

Academic year: 2012-2014

READYMADE GARMENT INDUSTRY AND ITS ROLE ON CHANGING STATUS OF WOMEN WORKERS IN BANGLADESH

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the joint academic degree of International Master of Science in Rural Development from Ghent University (Belgium), Agrocampus Ovest (France), Humboldt University of Berlin (Germany), Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (Slovakia) and University of Pisa (Italy) in collaboration with Wageningen University (The Netherlands)

This thesis was elaborated and defended at Wageningen University within the framework of the European Erasmus Mundus Programme "Erasmus Mundus International Master of Science in Rural Development " (Course No. 2010-0114 – R 04-018/001)

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Acknowledgements

All praises and pride are for the almighty Allah, who enabled me to complete this thesis for the degree of International Master of Science in Rural Development.

Actually, I have finished this thesis with the help of many. First of all I want to thank all respondents in my study sharing with me their personal information significant for this study. Also many thanks will go to Aleya Akhter, Nahida Akhter and Rabeya Khatun, for spending their valuable time while sharing their life experiences with me and providing me all required information patiently. Their valuable cooperation helped me to make this study possible.

I acknowledge my deepest sense of gratitude and immense indebtedness to my respected supervisor dr. Alberto Arce (Sociology of Development and Change Group, Wageningen University) for giving me several times his valuable advice, support and constructive criticism throughout the study period and preparation of the thesis. His generous support, careful readings and thoughtful instruction helped me to improve the report and make a valuable contribution to sharpen my existing knowledge on this specific field. Without his proper guidelines and mental support, I would not have been able to finish this thesis.

I would like to give thank in particular to Kazi Saidur Rahman (PhD student, Wageningen University), who spent many hours during my whole thesis period to complete my thesis. His thoughtful ideas and comments helped me to analyze all information in a proper way which I collected from respondents. His valuable suggestions also helped me for the modification and improvement of the thesis. Without his careful readings of many draft chapters and final report, it was difficult for me to finish thesis. Thanks will go to Lavlu Mozumdar (PhD student, Wageningen University), Aminul Islam, Mohammad Arif (PhD student, Wageningen University), Anindita Chakraborty, Mamatha, Aileen and to all of my Bangladeshi friends who are studying at Wageningen University, to provide me mental support and to give me their valuable suggestion to correct some parts of the thesis.

I would like to give thanks to all of our IMRD program coordinators, dr. Dirk Roep and Jan Schakel from Wageningen University; and Frederik Dewulf, Martine De Witte, Marie-Paule De Wael and Ilka Stevens from Ghent University and of course who provided me opportunity to come to abroad and gave chance to study in many reputed universities and to conduct study

through providing fund. I am really grateful to European Commission for selecting me as Erasmus Mundus Scholarship holder under International Master of Science in Rural Development program (IMRD). I want to thank to Ghent University, Wageningen University and Pisa University for providing me all administrative assistance during my whole study period. Special thank to Wageningen University that offers social science background students like me to conduct study with this social science group. Thank will goes to Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) for providing me two years study leave for this study purpose.

I am thankful to my father, mother, brother, and sister in law who assisted to create friendly environment while collecting information from respondents. I am thankful to my research assistant (M.S student, BAU), to select respondents from industry and helped them to bring in my home according their convenient time. I am sadly remembering my grandfather who died when I was studying here, inspired me to study in abroad. And of course I am indebted to my husband (Anwar Hossain) and little daughter (Fatiha Anwar Faiza), who sacrificed a lot for my absence with them during my whole study period.

Flora Begum

Wageningen, August 13, 2014

Abstract

The readymade garment industry is the main export earning sector in Bangladesh. This sector is considered as a way to change in women's status which is very prominent. It is providing employment opportunities of rural women since its introduction during late 1970s. The main objective of this study is to know at what extent the readymade garment industry has changed the lives of rural women workforce. In this study, we analyze 15 women workers in general and 3 women workers life histories in particular. The study finds that paid work enables some of the rural women to become economically solvent which gives women more freedom to participate in any kind of decision making activities and to increase their social network. Moreover, these types of changes in women lives influence women to take challenges in patriarchal social system through increasing their participation. The study also finds that some of the rural women are getting more secured life than before and those women help to change their family status through contributing financially as they have close connection with their family. Women workers are not only sending their money remittance to rural home, but also sharing their knowledge, feelings, ideas etc. with their rural home. From these perspectives, it plays a crucial role to change their existing rural family structure and rural society. However, women workers are facing several harassments and exploitations both inside and outside of the industry, but they (women workers) are very organized and have "Federation" to solve their problems.

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Chapter1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The readymade garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh is the key export sector and a main source of earning foreign exchange for the last 25 years (Ahamed, 2013). It generates 13 percent of the total GDP and contributes more than 78 percent to the country's total export earnings. Around 90 percent of its earning is generated through exports to the USA and European Union. RMG industries enjoyed a striking rise from 30 enterprises in 1980 to about 5,600 industries in fiscal years 2012-2013. According to statistics in 1983-84, this sector employed 0.040 million workers and in 20012-20013, this figure increased to 4.00 million workers. Among them, about 3.20 million workers are women (BGMEA, 2013). In fact, RMG sector is the largest employer of women in Bangladesh industrial sector (Islam, 2012).

Moreover, many factors are responsible behind the rapid emergence of readymade garment industry in Bangladesh. Due to Multi Fibre Agreement (MFA), the easy access to foreign market and the availability of cheap labour which facilitated rapid emergence of the industry. But even after the phase out of the MFA at the end of 2004, Bangladesh remains internationally competitive because of low labour cost and high production capacity (Akter et. al., 2013). On the other hand, several reasons are responsible for the gradual increase of women employment in this garment sector. One important reason is that, Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world. Natural disasters like flood and river bank erosion affect the country frequently and make many people homeless. These homeless peoples move to capital city, Dhaka in searching new jobs for their survival (Mathbor, 2008). Another important reason is that the rural area is transforming due to gradual decline of subsistence agriculture and fragmented land holding which ultimate result of decline in land security and individual land holding and the introduction of mechanized rice milling have reduced women employment opportunities in the rural areas (Hossain, 2013). Not but least the reason is that in Bangladesh women workforce are usually very unskilled and uneducated and it is easy for them to involve in agriculture, construction and domestic sector. But different tasks performed in these sectors are very open and usually done in public places and it is very difficult to perform tasks in these sectors as works are very labourious and hazardous. On the other hand, in readymade garment sector, tasks are carried out inside the industry and rural women think that this type of work is more respectful

compare to other works. All these reasons motivate rural women to involve in this garment sector rather than to involve in other sectors (Hossain, 2013).

Whatever the reason, the fact is that readymade garment industry has accelerated the shift from housewife to industry workers. It is viewed as one kind of process of empowering women through engaging them in this sector. This is especially important in third world countries where hierarchical relations exist between men and women (Hossain, 2013). Due to this type of hierarchical relation between men and women, women especially rural women are deprived to participate in economic, social and political activities. But readymade garment industry has tried to break down this hierarchical relation through providing employment option for the rural women which accelerate to change their status. Globalization also has a very important role to influence women involvement in the industry as well as in every sector and to change pattern of cultural beliefs and superstitions among peoples. Women's earning helps to increase women status in the family and in the society through contributing financially in their family and in participating in any kind of decision making activities. Although there are some problems in the industry such as poor working environment, sexual harassment, gender inequality etc. which act as barriers to change women status but it has more impact to change women status positively rather than barriers.

What is more important to say that garment workers are challenging social norms and traditions by delaying marriage, increasing decision making ability and working with male outside the home that was incredible even few years ago which helps to reduce social exclusion of women (Feldman, 2008; Khosla, 2009; Hossain, 2012). Therefore it is very important to develop conceptual understanding in order to analyze women workers present life style as well as their role and contribution in the family with respect to benefits offered by the Bangladesh readymade garment industry for rural women. The industry has impact to empower women economically and socially through increasing their participation in economic, household and social activities. The study will helps to analyze some changes on women lives due to their involvement in the industry and whether these changes have any impact or not to change their rural home and rural society. Further, the study will helps to explore the overall impact of readymade garment industry to change rural women status in a way so that in future this industry will be a sustainable employment option for women, a vehicle of change.

1.2 Statement of the work

The study will assess the impact of export-led garment industry on women lives. Our assumption is this activity can have either positive or negative consequence on the women working force. The industries have an unpleasant impact on women because of violation of women rights a fact that is exacerbated by women's docility, patience and lack of unionized experience (Beneria and Roldan, 1987; Roldan, 1993). On the other hand, it is argued that women's employment in the garment industries may liberate women from economic, cultural and social constraints. Women integration to the labour market may contribute against their present social and political marginalization. Some scholars argued that the garment industry provides them with certain kinds of social and political strength and solidarity across class and gender lines (Lim, 1983; Safa, 1995; Westwood, 1988; Wolf, 1991).

Bangladesh is a patriarchal society and culturally women's movement is limited by family organization and the expected role that women need to play in society. Has the garment industry an impact on this type of patriarchal social organization? Have the garment industry improve women position in society? Is there employment in the garment industries social and economic improvement and for whom? In the present study, all these questions will be addressed and explore who are these women employed in readymade garment industry and how the experiences they acquired in the industries influencing their everyday lives. This implies that the study will explain why women's involved in the garment industry are taken or not responsibility in changing their daily life. Further, I will assess whether this type of working experience is improving or hindering women position in society? The garment industry is part of rural women reality and today constitutes an important part of women livelihoods in Bangladesh society.

1.3 Researcher motivation

It is my dream to be a rural social scientist and to contribute in teaching, research and also in policy making levels after completion of my degree. I have completed my M. Sc. from rural sociology department of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) and my thesis topic was "Rural women in urban garments: A study on livelihood patterns of women garment workers at Dhaka city". As I am a woman, I am highly motivated to conduct research on women aspect as well as women workers position in the society which might be helpful to change their socioeconomic status in a positive way and ultimately whole society will be benefited. Previously, I followed quantitative method in my study. The total number of respondents was 90

women workers, selected from 3 garments industry. It was quite difficult to collect in-depth information from women workers due to time limits. My current study focuses the qualitative method more specifically the life history analysis of women workers. It will provide more information regarding the life history of women garment workers which will also fulfil the objectives of recent study. With the advanced knowledge and research guidelines of Wageningen University, this would be a great opportunity for me to conduct better study upon women workers by analyzing their working experience and to find out research gap in my previous study.

Another important factor which motivate me to conduct study on women garment workers is that, since Bangladesh is a developing country still there are lack of efforts in government level to develop rural areas which in turn responsible for the failure to generate sufficient employment and income for rural people. Due to male dominated nature of society, women' especially rural women have less power and are deprived to get opportunity in the family as well as in the society and do not able to contribute the economy. Even, in some cases they do not able to express their own opinion. Readymade garment industry is a very promising sector in Bangladesh and hopefully, it has huge prospect to change the current status of rural women by providing them employment opportunities. Of course, in garment industry, there are many problems such as exploitation of workers, violation of women rights, unsafe working environment, etc. But despite the existence of such problems, this sector eventually helps to change women status and assists to increase women empowerment. So, I want to analyze women workers experience to evaluate whether this sector only creates problems for them or they are benefited from this sector too. As this sector provides employment for rural women, there is ample opportunity to change family status of these workers, which will be good for the whole country as well. The bright future of women empowerment associated with the promising development of RMG sector in Bangladesh, needs to be analyzed with great attention.

1.4 Significance of the study

Readymade garment industry emerged as an important economic sector in Bangladesh and gradually replaced the jute industry. This sector is the key sector of the Bangladesh's economy in terms of employment, production and foreign exchange earnings (World Bank, 1990). In this garment sector, most of the women workers are unmarried young girl or widow, divorced or

separated whose presence in the city were persuaded mostly by poverty-stricken condition in their village (Absar, 2000; Kabeer, 2004). Their educational level is low and most of them are unskilled. The Bangladesh garment industry has afforded rural women with more economic status and personal independence. Several works have been done reflecting a wide range of problems faced by garment workers such as violation of labour rights, lack of social compliance, low wage, sexual harassment, lack of transportation; but this is not the only focus of garment industry in Bangladesh. Besides the problems faced by workers, this industry also helps to increase the socioeconomic status of rural women by providing them employment opportunity. Although some previous studies on the RMG sector in Bangladesh have focused on women empowerment issue for those who are involving in RMG sector but studies on the specific aspect are very limited. Since there are some studies which have already been done on women garment workers empowerment, but again I gave preference to conduct study on this field in order to analyze whether previous condition is still existing or not and how readymade industry plays role on rural transition.

In Bangladesh, with its strong patriarchal tradition (Amin, 1995; Cain et al., 1979), we might expect women's to have a relatively limited impact to contribute their family as well as society. In this society where men are the primary breadwinners and have access to employment, women deprived to get several opportunities from their family and society and economically dependent on their family. Such type of dependency is not only creates poverty in the family but also acts as a barrier to increase economic growth of a country. The readymade garment industry plays a very important role to breakdown this social system. It works as a process of rural transition through employing rural poor women in this sector and to transfer their earnings, knowledge, ideas to the rural home. The employment of rural women in this sector has direct impact to reduce poverty in their rural home as their financial contribution in their family. Moreover, the significance of the garment industry does not lie in the fact that it provides employment opportunity for rural women; rather it has impact to change rural society. With expanding the number of rural women it enables rural women to achieve a degree of self-reliance and economic agency within the family.

The wage employment helps women to increase their bargaining power and to increase their sense of self-confidence. Women's earning helps them to contribute in their family and increase

their participation in decision making that can enhance the power balance between men and women. However, women's involvement in economic activities is gradually increasing with the influence of globalization and transformation of traditional cultural belief and practices (Hossain, 2013). Moreover, this sector has uplifted the neglected section of the population i.e. rural women and helps to improve the whole Bangladesh's economy. This study will help to explore women's perception through their experience in RMG sector and will provide information on how women workers organize to overcome their problems.

1.5 Research objectives

The objective of the study is to explore the role of readymade garment industry on changing women workers status in Bangladesh by analyzing their livelihood pattern in the garment sector.

The specific objectives are:

1. To investigate the background and present life style of women workers in readymade garment industry and their duties and responsibilities within the industry.
2. To analyze how much potential readymade garment industry possesses to improve the status of women workers.
3. To assess how women workers organize themselves against the wage discrimination, physical abuse and poor working environment.

1.6 Research Questions

Central questions

1. Who are these women to get involved themselves in readymade garment industry and how the social and environmental conditions of their work influence their lives/ livelihood pattern?
2. Does this experience improve / hinder their present existence and general condition in Bangladesh society?

Related Questions (guideline to the central questions)

1. Who are these women workers and what types of duties and responsibilities they have inside the industry?
2. How their everyday life is going on?
3. What types of changes happened in their economic independence and decision making after involving in RMG?
4. What types of services provided by the industry and how much workers are conscious about their salary and wage structure?
5. What types of harassment workers face in the industry and what types of support they get from workers organization?

1.7 Research Methodology

1.7.1 Introduction

The reliability of a research depends on the proper methodology. So methodology is very important for any research process and has to be chosen carefully to fulfil the purpose of the study. Methodology should be such that it would enable the researcher to collect valid and reliable information and to analyze those data to arrive correct decision. In my analysis, both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data were used to formulate life history of three women garment workers and a qualitative assessment to meet the objectives of the study (Figure - 01). Basically, my study was qualitative but in some cases I did quantitative analysis just to get some basic information about 15 women workers. My purpose of primary data collection is to prepare detail life history of the following three specific women RMG workers:

- i) who is working for 2 or more than 2 years
- ii) who is working for less than 2 years
- iii) who has recently left the work

For these purpose, primarily I selected 15 women garment workers from a specific RMG. By talking to them through Skype, I collected their basic information by using interview schedule. Among these 15 women garment workers, I selected the above three women workers by analyzing some critical indicators like age, origin, marital status, education and motivation factors.

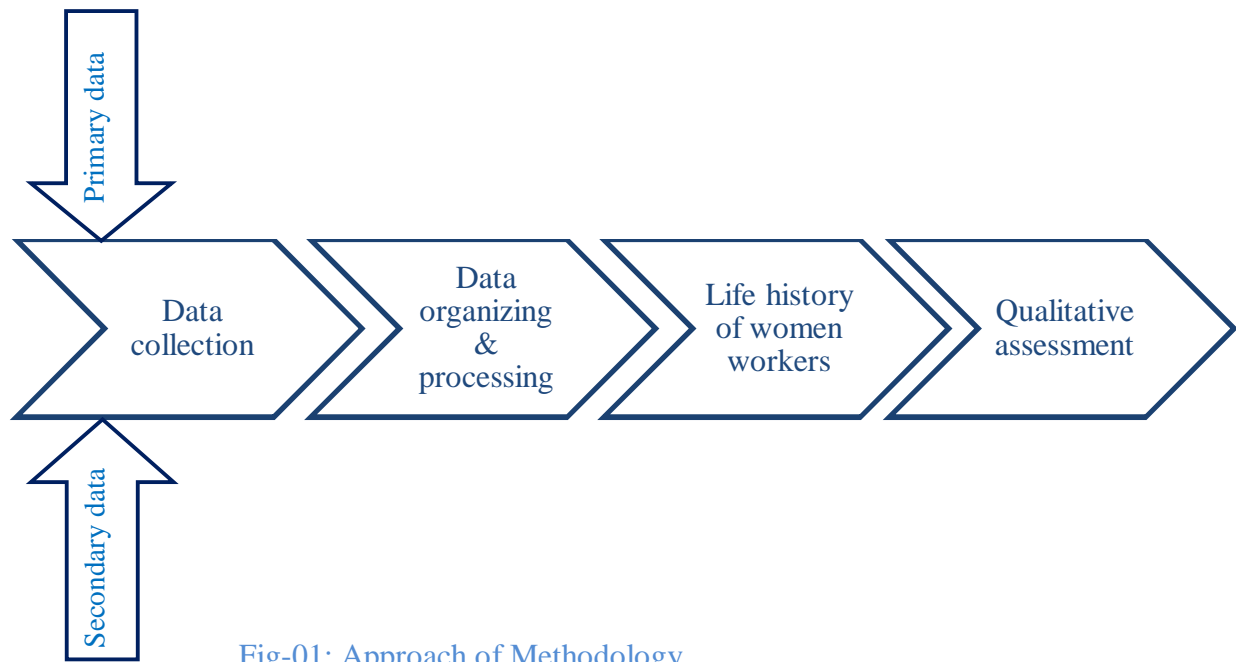


Fig-01: Approach of Methodology

Finally, I used a more detailed questionnaire to get the required information from these three respondents through Skype which is very advance method to collect data from respondents and also very cost effective and time saving method. The duration of collecting primary data was from March to April, 2014. On the other hand, I collected secondary data from the secondary sources like BGMEA reports, Export Promotion Bureau, Journal, articles, BIDS and various published and unpublished reports. After collecting all primary and secondary data, I made a qualitative assessment of their economic independence, empowerment, wage consciousness, worker's organization.

