

Socioeconomic Deprivation and Garment Worker Movement in Bangladesh: A Sociological Analysis

Md Kamrul Islam^{1,*}, Dilara Zahid²

¹Sociology Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna, 9208, Bangladesh

²Centre for Disaster and Vulnerability Studies (CDVS), University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Abstract The Ready Made Garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh accounts for more than 75 per cent of the total income from export and the largest employer of women in the industrial sector. In this study, we examine the socioeconomic deprivation and garment worker movement in Bangladesh using data both from primary (a sample survey) and secondary (media reports) sources. We analyse the data using quantitative techniques. We find that majority of the RMG workers earn below minimum wage of Tk. 1620.00 per month and cannot save any money after covering expenditures for food and accommodation. Most of the workers work overtime and get only 20 per cent more despite the provision of double payments for overtime hours. We also find that a vast majority of the workers jobs are not permanent and have limited access to toilet and other sanitation facilities. In addition, almost half of the workers are either verbally or physically abused by the management. RMG workers are compelled to work long hours with no access to sick leave, weekend holiday, annual vacation, pension, bonus, festival allowance, and trade union in the one hand and constant pressure to increase their productivity on the other. For these reasons, the RMG sector has been marked by fierce worker movement since 2006. To ensure stability in the RMG sector, both the Government and RMG owners should take necessary initiatives to ensure reasonable wage structure and very good work environment for the workers. Policy implications of the worker movement in the context of Bangladesh are discussed.

Keywords Ready Made Garment, Workers, Deprivation, Movement, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

During the last two decades the Ready Made Garment (RMG) industry has experienced a phenomenal flourish in Bangladesh that has not only opened employment opportunities for thousands of workers but also has generated huge amount of foreign currency for Bangladesh[1]. The industry is the largest employer of women in the formal manufacturing sector[2]. The labour intensiveness and the cheapest labour cost are considered as the major contributing factors for the flourish. The United States and European Union (EU) countries are the largest and fastest growing RMG importer from Bangladesh[3].

Although RMG industry in Bangladesh was highly benefitted from the inception of multi-fibre arrangements (MFA) in the early 1970s, the industry faced daunting challenges to hold two major exporting markets (the European Union and the United States) after the elimination of the quota system by the end of 2004[3]. However, the RMG sector in Bangladesh shows incredible performance in

increasing the volume of exports even after the post-MFA era[4];[5];[6]. In 2006, Bangladesh was ranked as the sixth largest exporting country in the USA and fifth largest in the EU even after withdrawing quota facility from 2005[5]. Reference[4] attributes the surprising growth of RMG sector to continuous support from her government, lowest wage rate, lower export price among other factors. There is no doubt that relentless effort and sincere support from the RMG workers have played pivotal roles for Bangladesh to become a leading exporter in the global apparel market.

In 2008-09, the RMG sector accounted for about 80 per cent of the total share of exports and earned \$12.7 billion which was about 14 per cent of the country's GDP[7]. This outstanding achievement of Bangladesh in the context of a highly competitive global market was possible due to sustained increased in export during last two decades. For example, the amount of export of Garments from Bangladesh was \$866 million in 1991 which has increased to \$4,911 million in 2003[3].

Nevertheless, the brilliant success story of garments industry in Bangladesh is now standing on the fact of labour exploitation, lower wages and worse work environment. This situation has paved the way for severe discontents between RMG workers and their employers. The labour movement in RMG sector in 2006 is an example of

* Corresponding author:

kamrulk@yahoo.com (Md Kamrul Islam)

Published online at <http://journal.sapub.org/sociology>

Copyright © 2012 Scientific & Academic Publishing. All Rights Reserved

spontaneous expression of the garment workers' suppressed anger and deprivation[8]. In the middle of 2006, for the first time, the RMG workers in Bangladesh became united on their demand for a reasonable wage structure and staged movement against the factory owners to achieve some legal rights. This movement has facilitated the way to establish their fundamental rights to some extent. In addition, a trilateral formal agreement has been signed among the government, RMG workers' leaders and BGMEA leaders. Thus, the recent worker movement in the RMG industry has generated profound interest among researchers and policy makers with a view to explore the causal mechanism of the worker movement in one hand and to derive a sustainable solution for the sake of national economy on the other.

Although previous research on the RMG sector in Bangladesh has focused on various aspects of labour market limited attention has been given in examining the causes and implications of recent worker movement in Bangladesh that has pivotal consequences for the economy in general and for thousands of workers in particular[2];[9];[10]. This study is a modest attempt to examine the internal and external mechanisms of the worker movement in the RMG sector. More specifically, using data from an empirical survey, this study aims to explore the following components of deprivation among RMG workers:

- to identify the level of deprivation among RMG workers by comparing their earning and expenditure.
- to examine the extent to which RMG workers enjoy their rights and fringe benefits.
- to determine the extent to which RMG workers are abused verbally and physically in their workplace.

