



**Disenchanted Garment Workers:
Social and Economic Crisis of Garment Workers**

A Thesis Presented By

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Abbreviation

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BGMEA	Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
LC	Letter of Credit
LDC	Least Developed Countries
MFA	Multi Fiber Agreement
RMG	Readymade Garment
TIB	Transparency International Bangladesh

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Abstract

RMG sector has brought a revolutionary change in the life of rural and poor people, previously these people had no ways other than joining into traditional farming occupation or to work as a housemaid in the households of affluent people. But RMG sector has given them the opportunity to join in industrial sector and extricate the mesh of traditional and oppressive society. Particularly enormous number of woman has joined in RMG sector and achieved freedom over their life. Beforehand these woman had to live behind the enclosure of traditional society. RMG sector has given them voice and ground to step ahead. But working in RMG sectors costs the workers poignant and heart-rending sufferings and tribulations. Some time it costs workers their most precious possession, which is life. This paper tried to implore the sufferings and miseries that the workers have to go through while working in this sectors. I tried to surface the socio-economic conditions of the garment workers in this thesis.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss on statement of the problem, objectives of this thesis, methodology, theoretical framework and the significant of this study.

1.1 Statement of the problem

RMG sector of Bangladesh has turned to be a remunerative one. There are not any doubt that in the economy of Bangladesh, RMG sector is playing a gigantic role. At present there are 4328 garment factories and 4 million workers are employed there (BGMEA). 80% of the aggregate national export is earned by this sector alone which is worth of almost 20 billion U.S dollar per year (Asian Center for Development, 2015). Such a huge amount of money is blessing for this third world country. RMG sector is providing this country a solid platform to step ahead. Populace from rural area is storming off toward urban areas to involve in the industrial work force and they are getting cash money in payment at end of the month. Women, who were reckoned to stay behind the closure and perform menial works, are now extricating the mesh of superstitions and traditional precepts. It's true that they have now money to support themselves. Patriarchal and traditional ideologies had been prevalent in Bangladesh (Asian Development Bank, 2001). As Rahman (2014) says that there are two social institutions, Shamaj and Shalish, in rural areas that dictate the life of people in general and in particular the life of women. It's the RMG sector that gives the hapless women strong voice and platform to stand against the oppression of rural society. But the position in which these women get themselves is free of oppression? The money the workers get is sufficient enough to build a secure future? There are many questions that have no answers. Living conditions of the workers lie nowhere near the minimum standard of livings. Deep down there lie inconspicuous sufferings and tribulations. These sufferings are so recondite that most of time they escape our eyes. These works do not know what future holds for them. Apparently they are living a comparatively good life but for how long they would persist that? Probably these workers won't be able to manage two month's victuals, if they stop working. They cannot save enough money to secure a good future.

1.2 Objectives

- What do the workers think about the working conditions in their factories?
- What are the indicators of the sufferings of the worker?
- What are the perceptions that workers have formed about their position within the society?
- Can the workers save enough money to survive in future?
- What are the salient struggles that the workers face?

1.3 Methodology

Methodology means the ways or techniques that I used to collect data during my field work. A research can be approached using two methods, qualitative and quantitative. Which methods one would use to conduct research is determined by the research questions and the issues that it explores (Marshall, 1996). Quantitative research is used to gather numerical data. “Quantitative research is used to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into useable statistics” (Wyse, 2011). “Quantitative research frequently involves the study of meanings in the form of attitude scales Qualitative researchers may feel that the tendency for attitude scales to be pre-formulated and imposed on research participants means that they do not really gain access to meanings” (Bryman, 2012: 620). Quantitative method is more suitable for survey research (Bryman, 2012:620). According to these definitions, my thesis’s topic goes more with qualitative research than quantitative research. My research addresses the sufferings, tribulations and woes of garment workers. To understand their life I applied qualitative method. I have to gain clear ideas of their experience that they had both in their working and housing places. I need to have grasp of their feelings and how they think on their life. I also need the quantitative surveys to know some statistical ideas. I also took interviews, which was semi structured. Most of the garment workers are not adequately educated. Because of this reason I conducted semi structured interviews. A technique that I used during my field study was building rapport, which incorporates talking in their language and engaged with them emotionally. Another one that I used was focus group

interview. That means conducting indirect interview of several people in a close gathering. I also read some books, online news, saw documentaries to gather information's.

1.3.1 Selection of Informant

To pick up my interviewees I used snowball sampling. Which is “ A non-random sample in which the researcher begins with one case, and then based on information about interrelationships from that case, identifies other cases , and repeats the process again and again”(Neuman, 2006). As my research focus on a particular group of people so I used this technique. However, I found somewhat difficult to arrange interview of the workers because they do not trust any anonymous person gathering it would be perilous for them. I knew a person who worked in a garment factory but he could not cope with the extreme hard labor that it required as he was ailing from a diseases so he gave up and started working as a day labor. His wife works in a garment. So I went to their house and talked with his wife and asked her to introduce me with some others workers. She introduced me with some other workers. I asked them the questions that I planned. As the interviews were semi structured the questions brought open ended answers. I took interviews of 5 women and 2 men.

1.3.2 Observation method

There are two kinds of observation methods, one is participant observation and another one is non participant observation. I used participant observation method to conduct my field work. An observer tends to be objective in non-participant observation (Gray and Malins, 2004). While in participant observation an observer has to engage thoroughly and intensely with people. “The term "participant observation" refers to naturalistic, qualitative researching which the investigator obtains information through relatively intense, prolonged interaction with those being studied and firsthand involvement in the relevant activities of their lives”(Levine, Gallimore, Weisner & Turner, 1980). I built rapport with the workers. I tried to subsume their feelings within me. I tried to realize life from their point of view. I tried to engage with them emotionally. I tried my best to win their trust because the issues that involved in this research were very sensitive. I went to the houses of some of my informants to explore the conditions in which they were living. I have recorded the conversations with workers having their

permission. I captured some pictures of their households. It took two days to complete my field work.

1.3.3 FGD

I have arranged a group discussion where participated all the respondents, of whom I had conducted interviews separately beforehand of the focus group discussion. Reason for this group discussion was to cross-check the information that they divulged to me. In my one to one interviews, respondents were to some extent adamant and they did not share many incidents with me. But in FGD all the respondents poured out their heart to me. I found FGD very effective mean to get confidential information.

1.3.4 Case Study

I have conducted in-depth investigations about the respondents. It was like excavating information from the older parts of their lives. I tried to know about the crucial past junctures of their lives, which had shaped their lives.

1.4 Research Ethics

At the very onset of conducting interviews, I mentioned my respondents very clearly that all the information I was about to collect was very important for my academic purpose. I promised them that their names won't be divulged in any way.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Theory of Structural violence coined by Johan Galtung is congruous with my research topic. Galtung (1969), said there are ranks, actors, agents within the structure. Resources are unevenly distributed within the structure. The theory of structural violence can justify the dire condition

of the poverty ridden workers of RMG sector. This theory illustrates how workers are exploited by their owner so adroitly and why their status or positions within the social structure or hierarchy are so precarious with poverty and earthly tribulation and poignant sufferings. Ho (2007) expounded the “Theory of Structural Violence” given by Johan Galtung. Galtung (1969) defines what “violence” actually is. Violence is any action, verbal, emotional, institutional or physical that impeded people from achieving their human potentials and annihilated their rights. Galtung (1969) pointed out another feature of Violence, which is “avoidable”. That means that Violence is not inevitable. The author addresses two salient features of our world, which are inequality and disparity of rights among people all over the world. The author defines the Structure. Ho (2007), gives example of political and economic structures which includes classes and class coalition and various institutions. There are agents within structures. Galtung (1969) argues that power within the structures resources are unevenly distributed among the agents. Ho (2007), told individuals within the structure are not free agents rather they are entrapped in their relationship within the structures and this relationship shapes their identities. So it’s not the individual who determines their destiny. Ho (2007) also argued that decisions which are taken within structure are not on the basis of rationality. Structures put harness round the agencies of the individuals. Another feature of structural violence that the author argues is that violence in the structure is indirect and no one can identify the perpetrator of the violence. Galtung (1969) argues that economic inequality stems from structural violence. Within structure, as power is unevenly distributed some people are getting richer every day while some people are getting poorer every day and poverty impedes the efflorescence of the latent potentiality of human beings. Galtung (1969) also mentioned that existing setting aggravates the inequality among the actors.