1.7.2 Brief description of methodology

In order to describe the whole methodology (Figure- 02), I followed several steps which are described below:

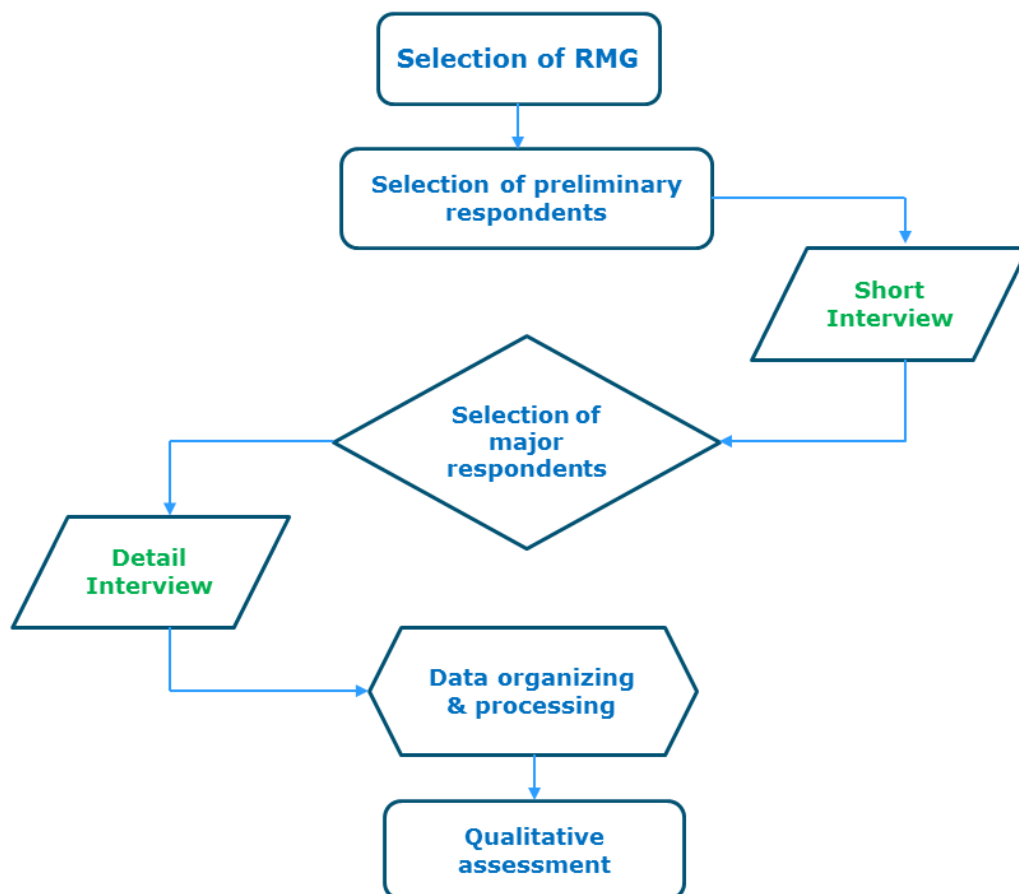
Selection of a RMG

I selected one garment industry purposively which is situated in Mirpur Thana in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. Mirpur is an area where many large and small garment industries are available. I selected this specific RMG industry because it was established over than 10 years ago (established in the year 2000) and a good number of workers are involved in this industry.

The total number of workers is 845; among them 524 are female workers. So, this large number of female workers seems satisfactory to start with.

Selection of 15 women workers

My one research assistant helped me to select 15 women workers from the above RMG industry. At first, I randomly selected 12 women from the list of total 524 women workers who are currently working in this industry. While interviewing them, I selected the remaining 3 respondents who had left the job by using snowball techniques. The participants were given assurance that all information would be kept confidential, will be used exclusively for research purpose and the study will not affect their interest in any adverse way, rather it might produce some benefits to them.



Fig– 02: Flowchart of the whole process

Short interview of 15 women workers

Before taking interview from them, my research assistant at first took appointment from them. My research assistant also helped to take them in my home during their free time. I talked to each individual participant personally through Skype in my home and collected information in a friendly environment. As I had previous field experience on this field, it was little bit easy for me to build a good relationship with them and to collect accurate information from them.

I used a very short questionnaire while interviewing these 15 respondents to collect their basic information like name, age, origin, marital status, education, working experience, motivation factors, monthly income and expenditure. There are mainly two purposes to collect such basic information: i) while selecting the major 3 respondents, these information will be analyzed using different criteria in view of achieving the purpose of the study, ii) these information will give a general idea of their background and distribution of age, education level and marital status and motivation factors which forced them to involve in RMG.

All the interviews were done outside the industry for few reasons. Firstly, it is not allowed by management talking to them when they are busy in their work as it was very time consuming for the participants while talking. Secondly, as I had collected information by talking to them through Skype, it was difficult to manage time during their working period. Thirdly, if I collect information when they are working in the industry, they might get nervous and couldn't speak freely due to fear of losing job. Finally, I wanted to establish a friendly environment and good relationship with them so that I can achieve true and accurate information from them.

Selection of 3 major respondents

This is one of the most important and tricky steps of my methodology. In order to select 3 specific participants from the above 15 respondents, I divided them into three categories. Among 12 interviewees who are currently working, I found 7 participants are working for two or more than two years. I put them in number 1 category. The remaining 5 interviewees are working for less than two years. So, I put them in number 2 category. I put the other 3 participants who have already left their jobs in number 3 category. My aim was to select one participant from each category based on some research criteria and analysis of their basic information.

From the 7 interviewees in category 1, I selected a woman worker named Aleya due to several reasons. While talking with 7 women workers those who are currently working more than 2 years in the industry, I found that Aleya was more interested to talk with me and to tell her whole

life history compare to other women workers. I thought that if I select her, then I would get more reliable information which would help me to conduct a good research. Some other reasons behind to select her are that she is divorced and wants to become independent and helps her parents financially. Her whole family came to Dhaka from Chandpur district. This district is little bit underdeveloped and river bank erosion is a main problem of this district and thus creates less job opportunity for rural people of that district. Moreover, she is also working here for many years compare to other women workers, thus very experienced in this field.

The remaining five interviewees those who are in category 2, from them I selected Nahida. The reasons are that she is unmarried, very young and wants to contribute financially to her family with her father. Another important reason is that most of the selected women in my study came from Mymensingh district. So I prefer to select one respondent from this district. While talking, I also have a feeling that she was very enthusiastic and energetic. Moreover, she also has little bit educational background.

From category 3, I selected one woman worker among three women workers who has left the job. Rabeya, she is married and little bit aged compare to other two women workers. She worked in the RMG industry for many years and has good educational qualification. As she left the job many more years back, so I think that she might compare her present life with previous life better compare to other respondents.

Detailed interview of three major participants

For collecting information from three major participants, I have used life history method. Life history method means the collection and interpretation of personal histories or testimonies which are collected during an interview process in order to understand “*the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future*” (Roberts, 2002: 1). A life history interview invites the subject to look back in detail across his or her entire life course. For knowing whole life histories of these three women workers, I used detailed questionnaire. Most of the questions in this questionnaire are open-ended so that the respondents can get the opportunity to express their opinions in a free-flowing manner.

For taking appointment from them, at first I talked to them through mobile phone. According to their suitable time, my research assistant helped to take them in my home. I used Skype for taking this verbal interview. Each interview was conducted on several occasions, sometimes only

half an hour in a day, sometimes two hours or more than two hours in a day. While taking interview, I wrote all information in my note book. Sometimes, I used a tape recorder for recording their words what they said. The way of interview was an unstructured interview that is the question sequence had not followed while talking to them so that they feel comfortable. Sometimes, I asked them questions indirectly in order to get more accurate answers from them. The content of the questions was same for two women workers who are currently involving in the industry. But for woman who has left the job, I have used another questionnaire in order to compare her past and present life style. For two women workers those who are involving in the industry, the question contents were relates to know their background information, duties and responsibilities in the industry, present life style, economic independence and empowerment, wage structure and workers consciousness, service provided by the industry, harassment faced inside and outside the industry and workers organization. The woman who has left the job, the question contents were to know about her background information, duties and responsibilities in the industry when she was there, past and present life style, past and present economic independence and empowerment, service provided by the industry, harassment and workers organization.

Organizing and processing of data

At first I tried to understand all information which I collected from three women garment workers. After reading several times, I tried to identify some key questions which I want to analyze. Then I tried to understand how these two participants (those who are currently working in the industry) responded to each question in order to identify whether is there any consistencies and differences. For participant who has left that work, from her information, I tried to understand whether is there any difference between her past (when she was in work) and present life (without work). This time I also used their fake name to keep them confidential as they involve in job right now and in this report, everywhere I recognized them at that fake name.

Qualitative assessment

The research approach of a study, whether it is quantitative or qualitative is determined by the nature of the research questions and interest and resources of the researchers. Based on the review of existing literatures and objectives set forth for this study, a qualitative design is

deemed to be appropriate as I am analyzing three women workers life histories. In a qualitative analysis, researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour. The qualitative approach investigate why and how of decision making, not just what, where and when. In the report, I followed standardized open-ended questionnaire for two respondents where I asked them same questions and responses were open-ended. These types of responses allow respondents to fully express their viewpoints and experiences. In a qualitative approach, I followed qualitative case study method. In my report, at first I presented three women workers life histories as cases. Based on these three cases, I did analysis to know whether is there any difference or not among three women workers and in their life any change has happened or not due to involving in RMG.

1.8 Problems in collecting data

In collecting data, following problems and difficulties were faced by the researcher:

- i) If I select other three women workers instead of selecting these three women workers, I might or might not expect to get better information, which was totally uncertain.
- ii) There was the limitation of time, for this reason data and other necessary information had to be collected within the shortest possible time.
- iii) Most of the workers were hesitated to answer the questions since the researcher was unknown to them.
- iv) Most of the respondents in the study areas did not have any idea about a research or study and it was therefore difficult to explain the purpose of this study to convince them.
- v) While writing about their motivational factor which forced them to involve in RMG job, I faced difficulties. One respondent reported about two or three reasons as her motivational factors to involve in RMG and it was difficult to categories which one would be the actual reason behind her to involve in RMG job.
- vi) Another important problem was that the study had to depend solely on the memory of the respondents for collecting necessary information because they did not keep any written record.

- vii) The respondents were usually busy most of the time in the garment industry and for this reason, it was difficult to find out their free time and to conduct interview according to their convenient time.

1.9 Outline of the thesis

The study focuses the influence of readymade garment industry on changing women workers status and their daily lives in Bangladesh. For analyzing this, the study formulates two central questions. The first question relates to how social and environmental condition of their work influences their lives and the second question is whether this industry hinders or improves their (women workers) present existence. In order to answer these two questions, this study is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter is introduction and focuses on significance, objectives and methodology of the study. Based on first chapter, the second chapter discusses the theoretical and analytical framework of the study. The third chapter provides some previous research results relate to women involvement in RMG, historical development and contribution of RMG, feminization and labour flexibility and present wage structure. The fourth chapter provides compact field data on some basic information of 15 respondents and life histories of 3 women workers. These life histories of 3 women workers are based on some specific fields such as their background information, duties and responsibilities, present life style, services provided by the industry, economic independence and empowerment and worker's consciousness on harassment and their wage. The chapter five contains socioeconomic analysis of rural women workers based on the findings of chapter four. The chapter six contains a brief discussion of the analysis and the chapter seven provides concluding remarks on two specific research questions raised at the beginning of the study.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

In Bangladesh, women's mobility is culturally constrained due to its patriarchal social system. Women are socially excluded to take part in economic, household or social activities which means they have less power and low status in the society. But participation of female with male in any kind of activities contributes a lot to change family status and society rather than participating only male. However, the readymade garment industry has an impact to empower rural women and to change rural society through providing them employment. But beside to change their lives, these women still have to face some problems. To address these issues, the women working in the garment industry are becoming organized and they have started to develop their own strategies to cope with family and society.

On the basis of the above considerations, the aim of this chapter is to provide an analytical framework that enables to understand how readymade garment industry influence changes in rural women lives. The framework in this study focused on the effects of patriarchy and the importance of family in Bangladesh, in this context women empowerment, rural transition and labour organization are the main concepts that I used to develop a theoretical understanding of the interviews and ideas that are the foundation for this study.

2.1 Concept of 'patriarchy' and family importance in Bangladesh

"Patriarchy" means male dominated family. It is used *"to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways"* (Bhasin, 2006:3). In another definition, *"patriarchy means to the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general"* (Lerner, 1989:239) which creates vulnerability among women. Moreover, the concepts of 'patriarchy' in above definitions are almost same where main focus is male dominance over women and thus women are in vulnerable situation. Women identify their vulnerability as being related to illiteracy, to non-ownership or non inheritance of productive assets, to the demands for dowry, to social constraints on movement, to male dominance, lack of security in a marriage and to limited options (Bhatt, 1998). Moreover, vulnerability as a concept is very important in this study since it is central to understand the negative effects of this patriarchal type of social system of women, especially those living in rural areas. These are vulnerable actors that have less ability and

freedom to get access to opportunities within the family and from society. In this study, I will analyze how readymade garment industry influence women to start challenging this patriarchal social system.



Fig-03: Patriarchal social system



Fig-04: Family attachment

The patriarchal social system is the one that bond family and kinship and therefore constitute the core of what women need to change in Bangladesh. The basic social unit is the family, generally consisting of a complete or incomplete patrilineal extended household and residing in a homestead. In Bangladesh most of the families are joint family having husband and wife, their unmarried children and adult sons with their wives and children in each household. Grandparents may also be present, as well as patrilineally related brothers, cousins, nieces and nephews. Elderly people, especially males play a dominant role in family life (Ball and Wahedi, 2010). Male is the authority figure and bear most of the responsibilities for all family members. Such household in rural areas is composed of three or four houses which face each other to form a square courtyard in which common tasks such as economic endeavour, landholding, social identity etc. are done (Website Countries and Cultures, 2014). Food supplies often are shared and younger persons must contribute their earnings to the head of the household. For this reason, when a child is grown up within such environment, they become familiar with similar customs which actually strengthen their family bonding. That is why when a person comes from rural areas to urban spaces for employment purpose, one of the main obligations of that person is to send money to rural home. This is usually done after the woman has managed to secure her own expenditure. It is very common in Bangladesh that female recognizes her father's home as their

own home. Traditionally, most women's economic and social lives have revolved around the home, children and family, but with limited access to markets, productive services, education, health care and local government. At present, due to poverty and new economic opportunities, some aspects of family life have been reshaped, families tend to be smaller in cities and converted to nuclear family group. Still such trends are not very common in rural areas, and thus most of the people who migrate to urban areas from rural areas for employment always try to keep in touch with their parents and siblings residing in rural home. In this study, I will analyze that in the family and society although women are vulnerable; they keep maintaining financial relationship with their home in contemporary Bangladesh. More and more they are taking responsibilities to keep the household in a sound financial situation. Household responsibilities are shared with the male headed household or in some cases are found that the woman is becoming the head of the household.

2.2 Concept of 'women empowerment'

Women empowerment is a broad concept and it can be defined in a variety of ways. According to Keller and Mbwewe (1991, cited in Rowlands, 1995) described this is as *"a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination"*. This concept focuses women empowerment based on their own organizing ability which have influence on women independent choices and control over their resources. The similar concept relates to women empowerment found in another article where the author define: *"empowerment is a process which enhances the ability of disadvantaged individuals or groups to challenge and change (in their favour) existing power relationships that place them in subordinate economic, social, political positions"* (Agarwal, 1995 cited in Meinzen-Dick et al., 1997:1306).

According to Bennett (2002:13), the empowerment means an *"enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them."* Although this definition of women empowerment is linked with above author's concepts of empowerment where authors explain that the concepts of empowerment as operational that outline the process, not an outcome but there is little difference on the meaning. Here the author includes and acknowledges in his definition with the concept of

institutions which affects individuals to increase assets and capabilities. The individuals and groups who are disadvantage in the society by the prevailing distributional rules, the institutions enable those disadvantage groups to seize and create opportunities to move up.

Another contribution comes from Kabeer (2001:435). She defines empowerment as *“the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.”* Empowerment is thus means a process of change where those peoples who did not have power will acquire it after a certain period of time.

According to Mahmud (2012), empowerment means *“having increased life options and choices, gaining greater control over one’s life and generally attaining the capacity to live the life one wishes to like”*. In general, the concepts of Kabeer (2001) and Mahmud (2012) on empowerment mainly focus on peoples increased life options, control over resources and freedom to live according to wish. The core of the meaning of women empowerment lies in the ability of a woman to control her own destiny. Almost all definitions include to an expansion of choice and freedom to take decisions and actions necessary to shape life-outcome. On the other hand, Karl suggests that *“empowerment is a process and is not therefore, something that can be given to people”* (Karl, 1995: 14).

In other words, women empowerment can be understood as *“the capacity of women to be economically self-sufficient and self-reliant with control over decisions affecting their life options and freedom from violence”* (Rao and Kelleher, 1995:70).

According to Haque et al., (2011:19): *“Women empowerment is a process through which they start gaining more power and control over their own lives and circumstances than that of the previous times whereas women autonomy is certain power of women by which they can do whatever they like to, without seeking permission or without having consent of others”*. In this definition, the authors distinguished between women empowerment and women autonomy. Moreover, the concepts of women empowerment and women autonomy are very important in this study as I will argue women autonomy in terms of women economic independence which helps women to do anything as her wish and to start gaining more power.

Involvement can be defined as people’s involvement in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that have the potential to bring about favourable changes in their lives

(UNDP, 1993:21). Actually women empowerment, women participation and women autonomy are closely related with each other. In this study, I will analyze women empowerment is the result of women participation and women autonomy. In another definition I found difference between the concept of 'women power' and 'women status' where "*status refers to women overall position in the society*" and "*power refers to women's ability to influence and control at the interpersonal level*" (Dixon, 1978).

In Bangladesh, women have very limited power in their social and economic sphere of life. This limited power has impact on women education and their lack of control over resources thus affects their decision making capacity, bargaining ability and employment opportunity. The women are seeing as a burden for a family and as a result they get lower value of life, while the situation can be changed through intervention of development practitioners (Basu and Basu, 2001). In this study, I will argue that women by themselves are in a process of participating in the labour market (society) and in their families. This participation is shaped through the money they can acquire from the garment industry. This participation in the labour process caused by the cloth industry is generating a degree of autonomy that can be interpreted as part of an empowerment process. This empowerment is partially reversing the oppressive situation of women in Bangladesh.

As women empowerment is very broad concept, it is difficult to cover all aspects relate to women empowerment. However, in this study, I will analyze women empowerment on two aspects 1) the economic empowerment and 2) the social empowerment, both are the building blocks of women economic independence and participation in the society, but also their increasing decision making ability in the changing of patriarchal family relationships. My point of view is that women involvement in the labour market (job in RMG), their financial contribution to their families (home) and their gradual participation in social network, beyond their family and relative groups are fundamental to understand the process of transformation in Bangladesh. These factors of the process of change are important factors and they have affected women demanding respect, recognition and security from society and their family. These expectations are new realities of civil engagement by a group of society traditionally marginalized from public live. These changes are in part influenced by the readymade garment industry and the establishment of a labour market for women.