2. Theoretical Framework

Various theories have been developed in order to explain the social movements organized by various strata of our society. Sometimes social movements are organized either to achieve certain rights and benefits or to bring some qualitative changes in the society. The most frequently used theories related to the social movement in explaining crowd behaviour are *contagion theory*, *convergence theory*, *emergent-norm theory*, and *game theory*.

The *contagion theory* suggests that communication network plays a pivotal role in disseminating information and attitudinal messages to groups and organizations which eventually influence the behaviour of others[11];[12];[13]. Reference[14], one of the major exponents of the *contagion theory*, argues that crowds have incredible influence over their fellow members. Thus a large number of people motivated by their emotion abandon their responsibility and become involve in irrational and violent action[14].

The *convergence theory* is widely used in the context of developing countries to explain workers' attitude, class formation and industrial development related phenomena. The underlying assumption of the *convergence theory* is that the like minded people who want to act in a certain way come together to form crowds[15];[16];[17]. For example, those

who want to create violence come together in order to achieve their desired goals, which is not possible to achieve alone. Another advantage of forming crowds is that it can intensify the pressure on their employers or governments to fulfil their objectives.

The *emergent-norm theory* is based on the premise that people with mixed interests and motives formed a kind of social cohesion among themselves in order to implement certain agenda through protests and violent means[18]. In this case, people who are involved in the same occupation or belong to same class become more active with a view to achieve not only their benefits and rights but also to express their anger and frustration to those who own and control the means of production. For example, when one worker starts to burn a bus in the street others also join with him/her to burn buses and other vehicles in the street. In this situation, some people emerge as leaders while others follow the same path of destruction.

Contrary to the assumption of communication network in *contagion theory*, the *game theory* posits that the crowd behaviour is a "strategic interaction" between two or more actors who act intentionally to pursue some objectives, which are designed through taking into account the choices of all[19];[20];[21]. Individuals, corporate and others are the main actors in *game theory* in which the actors' behaviour is determined through a process of rationalization. In this case, the actors strongly believe that they cannot obtain their legal rights or benefits alone which eventually motivate them to act in a more rational way so that they can exert tremendous pressure on those who own and control means of production. The *game theory* is very popular in sociology in explaining crowd behaviour.

Another important theoretical framework of explaining the antagonistic relations between workers and owners of industrial production is the *theory of class struggle* introduced by Karl Marx in his famous writings on capitalist society. According to the *theory of class struggle*, the main ideology of the bourgeoisie class is to make profit from the industrial production through exploiting the worker class. In this case, the bourgeoisie (i.e., the owners of the production) people are in the advantaged position because they own and control the means of production. On the other hand, the workers remain in the disadvantaged situation because they have to sell their labour for survival since they have no other alternative. Thus the profit of industrial production is appropriated by the owners, which has been defined as the *surplus value* in the Marxist literature[22];[23];[24].

Since workers do not get any share of the profit and are exploited by giving lower wages and benefits in the capitalist society, they not only suffer from frustration but also gradually become alienated from the production system. The level of alienation is further aggravated by the feelings that they are no body to the production process. For example, if they are sick and cannot go to work then they will not be paid. However, at one stage, all these deprivations lead to the development of a kind of class consciousness that eventually bring all workers under the same platform to revolt against

their owners in order to obtain their legal rights and benefits. According to this theoretical framework, labour unrest is very common and unavoidable because of the 'structural contradictions' in the industrial production[25];[26];[21]. Hence, Reference[25], in the *Communist Manifesto* argues:

"The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable"[25].

Researchers have found evidence in support of various types of deprivation among workers facilitated by the owners of industrial production in the context of Bangladesh [27];[9];[28];[29];[10];[30]. For example, reference[28] examined the problems surrounding wages in the RMG sectors in Bangladesh using data collected through a sample-survey. In general, the author finds that women have lower access to higher-paid white-collar and management positions. Hence, reference[28] argues:

"Women workers' limited purchasing power and poor command over commodities define and shape their access to housing, health and sanitation and transportation facilities. Lack of job security is compounded by low wages, which in turn cause insecurity of life for women in urban areas"[28].