In addition Karl Marx’s theory of alienation can be related with the workers conditions. Marx said that under capitalism system workers do not have any control over their labor and they are alienated from the product they produce. They do not have the ability to buy the clothes that they manufacture. The amount of money garment workers make, never allow them to substantiate their dream of wearing those fancy clothes. These workers are also alienated from their own natures because they cannot contemplate or ponder on their own potentialities. They do not know what they are capable of. Moreover, workers are estranged from the superior social class. As Marx said that the owners always get profit at expense of the workers tribulations and miseries. Owner’s pleasure costs workers heart-tearing sufferings. It is absolutely true for the garment workers. We have seen workers died in many accidents and many workers get maimed

or crippled, while working in the factories. It's the owners who lead grandiose lives full luxuries. They can gratify their material desires while workers somehow eke out their livings.

1.6 Significance of this study

RMG sector is doing the same function for this country as heart does for the human body. This sector is generating huge foreign currency. Workers are the most important part of this sector but they are the most neglected among the stakeholders. If the workers get demotivated or lose exuberance, it would have severe damaging repercussion on the whole sector. When the level of resentment of the workers will increase as a result of being swindled by the owners, they would eventually work perfunctorily and that would result in decrease of the standard of this sector. We should keep it in our minds. As a result it's very important to know about the factors which could cause workers' resentment. This thesis would try to locate and address various sufferings and tribulations of the workers. Knowing dark sights of RMG sector and the sufferings of the workers could show the ways to assuage or mortify those sufferings.

In this chapter I discussed on the statement of the problem, objectives, methodology, methods that I applied to conduct this thesis, which includes participant observations, FGD, case studies, snowball samplings. I have elucidated the theory of structural violence of Johan Galtung and finally briefly discussed on the significant of this study. In the next chapter, I will discuss on the origin of RMG sector in Bangladesh.

Chapter 2

Origin of RMG sector in Bangladesh

In this chapter, I will shed light on the factors that stimulated the growth of RMG sector in this country. These factors are the implementation of MFA, Desh and Daewood joint collaboration and some initiatives taken by government.

2.1 MFA

There are some historical significant factors that stimulated the growth of RMG sector in Bangladesh. One of them was the introduction of MFA- Multi Fiber Agreement, an international agreement between 44 countries around the world. According to those agreement those countries have to stick with some strict obligations pertaining trade. “ The MFA contains series of bilaterally negotiated quota restriction covering trade in both textiles and clothing between individual developed and developing countries”(Trela and Whalley 1990:13). Exporter countries could export a certain amount of products to other countries under this agreement. To say the truth this stratagem was machination of developed countries to hinder the economic growth of some specific countries, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea, dubbed as Asian tigers. Those countries were galloping at a tremendous pace in garment sector and their economic achievement caused consternation and perturbation for the developed countries lest their citizens would lose jobs. “The MFA provided the basis on which industrialized countries had been able to restrict imports from developing countries” (Rahman, 2014). The Asian tigers were flourishing to an extent that developed countries, having premonitions and presentiments of losing jobs of their citizens decided to impede the development of the developing countries. Bout this principle of MFA was a serious violation against the essence of GATT (Choi, Chung and Marian). The terms and conditions of MFA deviated from GATT in two fundamental ways: First, the provision of GATT prohibited the use of quantitative restriction on import and exports; second, the MFA allowed discriminatory treatments, which is in confliction with the precepts of GATT.

MFA was a sort of misdemeanor to deteriorate the economy of some nascent countries, which had the potentials to turn their economy into an opulent. The repercussions that MFA

implementation had on various garment exporting countries depended on their being LDC- least developed country- or Non-LDC. The quota system that MFA stipulated was applicable for the non-LDC countries like Taiwan, South Korea and Hong Kong, the main exporter of garment products. These countries could export only a certain amount of garment and textiles products whereas their ability to manufacture was much higher than the amount that they were allowed to export under quota restriction. For example in 1981, 73% of South Korea's garment export was subject to MFA quota system and by 1987 it became 97 % (Rahman, 2014). As a result MFA implementation was detrimental and menacing for the non LDC countries. But MFA came as a blessing to LDC countries like Bangladesh.

2.2 Desh and Daewood Joint collaboration

As Bangladesh was exempted from MFA quota, countries like Taiwan and South Korea tried to grab this opportunity. Daewood, a South Korean garment company forged bond with Desh Company of Bangladesh. Mr. Kim Woo-Choong, Chairman of Daewood, offered a joint venture to Bangladesh government (Rock, 2001). The then president of Bangladesh put him in touch with the chairman of Desh Company. They forged a joint venture. Desh and Daewood had a five years span agreement of collaboration. According to this agreement Daewood would help Desh in technical field, marketing strategy, business dealings and would supply all needed machineries. In return Daewood would gain access to the international markets of various developed countries. Daewood would get commission from each product that Desh would export. This was a juncture point in the history of Bangladesh. This joint venture with Daewood paved the ways through Which RMG sector of Bangladesh flourished at a tremendous pace. Before the entrance of Daewood, RMG sector in Bangladesh was fragile and brittle. It did not have any international network. It did not entail the skills needed for business dealings in international market. Desh achieved those skills using the platform that Daewood provided it. The outcome was tremendous and gigantic. Within six month Desh's export raised by 90%, which was more than 5 million US dollar (Mahmood). Daewood also arranged intensive training program to the employees of Desh in South Korea.

2.3 Government's Initiatives

Bangladesh government was also very keen and exuberant to flourish RMG sector. They tried to support that newly emerging and efflorescent industry by facilitating the policy pertaining trade and business, which were very intricate and time consuming beforehand.

2.3.1 Introduction of LC

One of the most important measure implemented was Back to Back Letter of Credit or LC. It includes three parties; Buyers and their banks, manufacturers and their banks, Suppliers (raw materials) and their banks. When buyers order the shipment they open a LC in the local bank which ensure the payment to manufacturer after the arrival of the products. The manufacturers also open LC in the local bank that would ensure payment to the suppliers of raw materials. As a result they don't have to pay instantly. When the buyers receive the shipment they pay the manufacturers the amount excluding the cost of raw materials, which would be given to suppliers and the commissions banks.

2.3.2 Other initiatives

Another important measure taken by the government was the introduction of bonded ware house facilities in 1980. Garment owners could import garment related tools without free duty on the condition that they could not sell these tools on local markets. Government also reformed the tariff policy. The overall tariff on all products was reduce from 114% to 22% in 1999(Mujeri and Khandaker, 2002).

2.4 BGMEA

BGMEA, Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association, was formed by the owners of garments in 1983. They mainly focus on the institutional policy of government and overall wellbeing of the workers. Moreover, they also try to ensure the rights of workers.

2.5 Impact of RMG sector

RMG sector has inconceivable impact on the social and economic aspects of this country. Especially this sector has shaken the hegemony of the rural conservative aristocracy by providing employment to poor landless people in general and women in particular. Providing jobs to women this sector brought a revolutionary change in the social structure (Rahman, 2014). Previously women were considered as fragile and incapable of working outside of the homes but RMG sector altered this hegemonic notion. RMG sector is the biggest revenue generating source in Bangladesh.

In this chapter I discussed on MFA, detrimental to many countries, was a boon and benediction for Bangladesh. Desh-Daewood collaboration paved the way through which RMG sector started efflorescenting. Bangladesh government also inaugurated many policies to facilitate previous intricate and time consuming policies by initiated policies like LC. In the next chapter I will discuss on the working conditions in RMG sector.

Chapter 3

Working Condition in RMG sector

In this chapter I will present the reviews of various articles that I have selected as the conceptual background of this study. These articles are about violations of workers' rights, working conditions in factories, socio-economic conditions of the workers.