2.3 Rural transition

Transition can be defined as a “*gradual but continuous means an incremental* (Grin et al., 2010) *process of change where the structural character of complex subsystems of society can be transformed* (Rotmans et al., 2001 cited in Dewulf et al., 2009:27). On the other hand, rural transformation refers to the fundamental changes in the composition of rural economic life and social organization. It is a process that has significance to modify and displace existing pattern of rural resource management, social mobility and political determination (Koppel, 1988: 285).

There has been a phenomenal increase in female labour movement in recent decades. Although the movement stream to the cities in some countries is dominated by men, the situation is changing in Asian countries where women movement is growing so fast rather than men (Lauby and Stark, 1988). This characterization is not uncommon for Bangladesh where some changes are happening in the gender dimension of social transformation. Recently women are moving at a considerable rate which was not seen in the past where movement happened on only single males in the working age group. The main reason for this type of movement is economic. This women movement from rural to urban city is increased due to the development of manufacturing industries (Naved, et al., 2001) and this has the impact on rural processes.

Rural life has connection not only with rural places; its build on rural urban networks. These networks can be materialized by flows of people, goods and capital and immaterial things such as flows of people's ideas and feelings (Stenbacka, 2012: 56). The industrialization has impact to change rural society through the flow of goods and financial assistance of women workers. The women generally have deep social and economic link with their relatives compare to men (Lauby and Stark, 1988; Chant, 1992). Women maintaining ties with their families are characterized often as part of their attribute as obedient, responsible with their family members (Lim, 1990; Trager, 1984). In this vein women loyalty and altruistic nature are traditionally emphasized. In my view these characteristics are persisted social trends among women workers. These trends in combination with their participation in labour market have contributed to change their rural areas. On the other hand, the women may achieve some benefits from this new status they have in the family. One of these benefits is to maintain their family property rights and securing their standing in the home village on which the women social status and prestige largely depend (Naved et al., 2001). After reviewing some articles on rural Bangladesh, I got idea about rural

transition and in this study I will analyze how some of the rural women have changed the socioeconomic condition of their families and contribute to change rural areas through their experience in the garment industry and their money remittance to rural home. These processes are generating relaxation of traditional norms in rural families. We can suggest that these changes are the result of women financial contribution to rural home, their delay in marriage and in the reduction of family size (Khosla, 2009).

2.4 Concept of organized labour

Organized labour can be understood as “an association of workers united as a single, representative entity for the purpose of improving the workers economic status and working conditions through collective bargaining with employers” (Website Investopedia, 2014). The purpose of organized labour is for workers to form “a continuous association of wage earners for the purpose of maintaining or improving the conditions of their employment”. This is primarily achieved by use of the technique of collective bargaining, where labour organizations negotiate wages and working conditions with employers (Website labour portal, 2014). In my study this is expressed in how women workers organized themselves to resist any harassment or discrimination. This concept will appear as an important notion in the life history of the woman interview for this study.

2.5 Analytical framework

The concepts discussed in this chapter are patriarchal social system and importance of family, women empowerment, rural transition and concept of organized labour. In this study, the concept of patriarchy and family importance put emphasis on the deprivation of women due to its patriarchal orientation of the social system. Although women are deprived in the families, they have a close connection with their family because of strong bonding. On the other hand, poverty, lack of job opportunity, flood and river bank erosion etc. are very common scenarios in rural Bangladesh. Moreover, due to these types of problems, rural women are motivated to move from rural to urban city for employment purpose and to help their family financially. In short, the feminization of labour has brought flexibility to society and this has started to allow women to shift from the rural and domestic sphere to the industrial sector and to join with male workers in the garment industry. On the other hand, women get more chance because of some favourable rules for women in the industry. The concepts of women empowerment in this study explain how a woman worker increased her power and autonomy in the family and society and thus helps to

change her status in the society. Further, the concept of rural transition put emphasis in the relation of a woman with her rural home and how this gendered labour that is involved in the garment industry has impacted and started to change rural society.

In this study, I will analyze the role of readymade garment industry on women workers status and whether this industry has any positive or negative consequence on women workers living standards.

In the industry, the women workers are involved in different types of activities and have different responsibilities according with their working capacity. Further, this study will not only analyze women workers empowerment based on their economic independence and participation in household decision making processes but also how they achieve respect and recognition in their families. Another point is to assess in the life history of the women, their awareness about how to improve their position within the industry and society. This study attributes an important role to the social network of women beyond the family and assumes that this social network would increase their social security as a woman within the family and society. In other words, this study wants to assess the relationship between employment and improvement of women life in Bangladesh.

In general, through the opportunities in the labour market the study will identify some new experiences for the women interviewed in the study. These women workers not only have started to change their status within their family but also each woman worker acts as an important actor to change their rural society.

Further, the study will try to show that although this industry has many positive impacts to change rural women lives, also it has some problems, such as the hazardous working environment in which women have to labour, wage and gender discrimination, inadequate fire prevention measures in their site of work and lack of minimal facilities, like canteen. These problems are acting as barriers to improve women everyday lives. The women-workers have to face some degree of harassment both inside and outside the industry. However, this study is interested in describing and analyzing how they overcome their everyday problems and what type of organizing practices they have to claim their right as individuals and part of an active collective labour force.

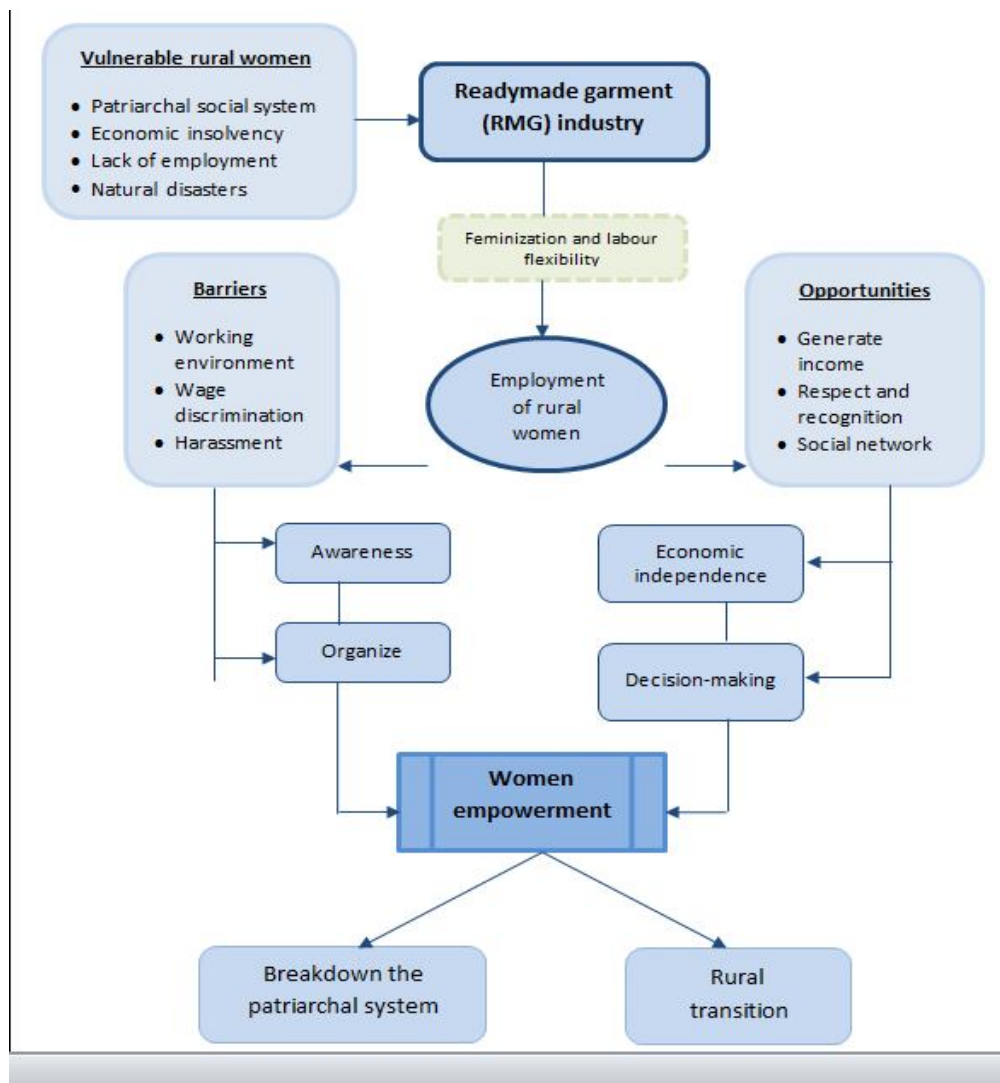


Fig-05: Framework of analysis

Chapter 3: Historical overview and rural women in RMG

Since the main concern of this study is to know the contribution of RMG to change rural women workers status, before starting to analyze this, it is very important to understand what is the meaning of readymade garment industry and why readymade garment industry emerged in Bangladesh and how it's contributing to whole economy. In addition, it is also very important to know the present wage structure and why women are getting more chance in this garment sector and how this sector is influencing to change women lives. I reviewed some previous research articles taking in mind the above concepts and tried to understand on what aspects these researches focused. Moreover, all these concepts are very important to get some basic idea on the context of my study field which will strengthen my knowledge to conduct this study. Further, these reviewed articles will help me to justify my findings with their findings and to find out the knowledge gap if exists in previous researches. After considering the above points in mind, in this chapter, at first I focused on development and contribution of RMG, present wage structure and feminization and labour flexibility. Then I focused women involvement in RMG into three subheadings such as background of women workers, opportunities that women are getting from RMG and barriers to change their status; and all those knowledge I gathered from reviewed articles.

3.1 Development and contribution of RMG

The garment industry is the key export earning sector and striking force in the field of industrialization for Bangladesh. It started during late 1970's and expanded rapidly within a short period (Ahamed, 2013). Before describing historical profile of Readymade Garment (RMG) in Bangladesh, We have to know what exactly mean by RMG. The RMG sector is a sub sector of the textiles and clothing sectors, comprised of two independent industries e.g. woven and knitwear industry. It consists of a range of manufacturing activities and processes integrated by backward and forward linkages which includes textiles, handlooms, processing and printing, dying, woven and knitwear, embroidery and spinning and processing of cotton. This implies that the workforce involved in RMG are divided into different categories such as preparation of textile fibre, spinners and winders, weaving and knitting machine setters and pattern card prepares, weavers and related workers, knitting, sewers and embroiders etc. (Hossain, 2013).

During 1980s, Bangladesh experienced a sudden boom of RMG. It is noted that garment manufacturing is not a new tradition of Bangladesh at all. It had a historic reputation for producing “Maslin Sharee”. Once Dhaka (the capital of Bangladesh) had kept long reputation for producing this “Maslin Sharee” during Mughal regimes (1526 - 1858) but didn’t keep its pace in the following centuries (Rashid, 2006). During 1970s, the government of Bangladesh took initiative to denationalize and remove barriers and limits to private investment. This encouraged private entrepreneurs to invest more in business and also created new opportunity for small and medium entrepreneurs. Manufacturer could make direct contact with their leading buyers. Numerous entrepreneurs initially started their careers to make garments but later diversified into spinning, weaving, dyeing or finishing operations (Ahamed, 2013). Some of them started manufacturing of threads, buttons, zippers and packaging materials. In 1978, there were only nine export oriented garment manufacturing units which generated export earnings of barely one million dollars. Examples of successful RMG manufacturers who took advantage of privatization in different ways are Reaz garments, Baishakhi garments, Desh garments and Trexim LTD and the Summon group (Rahman, 2004; Rock, 2003).

In the year a contract was signed between a Korean company Daewoo and Desh Garments of Bangladesh. As per the agreement, the Korean company provided extensive training on manufacturing and promotion of garment products to 130 supervisors and managers of Desh Garments, and left production itself to Desh after the expiry of the contract. After leaving Korean company within one year, 115 of 130 people who were trained in Korea left Desh garments. This is because these skilled personnel tried to establish their own industry and some of them were offered high salary (even 10 times higher) from other (Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004). Moreover, tariff and import quota free access in EU market under the Generalized System of Preference (GSP) opened a new window to the RMGs of Bangladesh. Furthermore, trade liberalization policy of Bangladesh government coupled with availability of cheap labour forces attracts foreign investments in this sector (Ahmed, 2009). As reported by BGMEA, around 4.00 million people are engaged in RMG sector of Bangladesh among which 3.20 million are women (Fig-07) that accounts for 80% of total workforce in this sector (Hossain, 2013).

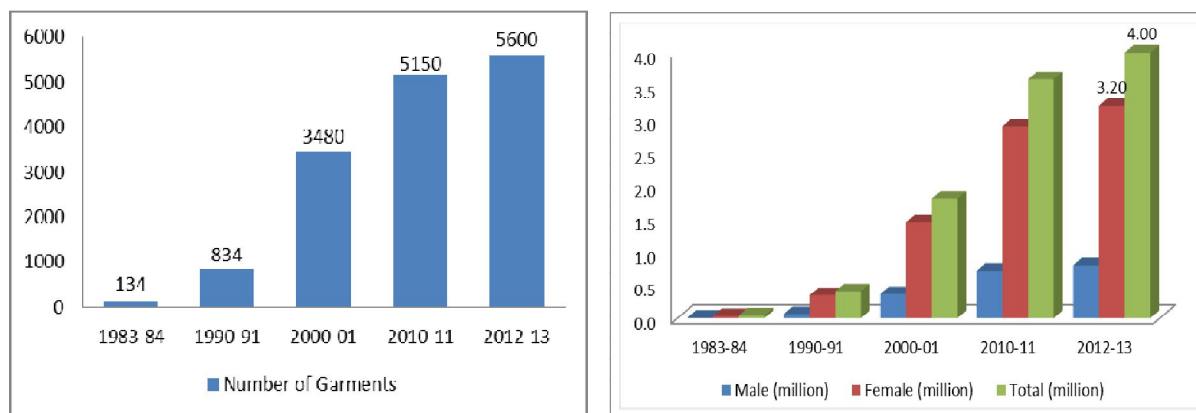


Fig-06: Increase in no. of RMG in Bangladesh from 1983-84 to 2012-13; Fig-07: Increase of no. of women workers from 1983-84 to 2012-13 (Source: Website BGMEA, 2013)

RMG industries enjoyed a striking rise from 30 enterprises in 1980 to about 5,600 industries (Fig-06) in fiscal years 2012-2013 (BGMEA, 2013). The United States is the main customer of garment products from Bangladesh who buys almost half of the total export followed by Germany, France, Italy, UK, Netherlands, Canada and so on (Ahmad, 1994). In 1996, Bangladesh earned a foreign currency of USD \$2.5 billion from exporting readymade garment products to all the American and European buyers (Quddus, 1996). The share of RMG in the total export was 3.89% in 1983-84 which was substantially increased to a huge 79.63% in 2012-13 (Hossain, 2013).

3.2 Present wage structure

At present, the minimum wage for all workers is 5,300 BDT (i.e. 68 USD) decided by the Minimum Wage Board on 21 November 2013 (Website Bangladesh Gazette, 2013), although the garment workers demand was 8000 BDT as their minimum wage. This current wage structure has been applicable from 1 December 2013 in all the garment industries within the territory of Bangladesh. The decision was taken with the presence of the worker representatives in the Wage Board and with the rejection of garment owner's representatives (Website Rise Society, 2013). After the declaration of this minimum wage, there was some rejections and arguments laid against this minimum wage by activists, NGOs, academicians along with other worker leaders, trade unions and even the garment owners. Garment owners protested against the minimum wage and if this was forced upon them, then many of the industries would be closed. They also complained about buyers who would prefer to go new alternative destinations where labour cost is comparatively cheap (Website Bangladesh Chronicle, 2013). Workers representative had earlier sought a minimum wage of 8000 BDT, later scaled down the sum to 6000 BDT and 5,500

BDT before and finally agreed to 5,300 BDT. On the other hand, the garment owner's preliminary offer of minimum wage was 3,600 BDT which they raised to 4,200 BDT. The proposed draft minimum wage structure at first included 3,200 BDT as basic salary, 1280 BDT as house rent, 320 BDT as medical allowance, 200 BDT for conveyance and 300 BDT as food subsidy. But, afterwards although the total minimum wage of 5,300 BDT remained unchanged, the basic wage of 3,200 BDT was cut down by 200 BDT (Table – 01) as the pursuance of the garment owner's representatives in the board. Under the new minimum wage structure, now the workers will receive 3,000 BDT as basic, 1,200 BDT as house rent (40% of the basic), 250 BDT as health allowance, 200 BDT as transport allowance and 650 BDT as food allowance. They will get 5% increment on their basic salary every year (Website Bangladesh Chronicle, 2013).

Table 01: Comparison between two proposed wage structures

Description	Basic wage (BDT)	House rent (BDT)	Health allowance (BDT)	Transport allowance (BDT)	Food allowance (BDT)	Total wage (BDT)
Draft wage structure	3,200	1,280	320	200	300	5,300
Final wage structure	3,000	1,200	250	200	650	5,300

It is important to mention here that the workers minimum wage of 930 BDT per month was increased to 1662 BDT in 2006 (Islam, 2012). Later in 2010, it increased to 3000 BDT which is now 5,300 BDT decided by the government of Bangladesh in 2013. In the present wage structure, there are total seven grades of workers; and minimum salary for entry level workers (grade seven) has been fixed at 5,300 BDT, while 13,000 BDT for grade one workers (Website Bangladesh Gazette, 2013).

3.3 Feminization and labour flexibility

Women workers participation in global manufacturing sector is happened due to strong influence of globalization. In patriarchal Bangladesh, a woman's bargaining power outside the household tends to be affected by sex stereotyping. Kate Young's (1988) analysis has highlighted the sex stereotyping of the labour market. According to Young (1988), "*sex stereotyping*" is a common

mechanism of exclusion and it appears to work in such a way that women may exclude themselves from certain types of work". But Standing (1989), argues that the feminization as well as flexibility of labour force have caused displacement of male workers by female workers. The feminization of the labour force is due to several factors such as deregulation in industries, erosion of labour rights, in security in jobs and nature of work. Generally, feminization of workforce allows mass entry of women into the formal labour force (Momen, 2006). There are two different meanings of "feminization of labour". First it is used to refer to the sharp increase of women's participation from agriculture to industrial sector. Second it is used to describe increased flexibility in labour works of men and women (Hossain, 2013). Labour flexibility denotes temporary employment pattern which is constituted by part-time and casual workers where employers have chance to increase their workforces during higher production volumes and can reduce workforce during small volumes of production (Ofrenio, 2010).