Similar findings were also reported by reference[27] who investigates whether Bangladeshi factory workers need saving. The author illustrates that RMG workers are not only exploited through lower wages and long working hours but also subject to various types of physical and verbal abuses. In addition, the recent unrest for higher wages in the garment sector and decreasing price for Bangladeshi products in the global market have further intensified the pressure on garment workers to increase their productivity with a view to maintain existing profit levels. Reference[27] demonstrates:

"No matter how unrealistic such targets, all workers are expected to complete them before being allowed to leave factory premises. Refusal to comply comes with usual risks. Supervisors are also under incredible pressure from upper level management to meet targets on deadline. Opportunities for harassment and sexual coercion have simultaneously increased"[27].

The RMG factory owners are quite aware about forming unions among workers in order to do collective bargaining for higher wages and other benefits. For this reason, the owners always stay alert to the threat of unionization, and to prevent unionization the owners employ their relatives in the factories so that they can gather information on any kind of labour movement well in advance[2];[31]. Reference[2] argues that "it is not only the threat of layoffs that makes these women reluctant to unionize. By creating a multiclass workforce, the industrialists have reduced the possibility of cohesion within it"[2].

RMG industries in Bangladesh have generated huge amount of foreign currencies since its inception in 1970s. Moreover, about one crore people are dependent on the apparel sector for their livelihood either directly or indirectly

in Bangladesh[32]. In addition, the growth of RMG industry has facilitated the flourish of linkage industries supplying fabrics, yarns, accessories, and packaging materials. Thus the RMG sector has become the cornerstone for the economy of Bangladesh[3];[32];[2].

Nonetheless, the benefits of such a highly profitable export oriented sector hardly go to the workers who are considered as a part and parcel of the RMG industry. Despite being a signatory member of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the RMG sector in Bangladesh has failed to ensure ILO conventions such as eight hours work, weekly holiday and minimum wages[9];[27]. The minimum wage of Tk. 930.00 per month was increased to Tk. 1,662.00 in 2006, after 12 years[33]. Reference[34] shows that, despite the increase of minimum wages, Tk.1662 per month is the lowest wage rate compared to other countries such as Cambodia (Tk 3440), Vietnam (Tk. 4128), Pakistan (Tk. 5232), India (Tk. 4488), Sri Lanka (Tk. 3453), and China (Tk. 5504). Reference[28] and reference[35] show that the lowest wage rates of RMG workers in Bangladesh is further aggravated by the fact that Bangladesh has the lowest unit labour cost (\$0.11) compared to India (\$0.26), Pakistan (\$0.43) and Sri Lanka (\$0.79).

3. Data and Method

This study was conducted using data from two sources: primary data collected through a sample survey during June 2006 to September 2006 in Dhaka, Bangladesh; and secondary data collected through national and international newspapers, media reports, and annual reviews of international development organizations. The survey was conducted in 2006 which was marked by the first fierce agitation of RMG workers in Bangladesh. Then we collected media reports during the period of 2006 to 2010 in order to do some follow ups on intensity of the labour movement and to investigate the extent to which workers demands have been accomplished during this period from the unprecedented labour movement in RMG sector in Bangladesh.

The primary data was collected through face-to-face in-depth interview from a randomly selected list of 11 RMG factories at Mirpur, Mohakhali, Uttara, and Savar areas of Dhaka. We interviewed 10 workers from each of the selected factories to ensure the proportionate sampling for each factory. Thus, the total sample size for this study was 110. We selected the respondents using the purposive sampling procedure with a view to ensure that the samples are true representative of the population. An advantage of the purposive sampling procedure is that researchers can use their judgments in selecting respondents who deemed most representative and capable of providing all required information for the survey. For example, in this study, we emphasized on selecting those respondents who had better understanding about various facilities and levels of deprivation among workers in the factory. We used a

standard questionnaire comprised of a combination of open-ended and close-ended questions to conduct the in-depth interview. We analysed the data using quantitative techniques.

A vast majority of the selected respondents (70.0%) are female. Majority of the respondents (52.0%) were aged 15-19 years, and only 2.7 per cent of the respondents were aged below 14. A greater percentage of the respondents have family members of 5 to 6 (46.4%) followed by 3 to 4 (32.1%), 7 to 8 (12.4%), single (7.3%), and 9 or more (1.8%). Most of the respondents were currently unmarried (55.5%) followed by married (36.4%) and widowed, divorced or abandoned (8.1%). Majority of the respondents had primary education (33.6%) followed by secondary education (17.3%), higher secondary education (15.5%), and *madrassa* education (13.6%). However, one-fifth of the respondents (20.0%) do not have any formal education.