3.1 Within Bangladesh:

Habib (2014) argues that despite of the economic advantage or employment opportunity given by the RMG sector to the woman of Bangladesh, they still remain vulnerable within the context of economic and social structure. The author implicates the theory of structuralism of Johan Galtung to the context of Bangladesh's female garment workers. The author analyses the growth of RMG sector in Bangladesh. Which includes The MFA agreement. Then he draws the traditional Context in which women of this country got enmeshed. The two prominent and influential religions in this country are Hinduism and Islam. Both of these religions generate ideal images of woman as bounding within home and subservient to their husbands. These religions formed a conception regarding woman as only capable and suitable for menial works. Thus the social structure in which women live in our country has formulated an austere situation for them where they do not have any strong ground to set forth on life. But because of dire poverty they started working in Garments. But the authors says that still many women could not spend their money on their decisions and many women think that working in garments does not increase their social status. On the contrary the have been stigmatized. Most of these woman are from countryside and from poor background. The author says that there are two factors, "pull" and "push", which obliged these women to join in garments. Pull factor stands for the women who joined in garment without any obligation and push factor refers to those, who did not have any other options left except joining in garments. According to other a great proportion of the female workers would not join in garment sector if they had any other choice. The author then shows the negative and positive effects of RMG sector. Positive aspects include their strong position within the families as they contribute to their families and the mobility they achieved. But the author addresses some vile aspects of garment sector including

harassment, both sexual, verbal and physical, morbid working conditions, poor and filthy housing condition, infringement of laws and rights. The author thinks that apparently it might look that these poor workers are empowered compared to their previous life but these people are oppressed and bereft of their basic rights by the powerful agent of the social and economic structure.

Labotilz and Bauman-Pauly (2015) focus on the workers and working condition of various factories. The authors estimated the total number of factories in Bangladesh, which was 7000. This number stands against the number of previous estimated number of total factories which was approximately 5000. This essay claims that only 20% factories are inspected by the government's inspectors. Among these 7000 factories there are direct and indirect factories. Direct factories are related with international buyers directly while indirect factories work as subcontractors of the direct factories. The authors claim that most of the indirect factories work under shadow and inconspicuously. This essay presents the fact there are 3200 direct factories and 3800 indirect factories. This essay also shows a vital assumption about the total number of garment workers. Which is 5.1 million whereas it is officially stated that the total number of worker is 4.1 million. Therefore it is a sharp contrast between the estimation of this essay and the estimation of previous studies. The authors also talks on informal subcontract. Many indirect factories work for partly export for the direct factories. These indirect factories are not subject to vigilance and inspections. Therefore working conditions in these factories are dreadful. The author says that these factories employ child workers and violate laws and regulations frequently. Even the basic standard of safety and health rules are not practiced in these factories. The authors claim that theses indirect factories are now a prominent part of the RMG sector. This articles also talk on Accord and Alliance, safety program for workers. The authors says that Accor and Alliance cover 1900 factories out of 7000. In 2015 Accord has inspected 1590 factories and advised them to fix some violation or infringement but only two factories have done what Accord prescribed them and Alliance said that only six factories passed in the inspection. This essay talks about international fund and assistance. After the collapse of Rana Plaza various international organizations declared to spend huge amount of money on the improvement of factory safety. But there is obfuscation about their spending money on factory remediation. About Trade unions this article says that trade union leaders have been subject to retaliation.

Mariani & Valenti, (2013) focus on the working condition of RMG sector in Bangladesh. Their accounts gave me a clear conception regarding working condition. The authors mainly focused on working conditions, which are obviously very perilous for the workers. Three pillars of social Dialogue that are government, employers and workers are also fragile. The authors argue that the trade unions are not strong enough to negotiate their rights. The gap between workers and employers on term of power relation is very high. The voices of works could not reach to theirs employers and get lost somewhere in the middle. They gave a brief account of how the industry grew without any standard guidance from the government to follow. In terms of conflicts between the workers and owners there is not efficient ways to mitigate the fracas. Procrastination is an obvious fact in term of conflict mitigation as result workers do not get any benefit from their demonstration. The authors also give a brief account of EPZ factories and argue that comparing to outside factories EPZ's factories provide much better opportunities and conditions. The authors also talk about the breaches of laws and compliance, which are prominent in short scale and unregistered factories. Sometimes government condone them because their affiliation with political parties. The author talks about the low wages and harassments of the workers. In their analysis the found that job security is very low as well as regulation regarding wage and working hour in not properly followed. Workers have to get through various kind of harassments specially the female workers. There is also discrimination but not in term of gender but on the basis of beauty. There is also some ethnographic accounts of workers.

Siddiqi (2003) explores pertaining the deplorable conditions of RMG Garment Factories particularly for women workers. The crucial issue on which she focused on is Sexual Harassment of female workers in RMG sector. There are also some others issues on which she focuses are low wages, arbitrarily job dismissal and lacunas of laws. The author has drawn a wide a wide horizon where the sufferings and tribulations of the women workers have been delineated. The author argues that most of the incidents of the sexual harassment of the female workers are not brought to light and only reported incident are disposed to media. She also says that the definition of sexual harassment cannot cover all the sexual harassment. For example in many factories many official decisions are contingent of female workers' responses to the sexual demand of the superior authors. Which is known as quid quo. The author says that

existing definition of harassments cannot vindicate the perpetrator of quid quo harassments. So the author comes up with a new definition of sexual harassment covering the quid quo harassment. She put blames on the power gap between the workers and owners as the main factor from which all harassments emanate. She also says that women consider their status as low as a garment workers. Women are harassed in factories in many derogatory ways. Even the local buyers sexually harassed them. This essay says that rape is common incident in factories. Especially in night shifts many women get raped. The superior male authorities force them to meet their sexual demands. This essay shows us that these women are also harassed and molested in public spaces. There is also example of abduction cases. Women do not have courage to go to police and file petition against their tormentor for the fear of retaliation. In the factories women tend to conceal their harassments because the authorities are involved with these salacious and lewd maltreatment.

Asian Centre for Development (2014) conducted a survey report. It presents the statistical scenarios of the impact of RMG sector in Bangladesh. This essay mainly focuses on the positive aspects that the garment sector has brought in this country. It is an enormous essay which contains gigantic number of information regarding workers demographic descriptions. For example where they come from, how RMG sector effects their social life. It present the socio economic profiles of the workers, which includes their residence type, their everyday meal, their educational background, their marital status. This essay also discusses on the issue of their health. This essay is not an analytical or critical one but a statistical one. After reading this essay one would have ideas regarding the number of workers in RMG sector, distribution of genders in working places, in which way their present status is different from their past ones. This essay is very informative.

Ahmed & Nathan, (2014) mostly focused on the positive aspects of RMG sector, which includes increase in wages and improvement in working conditions. This improvement is the result of horizontal change which include these relationships with the global networks, for example NGOs and various international organizations and vertical change, which the relationship between buyers and the suppliers. The authors states that RMG sector has brought a positive change in social and economic life of the workers. This essay claims that working in garment factories has provided the workers with prestigious identity. The authors also claim

that factories are now compliant. They also think that many factories still exist which do not follow standard rules. These factories are mainly unregistered and fall under tier2 category. A claim that this essay presents is that the suppliers has achieved some bargaining power over the buyers.

Hasan (2008) analyzed the working conditions of garment industry and focused on the rights of garments the workers of Bangladesh. It contains some ethnographical works. This essay draws the general picture of garment industry regarding the violence and tries to unfold the reasons behind violence. According to this articles many workers do not get their payment on time, laid off without any notice and compensation. There are rules and regulation to follow but the authorities do not follow these rules. Workers do not get their leaves, which includes maternity leaves and general leaves. This essay argues that workers are deprived of their basic rights and this triggers their rage to convert into massive violence and insurgency. This essay also says that government and media have a tendency to refer these violence as an intrigue of foreign countries. In 2006 a tripartite agreement was established on the basis of 10 conditions. This essay argues that most of the conditions were not fulfilled by the owners. Government has set a minimum wage for the workers but this essay tells that only A grade factories abide by this law of wage but grade B and grade C do not pay the workers according to the law. There are many factories that do not provide identity cards and appointment letters to the workers. This article also draws some severe allegations charged by the workers. These allegations include taking bribe from the workers, mid-management corruption, physically molested by the authorities and so on. There are laws and compliances but this article claims that many factories do not practice or obey these laws and compliances. This essay has surfaced many abject aspects and scenarios of RMG sectors which were mostly remained in shadow. Distance between the workers and owners is huge as a consequence worker's sufferings and tribulation could not reach the owners ears.