Moreover, the concept of feminization and labour flexibility is very important in this study because in Bangladesh, women participation is increasing in manufacturing sector drastically due to limited job opportunities in rural areas especially for women. The financial condition of these women is not good which forced women to involve themselves in urban industry in order to meet their family needs. The labour flexibility offers women a new opportunity to enter into the industry rather than male. The reason behind this shifting is due to the fact that it is easy to get female workers for such part-time or overtime jobs and females are also highly interested to do this type of work. Males are comparatively less interested to do part-time or temporary work. Producers and Multinational corporations (MNCs) also preferred women workers rather than male workers because of their higher productivity, more consciousness and passive nature. As a result, the presence of women workers in global manufacturing sector is overwhelming, which characterize the feature of feminization of workforce. As for example, the share of women workers in garment industry constituted 80% in Bangladesh, 90% in Cambodia, 70% in Morocco, 75% in Kenya and 87% in Zimbabwe (Kidder and Raworth, 2005).

Actually feminization and labour flexibility are linked with each other and it is difficult to undifferentiated. The combination of feminization and labour flexibility form a two-fold process that increases women participation in industrial sector. Women's are encouraged because they

need job. On the other hand, employers run the industry depending on flexible labour because surplus labour constituted by women is abundant (Smithson and Stokoe, 2005).

3.4 Women involvement in RMG

3.4.1 Background

The readymade garment is an export oriented industry which has expanded rapidly over the last few decades and has provided employment to millions of women workers. Nowadays it is a common scenario in Dhaka that every morning from 6.00 to 8.00 hours, thousands of women garment workers are walking in different streets of the city (Zaman, 2001). Most of the workers involved in RMG have come from different rural areas of the country and have moved to city for seeking employment. Islam (2012) shows that most of these women workers come from Rajshahi division followed by Chittagong, Barisal, Khulna and Sylhet divisions, while Akter et al. (2013) argues that they come from rural areas of Mymensingh and Barisal districts due to less job opportunity over there. However, there is a financial diversity among these households and most of these families have to face a difficulty to meet their survival needs. Actually all of these families have monetary debts and few of them have some assets and small savings in their homestead (Kibria, 1998). The largest part of the garment workers are young, unmarried women and come from poor families (Paul-Majumder, 2000). Alam (2011) reported that about 86% of the women are between 18 and 32 years old. Many of them do not have any prior working experience. However, some characteristics of female workers have changed over time. Some of these characteristics differ from worker to worker who employed in the garment industries located in the DEPZ and those located outside the DEPZ (Paul-Majumder, 2000).

There are several factors (Fig– 08) which motivate these rural women to migrate towards urban areas for seeking employment opportunities. First of all, the job opportunities especially for women in the rural areas are very limited as well as low-remunerative and low-waged (Alam 1985; Paul-Majumder and Zohir, 1994). Furthermore, the socioeconomic condition particularly poverty and unemployment and vulnerability to natural disasters are also the main driving forces that compels rural women to move towards the city for employment. In addition, the natures of job and remuneration package in the garment industry are also attracting rural women to be involved in this sector (Zaman, 2001).

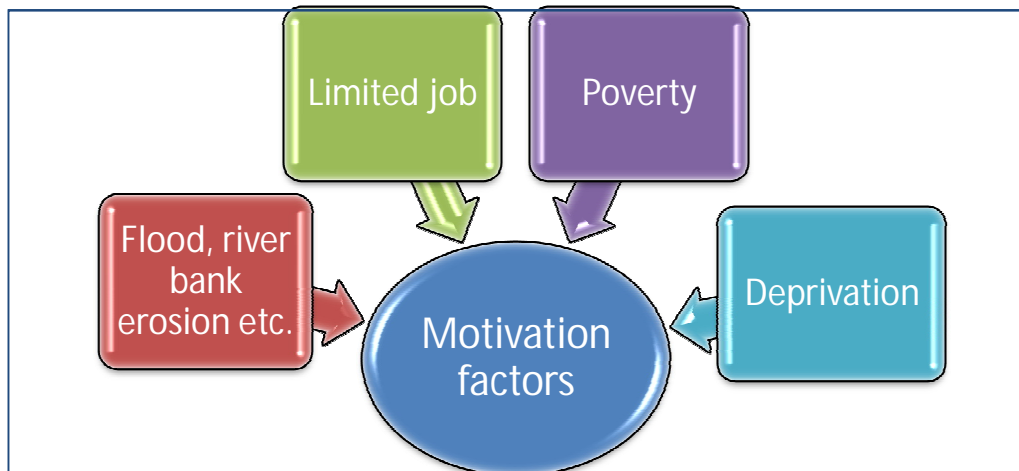


Fig-08: The factors that motivate rural women to move to city for job opportunities

Similar findings were also reported by Islam (2012), who conducted a study to examine the relation between socioeconomic deprivation and garment workers movement in Bangladesh. The author reported that most of the workers are migrated to Dhaka from rural areas and they started to work in RMG industry for better living conditions and to establish themselves in the skilled labour market. He pointed out that the main reasons for such migration as the poverty in their place of origin, natural disasters such as flood and river bank erosion, lack of suitable jobs and less financial capacity of husbands to take their family liabilities. Though the economic scarcity of different households does not provide a complete picture of why rural women become garment workers. In fact, economic scarcity operates in conjunction with other push factors such as family conflicts, marital breakdown, problems of harassment and uncertain marriage prospects (Kibria, 1998). In one study Kabeer (1995) points out the complexity and diversity of the economic motivation of women garment workers. She asserts that such job is a matter of basic survival for some of them, while for others; it is a way of improving their standard of living or earning money for personal accumulation and expenditure. However, the garment workers typically obtained their first job through family connections or social acquaintances depending on their kin network (blood, marital and fictive). Indeed, kinship and locality of origin are often key factors in the recruitment for jobs because the recruitment practices of the garment industries largely informal under deregulation policies (Zaman, 2001).

3.4.2 Opportunities

3.4.2.1 Economic independence

Economic capabilities of women have been enhanced by the employment generated by the readymade garment industry (Khosla, 2009). In the past few decades, women were engaged in paid work to a limited extent in the agricultural sector, at construction sites and as domestic maids (Amin, et al., 1998). Now in the readymade garment industry, women on average have the opportunity to receive higher and possibly more regular wages than other alternatives open to them. Nevertheless, employment in garments industries enhances their economic capabilities to spend, save and invest their earnings. Some of them are able to save money for their dowry (Amin et al., 1998), while others are able to bear the education expenses of their children (Ahmed and Bould, 2004).

Wolf (1991) in his micro-level study in Java, found that women workers enhanced their status within the family due to their earned income and economic power. Tiano (1994), in his study in Mexico found that women workers, despite varying levels of consciousness, can act as their own agents to engage in their daily struggles on a personal or collective level to improve their lives. Absar (2000) found that young rural women in Bangladesh valued the modern nature of life style, considered garment work preferable rather than agricultural labour appreciated the opportunity to help their family financially and became more self-assured and independent. Large numbers of women in Bangladesh seeking paid employment outside the home is one of the most widespread trends which ultimately change their economic status and livelihood pattern (Choudhury, 2013). Women from poorer household are coming out of their homestead to involve themselves in the garment industry in order to become financially self- dependent. This can also be explained with the close connection of their rural economy. Women workers involved in garment industries, usually remit two-thirds of their income to their rural home and play a vital role on reducing economic, social and political exclusion of women in Bangladesh (Afsar, 2001).

3.4.2.2 Empowerment

Sobhan and Khundker, (2001) reported that RMG sector has uplifted the neglected section of the society i.e. women, thus substantially transformed the socioeconomic condition of the country through employment generation and empowerment. Such type of empowerment and employment raised awareness regarding child education, health safety, population control, disaster

management, so on and so forth (Ali, 2008). In another study it was found that women have greater economic independence, respect, social status and voice than before (Khosla, 2009). Women's multiple responsibilities and specific social location as women and paid workers help them to create distinctive form of activism and political awareness (Zaman, 2001). This implies that working in the new environment creates consciousness among the workers.

Zaman (2001), conducted a study on garment workers experience to assess the implications of world market industries on women workers, their wages, work conditions, skill development, organizational links and empowerment. The study found that intersection of women lives in the family and the workplace and their networks with other women and labour organizations create double consciousness as women as well as workers. Involvement in the garment industry has positive implications for women workers in terms of improved social status, income, personal decision making and empowerment activities. These women's are not considered as quiescent and docile. Since women's mobility is culturally constrained in Bangladesh, women need to negotiate with patriarchy in order to join the male dominated labour market outside the home. The paid work confers on women greater economic autonomy and mobility, otherwise exposes them to different sorts of deprivation and exploitation. Women received greater respect and recognition from their family members particularly from husband when they were making a tangible financial contribution in their family (Choudhury, 2013).

In the earlier years, family security was linked with the dependence on males and they were considered as muscle power of the family than female members. The readymade garment industry has changed the expectation of the family that both the young male and female members are same and they can contribute equally (Ahmed and Bould, 2004). Khosla (2009) conducted a study on reducing gender based social exclusion of women. The study reported that women in Bangladesh have traditionally been excluded from taking part in economic, social and political activities. However, readymade garment industry provided opportunities for women to work outside the home and brought changes which help to involve women in the political, social and economic sector. The changes such as increased female education, reduced child marriage and delay in child bearing, reduced birth control are most evident for women who are employed in the garment industry. The study also revealed that women became more creative to negotiate and

manage the expectations of their families with their own desires for income and autonomy after involving in the garment industry.

3.4.2.3 Awareness

In order to sustain their social gains and to further improve their lives, the women workers are moving beyond the industry to make alliances with women's groups and with other activists groups including labour union. Similar type of result also found in another study conducted by Dannecker (2000). He argued that women resist their exploitation through collective action, creating organization and networking. All these strategies enabled women workers to cope with ongoing change and sometimes to reshape gender power relations.

In the RMG sector of Bangladesh, labour unrest is a common scenario. In most of the cases, employers do not put adequate attention to worker's rights and ignore labour standard and override fair labour practices (Ahamed, 2013). But garment workers have been organizing and rallying around workers issues since the emergence of the garment industries in the 1980s. Working experience in the industries has created self-consciousness about working class or working standards among them. Workers are becoming very conscious of fire hazards and aware of the necessity for united protests. For protecting their rights or the rights of women in general, they involved in protest meetings (Zaman, 2001). In general, labour rights situation in the RMG industry is gradually improving and the role of workers response in this regard cannot be denied. Along with many traditional actors, new global actors have emerged and are actively taking part in labour regulation and contributing to improve labour rights in the workplace. Traditional actors such as employers association, workers union, government organizations, and labour regulatory institutions are not taking proactive roles for establishing sound industrial relationships and protecting labour rights. Non- traditional such as multinational corporations, NGOs and human rights organizations, consumers and citizens' movement etc. are increasing and also playing a responsible role in this RMG sector (Hossain, 2013).

3.4.3 Barriers

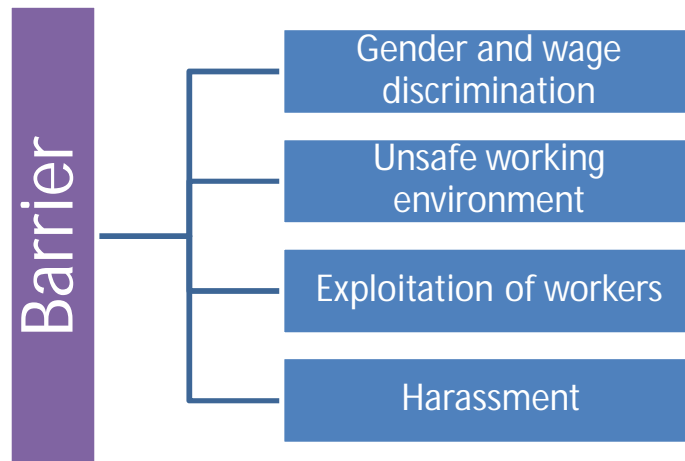


Fig-09: Barriers to change women status in the garment industry

3.4.3.1 Working environment

The above opportunities of the socioeconomic gains by the women workers are overshadowed by exploitative practices such as low wages, irregular payments, gender discrimination, harassment, job insecurity and hazardous work environment. Every day they use various tactics and strategies to fight against harassment and discrimination and to establish their rights in the workplace.

In most of the industries inside, the working environment is very congested which have impact on health of workers as they are restrained in a closed environment for a longer period of time. The nature of work in the garment industries creates various types of health hazards among the workers such as headache, musculoskeletal pain, eye strains etc. Similar finding also found in another research conducted by Begum (2010), where the author explored that most of the women workers suffered from headache and some are suffered from gastric pain because of poor quality of food. Moreover, the workers those involving in the cutting section are more prone to accidents than those in stitching and finishing sheds (Mehta, 2012). The garment workers are obliged to work comparatively for long duration and/or even consecutive two shifts in unsafe and

hazardous working environment (Kumar, 2006). Moreover, lack of safety in workplace during emergency time as well as insufficient recreational facilities, medical facilities, canteen facilities, child care facilities and transport facilities are very common problems faced by garment workers in Bangladesh (Mukul, 2013). Another important problem is that, since many garment industries do not have emergency fire exit; the injuries, disablement and the threat of deaths from fire are very common problems faced by workers (Majumder, 1998). Although a few number of industries do have emergency exit but the owners always keep those exits locked which is a complete violation of evacuation compliances. Poor working condition in industries and a lack of social compliance which was enforced since 2006 leads to labour conflict and damage to institutions and properties. In addition, a vast majority of the workers are not permanent in their jobs and have limited access to toilet and other sanitation facilities. There are no provision of casual leaves, weekend holiday, annual vacation, bonus, pension scheme and festival allowance for the workers, although they have to handle constant pressure to increase their productivity as directed by the owners (Islam, 2012). RMG workers suffer from malnutrition as they cannot afford balanced diets with their low wages and increasing cost of living in Dhaka city. With no weekend holiday and no annual vacation, workers are compelled to work long hours on regular basis despite their physical illness which eventually lead to faint and even death in some cases while working (Islam, 2012). Incidence of physical weakness among the women garment workers is much higher than male workers. Women are exploited easily due to lack of proper knowledge, training and awareness (Ali, 2008).

The emergence of RMG industry of Bangladesh has already past three decades, but the improvement in terms of labour rights and compliance is still disappointing. It is characterized by low wages, lack of workplace safety and security, denial of workers union and the frequent torture and harassment of union organizers by employers and law enforcement agencies. All these aspects have been a growing concern to global buyers, human rights organizations, consumers and policy analysts. This concern has gained momentum after two recent tragic incidents, the fires at Tajrin Fashion in November, 2012 and the building collapse at “Rana Plaza” in April, 2013 which caused death of 113 and 1128 workers, respectively. In a recent report, Odhikar (2013) notes that the lack of proper monitoring of the government, corruption, hazardous working conditions in rented buildings, construction of defective buildings, violation

of labour laws and lack of effective prosecution have put the RMG sector under serious threat (Hossain, 2013).

3.4.3.2 Wage and gender discrimination

Bangladesh is the second largest in the world in RMG manufacturing and many scholars predict that it is going to be the first due to rising labour cost in China (Wassener, 2012). But unfortunately, the owners basically treat the RMG workers as their slaves by enforcing wage and gender discrimination with poor working conditions. The owner's primary aim is to increase their profit margins and to keep their industry competitive in the international arena rather to provide better wage payment and safe environment for their workers (Kumar, 2006). Islam (2012) reported that most of the female workers earn below minimum wage of 1620.00 BDT per month and do not get the opportunity to save money after covering expenditures for their food and accommodation. Most of them are forced to work for overtime but the average wage rate for overtime is very low (20Tk per hour). Thus the workers demand for increased wages and other benefits has become a very common feature within this industry.

Agarwal (1997) observes that male macro power and patriarchal structure of society devalue women's work and as a result women in the work place encounter wage discrimination alongside other problems. Paul-Majumder and Zohir (1994), conducted a study on this aspect and found that female workers earn less than their male counterparts having the same education, length of service, skills etc. But with this problem the study also measured the female workers social status by the extent of their control on decision making activities.

3.4.3.3 Harassment

In traditional societies, who moves out of her accepted family role in order to involve in job may be seen as a "loose woman". Men who are not used to meeting women in a work situation may draw back on gender based social expectations and treat their female colleagues as sexually available (Momsen, 1993). It is often said that a lot of misbehaves occur within and outside the garment industry in terms of physical and sexual harassment. The incidence can take place at the industry, on the street or at the residence of the workers where they live. Every day, the workers have to travel a long distance from home to working place. During walking at night, sometimes, they are attacked by hijacker, local *mastans* and even harassed by police too (Ali, et al., 2008).

Every day walking along the road which create not only physical stress but also mental stress among workers (Begum, 2010).

Unfortunately, the working environment inside the garment industry is also not favourable for women; physical and verbal abuses by floor in-charge, supervisors and even by co-workers are very common incidents in the industry premises (Islam, 2012). To meet the demanding shipment deadlines, the workers are persuaded by management to work until midnight without a break. The workers could not refuse overtime for fear of losing their job (Alam, 2011).

From the above discussion based on previous research findings, it can be concluded that research articles focused on women background information, their opportunities from the industry and the working environment. After considering the above concepts in mind, I am going to analyze women workers experiences from garment industry and whether these women workers experiences have any impact to empower them or not and how their experiences linked to change rural society structure. In the next chapter, I will present 15 women workers some basic information and three women workers detail life histories. Based on the information of women workers experiences from industry, in the next chapter I will analyze all findings which I collected from respondents directly.

Chapter 4: Field Findings

I divided this chapter into two parts. In first part, I gave some basic information of 15 women workers such as their origin, age, education, marital status and working experience which I collected from them by using short questionnaire. In the second part of this chapter, I gave life histories of three women workers among 15 women workers which I collected from them by using detailed questionnaire. These three women workers I selected from two groups that I discussed in details in the methodology section (introduction chapter). Among 12 women workers, those who are currently working in the industry, I selected two women garment workers and from remaining 3 women workers who had left the job, I selected one woman garment worker. Then in the life histories part, I mainly focused their life experiences on some specific aspects such as their background information, duties and responsibilities in the industry, present lifestyle, economic independence and empowerment, wage structure and workers consciousness, harassment and workers organization in order to better understand about the impact of RMG on their entire life course.

4.1 Overview of women garment workers

In the table below I gave some basic information of 15 respondents so that it will give general idea about background of the respondents (Table -02).

