as possible. Like the surgeon who cuts only where there's a need for it, he wants to avoid needless blood shedding as possible. It will be precise, quick and will have a fast recovery. After the expropriation of land and the means of production, after dealing a swift defeat to the police and the army on the streets, they will hasten to abolish the rotten and soul crushing conditions of the old and create a just, equal, free new world.

The other type of rebellion is what we're all too familiar with. Without a conscious direction of the people's anger, disdain, hopelessness, depression, false ideas about the reasons of their misfortunes (conspiracy theories like Jewish domination, illuminati etc.) to a programme of social revolution – a goal of a just and free world and a world without poverty and war, it is then directed not at systems but towards people. Ideas are social. Just like how the idea of socialism and anarchy are propagated at the school, university, factory floor, tang ghars, facebook pages – so too ideas like how the jews are controlling the world and are the source of all our miseries,

or how the rohingyas are stealing all our wealth, or how just getting rid of Awami league bureaucrats and offering power to the military (through a coup of course) will solve our problems. Hence this outrage then expresses itself as a directionless mad violence that only seeks to hurt individuals – whether through murdering them or by putting them in concentration camps – the idea is that their pain will translate into our victory – the fantasy of destroying Israel by being at the head of a grand Muslim army (of course such victory is supplemented with a wholesale genocide of jews), then the heavens will grant us a world of peace which we were promised in the Hadiths (fabricated or not), even after leaving all the mechanisms of capitalistic and state oppression intact. The fantasy is of course metaphysical – taken to a spiritual level by propagators and actors who are not in the camps of the revolutionaries as mentioned before. Such ideas take many different forms in many different countries and cultures (fascists in Europe dream of genociding muslims, jews, communists and liberals) but the fundamentals are the same – Direct your violence not towards systems – but towards people. It matters not that the machines of repression (of the state and of capitalism) is ongoing – what matters is that the machine is running to oppress and murder those who we hate and that some Christians (or in the case of Asia – right wing Muslims) are in control of those apparatus. So when such bloody rebellions are launched which don't seek for a world of universal brotherly love and of the abolition of oppression of all men – not of just Muslims or Christians but also for Jews and Hindus as well, they are so chaotic in their blood frenzy that after getting rid of the supposed “oppressor race” they start to murder people of their own who they suspected of aiding the “oppressor race”.

Let us take the Sepoy mutiny as an example. A very archaic event, I know, but bear with me.

The brits have tried long and hard to blame the event solely on the rumour of the pig-fat dipped cartridges. But the fact to the matter is that the rebels almost forgot about that the moment the mutiny had left the fortress. The Brits, with their majestic arrogance towards their false righteousness couldn't even entertain the idea that their whole century of treating the people of India and Bengal as literal colonial slaves, of disregarding them as animals, of inhuman torture, wholesale massacres, of exploitation of the resources of this land and rendering the whole sub-continent as a barren colonial prison could lead to such outcry. The colonialists' treatment of the people as subhuman, of as low as a brute and of lower than an animal (the officers' pet dogs had more rights and meals than the average Indian) was expressed likewise in the Mutineer soldiers' orgy of violence unleashed upon the children and wives of the colonial officers. I do not want to go into details about the nature of violence inflicted upon the white civilians – but know that the British accounts of the events are not too exaggerated. But imagine a slave and a master. If for during all the years of servitude, the slave sees nothing but the leash, hears nothing but insults, feels nothing but the pain of the mace, believes in nothing but the cruelty of the world he lives in – if such is the only thing he experiences from life, then without intervention, why would he ever give the world back anything back other than that which the master has taught him? When he sees his own sister raped, his brother leashed, his children sold to another master, why wouldn't he spend countless sleepless nights thinking about paying the master in kind? Of killing all the master's children, of burning down anything and everything that the master owns? Such was the case of the mutineers of 1887. But such violence can only last for a few days. As stated above, since such rebellions are without direction, are not informed by a feeling of love for men, are not without the dream of a better tomorrow, it will inevitably start to show cracks. What will be the new form of government after the brits? What will be the system of land ownership? The sympathetic landlords and rajas wanted to keep the same old system of feudalism

but the regular soldiers wanted something that didn't render them from colonial slaves to the slaves of the landowners – of course what that entailed none of them knew. (You cannot say that they were clueless because the socialism of Karl Marx wasn't invented yet. The English civil war for example – had such revolutionary ideas like common land ownership and abolition of government centuries before Marx or Bakunin was born. But the English civil war was fermented by progressive officers of the English army for decades hence there was such a deep penetration of such ideas in the English society. So I categorise the English civil war in the former camp of the two types of rebellions). Because the rebellion was so spontaneous, it fell apart quickly. The aristocracy wanted nothing for the good of the people – which of course meant curtailing their power and the regular rank and file soldiers were not class conscious enough, to believe in anything other than what their local leaders would say (this is in contrast to the soldiers of the English civil war who indeed were class conscious).