TIB (2013) tries to plumb the depth of corruption and violations of laws in RMG sector. This essay says that from the outset of this industry government has overlooked the violation of construction codes that the owners perpetrated. Building were constructed arbitrarily and in a desultory way. Owner's main intention was to make quick profit. Due to the dearth of money government also lax the laws and regulations. This sector grew very rapidly. There was not any concern for workers safety measurement. TIB also argue that owners were in cahoots with

politician, government official and law enforcement department, as a result they enjoyed the freedom to run their business without having arranged any safety working conditions for the workers. This article also talks about the evolution of laws regarding RMG sector. Before 2006, the government enforced the laws that were formulated by British and Pakistan Government. In 2006, Bangladesh Government enacted new labor laws named 'Bangladesh Labor Act 2006'. This article expounds the negative and positive aspects of this law. This law has many provisions including "recruitment of workers, ownership and labor relations, setting of minimum wage rates, compensation to workers for job related injuries, formation of trade unions, raising industrial disputes and dispute resolution, health condition of workers, security and welfare, working conditions and working environment, labor court and relevant matters". To have permanent health care center, group insurance, recruiting welfare officers became mandatory. According to the new law garments owners will not be able to know the name of the workers joined in the trade union. TIB marked it as a positive aspect of the law. But TIB also criticizes this law because it has no provision for forming trade union EPZ areas. Another negative site of this law is that to form a trade union in factory it requires 30% of total labor of it. According to TIB this provision is an impediment toward the forming of trade union. This law has some others provisions which work sharply against the workers. For instance, now owners can deduct wages of the worker if found in involvement in strikes. Furthermore, owners can suspend the works without any compensation on the basis of misconduct. TIB argues that these provisions stand against the ILO convention. Owners also can terminate the workers on accusation of theft and embezzlement. TIB has the misgivings that owners may intentionally use their power over the workers. The law obliges the owners to increase the wage of the workers after five years of interval but this wage is not congruous with living standard and the escalating living cost of daily life. There is frequent violation of safety codes. Many garments do not have fire extinguisher, water storage and other safety equipment. This essay also addresses the intermittent violation of compliance and international standard by the factories. Owners also swindle the workers in many way and do not follow the rules and regulations of upgrading worker's ranks. The owners do not give the attendance bonus properly and make the workers work more than proper overtime hour. Workers do not get maternity leaves. There are inspectors to look over the condition but they overlook the conditions because they get bribe. Moreover, the number of government inspectors is insufficient and they do not have sufficient knowledge to carry on their job. Registrations of factories take place on the basis of bribe not on the basis of meeting the requirement. There are many unregistered factories that are running their business illegally but responsible government appendages do not take actions against

these factories. Many RMG workers died in fire accident but still the fire inspectors provide companies license which do not meet the fire safety requirements but they are provided with license because they give bribe to the fire inspectors.

Rahman (2014) talks on past, present and future prediction of Readymade Garment Industry of Bangladesh. The author gives a vivid and informative account of how RMG sector flourished in this country. He argues that Bangladesh had been vulnerable throughout its entire history. This helps me to understand why the people of Bangladesh had been a prey to dire poverty since centuries back. Because of intervenes of outer power, indigenous prosperous industry of this country gets fizzled. The author then talks about the inception of Garment industry in Bangladesh. Multi Fiber Agreement paved the way through which this country flourished in RMG sector. It was Desh Company, in collaboration with Daewoo, a Korean company, achieved tremendous success. Their success drew attention of others and inspired them to set on this sector. Bangladesh Government also helped them in much way and as a result of their combine volition to go forth, they just galloped toward success. Rahman (2014) thinks that RMG sector has brought change in both economic and social life of this country. Garment sectors account for more 70% of aggregate GDP of this country. The author then talks about social life. He says that society in this country is traditional which gives guideline on the basis of religious ground. Women are expected to live in home within boundary. Rahman (2014) argues that due to lack of employment women did not have agency in their life but RMG sector gave them employment and these woman extricate themselves from the tangle of social web of prejudice and traditional values and set forth a new life. The author mentions that woman working in Garment sector have now voice in their family's decision making process. He also illustrates that within the Global context Bangladesh remains vulnerable. He gives example of Bantai, an ethically and morally sound company, which was dragged to its demise because of being powerless in global context. The author extolls Bantai for practicing welfare and being benevolent to the workers. The author criticizes international buyers as they offer marginal price to the suppliers and the supplier have to acquiesce their unethical offers. The author also talks on labor union and non-union welfare groups and argues that in no way non-union welfare communities outshine union groups. The author also says that unions are much more inclined to the ruling elites than upholding the demands of working classes because of their alliance with major political parties. The author also states that most of the owners are associated with

political parties, so government does not take any punitive action against the owners and overlook their violation of laws.

3.2 Within Global Context

Vietnam's Governmental policies impede the formation of independent non-government organizing to check the abuse and violations perpetrated in the garment factories. The state and communist party persecute workers, who involve in unofficially formed unions. Workers are not allowed to remonstrate or to call strike against the repulsive factories. Nevertheless in 2011, 981 strikes were committed by the workers. Most of the factories violate the rules regarding legal working hours. Even the state authorities required many detainees, who were drug users, from state run rehabilitation center to work in factories. If anyone refuses to work, he/she gets punished brutally. Child labor exists in the garment industries of Vietnam. Children are trafficked from rural areas to work in small scale garment factories. Many factories resort to subterfuges to avoid providing their female workers maternity benefits. Working conditions in various factories are also precarious. Workers are deprived from their basic rights. Most of the factories do not follow the internationally standard safety codes. According to the law of the country all unions should be affiliated with Vietnam General Confederation of Labor, which is governed by the communist party. (Consortium, 2013).

Table 1: comparison of hourly and monthly wage of workers

Country	Daily minimum wages		Monthly minimum wages	
	In country currency	In US\$	In country currency	In US\$
Bangladesh(Taka)	167.67/	2.20	5,300.00 1/	66.04
Myanmar (Kyat)	6,400.00/	2.83	108,000.00 3/	84.81
Mongolia (Tugrik)	6,400.00 /	2.81	192,000.00 2/	84.30
Pakistan (Rupee)	333.33-400.00/	3.15-3.78	10,000.00-12,000.00 5/	94.44-113.33
Cambodia (Cambodian Riel)	18,666.67/	4.67	560,000.00 6/	140.00
Vietnam (Dong)	103,333.33/ - 116,666.67/	4.56- 5.15	3,100,000.00 - 3,500,000.00 7/	136.75-154.40
China (Yuan Renminbi)	33.33 - 73.00 /	4.99 -10.94	1,000.00 -2,190.00 16/	149.85-328.16
Hong Kong	260.00/	33.53	7,800.00	1,005.85

Source: Department of Labor and Employment (2016)

Bangladesh is the second largest exporter of RMG products but in terms of wages this country hits the lowest position amongst the other RMG exporter countries.

If we look back at this chapter, we would find that violations of workers' rights are prevalent, workers have to work in precarious environment. In particular female workers are subject of harassments. In the next chapter I will discuss on the socio-economic conditions of the workers.

Chapter 4

Finding and Analysis

In this chapter I will discuss on the socio-economic conditions of the workers and working conditions in the factories on the basis of my primary and secondary research.

4.1 Respondents' Demography

I have conversed with seven workers. Amongst them five respondent are female and two respondents are male. All of them migrated various countryside of Bangladesh to Savar.