Table 02: Summary of background information of preliminary 15 respondents

No. of respondents	Origin (district)	Age (in years)	Education	Marital status	Working experience
1.Rozina Akter	Mymensingh	23	Class seven	Single	2 years
2.Asia Begum	Barisal	25	Class four	Married	5 years
3.Momena Khatun	Bogra	28	Class six	Single	2 years
4.Amena Begum	Mymensingh	23	Class five	Single	1 year
5.Ambia Begum	Jamalpur	26	Class seven	Single	3 years
6.Minu Khatun	Sherpur	20	Class eight	Single	10 months
7.Asma Begum	Jamalpur	19	Class seven	Single	6 months
8. Maliha Akter	Jamalpur	27	Class five	Married	3 years
9. Moni Begum	Barisal	17	Class six	Single	11 months
10. Aleya Akhter	Chandpur	25	Class five	Divorced	10 years
11. Nahida Akhter	Mymensingh	19	Class six	Single	1.5 years
12. Sultana Begum	Shatkhira	22	Class five	Single	2.5 years
13. Zohora Begum	Barisal	20	Class six	Single	1.5 years
14. Ishita Pervin	Kushtia	21	Class nine	Single	3 years
15. Rabeya khatun	Shariyatpur	35	Class eight	Married	6 years

4.2 Life histories

Life history interviews allow us to discuss not only individuals and their lives, but also the social, economic and political spaces that individuals inhabit. They can be used to communicate how structure and agency intersect to produce the circumstances of a particular person's life. It may be topical, focusing on only one segmented portion of a life or complete, attempting to tell the full details of a life as it is recollected (Ojermark, 2007).

In rural Bangladesh, most of the families are not financially solvent. There is less job opportunity for rural peoples, especially for rural women. Even in the society, women feel less security both inside and outside their home due to patriarchal social structure. As a result women are deprived and not able to contribute to their family financially. The readymade garment industry in Bangladesh is an unprecedented success and opens the opportunity for such rural women to get access in jobs and income. This sector is now considered as the best option for rural women to survive economically. So, individual life histories of some women garment workers will reveal the fact of how much this industry is contributing to change the status of such rural women.

This chapter contributed to understand the three women garment worker's life histories based on some key indicators such as their background information, present life style, duties and responsibilities in the industry, economic independence, empowerment, wage consciousness and their organizing ability to overcome problems.

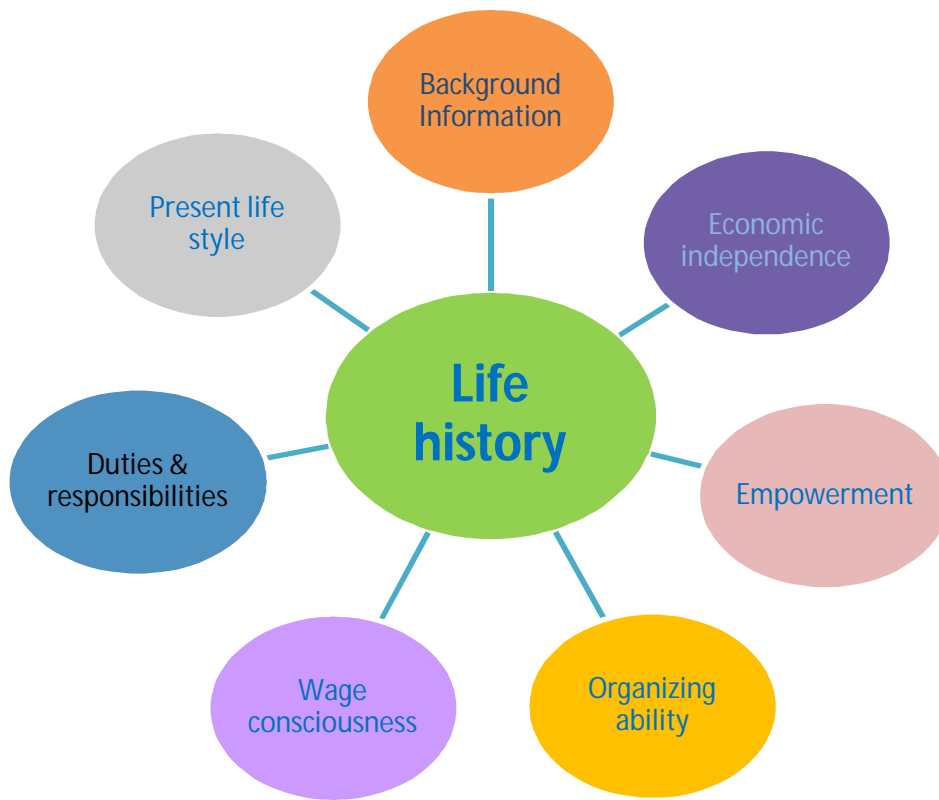


Fig-10: Indicators of analyzing women workers life history

Among these three women workers life histories, I will be able to know individual life pattern of two women workers who are currently involved in the industry. The third woman, who has left the job in her case, I will be able to explore the role of readymade garment industry by comparing her past and present life style. Their life histories associated with the changes that happened to their life after involving in the industry will reflect whether the industry has either positive or negative consequences in their life. These changes may be in terms of economic independence and empowerment, decision making ability in their family etc. Besides this, these life histories will also explore some background information such as what type of women are being involved in the industry and what factors motivate them to involve in the industry. Moreover, their life histories will explore how readymade garment industry influences to change their lives.

The life histories of these 3 women garment workers are described in the following sections separately:

4.2.1: Case study-1

Aleya Akhter

Garment worker

(Working for more than 2 years)

Background information

Aleya is 25 years old, home district is Chandpur. Her father's name is Rashid Miah and mother's name is Nasrin Banu. A long time ago, now she forgot exactly, her whole family came to Dhaka because of river bank erosion; her parents lost everything in their home district. She heard from her parents that in village, her father had almost 4 bighas¹ of agricultural land to produce paddy, vegetables, pulses, and some seasonal crops. At that time in village, her father was involved in business, to produce agricultural product and also did work as a day-labourer on other people's land. Now they don't have anything in their home district Chandpur.

Aleya had born at Dhaka. When she was 18-19 years, she got married because her parent was interested but after four years of conjugal life, they were divorced. The reason was that her husband liked another girl at that time. At first she couldn't understand that her husband like another girl. Sometimes her husband came to home at late night and did not behave well with her. Even whole day, he was busy outside. Her husband attitude was totally different what he did with her in the past. Finally, after a long period of time, one of her neighbour near to their home told that he has relation with another woman. Her husband had a small shop (Mudi dokan).² In that shop, sometimes that woman came to buy soap, oil, salt etc. and talked with her husband. This was the history of her husband to like another woman. It gave her pain and till now she cannot remove from her mind. Few months after knowing this, both they decided to divorce. After their divorce, her husband got married with that woman. Aleya's educational qualification is only class five. During childhood, she went school near to their home. Since her parent's financial condition was not good, after class five she didn't continue her study. But she had interest for education. Aleya's father works as a gate keeper in Dhaka city. Monthly he earns almost 6000 Tk.³ She has two sisters and three brothers, only one brother is younger than her but

¹ 1 acre=100 decimals, 1 bigha=33 decimals

² Mudi Dokan, it is local name of a small type of shop in Bangladesh where rice, oil, salt, biscuits etc. are sold.

³ 1 Tk= 0.013 USD, 1 Euro= Approx. 100BDT

all are married and living separately except one brother. Currently she is living with her parents and with one married brother with his wife too.

When Aleya was 15 years old, she wanted to involve herself in any kind of job in order to become independent and help her family financially with her father and brother. One day, one of her neighbour told that garment industry job is good, especially for women and it has good salary. After hearing this, she decided to involve herself in the industry. Her neighbour was also doing work at that time in the industry and she helped her to join the industry.

Duties and responsibilities

Aleya is working in this garment industry for almost 10 years. While describing the type of her work, she told that she started as a helper (helps to bring all products in one place). At that time, she didn't do any work for five or six months, rather only assisted other workers. As she did not have any previous experience, she learnt such work only by watching other's work. Other colleagues also helped her to learn during break/lunch time. Now she is working in production section as a senior operator in linking machine. Before getting this promotion, she was a junior linking machine operator. Now she can finish 1 dozen of products each day, if the work is difficult; otherwise she has the ability to complete 2 or 3 dozen of products each day, if the work is little bit easier.

The normal working hours in the industry is about 8 hours a day (from 8 a.m. till 5 p.m.) with one hour lunch break. After 5 p.m. most of the workers often do overtime as well as night duty during production and shipment deadlines. Aleya is working in production section where the work pressure is much higher compare to other sections. Every day her normal duty from 8 a.m. till 9 or 10 p.m. or sometimes it exceeds till 12 o' clock. But they do not count it as overtime in this section. This is her every day normal duty.

While working she get support from her co-workers and supervisors. According to her opinion, most of the colleagues are very helpful and caring on them. While working if she faces any difficulties or if she couldn't understand what she needs to do, the co-workers help her to solve her problems. Sometimes they give new inspiration and suggestion to make better in future. She also told that without their support, it would be difficult for her to do work there. But sometimes male supervisor do misbehave and get angry with her too.

Present lifestyle

Aleya is living in Kazipara with her parents along with one married brother and his wife as she has no alternative to stay outside. Her father and brother are the main guardians of their family. Her brother works in one garage of car. They don't have child, only two years they got married. Rarely her father and brother do misbehave with her because she involves in job. Usually she plays a gentle role with her parents and brother as she lives with them. Her parents are very worried about her marriage also. But she doesn't want to marry again. She told that everything is going on well without husband. Her parents all times support her, she share everything with her parents. If she don't involve in job, maybe she wouldn't get this type of support. While describing their housing condition she described that their house is a one-storied brick building with roof made of tin. There are 11 rooms and they rented only one room with a false partition wall, rest of the rooms are rented by other people. There are two shared bathrooms and one shared kitchen for all the tenants. There are five stoves in the kitchen and they use wood or 'lakri' for cooking purpose.⁴ They buy "lakri" from outside.⁵ They have TV, refrigerator, showcase, dressing table, beds, shelves etc.

Aleya's daily routine is almost same in weekdays. When she comes back to home, it's already dark. After coming back from industry in some days she saw that her brother and brother's wife slept already because her brother feels tired after coming from work place and he needs to get up at early morning. But her mother waits for her to eat together until her reaching. According to her own words,

"When I finished my duty, that time it's already dark outside. I go back to home, after get fresh I finish my dinner with my family members if I came early, then sleeping. Sometime, only my mother waits for me to eat together until my reaching from industry."

During weekend or Friday, she woke up little bit late. After gets fresh (washing face, brushing etc.) and have breakfast, she helps to cook. As for breakfast, usually they all family members eat rice with curry. But sometimes, her mother prepares "Ruti" from maida because of her father and

⁴ The "Stove" or "Chula" that the women workers are used for their cooking purpose. The "Chula" is a fireplace for cooking food which is made from mud and give a standard design.

⁵ Lakri, it is branches of trees used for cooking purpose. In Dhaka, some poor people collected it from rural areas and sell it to other those who need it for cooking purpose.

brother prefers “Ruti” as breakfast than rice.⁶ Then after taking bath and finishing lunch, she either sleeps again at afternoon or watch TV. During evening time, she just walks in front of her home, sometime gossip with neighbour. In some weekend, she goes outside to meet her colleagues and their children.

Services provided by the industry

Aleya reported that the industry is closed only in one Friday in a month. They have to do their duty till 1 pm on other three Fridays. The industry is fully closed in national holidays like Victory Day (16 December), Independence Day (26 March), Language Martyr’s Day (21 February), National Mourning Day (15 August), May Day (1 May) etc; in religious festivals like Eid-ulfitre and Eid-ul-azha (for Muslims), Christmas (for Christians) and Durga Puja (for Hindus); and also in cultural festivals like Bangla New Year’s Day or Pohela Baishakh (14 April). During two Eid festivals, the industry is closed for almost one week for each occasion, which are the longest holidays in RMG sector in Bangladesh.⁷

In the past, there was no medical leave provided by the industry but recently they have started to give medical leave for all workers, 15 days in a year. The industry is also providing 4 months maternity leave, two months before child birth and remaining two months after child birth.

Aleya described that the working environment is very congested inside the industry. There is approximate 300 workers work in each floor without proper ventilation, even no leisure time and no separate room for taking rest. In upper floor, there is one small prayer room, but no canteen facility. She also told that recently the industry has appointed one doctor providing services for all workers from 8am till 5pm.

Usually the lunch hour is one hour (1-2pm). As she brought food from home, she doesn’t need to buy lunch from shop which is near to industry. But they don’t have any separate room to eat; they all eat by sitting at the corner of their working room. Another important problem is that

⁶ In Bangladesh, most of the peoples prefer to eat ‘Ruti’ as their breakfast. At every morning in home the women usually make ruti from wheat flour or from rice flour for all family members.

⁷ Eid ul fitre and Eid ul azha are the two important religious festivals celebrated by Muslims worldwide. Eid ul fitre that marks the end of “Ramadan”, the Islamic holy month of fasting (sawm). On the other hand, Eid ul azha, it is celebrated by sacrificing or qurbani of the domestic animals (cow, goat) at that date.

there is only one entrance door, no emergency exit. The industry does not have adequate fire prevention measures and they do not have fire alarms. Lack of pure drinking water inside the industry is another important problem. Aleya reported that most of the workers bring water in bottle from their home.

Despite some problems, the industry is following some rules and regulation and providing training facilities for workers which are good signs for all workers. While asking about any punishment from industry if she comes at late, Aleya reported that if they come three days continuous late, then they (the industry owner) consider one day absent and deduct one day salary from their monthly salary. Recently, the industry arranged short training for them. The duration of that training is one week. At a time, 10-15 workers are being trained. Those workers, who are more senior in a floor and talk nicely, the industry usually provides training only for them so that later they can teach other workers in the same floor. The training is provided by outside trainers, especially expert from fire service. Yet, Aleya did not get the opportunity to attend this training program.

Economic independence and empowerment

The monthly salary of Aleya is almost 8000 Tk/month including overtime. Usually she gets this salary first week of a month. From this monthly salary, she spends 6000 Tk/month for different purposes such as paying for house rent, buying food, cloth and for medical purposes. The rent of their housing is 3000 Tk/month; she pays half and her brother pays remaining half as she lives with her brother. Her father doesn't need to contribute as house rent purpose but he spends for other household expenditure purposes. Every month she also gives 2000 Tk. for food purpose to her brother. From her monthly income, she is self-sufficient to bear her monthly expenses and she doesn't ask money to her family members for any personal expenditure. She can buy everything as her wish. Last month before visiting her sister's home, she bought sweet, fruits and one "sharee" for her sister.⁸

⁸ "Sharee" is the national wear of Bangladeshi women. It is the most popular dress for women throughout Bangladesh both for casual and formal occasion. The "share" is usually worn over a petticoat, with a fitted upper garment commonly called a blouse. The blouse has short sleeves and is usually cropped at the midriff.

She also bought one “lungi” for her father 2 or 3 months back.⁹ According to her own words,

“I can buy everything as my wish, last month I visited my sister’s home, before going I bought sweet, fruits, one sharee for my sister. I don’t need to ask others, 2 or 3 months before, I also bought one lungi for my father.”

She can also save 1000Tk/month from her monthly salary in Islami Bank. Several factors motivate her to save money. She wants to save because of future security. She will decide later in future what purposes she would spend this saved money. Two years back, she bought one gold chain for her with saved money. She knows that there is no loss if she invests her money in buying gold. In future during her crisis moment, she can sell it.

Aleya thinks that this type of work helps to increase her respect from her family members and neighbours. Before taking any decision on family matters, her family members ask her and want to know her opinion. As for example, two years before, while taking decision to buy a refrigerator in their home, she was also participated in the family meeting with her father and brother and gave her own opinion. She contributed financially with her father and brother to buy that refrigerator.

Now she is evaluating more than before as her family members ask her before taking any decision. Now she has more power to play role in the family and involve herself in decision making capacity than before. She has one mobile phone which helps her to connect with her family members, relatives, friends, colleagues as well as helps to increase her social network.

Wage structure and workers consciousness

Aleya knows that minimum monthly wage of the workers is approximate 5,300Tk without overtime. She doesn’t have so much idea about her basic wage and what other allowances are included in gross monthly wage. Even, she doesn’t know about yearly increment on her basic salary. But she told that when she was junior linking operator, her basis was 3,500 Tk., now it

⁹ “Lungi” is the most common traditional dress of Bangladeshi men almost universally indoors and commonly outdoors as well, although it is not used for formal occasion. It is used instead of trouser and particularly important in some regions people where hot and humidity creates an unpleasant environment to use trouser.

has increased to 4,200 Tk. as a senior linking operator. She has little bit knowledge about the categories or grades of the workers in respect to their positions such as it starts with as helper, then junior operator, then senior operator and at the end cutting master or supervisor. If she gets promotion, she might be promoted as supervisor in future but she is not interested to reach at that position because of low salary compare to her position. According to her opinion, most of her colleagues don't know exactly about their basic.

Harassment

Aleya told that sometimes while coming at night, she feels afraid because of less security for women in the society. Some outsider people use very bad words if she comes at late night. Inside the garment industry, she also faced some problems from supervisor or line chief; they do misbehave if she doesn't understand. Most of the times they keep her under pressure and ask to do work hurry. If she doesn't able to finish her work at exact time, they get angry with her and use very abusive language. If someone does misbehave with her, that time she complains about him to industry manager. As a punishment, manager suspends that man from work for few days.

Workers organization

Aleya told that for solving their problems, they have organization which is called "Federation".¹⁰ Although the industry do not looks this federation in a good eye, but this organization works hard to establish their rights. She told that one day she went to federation for making card. One woman, working in federation helped her to make card and told that if she face any problems in future, she might come to federation with this card and can explain her problem. Till now she didn't face any problems for which she needs to go to that organization. But, one of her female colleague was working for many years in the industry. Garment was not providing any financial help to her while leaving the work. Then after complaining to federation, garment provided her Tk. 20,000 while leaving. This was possible only for federation.

¹⁰ The National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) was established in 1984 as an independent, democratic and progressive trade union federation. Its central office is in Dhaka and regional branches across the country. It has campaigned since its inception for the protection and enforcement of women workers rights. It played a leading role in the most recent campaign to increase the minimum wage for Bangladeshi garment workers, which resulted in an 80 percent wage rise for the lowest paid workers in 2010. <http://www.waronwant.org/overseas-work/sweatshops-and-plantations/sweatshops-in-bangladesh> (Accessed on 30.07.2014).

While describing organizations work, she described that,

“My one female colleague was working for many years. While leaving that work, garment was not providing any financial help. She went to federation and complained there. Then federation forced garment owner to help her financially.”

4.2.2: Case study-2

Nahida Akhter

Garment worker

(Working for less than 2 years)

Background information

Nahida Ferdous is 19 years old and unmarried woman. Her father's name is Mojid Ali and mothers name is Firoza Begum. She came from a small village of Mymensingh district. The name of her village is "Balihati" under "Issshargonj" upazilla. She has completed sixth grade of her education. Her parents had interest to continue her education but at that time she involved as maid servant of another people home. That time one of their relatives told her parents to involve her in domestic work of other peoples home. Actually, her parent was motivated because they thought that she will earn money and will contribute to her family. Then after few months they send her to Mymensingh city of one people home and could not continue her study after class six. According to her own words,

"My parent thought that I will earn money and will contribute to my family. So, when I was in class six, they send me to Mymensingh city of one people's home and could not continue my study after class six."