4. Findings of the Study

4.1. Part I: Based on the Data Collected from Secondary Sources

The RMG industry, one of the most promising industrial sectors in Bangladesh, is characterized by insecure working place, abusive work environment, lower wages, and job uncertainty for workers. In February 2005, more than 50 workers were killed and 100 injured in fire at a textile mill in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. In the same year, 64 workers died and 84 injured from the collapse of an entire factory in the suburbs of Dhaka[6]. Most of the garment factories do not have emergency exit. Although on a few of the factories have emergency exit the owners always kept those exits locked.

On May 22 2006, RMG workers went into rampage to fulfil their various demands including increase in their payments. Workers came out on the street to form a crowd and then set fire in two factories, damaged more than a hundred vehicles and created barricades on streets to fulfil their demands that include payment of all unpaid salaries, overtime wages, basic wages for all, and an end to harassment by employees loyal to the owners of factories[36].

The agitation by the RMG workers was further intensified on June 3rd, 2006 in Gazipur, Savar and Ashulia (areas adjacent to Dhaka) to eliminate all kinds of discrimination against the workers. They clashed with police that led around 100 people injured forcing foreign and local investors to close their factories. Thousands of workers also demonstrated inside the Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) and went into rampage in several factories while chanting slogans in support of their demands of increasing minimum wages, higher wages for skilled workers, a weekly holiday, not to engage female workers on night shifts, transport facilities, the right to form workers' unions, providing appoint letters for the workers[37].

Because of lower wages and increasing cost of living in Dhaka city RMG workers suffer from malnutrition. It becomes difficult for RMG workers to work in long shifts in the factory. Many garment workers become sick and faint because of weakness[38]. Even there are evidences of deaths in the factory while working because of stress, overwork and malnutrition. For example, in May 2008, the rumour of deaths of some garment workers while working led to severe violence and rampage in *Diganto Sweater's factory* in Gazipur. Similar unrest took place in the same month in Chittagong Export Processing Zone where some workers are believed to be fainted and even dead in factory toilets[38];[38].

RMG labourers' unrest continued throughout 2009 with increasing level of destruction and violence. In June 2009, thousands of RMG workers became involved in rioting and demonstrations in the areas of Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) where many garment industries are located. There was a severe clash between workers and police which left hundreds of workers injured. Twenty thousand workers formed a crowd and moved towards the Hamim Group factory complex where the number of protesters increased to 50,000[39];[38]. "The workers split into smaller groups and stormed the complex at around 10.15am. They sprinkled the buildings with petrol; a sweater factory, three garment factories, two washing factories, two fabric storehouses ... over 8,000 machines, a huge quantity of readymade garments, fabrics, three buses, two pickup vans, two minibuses and one motorbike were all reduced to ashes"[39].

Because of widespread protests and rioting in the RMG sector, the minimum wage structure of RMG workers was announced in 2010. This time the minimum wage was fixed at Tk. 3000 which was Tk. 1662 since 2006. However, because of higher inflation rate and increasing cost of living the RMG workers rejected the new minimum wage structure and "streamed onto the streets and began blockading the main highways with burning tires. Police responded with teargas, truncheon charges and water cannon... Making the link between their class status and the contrasting concentrations of wealth in the city landscape, workers were quite specific in their targets; as well as attacking garment factories, 200 businesses were targeted"[40].

4.2. Part II: Based on the Empirical Data Collected through the Sample Survey

Majority of the respondents migrated to Dhaka from Rajshahi division (31.8%) followed by other areas of Dhaka (20.9%), Chittagong (17.5%), Barisal (15.4%), Khulna (12.7%) and Sylhet (1.7%). Most of these workers came to work in RMG factories in order to have better living conditions and establish themselves in the labour market (41.8%). This is followed by poverty in rural areas (22.7%), natural disasters such as flood and river erosion (13.6%), lack of work for their survival in their locality (14.6%), and husband's reluctance to take their families liability (7.3%).

4.2.1. Earnings of the Respondents

Table 1 shows that a substantial percentage of workers earn below the minimum wage structure of Tk. 1662.00 per month (23.7%). Most of the workers (30.9%) earn Tk. 1601-2000 per month followed by Tk. 2401 and more (24.5%), and Tk. 2001-2400 (20.9%).

Table 1. Monthly earning of the respondents

Amount in BDT	Percent
≤ 800	0.0
801-1200	6.4
1201-1600	17.3
1601-2000	30.9
2001-2400	20.9
2401+	24.5
Total	100.0

Their family members are also involved in some other types of work so that they can generate some earnings for the maintenance of their families. For example, 25.4 per cent of the respondent's family members work as gate keepers followed by rickshaw pullers (15.5%), shop keepers (18.3%), domestic servants (8.2%), and drivers (4.2%). These percentages do not add up to 100.0 because some of the respondents' family members also work in the RMG factories. The average earning of the respondents' family members ranges between Tk. 1000 to 2500 per month.