Table 2: Workers demographic description

Informants no	Age (years)	sex	Marital status	Religion	Education	Birth place
I1	52	male	married	Islam	illiterate	Gaibandha
I2	18	female	married	Islam	Below primary	Bagerhat
I3	17	Female	married	Islam	Below Primary	Rangpur
I4	18	Female	Unmarried	Islam	Below Primary	Sylhet
I5	17	Female	Married	Islam	Below Primary	Sylhet
I6	28	Male	Unmarried	Islam	Class 8	Satkheera
I7	35	Female	Married	Islam	Below Primary	Rangpur

4.2 Workers' Socio- economic conditions and working conditions

4.2.1 Accommodation

Most of the garment factories are situated in Savar, Narayanganj, gazipur, Keraniganj and some areas like Mirpur, Badda in Dhaka. House rent in those areas are very high and because of low wage workers have to live in slum or slum like establishment for example shantytown. These places are very cramped and dilapidated and deprived of most of the basic facilities. For women workers it is most difficult to get a safe place to live in. Absar(2002) says “ A problem faced by working women specially in urban areas is the lack of proper accommodation... woman face extreme hardship to make ends meet because of low wage and high rental costs “. There are also mess like establishment but these are insecure for women because one can stay one night and may disappear in the next day (Absar, 2002). Living in slum is very precarious for women often they are gang raped by other inhabitants of slum (Bdnews24, 2006). Numbers of toilets are also incongruous comparing to the numbers of inhabitants. Every morning dwellers have to stand in a long queue to go to toilet and get water for household works. The environment in which workers live is very asphyxiating and choking. So garments factories are not paying these workers a minimum amount to have a liminal decent living place. Is this the precedent of a better or emancipated life? A worker is working from morning to night, drenching her/his top to toe with the perspiration of immense working, has not even a place to live comfortably. I have visited in person some of the worker's houses situated in Savar. Most of the houses are beneath standards. Landowner built those houses arbitrarily and improperly. The numbers of toilets are very inappropriate compared to numbers of inhabitants Rooms lie in a row. There is not attached toilets and kitchen. Everyone shares only one kitchen. There is fixed time slots for the dwellers to use kitchen. The toilet is a sanitary one but it is very scruffy and filthy, emanating rancid odor. The place is cramped and highly overcrowded. As I4 says

“I don't like to live here but I don't have any other way”

Size of a room is 10/5 feet. There is family of 5-6 members live in a single room because they cannot afford the cost of two rooms. When any guest comes from their village it becomes very difficult for them to sleep. Even there is no privacy. Even it is very difficult for them to change their clothes. There is not necessary furniture's in their houses. To sleep they have “ chokies ”. Two or three members of a family sleep in choky and rest others sleep in ground .Most of the

workers to whom I talked had been living in the same houses since they had come to Savar. Only one worker had been able to move into a new house. His wife has started working as a house maid and with the extra money that she earned they moved into a big house with two rooms. Women workers have said that they never faced any harassment in their houses.

4.2.2 Social Status

Majority of Bangladeshi populace are inclined to traditional precepts. Religious and traditional views dictate the way they perceive about life. Strong traditional beliefs and precepts in Bangladesh emphasize on maintaining distance between two opposite gender (Wilson). Gender roles and characteristics in Bangladesh are historically and culturally determined (Anderson, 2013). Prevalent notion regarding women is that women should have suppleness and shame, they should be polite and reticent. But as these women step against these hegemonic ideas, society turn on them and become hostile to them. People look at these workers in denigration and disparagement. It is said that female garment workers are morally inferior or immoral because they have to work in close proximity with male workers. Within their community they get stigmatized (Wilson). Female workers get excluded from their society and community. As Siddique (2003) says that female garments workers are also aware of their inferior status among the bhadralok society. They are working in garment because they do not have any other ways. There is case where someone concealed her identity as a garment worker in fear of social stigma. Most of the workers with whom I talked reckon their profession as a lower one on the scale of social status. They said that they work in garment factories because they don't have any other options. In rural areas from where these workers came various aspersions hover around regarding this profession. In this regard I4 says: *"People of our village perceive working in garment factory as a nasty job"*.

I2, I3 and I5 also said that people from their villages look on their professions as a very dirty one.

Respondent I3 says:

"When people hear that I work in garment factory they tell me why I am working there because it is nasty job".

Most of workers to whom I talked hold low and inferior perception about their own selves. Even a prevalent euphemistic term of tawdry or tastelessness is “garments party”. I have heard couple of times, when some people said “If I wear this costume I would look like a garments party”. Any working person should be given respect for the perspiration he/she sheds. But unfortunately garments workers in our country are the subject of disparagement and laughter. As a working women they should have been respected but they are the subject of social stigma and aspersion. They are getting excluded from the social circles of their village’s communities. They are becoming stranded from their society. I4 said me that there are garments factories in Sylhet, her native home, but in fear of getting stigmatized perpetually she did not work there and came in Savar to work in garment factory with her mother and two sister lest the denizens of her village would know.

4.2.3 Poor Working condition

Working Environment of most of the factories are beneath standard. Most of the garments factories do not follow the proper standards. The factory place is very cramped and ventilation system is very poor (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000: 15). As the main intention of the owners is to generate profit they give a little thought on the comforts of the workers. Because of over crowdedness and the lack of proper ventilation system the environment of the factories become asphyxiating. It becomes very difficult for the workers to work there. Workers suffer from various ailments. Garment workers suffer from fever, headache, eye infection, jaundice and back pain (Ahamed, 2013: 12-13). Another essential aspect is that most of the garments do not have sufficient numbers of toilets. From the onset of this RMG sector profit has been given preference over worker’s rights and benevolence. Government gave importance on the economy and overlooks the working conditions of the factories (TIB, 2014). There are standard codes to follow regarding working condition an environment. But most of the cases the owners do not implement these codes in their factories. RMG sector of Bangladesh does not abide by the standard and the working conditions in the factories are in conflict with international standards (Huq, 2013). Both formal and informal factories violate laws constantly. Accord, The Alliance, ILO and government of Bangladesh made 3425 inspections within the factories but only 8 factories came out getting passed (Bauman-Pauly and Labowitz, 2015). This aforesaid statistical information can explain clearly how vulnerable the workers are. Most of

the workers have said that the number of toilets is incongruous to the numbers of workers. Most of the factories do not maintain those toilets properly. Respondent I3 says:

“There are only 4 toilets in our factories and a cleaner cleans the toilet at morning and for the rest of the days no one cleans those toilets and these toilets get very dirty and emanate rancid and putrid odor”.

Respondent I6 Says:

“Factory toilets were horribly dirty and unhygienic and I need to hold my all nerves before going there and I tried not to drink water to avoid going using those toilets”.

Because of the amount of the stress and toil through which the workers have to go, they need to drink a lot of water. As a result it is very difficult to avoid using these toilets.

4.2.4 Insufficient payment

Gatlung(1969) said that the existing setting always aggravate the inequality and powerless class are the victim of inequality. Minimum wage of the garment workers is 5300 taka. But the living wage in Bangladesh is 29442 taka. Minimum wage of garments worker in Bangladesh Is only 18% of living wage whereas workers of Srilnaka, Cambodia, India, Indonesia and china respectively get 20%, 34%, 62%, 66% and 53% of living wage(What is a Living wage). RMG sector of Bangladesh stands at 2nd position in the world in terms of exporting but workers get lowest wage. According to ILO minimum wage should be a basic right of a worker (Dhaka Tribune, 2016). Price of necessary commodities also has soared up. Transportation cost has also rocketed up. Rickshaw fair, Bus fair and fair of all vehicles have increased. Housing rent also increased. Even in slum a single tin shed room without attached bathroom, toilet and kitchen takes 1200-1500 taka per month. It is almost impossible to maintain the expenditure of a single person in city life with that amount of money. Most of the workers cannot save money for their future. It is for the cheap labor that various worldwide clothing brands are shifting their plants to countries like Bangladesh, India and Srilnaka (Dhaka Tribune, 2016). The workers are living like modern drudges. They have nothing to do with it because their voice never can reach ears of the inexorable masters who are living grandiose lives.