In that home, she had to do a lot of work, even at night she could not sleep nicely because of work. That time, monthly she earned 1000Tk; provided food and cloth also. Almost two years she was there, then again came back to her rural home. After coming home, she thought that she will continue her study now but it was difficult at that time because already her two sisters have started to go to school. She had to stay in home and to help her mother in domestic work.

Nahida came alone just one and half year before to involve in the industry. In Dhaka, she lives with her grandmother. Her father is a rickshaw driver, works in Mymensingh city.¹¹ Every month, he came to Balihati to their rural home. She has two sisters and one brother, all are younger than her. Her father's income was not sufficient to meet their family demand. For this reason, her father told her to involve in the RMG and that's why she came to Dhaka. Moreover,

¹¹ Rickshaw is a small scale local means of transport to carry passengers on a for hire basis.

she also wants to help her father and wants to contribute financially. One of her female friend in the village, who is working in RMG, helped her to get this job. She was motivated because this job is little bit easier to get compare to other jobs and more respectful compare to work as maid servant in other people's home. Also she doesn't have higher educational qualification which is accepted in RMG sector.

Duties and responsibilities

Nahida is working almost one and half years in the finishing section of this RMG. After measuring the quality of the product if in the product there is any extra thread, she removes that thread. She can complete approximately 50 pieces in everyday, depending on order of the buyers. She did not have any previous experience, but at home they had one sewing machine and she had little bit idea about how to make clothes. She tried to make her and her younger sisters cloth. At the beginning when she was involved in the industry, she observed closely her colleague's work during working time and tried to learn. In this way, she has learnt this work. During break/lunch period, other colleagues also helped her to learn this work.

The working hours in the industry is about 8 hours a day (from 8am till 5pm) but sometimes it exceeds more than 8 hours. There is usually one hour lunch break. Many workers do overtime regularly. The industry counted overtime work after 5 pm. Every day she starts her work at 8 am in the morning and finish duty at 5 pm. After this regular duty time, she has to do overtime till 8 pm or 10 pm every day. The overtime rate is per hour 20 Tk. If there is any deadline for production and for supply, she also has to do night duty till 3 am. According to her words,

“Every day I do overtime and sometimes night duty if there is more work, 5 pm-8 pm or 5pm-10 pm they count it as overtime, many workers do overtime regularly. I also involve in night duty till 3 am.”

After night duty, she sleeps inside the industry. There is a room for sleep for those who do night duty. Early morning she return to her home for taking shower and having breakfast, then again come back to RMG and start her work at 8 am in the following morning.

Most of her co-workers and supervisor are very helpful and caring to her. While working, she often faces so many difficulties, sometimes she does mistake and does not understand what to do; but with the help of her colleagues, she can solve her problems. Her colleagues also give many suggestions about how to do work in a better way so that in future she can get early promotion. Without their support and kind behave, it would be difficult for her to do work there. But sometimes male supervisor would get angry and do misbehave if she does mistakes.

Present life style

Nahida is living in Sheorapara with her grandmother. Her grandmother works in other people's house. They have rented a room in a shed. They have one big stove made of mud outside the room. They also have one small stove inside the room, during rainy day they use that stove. They have to share bathroom with other tenants in this shed. As furniture's they also have one TV, one bed, a wooden shelves, show-case and dressing table in their room. She is not fully self-sufficient as she gets less money. She is not spending money for rent purpose, her grandmother bears this expenditure. She only spends her money on buying some foods, clothes and cheap ornaments like churi,¹² ear ring, chain etc.

Every day after finishing her duty, she returns directly to her home. If she can finish her duty early, sometime she goes to market while coming and buys some cooking items like chilly, salt what her grandmother asked her before going to the industry. Sometimes she buys juice, cheap, chocolate for herself. After getting fresh and finishing dinner with her grandmother, she usually goes to bed, or sometimes she watches TV or listening song in radio before sleeping. The routine is little bit different during weekend or holidays. That time, the industry is closed and she does not need to go to industry. She tries to wake up little bit late and then she helps her grandmother in cooking. Sometimes she goes to market near to home with her female colleague to buy vegetables, fish etc. according to her own choice.

¹² "Churi", it is one kind of ornaments which is used by most of the women in Bangladesh. They like to fill their hands with lots of churi of different colours and it is suitable with any kind of dress. It is made either from glass or from plastic.

According to Nahida's words,

“As I don't need to go to industry during Friday or other holidays, I try to wake up little bit late, I help my grandmother in cooking, sometimes I go to market near our home with my female colleague (same age like me) to buy vegetables, fish etc. which I like most.”

Usually as for breakfast, she eats rice but she prefers to eat “Panta”.¹³ During weekend she tries to cook some special food items (Shutki vorta, semai) which usually she does not have time to cook in other days.¹⁴ After taking bath and finishing her lunch, she tries to sleep, sometime she watches TV in the afternoon. In some weekend evening she goes to outside with her friends to see some places like Zoo, Shishu park etc. or goes to market for buying “Shalwar kameez”¹⁵ and “Orna”¹⁶. In some weekend she does not have time to go anywhere because she has to do her own works (washing cloth, cleaning room) which she does not have time to do in weekdays.

Services provided by the industry

Nahida told that in a month just after getting salary, one Friday the industry is fully closed; but other three Fridays, they have to do their duty till 1 pm. During other national holidays like 21 February, 16 December, 26th March, 15th August, the industry is fully closed (govt. holidays). For Muslim, there are two big festivals, Eid-ul-fitre and Eid-ul-azha. At that time the industry is closed for 6-7 days. But for other Muslim festivals like Shab-e-barat, 10th Muharram etc. the industry is open. She has heard from her colleagues that in the past there was no medical leave

¹³ “Panta”, it is traditional food dish for Bengali peoples. It is made from rice mixing with water.

¹⁴ “Shutki vorta”, it is processed dry fish, after fry the dry fish in oil, it is mashed with onion, garlic, salt and chilly. “Semai”, it is sweet food dish and made from wheat flour, very tasty Bengali desert and easy to cook. While cooking, it is necessary to add milk and sugar with semai.

¹⁵ “Shalwar kameez”, this is the traditional dress for women in Bangladesh before marriage. The “Shalwar” are loose pajama like trousers. The “kameez” looks like long shirt or tunic. This type of dress is made from cotton or silk.

¹⁶ The “Orna” is a scarf wear by Bangladeshi women as a part of traditional dress. The women usually use it with shalwar kameez and sometime with Sharee also.

for them, but now the industry has changed some rules. She is seen from her joining that industry is providing medical leave for all workers, 15 days in a year. The industry is providing 4 months maternity leave too.

In the industry, the working environment is very congested. Nahida reported that in one floor there are many workers, not proper ventilation, no leisure time and no separate room for taking rest. The industry is not providing any transport facility for them and that's why most of the workers came by walk. Most of the time, she has to do work by stand on foot and sometime while standing she feels so much pain in her leg. In upper floor, there is one small prayer room, no canteen facility but near to the industry, two or three small shops are there. If she wants she can buy during break time from that shop. Recently the industry has appointed one doctor for them.

In the industry, lunch hour is one hour (1-2pm). As she brought food from home, she does not need to buy lunch from shop which is near to industry. But they do not have any separate room to eat; they all eat by sitting the corner of the room where they are working. While eating time, they talk with each other and sometime she shares her food with her colleague also. Nahida also told that sometimes she goes back to home during lunch time for eating purpose as she is living near to industry. While coming in the industry, she brought water in bottle because there is lack of drinking water in the industry. Only one entrance door, no emergency exit door and no adequate fire prevention measure are very important problems for this industry. Sometimes, she feels afraid as the main entrance door is all times locked by security. They do not have fire alarms also.

Despite some problems, the industry is following some rules and regulation and providing training facilities for workers which are good signs for all workers. While asking about any punishment from industry if they come at late, Nahida told that if they come three days continuous late, then they consider one day absent and deduct one day salary from their monthly salary. Recently the factory arranged for short training. The duration of that training is one week. At a time, 10-15 workers will be trained. Those who are more senior in a floor and talk nicely, only for them the industry will provide training. These trained persons will teach other workers in the floor. As she is junior, till now she did not get change to participate in the training.

Economic independence and decision making

The monthly salary of Nahida is about 6,600Tk including overtime. Her monthly expenditure is almost 1,500 Tk. for food purpose. The house rent is 2000Tk/month but she does not need to pay the rent as her grandmother pays the rent. She usually spends her money on buying some foods and clothes for her and for her grandmother. In a month when she buys cloth that time her monthly expenditure exceeds 1,500 Tk. She does not save money in Bank like her other colleagues. But every other month she sends 5000 Tk. to her rural home. In room, she has money saving a small plastic box and keeps money there. According to Nahida's word,

“Every other month I send 5,000Tk to my rural home through “bKash”, I do not have bank account like my other colleagues but I have money saving a small plastic box in my room where I can save money.”

Instead of saving money in Bank, she sends money for her parents through bKash.¹⁷ bKash is a financial service provider through mobile phone for money transfer. Several factors motivate her to save money. She wants to save to buy cheap ornaments for her like churi, chain etc. She also wants to save money because it will help her parents to spend during her marriage.

Occasionally, she can buy some items as her wish without asking others. During last Eid festival, when she got salary, she bought many things for her younger brother, sisters and also for her parents. Before going home, she bought cloths for her younger brother and sisters and one sharee

¹⁷ “Bkash” provided a service to widening the net of financial inclusion among the people of Bangladesh by facilitating money transfer through mobile phones. It is a mobile financial services that allows its customers to send, receive and pay money from their mobile phones. By using the advanced technology in the mobile phone, it enables people to send money to anywhere. Bkash is a subsidiary of BRAC bank limited and started its journey as a joint venture company between BRAC bank limited, Bangladesh as well as Money in Motion LLC of USA and in April 2013 International Finance Corporation (IFC). It is a member of the World Bank group. It serves the low income peoples of the country by providing services that are very convenient, affordable and also reliable.

<http://www.bankall.org/2013/11/16/bkash/> (accessed on 23.06.2014)

for her mother. She also bought cheap jewellery, cosmetics and some foods (semai, basmati rice) for taking to home. During Eid day, she gave some money to her father to buy beef meat. Her mother also cooked that meat and semai during Eid day. She was feeling happy when her mother was telling to other neighbours that she bought all those items. Before coming to Dhaka, she also gave extra 2000Tk. to her father's hand to buy one cow.

When she was not involved in job that time she was in her rural home with her parent. She had to do a lot of work in her home (washing clothes, cooking etc.). Sometimes her parent got angry on her if she went outside without informing them. She had no freedom to do anything as her wish. Her mother sometime beats her if she did any mistake while working. Now she has freedom to do everything according her choice. Before taking any family decision, her parent also asks her and wants to know her decision. Two or three months back, her father was telling that in home they need one wooden shelf for keeping cloth. For this reason, he wanted to know whether she has money or not to help him (father) financially. Then she gave her opinion and also gave money to buy that furniture. Now she gets more respect and evaluation from her family members and from her relatives. According to her words,

“Two or three month before, my father was telling me that in our home, we need one wooden shelf for keeping clothes. For this reason, he wanted to know whether I have money to help him financially. I gave my opinion and money for buying this furniture.”

Before Eid festival, her parents also wanted to know from her, what special items they will cook in home during Eid day and what type of cloth they need to wear on this occasion. Many proposals are coming for her marriage purpose as she is now involved in job. But she does not have any interest to marry right now. Her grandmother also told her parent that she is not getting married now.

Nahida has many male and female colleagues. Every day during working time and while commuting between home and industry, she talks to them, sometime she shares her problems with them. They provide her valuable suggestions. Sometimes she goes to visit many new places with them and introduce with new peoples. It helps to increase her confidence, to increase her

decision making ability. She has one mobile phone through which she can communicate with her parent, relatives, colleagues and friends. Her family members and relatives support her to do this work.

They think that this is a good job compare to other jobs and have better future; they also respect her because she is involved in job and earning money. Her younger brother and sisters ask her if they plan to do anything. But some neighbours' near to her home criticizes this type of work in a negative way as she is working with male workers and spending the whole day in the industry.

Wage structure and workers consciousness

Nahida, she is little bit new here and do not know so much about wage structure. But she knows that minimum monthly wage of the workers is about 5,300Tk. She does not have any idea about basic and other allowances that included in gross monthly salary and yearly increment on her basic. She also does not have any idea about grades or all categories of the workers, but she knows that if she do work well, she will be assistant sewing machine operator and her salary will be high. She has idea that highest grade is senior operator and at last she can reach at that position but how much salary will be for that position, she does not know.

Harassment

As Nahida, always walk in group with her other colleagues, while going and coming she does not face any problems. But sometimes in the road, some outsider people do eve-teasing and use abusive words. Beside this, inside the garment industry, sometime supervisor and line chief do misbehave; even some male co-workers also do misbehave during working time. She also feels afraid if she stays in the industry after night duty. As she is unmarried, some male co-workers try to establish physical proximity; they want to make sexual advantage. Sometime she involves in night duty but the industry is not paying for that duty. Every day doing overtime makes her tired and bored also.

Workers organization

Nahida told that they have federation for solving their problems. One day she went to federation for making card with her senior colleague. She also told that this organization is very cooperative as she already heard little bit about this organization from her other colleagues. After reaching at that federation office, one federation woman came and asked her for what purpose she came here. Then Nahida explained her reason to come there and that women helped her to make card because without card she could not complain about her problem to federation. That federation woman told that if she faces any problem in future, she could have come to federation with this card, without card she cannot do anything. That woman gave her mobile number to Nahida to make personal contact if she wants. That federation woman explained about their whole activities, what they did in the past and still what they are doing right now for workers. From that federation woman, Nahida also came to know that they are working to establish their rights and to solve their problems what they face in the industry. She does not know exactly about the relationship between industry owner and this organization.

4.2.3: Case study-3

Rabeya Khatun

Garment worker (who has left the work)

Background information

Rabeya, she is 35 years old. Her home district is in Shariyatpur. Her father's name is Chan Miah and mothers name is Romilla Khatun. She has completed class eight as her education qualification. She is married and her husband is a taxi driver. When she was 27-28 years old, that time she got married. Her marriage was not arranged marriage. It was love marriage and at first her husband chooses her to marry. Her father is a shop-keeper; he has one small shop in their rural village. This shop is called "Mudi dokan" in Bengali term and he sells soap, salt, sugar, semai, buiskit etc. Near to their rural home, they have few agricultural lands to produce rice, wheat and vegetables. Rabeya has two sisters, one is elder than her, and other one is younger to her. Elder sister is married and live with her husband away from their home. Younger sister completed class six from their rural school. When Rabeya was 20 or 21 years old, that time she came to Dhaka alone. In her father's home, she did not feel comfort because of her step mother. Her mother died during her childhood. After her mother died, her father got married with another woman near to their home. As they were very little at that time, to take care of them her father decided to get marry again. But her new mothers behave was totally different what they expected before marriage, she did not takes proper care of them. Her father also did not tell anything to her new mother about to do such kind of misbehave with them. Sometime, Rabeya got angry on her father and on her new mother. She was not feeling good at home because of her new step-mother. For this reason, she decided to come to Dhaka. One neighbour (uncle in relation) told her that if she comes to Dhaka, she might get RMG job. He would help her to get this job as he is involved in RMG. She was motivated because she wanted to become independent and to take care of her younger sister.

Duties and responsibilities

Rabeya worked in RMG almost 6 years. At first she worked as helper, then involved in joining all parts of a cloth. She had little bit idea about how to make ladies cloth. When she was at home, she learned this type of work. But after involving in RMG, she learned more by observing other

colleague's work. During lunch or break time, she tried to operate her colleagues machine, sometimes they also helped her to operate. According to her words,

“After involving in RMG, I learned more by observing other colleague's work. Sometimes during lunch or break time, that time I tried to operate their machine. My colleagues also helped me to learn how to operate the machines.”

She got many support from her colleagues. All the colleagues were very helpful and cooperative. They helped a lot to learn while working in RMG. Every day, she started her work at around 8 or 8.30 and finished at around 6 o'clock. Most of the days, she did overtime also till 10 o'clock. This overtime was every day as like as her normal duty, without doing overtime, her monthly salary would have been low. Rarely, she did night duty, it depends on workload.

Past (when she was in job) and Present life style

Rabeya lives in Sheorapara with her husband, her two daughters and one son. Her son is elder than her two daughters; son age is 5 years and two daughters who are 3 years and 3 months old. Her younger sister (involved in RMG job) is also living with them. When she was in job, she with her two colleagues rented one room in a place where other colleagues were living. That time in her room she had one bed,¹⁸ one table and one small “almira” for keeping cloth. As she was unmarried, she did not have much furniture. Now in her house, there is refrigerator, TV, one cabinet, one bed and one wooden shelf. After her marriage, they did not have TV and refrigerator. Last Eid festival, her husband and younger sister got bonus (extra money) with their monthly salary. They had some saved money. By adding this saved money with that bonus, they bought one second hand refrigerator just two days before Eid festival. The price of their refrigerator was 12,000 Tk. Her husband bought TV one year later after their marriage. She likes to saw programs, drama in TV but no time is there to see drama or serial now. Most of the time she has to spend time with her children, she is busy all times to do their work. In their place where they live at present, there are many small rooms. They rented one room. Her younger sister and her two children, they sleep on the floor of that room. Rabeya also told that it is difficult to stay all family members in one room. For ten separate rooms, a shared toilet, a shared

¹⁸ Bed, upon which a person sleeps.

bathroom and a shared kitchen. In kitchen, there are five stoves for cooking. After cooking, she brought all cooked items to her room and keeps inside the rack (place to keep food items). They all eat by sitting on the floor of the room.

When she was in RMG every day it was too late when she came to her room. After getting fresh, she had to cook something for eating, then after finishing her dinner sometimes she gossips with her other roommates and then slept. But now her daily routine has changed little bit. Now every day she has to do a lot of works. She has to take care of her children, her all family members; her daughter's age is only three months. She has to cook for all of her family members; sometimes her younger sister helps her to cook if she is free. She cannot do any heavy work as she had one seizer operation three months back.

When Rabeya was in RMG, sometime during weekend, industry was opened and she had to do her duty. But in some Friday the industry was closed. At that time, she tried to sleep more compare to other days. She also tried to do her other works at that time. During evening time, she just walked in front of her home with her other colleagues and talked about job prospect, problems in the working place, behaviour of other colleagues, family matter etc. In some weekend, she went outside to visit some places, to do shopping and to buy necessity items. Now during Friday, she does not do anything special. But in some Fridays, she cooks some special items such as khichuri,¹⁹ chicken curry and payesh²⁰ because her husband and her younger sister likes those items. According to her own words,

“Now there is no difference between weekend and week days. But sometimes during Friday I try to cook some special items like khichuri, chicken curry, payesh which my husband and younger sister like most.”