4.2.2. Expenditure of the Respondents

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents (51.8%) spend Tk. 501-1000 per month for food. Among respondents, 10.9 per cent spend less than Tk. 500 per month for the same purpose. Nevertheless, none of the respondents can afford to spend more than Tk. 2500 per month for food. Regarding house rent, most of the respondents spend Tk. 501-1000 per month (54.6%) followed by Tk. 1001-1500 (22.7%), less than Tk. 500 (13.6%), Tk. 1501-2000 (6.4%), and Tk. 2001-2500 (2.7%). In addition, none of the respondents can afford to spend more than Tk. 2500 for house rent (Table 2).

Table 2. Expenditure of the respondents (in percent)

Amount in BDT (Per month)	Food	House rent
≤ 500	10.9	13.6
501-1000	51.8	54.6
1001-1500	17.3	22.7
1501-2000	12.7	6.4
2001-2500	7.3	2.7
2501 & above	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0

After spending the lion share of their earnings for the purpose of food and accommodation, majority of the respondents (61.8%) are left with no money to cover their transportation cost, therefore, go to their work place on foot. Concerning clothing, 73.6 per cent of the respondents mention that they can afford to spend maximum Tk. 200 per month. A substantial percentage of the respondents (41.8%) get free medication either from their factory physician or

from government hospitals while 52.7 per cent of the respondents spend up to Tk. 200 per month for medicine.

4.2.3. Savings of the Respondents

Majority of the respondents (35.6%) do not have any savings (Table 3). However, 22.7 per cent of the respondents save Tk. 100-200 per month followed by Tk. 401-600 (21.8%), Tk. 201-400 (12.7%), Tk. 601-800 (3.6%), and Tk. 801-1000 (3.6%). Moreover, none of the respondents can afford to save more than Tk. 1000 per month.

Table 3. Savings of the respondents

Amount in BDT (per month)	Percent
0	35.6
100-200	22.7
201-400	12.7
401-600	21.8
601-800	3.6
801-1000	3.6
1001 & above	00.0
Total	100.0

4.2.4. Job duration of the Respondents

Job duration is considered as an important determinant for salary fixation. Higher job duration is associated with higher wages and benefits. In this study, Majority of the respondents' job duration (36.6%) is 1 to 2 years and 27.1 per cent of the respondents have job duration of 3 to 4 years. Almost one fourth of the respondents' job duration is below one year whereas only 11.7 per cent of the respondents' job duration is five years or more.

4.2.5. Working hours and Overtime

A vast majority of the respondents (72.7%) work 10 to 12 hours per day whereas only 14.6 per cent of the workers work regular eight hour shift. Nonetheless, 12.7 per cent of the respondents work more than 12 hours per day. Although 80.9 per cent of the respondents have access to overtime hours, most of them (80.2%) get payments of less than Tk. 12.00 per hour. Despite the general provision of double payments for overtime hours, the respondents get only 20.0 per cent of their wages as overtime payments.

4.2.6. Worker's Rights and Fringe Benefits

In this study, we looked at workers rights and fringe benefits in terms of their job status (i.e., whether permanent or not), availability of training facility in the factory, permission to form trade unions, access to medical allowance, transport facility, and maternity leave. Table 4 shows that majority of the respondents' jobs were not permanent (60.9%). Most of the respondents' do not have access to training facility (80.0%), medical allowance (52.3%), and transport facility (91.8%). And 58.2 per cent of the respondents' have access to maternity leave. Nevertheless, none of the respondents' are allowed to form trade unions for collective bargaining (Table 4).

Table 4. Worker's Right and Fringe Benefit

Rights and benefits	Availability of rights and benefits		Total
	Yes	No	
Permanent job	39.1	60.9	100.0
Training facility	20.0	80.0	100.0
Trade union right	0.0	100.0	100.0
Medical allowance	42.7	52.3	100.0
Transport facility	8.2	91.8	100.0
Maternity leave	58.2	41.8	100.0

The study also looked at the future plan of the respondents. Among those who replied to the question on their future plan, 12.7 per cent try to save money to marry a good person; 13.6 per cent want to start own business; 17.3 per cent want to establish themselves socioeconomically in Dhaka; 27.7 per cent want to go back to their own village after saving enough money; and 4.6 per cent want to take further training using their savings.