4.2.5 Harassment of the Workers

Harassment is a very common phenomena that garment workers, very particularly female workers experience in their everyday life. There are two types of harassment, quid pro quo which include any official decision influenced by worker's response to the sexual desire of employers and the second one includes any sort of verbal or physical abuse or maltreatments (Siddiqi, 2003). Both types of harassments are common in the factories. Lineman often pulls the female workers by their hair and berates those using scurrilous words (Siddiqi, 2003). Linemen, floor in charge abuse the workers (Hasan, 2008). But most of the times these incidents remain in the shadow as the Workers have fear of retaliation and exclusion of jobs. Because most of the workers don't have formal contract or appointment letter. As the workers do not get appointment letter and ID card, they cannot resort to any legal action when dismissed illegally (Hasan, 2008). Working in night shift is very precarious for the female workers who catch the look of superior male workers (Siddiqi, 2003). Male workers or lineman sometimes grab the worker female workers by their wrist and cast suggestive comments towards them. The slangs they use are highly sexualized (Hasan, 2008). Moreover female workers have to face harassment beyond the factories. Sometimes helpers of the bus and rickshaw puller abuse them and try to philander them (Siddiqi, 2003). Working as a garment worker costs any woman a lot of self-respect and dignity. Most of the workers have said harassment is prevalent in their factories and most of them has experience of being harassed both verbally and physically. After completing my field on the garment's workers I have the notion that harassment, mostly verbal and physical abuse, is the most major characteristic of the garment industry. The authorities have taken verbal and physical abuse for granted as a tool to maximize the output. Lineman, floor in charge and supervisors are mainly the abusers. They use obnoxious and sexually offensive slangs to diatribe and castigate the workers. Most common slang is "Khanki Magi", a very scurrilous and bumpkin slang. However venial and tiny mistake is, onslaught of slangs would gush forth them. Sometimes linemen physically abuse the workers. In FGD I2 divulged one of the incidents when she was physically abused. She expressed:

"One day I felt sick and I asked the lineman for rest but he denied my request nevertheless I insisted and he said "" Oi khanki magi kono chuti pabina"". Then I told him why you were being so rude to me and in response he hit me with the body".

She (I2) also says: *"When I worked in Dilkuhsa garment, women linemen used to beat us"*

I4 says: *“Linemen push us by neck and pull on our neck”*

This is complete violation of laws. If we look at these squalid incidents from moral point of view there would be only one question, how someone has the right to abuse another physically and verbally because they pay her? Is this can be called true empowerment? In their rural life these women were exploited by traditional society but now in city they are being exploited by the modern industry. They don't even can voice their opinion. As I5 says: *“If any remonstrate he/she would get fired”*

These workers are actually working like slaves or the serfs in feudal system. But they don't have any other ways to go. Despite of all the harassment, they have to work there and bear up all the dire tribulations and sufferings. That shows that how hapless and powerless these workers are

4.2.6 Forced Labor

Forced labor is prevalent in most of the factories. By law the total working hour of a worker cannot exceed sixty hours in a week(International Labour Organization, 2009).But almost all the factories violate this rule and force their workers to work more than the legal working hours. But there is no one to prevent this. Even the workers often do not get the weekly off day. By law every industrial establishment have to allow in each week one and half days holiday(International Labour Organization, 2009). But some factories remain there operation running in fry days. If the workers demand for their legal leaves, authority threatens them of firing their jobs. During the major festivals like Eid and Pooja workers are granted the government approved leaves but they have to make it over by working in advance in the Fridays beforehand(Hasan,2008). Sometimes workers have to work more than they should under the threat of salary cut (Mariani and Valenti). There are also factories where workers are forced to work till late night (Siddiqi, 2003). Bangladesh labor acts clearly states “No adult worker shall ordinarily be required or allowed to work in an establishment for more than eight hours in any day: provided that, subject to the provisions of section 108, any such worker may work in an establishment not exceeding ten hours in any day” (A Hand Book on Bangladesh Labor Acts, as cited in Habib, 2014). Workers are given specific target to fulfill but if they cannot meet the target, they have to work in extra hours without extra payment(Habib, 2014).Whatever dire

the situation is some factories do not allow the workers to leave until the end of working hours (Hossain and Al-Amin, 2012). Most of the female workers do not get leaving during pregnancy. Laws states that “Every women employed in an establishment shall be entitled to, and her employer shall be liable for the payment of maternity benefit in respect of the period of eight weeks preceding the expected day of her delivery and eight weeks immediately following the day of her delivery” (A Hand Book on Bangladesh Labor Acts, as cited in Habib, 2014). But in reality a few workers get that maternity leave and start working just after the birth of child (Paul-Majumder, 2003). Most of the workers to whom I talked said that their factories had forced them to work beyond the legitimate working hour. They are given specific target for each hour. If they fail to meet that end, they have to work extra hour without any payment to produce remaining quantity. If they don’t work in that extra hour, their wages get cut off. Some factories maintain their operation even Fridays too. I4 says:

“There is month when we have to work in consecutive three Fridays”.

Respondent I3 says:

“We have to work in Fridays”

If someone gets sick while working, he/she never gets leave. For some moments they are allowed to take rest but after the interval they have to work again. As I3 says:

“Very often my coworkers become sick but they have to work again after having a break of one or two hours”.

Most of the garments factories do not grant their workers with sick leaves.

As respondent I1 says:

“I have been suffering from cough and fever but the authority did not allow me leave. At last they gave me two days leaves”.

While I was talking with this informant he was still coughing. Most of the workers said me that they often work from 8 am to 10 pm in a day. According to the Bangladesh Labor Act 2013 maximum working hours must be ten in a day. But in reality workers often work more than fourteen hours. This working period they only get one hour interval for launch. These poor people are working like machines or horses, as if the owners have harnessed the workers and pull their rein to make them gallop in torrent. Is this the true emancipation of the poor people or the enslavement to a new system? These poor hapless workers are turning their blood into

water to make rich people richer. When the pressure is high the workers have to work seven days in a week from 8 am to 7 pm each day. No logic can justify their dreadful and deplorable condition. They do not have time to spend with their family members let alone getting recreation or some refreshing activities. So the moral cost of becoming a garment worker is very high.

4.2.7 Workers Safety Measurement

All the factories should have enough equipment to extinguish fire breakout. But unfortunately most of the factories don't have necessary fire protection systems. Many workers have been burnt to death while working in the factories. In most of the cases main reason behind the causality was that the main gate was locked (CBC News, 2013). Most of the factories do not have adequate numbers of fire extinguishers. There are government inspector who investigate the factories and floors but factories that do not have firefighting apparatus can get approval of the inspector by paying graft to the inspectors (TIB, 2013). Workers feel much unsecured as the factories do not have enough firefighting apparatus (Habib, 2014). The most fatalistic incident took place in Savar on, 24th April 2013 when Rana plaza collapsed and killed almost 1200 people. The day before its collapse crevices appeared on the pillars and building. Factory workers deserted from the building but they were forced back to work (Yardley, 2013). Factories are supposed to run drills on fire breakout but most factories arrange this program in a perfunctory way that worker do not make head or tail of those drill programs (TIB, 2013). Most of the factories do not have emergency exits. The authorities always overlook the violations of safety codes (Mariani and valenti).

4.2.7.1 Fire safety:

By law "Every establishment shall be provided with at least one alternative connecting stairway to each floor and such means of escape in case of fire and firefighting apparatus"((International Labour Organization, 2009). But most of the works told me that their factories lack of above mentioned precautions. Respondents I2, I3, I4, and I6 said me that the factories where they

work do not have fire safety apparatuses. Respondent I3 Says: *“In my floor there is one small fire extinguisher but I don’t know whether it can work or not because it’s very old”*.