For her, every day is same now. She has to do same work every day. She has to wake up at early morning, at around 6 o'clock. Then she needs to cook rice and curry as her husband and her

¹⁹ The “khichuri” is a rich gourmet delicacy and very favourite food dish for many peoples of Bangladesh. The rice is cooked mixing with dal, spices, vegetables, peas etc. While eating, someone used ghee (clarified butter) and achar (oil-based pickle) to make it more tasty. It is accompanied with meat curry, fish fry, potato chops, eggplants and omelettes.

²⁰ “Payesh”, it is also one kind of sweet food dish. Rice is cooked mixing with milk and sugar.

younger sister goes to work after eating hot rice. She also prepares some food for her children. Most of the time in a day, she spends to cook and to take care of her children. After doing whole day many works, she feels sleep at early night when it is around 8 pm. She does not have time to go outside, to talk with neighbour or to watch drama, movie.

Economic independence and empowerment

Rabeya got monthly salary 6000 Tk. including overtime when she was in job. That time her total monthly expenditure was almost 1,700Tk. She had spent money for rent purpose, for buying cloth and food, for caring her younger sister, for medical purpose and little bit for transport purpose. Sometime she bought cheap cloth, cheap ornaments (chain, churi, ear ring) from shop near to footpath as for gift purpose. She remembered, one day she bought one 'lungi' (Tk. 200) for her father. While going to her elder sister's home, she took one sharee (Tk. 300) for her also. The rent of her room was 2,500 Tk/month. But that time she was unmarried and lived with her two colleagues. In one room, they were three female workers and shared this 2,500 Tk. for housing rent equally. So, her expense was 850 Tk. for rent purpose. The rent of her present house is 3000 Tk/month, but she does not pay this rent. Her husband and her younger sister are paying the monthly house rent.

Now she has no income as she does not involve in job. Sometimes, her husband and her younger sister give her money. From that money, she spends for her family purpose. But most of the time, her husband buys foods, clothes and other things for them. Rabeya also told that when she was in job, she did not ask to her family members for her expenditure purpose. She also saved money for her marriage purpose. Her father did not have ability to bear expenditure for her marriage. She has another younger sister too. With saved money she bought wedding dress, jewellery and some cosmetics during her marriage time. Her salary was sufficient for her to bear her own expenditure. But now she needs to ask her husband for money as she is not earning and she has to buy something for her family members every day. She is totally dependent on her husband, if she wants to buy for her children or for herself.

According to Rabeya's words,

“When I was in RMG, that time I tried to save money to bear my marriage expenses. My father's did not have the ability to bear my marriage expenses. During my marriage, I bought wedding dress, jewellery, cosmetics for me from my savings.”

She had a small money saving box made of mud in her room. If she had any extra 5Tk or 10 Tk after coming from industry, she kept that money in that box. Sometimes after getting salary, she usually kept 200 or 300 Tk. in that box too. Now sometimes from her husband and from her sister's money, she keeps extra 20TK or 30Tk below the bed. If her children want to eat any food or if she wants to buy vegetable in front of her home from “Sabzi wala”,²¹ that time she spends that money. But now she is interested to save money to ensure a secured future but no change is there. They do not have enough money to spend during emergency time such as for sudden disease (critical operation) or during loss of job of her husband. During last couple of years, she was able to save a little amount of money, but it was spent during the birth of her younger daughter. Unfortunately she does not have any opportunity to save right now. Rarely, she has chance to save.

After her marriage, she had left that job, may be 7 or 8 years before. At first, her husband did not like this job because she had to spend whole day in the industry. But now her husband gave permission to join again in the industry from next year. Not now, because her daughter age is only three months. She is also interested to join again and to contribute in her family financially with her husband. According to Rabeya's word,

“At first, my husband did not like this job because I had to spend whole day in the industry. I did not have time to concentrate in my family. But now my husband has changed his mind. He told me that from next year I can try to join in any industry if I want.”

In Dhaka city, everything is very expensive and it is difficult for her husband to bears family expenditure. Most of the time, at last of the month her husband does not have money, even to

²¹ “Sabzi wala”, are those peoples who sell vegetable like potato, brinjal, bean, etc. in front of home.

buy 1 kilo of rice for them. At that time, her husband asked her whether she has any money to buy food items or not. All this factors motivate her and her husband to join again in RMG.

Rabeya also told that she did not face any problems from her relatives and neighbour, they thought this is a good job and she got respect from them too. Even, she could participate in some decision making activities. Her family members especially her father and her younger sister asked her to take any kind of decision. Few years before, her father told that for him it is difficult to bear her sister's expenditure. That time she gave her opinion and told her father not to be worried. Few days after this, she went to home and came back to Dhaka with her younger sister so that she can lives with her. Rabeya also told that when she was involving in industry job, she had more power to give her own opinion and to bargain with her family members.

She bought anything according to her decision. Nobody could ask her. But now she is totally dependent on her husband and feels less freedom in her family. Sometimes, her husband without asking her, start to do some works. She always has to explain clearly for what purposes she spent her husband's money. RMG job gave her much flexibility to increase her social network. Rabeya had many colleagues, sometimes they came to her home and she also visited to their home. That time, by working with other colleagues, she got opportunity to get knowledge and information from them. When she faced any problems, they helped her to overcome that problems and provide valuable suggestions.

Services provided by industry

During Friday the industry was closed but not every Friday. It also provided holidays during festival time like Eid day or other big festivals. Four months maternity leave was there. There was no training program provided by the industry for workers. The working environment was very congested and overcrowded, only one entrance door, no leisure time, no prayer room, no doctor, no separate room to take lunch. In one floor, there were approximately 200 workers and for these 200 workers, there were only two toilets which were not sufficient. Although there were many fans inside the industry but during summer time it was too hot inside the room. There was no transport facility provided by the industry for workers.

Wage structure and workers consciousness

Rabeya, had no idea about their minimum monthly wage. She also did not know how much her basic and what other allowances are included in gross monthly wage. She did not have idea about the grades of the workers in respect to her position. She only knew that at first she was helper, then after doing few years job, she got promotion and the work pattern of that position was to joint all parts of a cloth. She only knew this much, nothing more.

Harassment

Rabeya reported that one day one of her female colleague was feeling sick while working. Then her colleague requested line manager to leave but line manager did not give permission and used abusive words. Once she was suffering from gastric pain, she requested for leave during lunch break but line chief told that if she leave now, then he will be considered absent for whole day although she is present half day, this was nothing but harassment.

Rabeya, also told that while walking in group, some male workers wanted to touch inappropriately. When she came at dark night from industry, some outside people made bad language while seeing her. Inside the industry, sometimes male workers beat her and gave threat to lose job if she did not finish or did not understand work properly. After doing whole day night duty, she felt tired during overtime; sometimes she felt hungry and could not concentrate in her work properly. After night duty if she slept in the industry, she felt that the industry environment is not so much secured for her to stay at night.

Workers organization

Rabeya reported that they had organization for solving their problems. This organization was helpful to solve their problems and took necessary actions against low wage, any kind of harassment inside the industry. But she did not go to that organization.

Chapter 5: Socioeconomic analysis of women garment workers

In this chapter, I discussed about the compact findings of my study. I divided this chapter into four sections. At first, I analyzed and discussed about the background of women workers such as their origin, age, marital status, education and some reasons that motivate women workers to involve in RMG, then in the second section of this chapter, I discussed more in details about their economic independence and empowerment. Later, in third and fourth sections, I discussed about their duties, responsibilities and services; and wage structure and workers consciousness, respectively.

5.1 Background information

5.1.1 Origin

The readymade garment industry in Bangladesh attracts people from all over the country. In my study, most of the women came from different rural areas of different divisions.²² Among 15 women workers (information from table-02), majority of the respondents came from Dhaka division (53.33%), followed by other divisions such as Barisal (20%) and Khulna (13.33%). The percentage of respondents is same for Chittagong and Bogra division (6.67%). There was no woman from Rajshahi and Sylhet division.

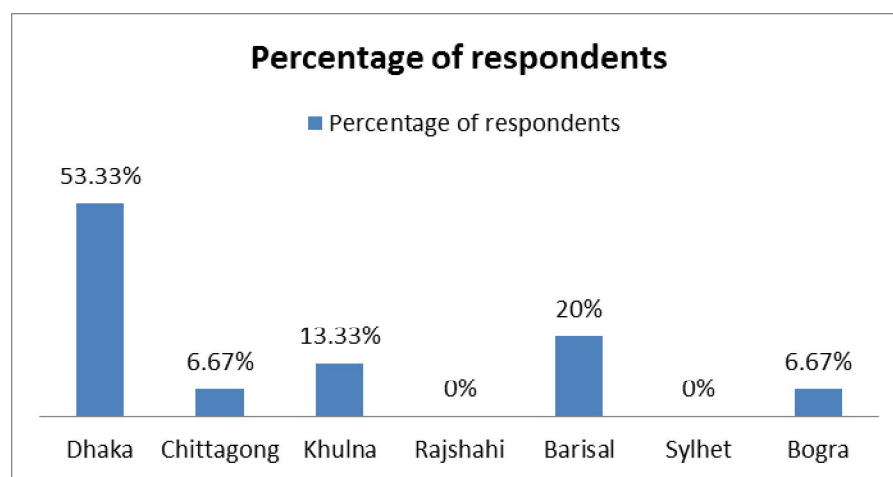


Fig-11: Distribution of respondents according to Origin

In Bangladesh, under one division, there are many districts. The respondents usually are coming from different rural parts of different districts. However, the number of individuals from each district varies widely. In my study, maximum respondents came from mainly two districts,

²² Bangladesh has 64 districts under 7 divisions.

Mymensingh and Barisal, compare to other districts. Here it means that respondents are not only from Mymensingh city, many respondents came from near to Mymensingh district like Jamalpur, Sherpur etc. In past, these districts (Jamalpur, Sherpur) were under Mymensingh district. From these districts the percentage of respondents account for almost 47%.

The reasons to move more respondents from Mymensingh district is that, Mymensingh is geographically close to Dhaka and the transport infrastructure from this district to the capital (Dhaka) is comparatively well developed. This is obviously one reason for the large proportion of respondents originating from this district. Another important factor is that Mymensingh area is comparatively poor to other districts in Bangladesh and employment opportunity in this district outside of agriculture is scarce.

On the other hand, Barisal division is situated in southern parts of Bangladesh. This division is very close to river and flood, river erosion etc. are very common problems which affect most of the peoples of this region every year. For this reason, peoples from this area are moving out to Dhaka city and involve themselves in the industry.

5.1.2 Age

The age of the respondents is classified into three categories such as less than 18 years, 18-25 years and more than 25 years. The percentage of respondents aged less than 18 years is about 6.67% while single largest group accounting for almost 66.67% for aged group 18-25 years, followed by 26.67% of aged group more than 25 years. The distribution of respondents among three age categories reflects that the RMG industry is clearly dominated by young women workers. Almost three-fourths of the interviewees are below 25 years of age.

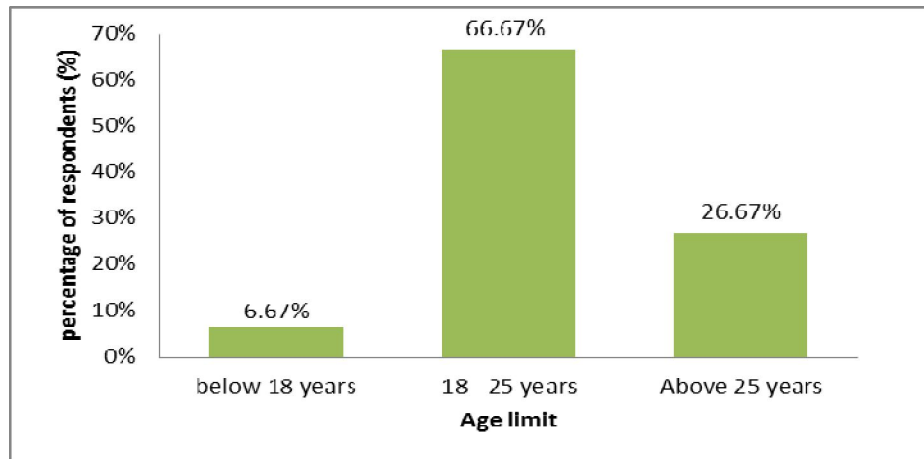


Fig- 12: Distribution of respondents according to Age

5.1.3 Marital status

Among these women workers, most of the respondents are single (73.33%). A few respondents are married (20%). Only 6.67% respondents found to be divorced.

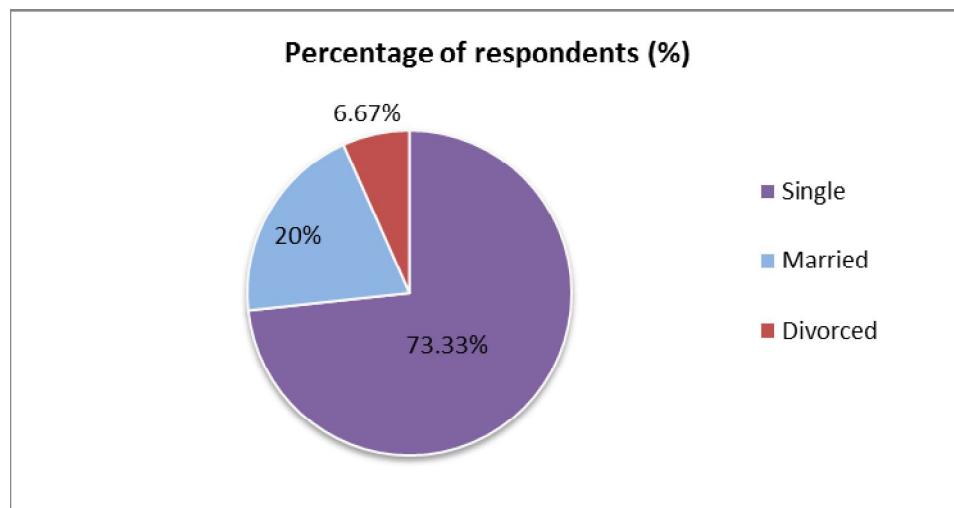


Fig-13: Distribution of respondents according to Marital status

5.1.4 Education

The level of education among the respondents differs widely. In order to examine the educational level of the respondents, I classified educational level into four categories such as who didn't finish primary education (below class V), who finished primary education but not junior school (between class V and class VIII), who finished junior school but not secondary education

(between class VIII and class X) and who completed secondary education (more than class X).²³ In my study, 6.67% respondents whose educational level is less than primary school, 73.33% respondents who completed primary education level but not junior school and 20% respondents completed junior school but not secondary school. There was no woman whose educational level secondary or upper than secondary.

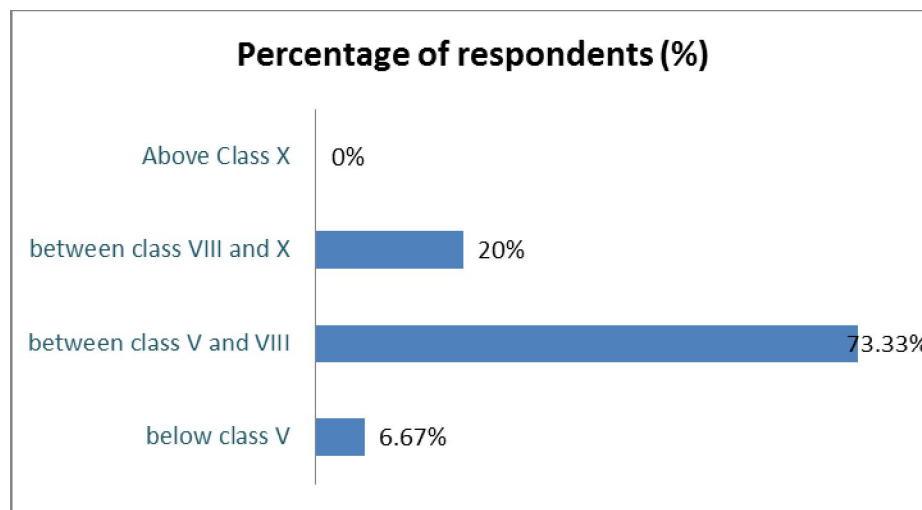


Fig- 14: Distribution of respondents according to education

5.1.5 Motivation factors

Several factors are responsible which motivate rural women to involve themselves in the urban garment industry. Among these factors, the economic status of the workers family is obviously the central reason which motivates workers to come to city and to join in the RMG industry with males. In rural Bangladesh, most of the families are very poor and there is lack of women employment opportunities. Most of the respondents in this study came from landless poor families and their income levels were also low. However, the statements made by the respondents in regards to their individual reasons to move reveal the different shades of that motivation factor.

In this study, the most common reasons (Figure - 15) from 15 women workers which motivate rural women to involve in RMG are found as below:

²³ For education, Bangladesh follows British School System.

- 1) To help family financially (46.67%)
- 2) To become independent (33.33%)
- 3) More prestigious than domestic work (13.33%)
- 4) Easy to get (6.67%).

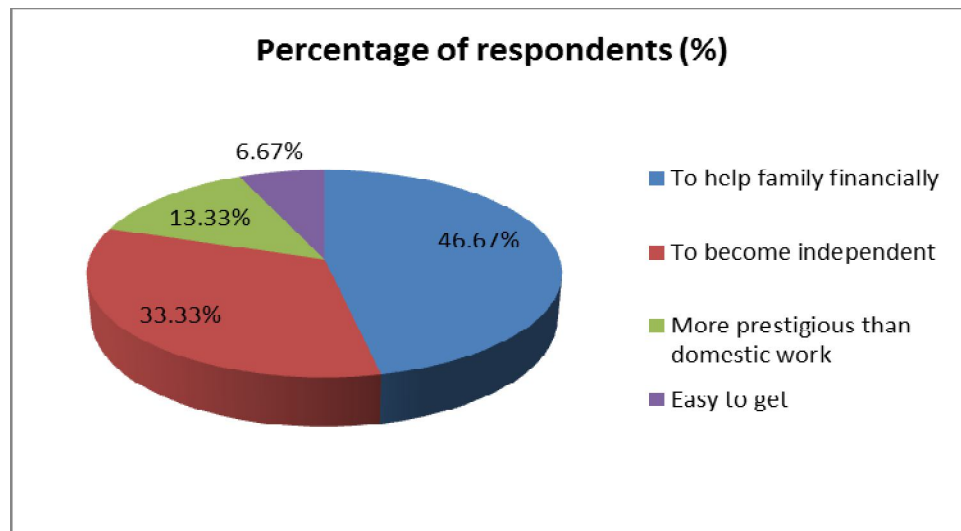


Fig- 15: Difference in motivation factors

The most common widespread explanation offered by the respondents was that they had entered garments in order to ensure their family's survival. In rural Bangladesh, most of the families are not financially solvent due to some problems or barriers in rural areas. Among these problems, the most important problems are lack of job opportunity, low education among rural people, river bank erosion, drought, flood etc. With these problems, in some rural families, domestic problems are also very prominent such as father divorces mother and mother lives separately with her children, death of father, elder brothers marriage and goes away, only one income source maintaining all family expenditure etc. Moreover, due to all these kinds of problems, the rural women are motivated to move to city and to join in the RMG. They are determined to contribute financially in their families in order to improve their family conditions (46.67%).