Regarding the work environment we find that almost half of the respondents (47.3%) were verbally abused mostly by floor in-charge and supervisors in the factory. Moreover, 26.4 per cent of the respondents were abused both verbally and physically. The worst scenario of work environment is further compounded by the fact that 65.5 per cent of the respondents do not have access to proper toilet facilities and 60.0 per cent of the respondents do not have access to pure drinking water. In addition, 31.0 per cent of the respondents suffer from insufficient light and ventilation.

Considering all these facts, respondents were asked whether they are satisfied with their jobs. We find that majority of the respondents (67.3%) were not satisfied with their jobs because of lower wages, restricted benefits and rights, unhealthy work environment, job insecurity, and lack of support services to enhance their skills and capabilities. Those who were more or less satisfied with their jobs (32.7%) also mentioned that they had no other alternatives for their survival. Hence, they feel secure to some extent for having jobs rather than living without any sustainable way of livelihood.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the working environment in the RMG factories in Bangladesh is neither worker friendly nor maintain the basic requirements of ILO conventions. Most of the RMG workers' jobs are not permanent which is further aggravated by the lowest wages compared to the global labour market despite the lowest per unit cost of production in Bangladesh. With constant lower wages and spiral cost of living in Dhaka city RMG workers are in a dire situation of increasing their productivity to maximize the profit for the owners of the factories. With no weekend holiday and no annual vacation RMG workers are compelled to work long hours on regular basis despite their condition of malnutrition and other illness which eventually lead to faint and even deaths in some cases while working. The RMG workers live in a situation where they have no

access to sick leave, pension, bonus, festival allowance, trade union in the one hand and constant pressure to increase their productivity associated with verbal and physical abuse on the other. In general, the findings of this study is consistent with previous research conducted by references [27],[9],[28]; [2], and [31].

What comes out clearly from the above discussion is that RMG workers have no alternative to obtain their legal right and benefits from their factory owners but to form crowds for creating a platform for fierce movement in the public space. The unprecedented labourers' unrests since 2006 in the RMG sector are some of the manifestation of workers anger and deprivation. The question that remained to be answered is to what extent the RMG workers were able to fulfil their objectives from the unrest in the factories? As a first response to the labour unrest in 2006, a trilateral formal agreement was signed by the government, factory owners and workers leaders to fulfil various demands of RMG workers. In addition, the government came forward to protect the interest of the RMG workers and "The Bangladesh Labour Law- 2006" was passed by the parliament. The major provisions of the law include the fixation of minimum wage for seven grades of workers; double payments for overtime (after eight hours); providing weekly and government holidays; providing appointment letter and ID card; right of trade union; festival allowance; and fixation of retirement age at 57 [37].

However, the owners of the RMG factories did not properly implement the above mentioned provisions for their workers, which eventually led to further worker movement that continued until 2010. In the face of continuous labour movement, the Government of Bangladesh announced the new salary structure for RMG works on 29th July 2010 [36]; [37]. The minimum salary for entry level workers (i.e., grade VII) was fixed at Tk. 3,000. The salary structure for other grades were Tk. 3,210 for grade VI, TK. 3,455 for grade V, Tk. 3,763 for grade IV, Tk. 4,120 for grade III, 7,200 for grade II, and 9,300 for grade I [40]. It should be mentioned that most of the RMG workers belong to grade VI and VII, and their upward mobility is highly limited because of lower education, lack of skills, and absence of other required qualities. Because of higher cost of living and higher inflation rate, the RMG workers rejected the latest salary structure announced by the government and became inflicted with another round of agitation and violence.

All these chronology of events in the RMG sector in Bangladesh raise the question of which theoretical framework best explains the levels and patterns of RMG workers' movement that the global world has seen since 2006? We find evidence in support of the *contagion theory* in the context of labourers' unrest in the RMG sector in Bangladesh where the workers successfully used their communication networks to disseminate their demands and attitudinal messages to their fellow groups. The levels and trends of labourers' unrest in the RMG sector is also consistent the *convergence theory* which suggests that likeminded people gather together to form crowds with a

view to fulfil certain demands that is not possible to achieve alone. In this case, thousands of workers came out on the street to form crowds and then went into rampage for long time.

We find partial evidence in support of the *emergent-norm theory* for the unrest in the RMG sector where thousands of workers formed a kind of cohesion among themselves to press their demands through protests and violent means. However, another important ingredient of the *emergent-norm theory* is that people with different motives come together to express their anger and frustration to certain class, group or organization. In this case, our study mainly focused on the RMG workers who are involved in the same occupation and, therefore, have same class interests. Hence, whether other people or any vested quarter with different motives was involved in creating instability in the RMG sector is beyond the scope of this study.