Now let us go to the topic at hand – *The BDR mutiny*.

Everything I have said before was to set the stage of the mentality of the BDR mutineer of 25th February, 2009. I personally have witnessed the condition of the rank and file BDR soldier for almost all my life. In the para-society of the military, the BDR soldier was treated as nothing other than a low brute. They were not allowed to keep moustaches, they were not allowed to ascend the ranks higher than a lance corporal, they were regularly beaten, berated, and insulted. All their officers were from the military who treated the organisation as nothing but a stepping stone to advance their careers. There were no sincere moves to better the lives of the average BDR soldier by the officers despite the fact that the officers lived as kings with untold privileges and the average BDR soldier lived below the poverty line. They rode in Mercedes Benz Jeeps whereas the soldier lived in a below average quality house. If they were lucky they got the chance to live inside Peelkhana – the HQ – where the rent is comparatively low, but for the vast majority, they had to live outside of the HQ – in Tannery Mor – where the lead in the air was enough to make anyone ill and the smell itself made it nothing more than a shanty town. And this feeling of degradation, of humiliation was building up inside everyone for decades.

If you look at Americans, the reason why they love their millionaires – their oppressors so much is because late stage capitalism has made them believe that everyone in America are just temporarily embarrassed billionaires. So an attack on the millionaires is seen as an attack on themselves. Because one day, I will get to wear the boot, and on that day I don't want any pesky leftist to get in the way of me oppressing other people like me! Such a mentality is a huge reason for why during the post-ford era (late stage capitalist era), worker uprisings are so uncommon (other factors are also involved but this is a huge part) in comparison to pre-ford era capitalism.

But since the average BDR soldier knew that there was absolutely no escape from the wretched conditions that they are in now, that they will never get to go any rank higher than the Lance Corporal, that such life of indignation, of sorrow, of poverty, of humiliation and of degradation will last until they die, they felt a state of eternal escapelessness. Using the example of the slave yet again, if from the moment of their birth, he was told that slavery is the natural order of society, that if he will have no other life than that of the slave, if he is never given the chance to dream of a life without slavery in the world – then how do you expect him to attack the system of slavery and not individuals? He won't even know what a "system of slavery" is – to him this is the natural order of society. A world without chattel slavery is just impossible to him but he has never even had the chance to hear about it in abolitionist propaganda. How could he attack gravity, or the flow of air? What is the difference between that and slavery –

which are all natural to him. All his life – he has seen anger manifested as murder and arson – and this is how it will manifest it in the real world. Such was also the case of the BDR soldier.

For the Sepoy mutineers, the rumor of the pig-fat dipped cartridges was the fuse to start the rebellion of resentment that they had infused in their souls for decades. And for the BDR mutineers it was the so called “Chaal-daal kormoshuchi” (The Rice and Lentil Programme).

2009 was a year of deep hardship. The whole world was going through a tough recession. Despite awami league propaganda, the recession hit this country hard as well – albeit not for the captains of industry but for regular people. Yes, the “GDP” did not take a great downfall but the prices of daily goods like rice and oil hit a sharp increase and even so called “middle class” people were forced to stand in lines to buy government rationed cooking oil. The army officers in the BDR, since they have the autonomy to run businesses (like how they privately own the two large School + college inside peelkhana) so they initiated their infamous chaal daal programme. The basic gist is that they were supposed to import daily goods from India and sell them to the populace at a cheap price. But corrupt tyrants do what corrupt tyrants do best. From the get go it was nothing short of a syndicate-like monopoly business (not the good syndicate like our anarchist worker syndicates). The huge chunks of goods that they bought were placed in the parade grounds inside peelkhana for weeks, to allow their prices to increase. So despite the fact that they bought the goods at an astonishingly low cost, they were selling the same things at record profits. Now the twist is that the people who were in charge of selling the goods to the people, were ordinary rank and file BDR soldiers who started to catch the whole brunt of the blame for the high prices and charges of corruption despite them having to do nothing with it. They didn’t even get a cut of the outrageous amount of profits that the officers were making (not that that would’ve been a good thing – just that they were distant from the scheme through and through). Now the thing is, it wasn’t just the charges and the humiliation – The BDR soldiers were also the main customers of the products of the scheme. So not only were they falsely indicated in the scheme but also they were its main victims. Representatives of the soldiers went to the upper echelons time and time again but they were either met with cold shoulders or with insults. The hand of the clock was now approaching twelve.

On the eve of the second day of the BDR day (it was observed for three days from 24th to 26th February), a rumour had spread within the ranks that the Major General, Shakil had beaten a soldier for protesting about the chaal-daal situation. All evidence indicates that the BDR soldiers initially wanted to take the officers as hostages and state their demands. But cooler heads did not prevail yet the decades of the inhuman treatment by the officers did. You reap what you sow – as the old adage goes. The army’s surprised reaction at the situation was as amusing as the reaction of the brits at the sepoy mutineers. All you can say at that moment is – what do you expect? Speaking with the privilege of Hindsight, not seeing a violent backlash would’ve been more surprising – both in 1887 and in 2009.