But I5, I1 and I7 told me that their factories have proper numbers of fire extinguishers and drills are arranged regularly. From 2005 to 2013 more than 1322 people were killed in various factory accidents and many people became limp (CBC news). Gatlung (1969) said that if anyone dies from a death that was avoidable, it would be violence against him/her. All those accidents that happened could be prevented, if the owners or government would have been careful regarding the working conditions

4.2.7.2 Medical facilities:

Most of the workers said that their factories do not provide any medical facilities and there is not any doctors and nurses in their factories. A few works said that their factories provide medical facilities and but there is not sufficient numbers of doctors and nurses compare to the numbers of workers.

Respondent I1 says: *“There are 8000 workers in my factory but one or two doctors are available to get treatment”*.

4.2.8 Is their Payment enough to secure Future?

While interviewing I asked the workers whether they can save money after paying their lively costs. All the workers except one have replied in negative. They said that their intention before migrating to city life was to save some money then come back again to their roots. But they cannot save money for their future. When I asked I1 that he was already old and what he was going to do after getting retired from factory. He says *“I would return to my village and open a shop to sell tea and pan”*

While I asked respondent I3 about her future she became melancholic and said: *“Allah knows better”*. All the respondents except I7 could not manage any savings because her husband works as driver. Most of the workers cannot save because price of necessary commodities are very high. Garment owners do not pay them properly. I3 got only 4800 taka while minimum

wage is 5300 taka. I4 works more than 72 hours in a week as an operator but at the end month she got only 6800 taka. I1 says:

“I could not buy notes for my school going child with the money got so my wife has started working as a house workers and with her money we buy my child’s educational staffs”.

It’s true that at the end of the month garments workers get cash, which was beyond imagination while they were living in village. Most of them was landless and completely depended on others Commiserations. Most of them were exploited and duped by those inexorable and sordid local aristocrats. But at present they get money but it cost them a lot far way than what they achieve. The factories are devouring their exuberance. They are getting exhausted.

As I4 say: *“At the end of the working day my pain excruciatingly hurts”*

I7 says: *“My waist line swelled in pain”*

Aforesaid descriptions are the stories of their lives. They are working without knowing what their future holds for them or what would happen to them when they no longer can work. I7 told me that her youngest child is a handicapped but she could not bear the expanse of treatment of her child.

4.2.9 Job security

By law each worker should be provided an appointment letter and an ID card(International Labour Organization, 2009).But All the workers except one to whom I talked do not have any appointment letters. Even most of the workers to who I talked don’t know anything about appointment letter. As a result these workers are exploited by the owners of the factories very easily. Because of silly and venial mistakes the get fired from their jobs. If they voice their opinion against the exploitation and maltreatment of the owners, they get fired and it firing workers does not cost the owners any liability. The factory authorities orchestrate and devise machinations to fire the workers. For example they put something into the reticules of the workers on the sly and accuse them of burglary. Respondent I1 says in this regard:

“When the authority wants to fire any workers, they put something into the handbag of that worker and exclude him/her on the accusation of theft”.

When I asked respondent I3 why they do not raise their voice against the owner she said:

“If anyone raises voice or demonstrates, he/she likely to get fired”.

Workers are completely powerless and voiceless. It's the owners who has unquestioned and untrammelled authority over them. I have found only one worker who have appointment letter. I asked her why she was given an appointment letter and she said that the owner of her factory is a good, kind benevolent person and he really cares about the well beings of the workers. It seems that the job security depend on the kindness of the owners.

4.2.10 Inspections

All of the workers have said that they are regularly threaded to conceal the real scenarios of the factories from the inspectors. The factory authorities warn them that if anyone divulges any information he/she would be fired. So during the inspections the workers never speak the truth to the inspectors. Almost all of the workers to whom I talked are univocal regarding this fact.

Respondent I1 says: *“The authorities warn us not to speak anything to the workers”.*

Respondent I3 says:

“Our factory owner convened us and warned that if anyone let go off any truth to the inspectors, he/she would be fired”

Some factory owners resort to forgery and insidious stratagem to eye wash the inspectors.

AS I4 says:

“They keep two drafts of payment records, one is actual and other one is false, and show the false one to the inspectors”.

But these workers cannot represent the inklings of original working conditions of the factories.

4.2.11 Factory types

According to the numbers of workers employed I have divided the factories into three categories, Large, medium and small. Factories where numbers of the workers are more than 3000 fall in large category and medium and small factories hold more than two thousands and

less than 1000 respectively. From my field study I have seen that large factories are far away better than the medium and small factories. Medium and small factories are like purgatory. These factories are locally known as Bangla factory. These factories are operating their business under shadow and without any vigilance. They do not pay heed on rules and regulations. Arbitrarily they maintain their production. But large factories at least try to provide some facilities to the workers. Large factories are liable to the buyers and inspectors. Regular inspections take place in large factories. As a result owners try to provide modest working conditions to the workers. Large factories are complaint and medium and small factories are non-compliant. From my field work I gather that working conditions in compliant factories are far better than the non-compliant factories because inspections regularly take place in compliant factories.

Table3: Differences between compliant and non-compliant factories

	Compliant	Non-compliant
Forced labor	No	yes
Child labor	no	yes
Toilets	Sufficient and clean	Insufficient and dirty
Overtime payment	According to the rules	Far less than the actual
Medical facilities	yes	no
Fire-safety	yes	no
Harassment/Abusing	Hardly happens	Very prevalent
Sick leave	Very difficult to get	Can get sick leave but wage would be cut
Appointment letter	no	no
Job security	no	no
Air ventilation system	Good	no
Inspections	regular	irregular

Source: Collected by researcher (2016)

We have seen in this chapter, despite the employment opportunities provided by RMG sector, it costs the workers dire sufferings. Most of the workers have mentioned that they are working in filthy environments. They do not have job security and the wages that they are paid are not enough for economic emancipation.

Chapter 5

Case studies

In this chapter I will present the life stories of three workers. I have replaced pseudonyms with their original names to keep confidentiality. Using their original names involve the risk of retaliation or retribution.

5.1 Case Study 1

A 20 years age old girl and we assume her name is Laboni. This girl is from Bagerhat, a district under Khulna division. She came to Savar when she was 6 years old with her parents. Life has always been harsh to her. Her father used to pull rickshaw and her mother worked as a maid in people's house. But some days later her father was ailing from some disease and could work no longer. So she started working as a garment worker when she was 16. She started working as a helper and got promoted to operator after one year. She was given target production for each hour. If she failed to meet the target the supervisor berated her using scurrilous and lewd slangs. One day supervisor set her a target of 70 pieces of products to be produced in each single hour. After producing 6 units she somehow broke the needle and fixed it. But unfortunately she forgot to count the units that she produced after the emendation of needle. When supervisor asked her about the numbers of units she could not figure it out and that infuriated the supervisor. He got demented.

As Laboni puts it

“Supervisor amake bollo oi knanki tui ki amar bou lagos naki bon lagos? Tarpur o amake body (product) chuire marlo mukher upor. Ziper amar gal a laige amar gal chile gesilo.”

She said that she had to face there incommensurable numbers of similar incidents. Both verbal and physical abuse was a common incident. Finally she drooped her job and looked for another factory. Now she works in another garment factory in Savar. This factory produces jackets, three quarter pants and shirts. At present 2000 workers work there. She says that her floor is crammed with people and she hardly could move. There is only five toilets for women. These toilets are not hygienic and clean. A cleaner cleans these toilets for once and rest of the days people use these and make impossible to use anymore. Vile and unbearable putrid rancid

emanates from toilets and aggravate the situation. There is not a single Doctor in the entire factory. The main gate always remain closed. Workers very often get ill as the place is very congested. She is working there for two years and each time the inspector came the owner and supervisors stand by them so that they could not tell truth to the inspector. Before the inspector came, the owner threats them not to divulge any information to the inspector. She was not given any contract paper. She starts working from 8 am in morning and finish at 9 or 10 pm at night. When she comes back home her legs bloated up in severe pain. She cannot take leave when she feels sick. Leave is granted on the condition of cutting payment. Often she has to work in fry days. Rarely does she get festive leaves. During the eid they get leave but they have to make it up by working in Fridays. She does not have any slightest ideas about what trade union is. She does not know anything about worker's rights. Her current salary is 6200 taka. She says it is very hard to maintain her family with it. She lives in a shanty town. Her house rent is 1300 taka. This place is crammed with people and very scrubby. She has to share a toilet with 20 people. Her life is very hectic. She does not have any time for herself to get refreshed. Life has become a heavy burden to her. Moreover she is a subject of aspersion and disparagement because she works in garment factory. During eid vacation she travels to her village and she loves her village which is fresh and clean. She wants to get rid of her hectic life in Savar. But she cannot find any way to extricate herself from the den of sufferings.