Nevertheless, the labourers' unrest in the RMG sector can be better explained by the *game theory* which suggests that the crowd selects their objectives through taking into account the choices of all and act in a more rational way. In this case, there was a consensus among RMG workers about their rights and benefits that they deserve and then they agreed to commence fierce protest against their employers. Although there are avenues for debate on whether we can define the violent action of the workers as rational behaviour, we can, at least, take the fact into account that the levels and patterns of deprivation in the factories compelled them to choose the most unwanted act for pressing their demands. And it is crystal clear that they will stop all kinds of protests as soon as their demands are fulfilled.

Finally, Karl Marx's *theory of class struggle* can be used in explaining the antagonistic relation between the RMG workers and owners of the factories. According to Marx, an important component of *class* is that workers have to be conscious about their rights and privileges which Marx defined as "class-for-itself". When workers turn into a "class-for-itself" then they become ready to fight against the owners to fulfil their demands.

In the case of RMG sector in Bangladesh, the workers are truly aware about their rights and benefits and they are ready to stage movement against any kind of exploitation by the owners of the industrial production. This has been clearly depicted in this study in the finding section (part I) collected through media reports. However, according to Marxist theoretical framework, the aim of the proletariat class (i.e., workers) is to establish their own control over the means of production through overthrowing the bourgeoisie class (i.e., owners of the production). We should be very cautious in predicting whether the RMG workers either have such an aim or have the capability to do so in the context of a situation where the state, which by all means works as an agent and protector of the capitalist system, has firm grips on all kind of formal and informal organizations. Emphasis should be given on this issue in future research.

6. Conclusions

The major findings of this study include the lowest salary structure for RMG workers, verbal and physical abuse in the work place, unhealthy work environment, job insecurity, continuous pressure to increase workers' productivity, and calorie deficiency among the workers, and risk of death while working. This level of deprivation and frustration among RMG workers pose a severe threat for stability and continuity of production in the RMG sector in Bangladesh. Unless those issues are properly addressed by the owners of factories and the government, Bangladesh is more likely to exhibit frequent and severe unrest in remote future which might have disastrous impact on holding the competitive global apparel market in post-MFA.

In this study, we looked at both male and female workers and we did not focus on gender discrimination in the RMG sector. In future research, it would be meaningful to do a separate analysis for male and female workers. Because of time limitation and resource constraints, this study did not look into the internal and external mechanisms of upward mobility in the RMG sector in Bangladesh. Therefore, initiative should be taken in future research to explore the problems and limitations of upwards mobility in the RMG sector in Bangladesh. Last, but not the least, conducting a special survey with a view to uncover the pathways of increasing RMG workers' skills and capabilities would be worthwhile for Bangladesh since this will have pivotal impact on the survival of the RMG sector in the competitive global market.

REFERENCES

- [1] Chowdhury, S. U. S. 2010. RMG sector in trouble in Bangladesh. *June 23, BLITZ*. (<http://www.weeklyblitz.net>)
- [2] Ahmed, F. E. 2001. The rise of Bangladesh garment industry: globalization, women workers, and voice. *National Women Studies Association Journal*, 16(2): 34-45.
- [3] World Bank. 2005. Bangladesh growth and export competitiveness. *Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Sector Unit: South Asia Region, Report no. 31394-BD*.
- [4] Joarder, M. A. M., Hossain, A. K. M. N., and Hakim, M. M. 2010. Post-MFA performance of Bangladesh apparel sector. *Internal Review of Business Research Papers*, 6(4): 134-144.
- [5] CPD. 2007. Bangladesh's Apparel Sector In Post-MFA Period: A Bench-marketing Study on the Ongoing Restructuring Process. *Annual report of the Centre for Policy Dialogue*.
- [6] Kumar, A. 2006. Bangladesh: Industrial chaos worsens political instability. *South Asia Analysis Group*, Paper no. 1852.
- [7] Khan, S. 2011. Labour unrest and compliance issue in garment sector. *Financial Express*; 18(231), January 30.