I reflect the feeling of Malatesta in situations like these. Yes, it would’ve been great if the mutiny was directed towards a social revolution – towards the abolition of the military, of all ranks – side by side with workers to expropriate land and the means of production. Yes it was violent which did not result in any real gains. But just like Malatesta has said, I do not condemn the slave in his righteous rebellion against the master. For the slave is always in a legitimate state of self defence. And as Franz Fanon has said, through the act of rebellion, the slave exerts his humanity which has long been denied to him. Through rebellion, the slave finds his humanity – for only humans can rebel.

Since 2009, Conspiracy theories have sought to take the brief glimpse of agency that these brave men have claimed for themselves. BNP accuses the Awami-league of plotting the whole thing — despite the fact that it was only a few months that they took power and it takes years for tyrants to take control of hostile state apparatus that are loyal to the other side. If it were that easy for political parties to manipulate soldiers into killing their officers for nothing (as BNP claims — but we know that it wasn't for nothing) then we would've lived in a world with the existence of a united latin american socialist republic because it's the region's army who are the main actors of coupling the leftist government and the army is notoriously hard to tame or manipulate. The other argument is that awami-league didn't plan it but they intentionally stalled the invasion of peelkhana to allow for the timely murder of the officers — despite the fact that the killing of the officers was already done in the 1st day of the mutiny and the army only amassed at the gates of peelkhana on the second day and also the fact that the army would've surely undergone a reprisal spree of massacring not just the mutineers but also the thousands of family members of the BDR soldiers that were in peelkhana at that time. BNP says all those things because it claims that the 30 or so officers were all BNP aligned which is a dubious claim at best because there's absolutely no evidence for it. Of course Awami league accuses the BNP of plotting the whole thing which is more ridiculous than the former claim. Now the question is if it really was a plot by either side and the killing of the officers was the sole plan, then why did the mutiny spread all over the country? Why, at a moment's notice did all the BDR soldiers rise in rebellion when they heard that their brothers in Dhaka were doing the same? If you still don't get it then I want you to read this whole document again.

What followed was nothing short of a penal expedition against the BDR and their families. The BDR were prisoners of war of the army for a brief time. To call the subsequent court martial a kangaroo court would be an insult to all other historic kangaroo courts. The officers sentenced so many soldiers to hanging that if you were to hang 3 soldiers every 1 hour, it would've almost taken 3 months to hang everyone. Let's not even begin to mention the tortures that were inflicted upon soldiers that were not even present on peelkhana on those days. The civilian government took over and hanged a reasonable amount of people, not too much but not too little so as to not upset the rage boner of the military, because after all, you will need the army's support for your coming tyrannical rule.

All the conspiracies about the BDR mutiny being the tool of the two large parties are as baseless as India planning it (yes, there are fools who are brain dead enough to believe in that as well.) The BDR mutiny was as righteous as the rebellion of the Sepoy in 1887, as the rebellion of the soldiers of the English civil war, as the French troops who mutinied during WW1, of the countless slaves rebellions in the USA and in Africa, of the great slave rebellion of Haiti. The reason why we sing the songs of the heroes of these mutineers and not of the BDR ones is because, although the mutinies themselves weren't successful, the ideas behind it won. India did gain independence from the brits, The parliament is now in power of the English government, the people did acknowledge the absolute baselessness of WW1, people do acknowledge how horrible slavery was throughout the history of USA and Africa and of course the righteousness of the slave rebels in Haiti. For decades if not hundreds of years, Indians themselves hated the Sepoy mutineers, the English people hated the parliamentarians after their defeat, the French public hated the mutineers because they were "unpatriotic" People in the USA hated their own slaves and their want for freedom. We all love the Fakirs in the fakir rebellion despite the fact that throughout all of English rule the Indian media called them bandits. Titumir and Shurjo Shen

were all called traitors and thugs but now we build statues for them. And today we sing songs like “ami chitkar kore kadite chaiya korite parini chitkar” for the slain officers — they probably would’ve cried their eyes out for the slain colonial officers that the Sepoy mutineers had killed. If you know about the colonial and servile mentality that prevailed in the Indian and Bengali public throughout the 200 year rule then you know that I’m not even exaggerating.

As Castro has said, “Condemn me if you want, but history will absolve me.” Just like history has absolved the sepoy mutineers and the slave rebels of africa and america, the BDR mutineers will be absolved as well.

Unleash terror upon the tyrants!

If there is no bread for the soldiers, then let there be nothing but lead for the generals!

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This article was written in 25th February, 2023 — on the 14th anniversary of the BDR Mutiny.

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