5.2 Case Study 2

Anis was a farmer, whose father had some handful farmlands in Gaibandha, a country district situated in Rajshahi. They had a happy life there. But things changed dramatically. His father had four brothers and they harbored jealousy and malice towards his family as they had lands. His father was a very candid and simpleton like most of the people who resides in country sides. In their village a monthly hut was organized where his father and uncles went regularly. Once his father did not have any money with him and his uncle offered him loan on the condition of having his tip mark in a local registration office. His father gave his tip mark and got the loan. This was the undoing of their happy and simple life. His perfidious uncle swindled them and extorted everything from them. Anis then came to Dhaka in 1988 and started working as a helper of covered van. He took shelter in Korail slum in Mohakhali. After living there for some years he joined in a garment factory in Dhaka as a helper. This factory later shifted their

production establishment to Savar. He also came to Savar with his factory and found living shelter in Majidpur. In his working place he met a woman whom he married later on. Now they have two daughters and a son. His wife no longer works in garment factory. Because she has to raise her children and take care of household chores. Now she works as a house maid. She says working in garment factory is too difficult as she had to stand on foot for 6 hours without having any rest. Anis has been working in this factory for 18 years and his salary is now 6400 taka and including overtimes he gets almost 9000 in a month. But he had to work from 8 am to 10 pm. He says that it is very difficult to maintain his family with this amount of money. Delay of payment is a common incident. He has no idea about trade union and provident fund let alone others' rights of workers. He says foreign buyers and auditors frequently come to visit the factory but during the visit workers kept under strict vigilance as not to leak any information of their misery which they experience in the factory. Even the workers are warned beforehand as not to divulge any thing to the inspectors.

He said the supervisors treat the workers as beasts. As he puts in – *“They (workers) cannot cry only in shame. Supervisors are not human”*. They have to work on some Fridays too. Leaves are very difficult to get granted even if someone is very sick. Workers frequently catch cold and fever but they are not given sick leave. If someone becomes seriously ill they are granted with one day leave. Workers get incarcerated within the factory. Authority can terminate anyone on the pretext of burglary. Anis has been working for 18 years but he could not manage to save significant amount of money. His main intention was to work and save some money to buy lands in his village and then return there and reinstate previous occupation. Instead of that he has become enmeshed with implicate situations of urban life. He does not have any idea about what life has in store for him. He is floating in a sea without knowing his direction. He does not have any control over his life. He gets up at 6 am in the morning then goes to work and works there till 9 to 10 am incessantly. Comes back home at around 11 pm and after having his dinner he gets sleep.

5.3 Case study 3

Munmun is another girl from Gaibandha. She came Savar with her husband to alter the conditions of their life. Her husband is working a butcher in a meat shop and she works in a garment factory in Savar. At present they are living in Imandipur, Savar. Her living place is almost like a gutter. More than 100 people live there within a very cramped space. There are three toilets for more than twenty families living there. Every day morning she has to stand in a queue to get water and then in another queue for having access to toilet. Skirmish and altercations take place every day while standing in line. Going over all these hazards, she prepared breakfast for her family after getting breakfast she wends her way to the factory which is a perdition and purgatory according to her description. In her factory more than 1000 workers use to work. Most of the windows remain closed and the main gate is also closed. The environment of this factory is asphyxiating. There are not enough toilets for the workers. In entire factory there is also one or two fire extinguishers are kept. There is not any doctor and dispensary in the factory. Workers are forced to complete their task in given hour and if they fail the vile and obnoxious castigations of supervisor gush towards them in torrent. Sometimes supervisors grab them by their necks and elbow them. Owner of this factory is petulant and irascible person. He cannot endure the slightest mistake of the workers. Sufferings and misery of the workers hover within this factory. One day she lost her scene while working and she was to home. She worked 4 hours that day but as she could not continue to work for the rest of the hours she got only 25 taka in that day. Her present salary is 4700 taka and she is an operator. In her working factory lowest salary is 2500 taka. She has to work in Fridays too. Hitherto she never gets any sick leave. Very often she has to work seven days in a week from 8 am to 10 pm. Drudgery and enslavement are the terms which are appropriate to label on her life. She does not have any negotiation power over her labor. She does not know anything about worker's rights and trade union. Moreover her main objective of coming Savar was to get rid of poverty but still she is fighting with poverty. Economic solvency seems beyond her grasp as she puts it. When she compares between her life in Gainbandha and in Savar she says that psychologically she was happy there but economically unhappy but in Savar her mental life is in dreadful condition. If she was given any job in Gainbandha she would not give a second thought in leaving Savar. She abhors her hectic life. She understands that her owner is extorting labor from her in return she gets nothing compared to the benefits of the owner. But she accepts

that because she has fallen in an abyss from where her sufferings and her voice would not reach to anyone.

In this chapter we have seen in-depth histories of three workers. These workers are not happy with their lives. Every day of their lives is full with challenges and dire sufferings. They do not know what future holds for them. In the next chapter conclusion of this whole thesis would be drawn up.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Summary

There is no gainsaying about the contribution of RMG sector in the economy of Bangladesh. Success in this sector has proven that Bangladesh has the potentiality to compete in the International market. RMG sector has pushed our country ahead and paved the way to achieve more success. This sector also has also provided the oppressed and rural people platform to extricate from the mesh of the hegemonic rural and conservative society. A stagnant puddle is in every way inferior to a running stream, full of precarious stones, because a stream would eventuality converse with a river or a sea. Likewise RMG sector has opened a wide horizon before the workers. But working in RMG sector is challenging. Lots of workers died in various accidents in the factories. Garment workers are still subject to social stigma. They cannot save enough money for a secure future. They do not have job security because most of the garments do not issue the workers legal contract paper. Forced labor still exists in non-compliant factories. There is many lacuna in the inspection process. Workers cannot tell the true pictures of the factory to the inspectors. Workers do not get enough stipends to afford a minimal comfortable house .These workers are deprived of their basic rights like getting sick leave and weekly leave, medical facilities and so on. It's the ravenous and ravaging greed of the owners which cause all these sufferings for the workers. If there were strict, scrupulous and neutral adjudicator to check all the violations, Workers would have a good life.

6.2 Limitation

This research was a short-scale research. Perhaps it cannot present the wider picture of RMG sector. I did not have enough funding to conduct this research. If I had sufficient fund, I would plunge into deeper layer of this Industry and surface more information. Because I believe deep down there is more untold and appalling stories of the workers. Besides I have to attend in other courses in my university while doing this thesis. As result it was difficult manage extra time.

6.3 Recommendations

I have come up with some recommendations

- BGMEA should be more strict and inexorable regarding the violations of workers' rights perpetrated in the non-compliance factories
- Government can increase the power of the inspectors to issue instant punishment on owners and factory authorities if found to be violating workers' rights
- NGOs should be more active on awaring the workers on their rights
- Civil society have to arrange more dialogues between the stakeholders of this sector
- Trade Unions should be effective in systematic ways to up hold the rights of the workers

6.4 Further Research

There are many scopes on which further research could be conducted about RMF sector. A research can be conducted on the lacunas of inspections process through which the non-compliant garment factories always get through. A longitudinal research on workers' economic conditions could be conducted to understand what economic positions workers achieve after working for a long time in RMG sector.

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Appendix

Photographs taken during field work



Pic 1: Houses of Workers
lives



_Pic 2: A dilapidated room, where a family
lives



Pic 3: Filthy toilets



Pic 4: one kitchen for 9 families



Pic 5: Researcher with some children of the Workers.