- [8] Zaman, M. & Ahsan, S. 2006. From Grievance to Mayhem. *Star, Weekly Magazine*, Bangladesh, June 2.
- [9] Kabeer, N. 2004. Globalization, labor standards, and women rights: Dilemmas of collective (in) action in interdependent world. *Feminist Economics*, 10(1): 3-35.
- [10] Kibria, N. 1995. Culture, social class and income control in the lives of women garment workers in Bangladesh. *Gender and Society*, 9(3): 289-309.
- [11] Burt, R.S. 1992. *Structural holes: The social structure of competition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- [12] Contractor, N.S. and Eisenberg, E.M. (1990). Communication networks and new media in organizations. In J.Fulk & C.W. Steinfield (Eds.), *Organizations and communication Technology* (pp.143-172). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- [13] Carley, K.M. and Kaufer, D.S. (1993). Semantic connectivity: An approach for analyzing symbols in semantic networks. *Communication Theory*, 3,183-213.
- [14] Bon, G. L. 1982. *The Crowd: The Study of the Popular Mind*, Cherokee Publishing Company, Atlanta, (2nd edition).
- [15] Inkeles, A.1981. "Convergence and Divergence in Industrial Societies." In M.O. Attir, B.H. Holzner, and Z. Suda, eds., *Directions of Change: Modernization Theory, Research, and Realities*, 3-38. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.
- [16] Inkeles, A., and Smith, D. E. 1974. *Becoming Modern*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- [17] Kahl, J.A. 1968. *The Measurement of Modernization: A Study of Values in Brazil and Mexico*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- [18] Turner, R. H., and Killian, L. M. 1993. *Collective Behavior*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice-Hall,(4th ed.).
- [19] Petersen, T. 1994. On the promise of Game theory in Sociology. *Contemporary Sociology*, 23(4): 498-502.
- [20] Bernard, J. 1954. The theory of games of strategy as a modern sociology of conflict. *American Journal of Sociology*, 54:411-424.
- [21] Elster, J. 1985. *Making sense of Marx*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [22] Appelrouth, S. and Edles, L. D. 2007. *Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory: Text and Readings*. Pine Forge Press.
- [23] McLellan, D. 1973. *Karl Marx: His life and thought*. New York: Harper and Row.
- [24] Hook, S. 1994. *From Hegel to Marx: Studies in the intellectual development of Karl Marx*. Columbia University Press.
- [25] Marx, K. and Engels, F. 1948. *The Communist Manifesto*. Mises Institute, United States:
- [26] Calhoun, C. J. 2002. *Classical Sociological Theory*. NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.
- [27] Siddiqi, D. M. 2009. Do Bangladeshi factory workers need saving? Sisterhood in the post-wseetshop era. *Feminist Review*, 91: 154-175.
- [28] Absar, S. S. 2001. Problems surrounding wages: the ready made garments sector in Bangladesh. *Labour and Management in Development*, 2(7):1.17.
- [29] Bhattacharya, D. and Rahman, M. 2000. Bangladesh apparel sector: growth trends and the post-MFA challenges, paper presented at the national seminar on Garment industry in Bangladesh: Economic and social dimensions, Dhaka, 21-22 January.
- [30] Khaleque, A. 1992. Work values, attitudes and performance of industrial workers in Bangladesh. *Social Indicators Research*, 27(2): 187-195.
- [31] Feldman, S. 1992. "Crisis, Islam and Gender in Bangladesh: the social construction of a female labour force." In *Unequal Burden*, edited by Lourdes Beneria and Shelly Feldman. Oxford: Westview Press.
- [32] Fattah, M. G. 2006. Garments Shilpo- k Bachate Hole. *Zai Zai Din*, Bangladesh, June 27.
- [33] Hussain, Z., and Zaman, S. 2010. Let good sense prevail in Bangladesh's garment industry. *July 13*, (www.blogs.worldbank.org/ndpoverity:southasia/node/633).
- [34] Ahmed, M. 2007. Poshak shilpe nunotomo mojuri; Bangladeshei sorbonimno, tao shobai deina" Prothom Alo, A national daily news paper of Bangladesh, July 9.
- [35] Zahir, S. C. 2000. Intra-household Relations and Social Dynamics among Garment Workers in Dhaka City, paper presented at the National Seminar on Garment Industry in Bangladesh: economic and social dimensions, Dhaka, 21-22 January.
- [36] The Daily Star. 2006, May 23. EPZ workers go Berserk: 2 RMG units set ablaze 100 damaged, 1 killed.[staff correspondent]. Vol. 5, No. 704; P.1
- [37] The Daily Star. 2006, June 4. Workers damage RMG units, fight with law enforcers: 100 hurt.[staff correspondent]. Vol. 5, No. 717, P.1
- [38] Marriott, R. 2008, September 15. Bangladesh: in the militarized factory-visions of devouring demons of capital. (www.libcom.org/news)
- [39] Marriott, R. 2009, June 30. Short fuse: 50,000 workers on the streets and 50 factories burning in Bangladesh. (www.libcom.org/news)
- [40] Marriott, R. .2010, August 4. The rage over wage. (www.libcom.org/news)