The second important factor is that women want to become independent which was made up of 33.33% respondents in my study. Due to patriarchal society in Bangladesh, women have less ability to do anything. But when women earn income, it confers on them more freedom to spend

as their wish which implies greater recognition within their family and society. This set of explanations offered for the decision to seek garments employment centred around the idea that this is path is a way to get better future, to take care of oneself financially and to make own way in the world.

Some respondents (13.33%) opinion in my study was that this job is more prestigious compare to do domestic work as it has good salary and providing better facilities for workers. Another very important motivation factor is that this job is easy to get compare to other jobs as it demands no higher educational qualification and pre acquired skill, which was made up of 6.67% respondents in my study. The relative attractiveness in connection with the fact that there are no requirements in regards to previously acquired skill or education, make the RMG industry seems to be the “least worst” option for young women. Rather saying that RMG industry is a great place to earn income, it might well be the “least worst” of all available options, especially for young poor women.

Based on the above discussion, it could be concluded that most of the respondents in my study are from Mymensingh and Barisal district which is consistent with the result of Akter et al. (2013). A large portion of the respondents are unmarried and young age, which is almost similar with the result of Paul Majumder (2000) and Alam (2011) what they got in past. The educational qualification among the respondents is also very low. In fact, due to their less educational qualification, they choose readymade garment industry job where the workers educational qualification is of less importance. The rural households’ socioeconomic condition is also very important which motivate rural women to involve in RMG job. I found that most of the respondents came from rural poor households in order to help their family financially and this result is consistent with previous research result conducted by Islam (2012). Although in my study I found some other factors such as to become independent economically, more prestigious job compare to domestic work etc. for which rural women are motivated but all these findings are almost similar with previous research results.

5.2 Economic independence and women empowerment

5.2.1 Income/Expenditure

The monthly salary for Aleya is almost 8000 Tk/month (approx. 80 EURO) including overtime. She has the opportunity to spend this money for different purposes. From her monthly salary, she spends almost 6000 Tk/month as paying for house rent, buying food, cloth and for medical purposes. But for Nahida, monthly salary is about 6000 TK and her monthly expenditure is 1,500 Tk/month only for food purpose but sometime she spend more than 1,500Tk. The reason behind to spend less is that her salary is not so much as like as Aleya and lives with her grandmother. In a society like Bangladesh, grandmothers have affection with their daughter in law and they gets many supports from grandmother while staying with her.

The house rent for Aleya is 3000Tk/month. She pays half and her brother pays half as she lives with her brother. But for Nahida, no need to spend for rent purpose. This is another reason behind Nahida to spend less. Her grandmother pays 2000Tk/month for rent purpose as her grandmother does work as maid servant of others people home. In case of Aleya, the house rent is more than Nahida because that room is little bit bigger than Nahida's room. Rabeya, when she was in job, she got salary 6000 Tk/ month and for rent purpose her expense was only 850 Tk./month. Since she was alone in Dhaka and was unmarried and lived with her two unmarried female colleagues, the total 2,500Tk as for rent purpose, they shared equally among them.

As most of the workers financial condition almost same, they do not have ability to rent a house with attach bathroom and attach kitchen and usually try to live together in a place where house rent is comparatively low compare to other places. For this reason, most of the workers housing condition are same. In my analysis I found most of the workers rented one room and that room is a one-storied brick building with roof made of tin. They have to share bathroom and kitchen with other tenants those who live in that place, even in that kitchen there is no gas and usually use "lakri" for cooking purpose. In that room, Aleya told that they have TV, fridge, showcase, dressing table, beds and shelves as furniture. But Nahida told that except fridge they have other furniture's like TV, one bed, a wooden shelves, show case and dressing table.

From monthly income, Aleya is self-sufficient to bear her monthly expenses and she doesn't ask money to her family members for her expenditure purpose. She can also save 1000Tk/month from her monthly salary in Islami Bank. Nahida is not fully self-sufficient as like as Aleya. She

does not save money in Bank. Instead of saving money in Bank, every other month she send 5,000 Tk to her rural home for her parent through “bkash” and contributing financially to her family. During Eid festival, Nahida also contributing financially with her father to buy food items like meat and semai for cooking at that day. She also has a small money saving box in her room which is made of plastic. If she has any extra money every day or monthly, she keeps inside the box. Rabeya also had the ability to save 200Tk. or 300 Tk. in money saving box in each month. With saved money, she bought many marriage items during her marriage time. She also expands money to take care of her younger sister.

From above discussion, it may conclude, that Aleyas monthly salary is more compare to Rabeya’s monthly salary. But Rabeya also involved in the same type of work i.e. joining all parts of a cloth which indicates that now salary has increased for the same position. This is a good sign for workers especially for women workers to motivate them to involve in RMG and to change their social status. It is also clear that Aleya is getting more money than Nahida because her working experience more than Nahida. In the garment industry, working experience plays a very important role on changing workers salary. Usually, those who are working more years in the industry, they are demanding more salary compare to those workers with less experience in the industry.

In Bangladesh, those who are married and divorced, they have very less opportunity to do anything; even they do not have opportunity to express their opinion freely. They are deprived from their family as well as from society. They are just like vulnerable people in the society. The readymade garment industry gives new life of this divorced women group through providing them monthly salary. This industry helps to increase their status in the family through enabling these women to be economically solvent and to contributing financially along with other family members.

As I described already in theoretical section that there is close link between rural and urban life and rural life is influenced through the flows of people’s capital, goods, ideas and feelings (Stenbacka, 2012). On the other hand, by naturally, women have strong attachment with their families (Lauby and Stark, 1988) compare to males. In this study, I also found that there is a relationship between women garments worker and their rural economy. As most of the women garment workers are from rural areas, they are maintaining strong relationship with their rural

home. The women are sending money to their rural home which helps to change the status of their family and to become independent economically as well as plays role on rural transition.

5.2.2 Saving/Holidays

Several factors motivate the garment workers to save money. In my study, I found that Aleya wants to save because of future security. Now she does not know exactly in future at what purposes she will spend this saved money. Actually, in her case this saved money is seen as an insurance which helps her to overcome any uncertainties in future. Since she does not have husband, she has no chance to get financial support from family. This saved money will be helpful for her when she does not have this job or during her sickness time. But the situation is different for Nahida. As she is unmarried, she wants to save so that this saved money will help her parents to spend during her marriage time. Similar opinion I found from Rabeya also when she was in job. She also tried to save how much she could bear for her marriage purpose. This type of result I also found in another study conducted by Amin et. al. (1998) where the researcher explored that some unmarried women workers wanted to save just to pay the dowry. In Bangladesh, during marriage time, girls and girl's parents need to buy many things for marriage purpose. Sometimes, girls parents are forced from boys' family side to buy many things like furniture, dress for bridegroom although they do not have ability to buy those items. Paying dowry is a very common practice in contemporary rural Bangladesh. Only for this reason, many divorce and suicide are happened every year. This is not only the scenario for rural areas, in urban areas educated society sometime this situation can be seen. The readymade garment industry helps women not only to save money for dowry, instead it will help to reduce dowry also. It is expected from my study, that this saved money will give woman a more secured life and give freedom to lead balance conjugal life after marriage.

From this study, it is also seen that future security is not only the main reason for which rural women motivated to save money. Those who are unmarried women for them marriage also act as one kind of future security for which they want to save. The young and unmarried women consider marriage for their future security.

In Bangladesh, people's savings is not to depend on spending during long term vacation or summer vacation like as western countries. But in western culture or developed country, it is very common that they saved to spend during two months summer vacation or long term

vacation. But the people of Bangladesh spend very short vacation or holidays. In my study, all women garment workers, usually they prefer to spend their holidays or weekend in a different way than other week days. Aleya who is divorced and little bit aged compare to other two women workers, she just prefers to walk in front of her home during evening time or in some holidays, she went to visit her sister's home and colleagues home to get little bit relax. But I got different opinions from Nahida and Rabeya (who has left the job). Rabeya when she was in job, that time she was unmarried and Nahida she is also unmarried presently. Mostly, they prefer to go outside to visit some places like zoo, shishu park etc. during weekend or holidays. They also prefer shopping at that time. In Bangladesh, peoples age also very important factor on which peoples visit to some places depend. Usually those who are aged they prefer to visit some specific places or sometime they totally don't prefer to go outside rather than younger and unmarried aged group. Another point is that in rural Bangladesh, women those who are not involved in job, they do not show their preference to go outside as they have less capacity or ability. But in my study, these women garment workers are going outside during their holidays because they are independent economically. They are not going to visit some places at far distance because of their less financial ability but they are trying to visit some places near to home during holidays.

5.2.3 Decision making

Involving in the garment industry leads to women having greater roles in decision making in the family and enhance women power in the family as well as in the society. By examining the opinions of the respondents in my study, I found that this type of work helps them to increase their respect from their family members and neighbours as they are involved in job. Before taking any decision relates to family or others, their family members ask them and want to know their opinion. Aleya told that while taking decision to buy refrigerator in their home, that time she participated in the family meeting with her father and brother and gave her own opinion. She contributed financially with her father and brother to buy fridge. Nahida also gave same opinion as like as Aleya. She told that in their rural home, before buying one wooden "Alna" for keeping cloth, her father wanted to know her decision whether they should buy or not. She gave her decision and contributed financially with her father. She also has the ability to take her own marriage decision. This implies that women garment workers gradually increasing their empowerment through participating in their family decision making activities. The importance of

readymade garment industry on women decision making ability can easily be understood if we examine Rabeya's past and present life. When Rabeya was in job, that time she took any decision as her wish. She did not need to take permission from her family members for buying purpose. She had spend money as her wish. But now she need to ask her husband for money, even while buying any items she need to explain to her husband why she wants to buy. Now she has less freedom and less power to take decision in her family because she does not earn money right now.

In Bangladesh, women have less power to give their own opinions in their family. Sometime woman want to participate but her opinion is rejected by her father or elder brother. This situation is more prominent in rural Bangladesh. When Nahida was in rural areas with her parents, that time she had to do a lot of work, even sometime her mother beat her if she did mistake while doing household work. Her father did not ask her while taking any decision. But now her father respects her decision as she involves in job and contributing in her family. I also found that Rabeya (who has left the job) at first she was depended on her father but when she was in job that time she choose her husband by herself which is very unpredictable in rural Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, usually parent select boy for her daughter, whether her daughter agrees or not agree to marry that boy, it does not matter. The readymade garment industry helps to change this traditional marriage system by increasing women decision making ability. I also found they are evaluating more than before as their family members ask them before taking any decision. This industry also plays role to increase their awareness and social network as they are working with other co-workers and share information with them. This result is consistent with previous research result conducted by Zaman (2001) where she explored that women lives in the family and workplace create double consciousness as women and as workers. I also found that most of the workers have mobile phone through which they maintain social relation with their colleagues as well as with their relatives.

In Bangladesh, women are responsible to do household activities and male are responsible to do outside work. Since most of the women are not involved in job, they have less financial contribution in their family. But in my study, women are contributing more or less financially in their family and help to change their family status. Rabeya when she was in job that time she was totally economically independent. Not only she bear her expenditure but also her younger sister

expenditure. Aleya also fully independent but Nahida little bit dependent on her grandmother as her income is low because of less working experience. But whatever the reason, the main fact is that they all are contributing more or less to their household economy with their own personal autonomy or self esteem. The readymade garment industry confers women a greater recognition within their household and society by providing them employment opportunities. It also helps to bring a shift of other people perception among themselves. Now they received greater respect and recognition from their family members and society as they have financial contribution in their family. Women enjoyed many positive outcomes in their lives in terms of economically, self-respect and freedom to take decision. The industry also empowers women through increasing their awareness and confidence.

What comes out clearly from above discussion is that readymade garment industry helps women to change their status in the family and society through increasing their participation in economic and social activities which is also consistent with the result of Khosla (2009). In his study, the author explored that women involvement in economic and household activities has impact to change their status and their family status. In fact, due to feminization and labour flexibility women are getting more chance to participation in the industrial sector which helps them to become independent economically. Women can contribute equally with their male family members and thus can change their parent's perception on their daughters.

5.3 Duties, responsibilities and services

5.3.1 Types of work

In the garment industry, women typically are responsible for different types of activities such as ironing, cutting, sewing, packaging, quality control, finishing and embroidery. Moreover, the nature of work in the garment factories encouraged recruitment of many women workers (Zaman, 2001). On the other hand, in Bangladesh, most of the women during their childhood learn this type of skill as like as their hobby and to meet the demand of their family and this experience is necessary for industry work in the society. As a result women can displace male workers in the garment industry. In my study, I found that as women are involving to work in different section, their work pattern also varies from one section to another section. Some are involved in production section; some are involved in finishing section as either helper or as an operator.

Despite their gender based skills, most of the women in my study started their first work in the industry as helper. Aleya reported that at first she worked as an assistant of other workers as she do not have previous experience to do such type of work but now she is working in production section as a senior operator of linking machine. While describing her work she explained that after coming product from cutting section, she joints all parts of a product like as complete sewing of a cloth. Her work patterns same as like as Rabeya (who has left the job). Actually what type of work a woman will do in the industry, it is not only depends on her previous working experience, it also depends on her present working experience where she is working now. As Aleya is working almost ten years, for this reason she got promotion to do work as an operator. But for Nahida, although she has previous experience about how to make a cloth in the industry but she involves in the industry only one and half year, she is working in the finishing section (after measuring the quality of a product, in this section they remove extra thread of a cloth). I also found that most of the workers those who do not have any previous experience, they learned this type of work after involving in the industry. During working time every day, they observed closely their colleagues work and tried to learn. Sometime, their colleagues also helped them to learn this type work. In a day, how many products they have to complete, it also depends on their type of work i.e. whether it is easy or difficult and also buyers order. If there is any shipment deadline, they have to do lot of work at that time. Nahida described that she can complete 50 pieces in a day, but Aleya told that every day she can complete 1 dozen if the work is difficult but if it is easy, every day 2 or 3 dozen she can complete.

5.3.2 Working hours

The normal working hours in the industry is about 8 hours a day (from 8am till 5pm) with one hour lunch break. After 5 pm, most of the workers do overtime regularly and night duty frequently during production and shipment deadlines. For this reason, garment workers try to live near to industry so that it would take less time to reach the industry. The average walking hour is about half an hour from their work place to home. As no transport facility provided by the industry, most of the time the workers try to walk in groups to reach to their workplace in the morning time, even while evening time they try to walk in groups to reach to their home if every workers work finish at a time.

In the industry, most of the workers are involved in overtime and night duty. Sometime, they are forced to work overtime after their normal duty (Islam, 2012). In my study, I also found similarities of previous result. Aleya as she is working in production section, in this section work pressure is more compare to other sections. Every day her normal duty is from 8 am till 9 or 10 pm, sometimes it exceeds till 12 o' clock. But the industry does not count it as overtime in this section. This is her every day normal duty. I found another opinion from Nahida. She described that in her section there is overtime. After 5 pm, every day she do overtime till 8 pm or 10 pm. If there is any deadline for production and for supply, at that time she involves in night duty till 3 pm. The industry provides accommodation to sleep after night duty. Those who do night duty, usually they sleep inside the industry after night duty. At early morning they return to their home for taking shower and having breakfast, then again come back to industry and start their work at around 8 am in the following morning.

5.3.3 Holidays (weekend, vacation leave)

In the study, according to workers opinion, I found that in a month one Friday, the industry is closed whole day, but other three Fridays, they have to do their own duty till 1 pm. But during other national holidays like 21 February, 16 December, 15th August, 26th March; the industry is fully closed (govt. holidays). For Muslim, there is two big festivals, Eid-ul-fitre and Eid-ul-azha. At that time the industry is also closed for 6-7 days which are big vacations for workers.

5.3.4 Working environment

Export-oriented industry is supposed to maintain working conditions that are comparable to international standard because the industry produces for the international market. Therefore, export-oriented industrialization is supposed to have a positive impact on working conditions (Paul-Majumder, 2000). But in some cases, export-oriented industry is not maintaining standard working condition which creates occupational hazards among workers. In the study, I found that the working environment is very congested. Aleya described that in one floor there are around 300 workers, not proper ventilation, no emergency exit door, no fire alarm, no leisure time and no separate room for taking rest. Even, the industry does not have adequate fire prevention measure. This result is almost similar with previous research result found by Mukul (2013) where the author described that poor working environment in the industry creates several problems among workers. Although in upper floor, there is one small prayer room but no canteen facility provided by the industry. But they have permission to buy food during lunch time from

shop near to industry. Due to long working hours, workers suffer from headache, stomach pain which is consistent with the result of Begum (2010). Recently the industry has appointed one doctor providing services for all workers from 8am till 5pm.

Usually the lunch hour in the industry is one hour (1-2pm). As most of the workers brought food from home, they don't need to buy lunch from shop. Since there is no separate room to eat, they all eat by sitting the corner of the room where they are working. Nahida also told that sometimes she go back to home during lunch time for eating purpose because her home is near to industry. Lack of pure drinking water inside the industry is also very important problem informed by our women workers. Most of the workers reported that they brought water in bottle from their home.

Despite some problems, the industry is following some rules and regulation and providing training facilities which are good signs for all workers. If the workers come three days continuous late, then they consider one day absent and deduct one day salary from their monthly salary. In the past, there was no medical leave provided by the industry but recently they have started to give medical leave for all workers, 15 days in a year. The industry is providing 4 months maternity leave also. Recently, the industry arranged short training for them. The duration of that training is one week. In a time, 10-15 workers will be trained. Those who are more senior in a floor and talk nicely, the industry will provide training only for them. Later, these trained persons will teach other workers in the floor. During training time, people from fire service come.

From the above discussion, it may conclude that women in the industry are involving to do different types of activities. Their working hours also varies from one woman to another woman. Although the normal working hour is same for every woman but due to night duty and overtime, the working hour varies from one woman to another woman. Those who involves in production section, everyday they need to do overtime which is counted as like as their normal duty. But those who are involved in other sections; maybe they do not need to do overtime or night duty every day. While working, women also faced some problems relates to working environment like congested working place, poor ventilation, lack of pure drinking water etc. which hamper the concentration of workers to work with more concentration. So, there is a lot of scope for owner of the industry to improve working environment and to provide some other facilities which will encourage the workers to work with more efficiently in the industry and to motivate

other rural women to involve in the industry. By talking with them, I came to know that if the working environment is in favour of them, they will get new inspiration to work efficiently and finally production will also be high. Although in some cases, the working environment is not favourable for workers, but the industry has some rules and regulations and provides some services like training facility, medical leave and monthly salary at fixed time etc. for all workers which were not found in some previous research results. Of course, this is a good sign for all workers to do work with new inspiration and hopefully all workers will enjoy the work while working rather than to feel pressure.

5.3.5 Harassment

Usually, when women move out of their family, they have to face some illegal behaviour from male either in the open street or in working environment or in the market place. This types of behaviour often termed as harassment for women and quite common faced by women in the society of Bangladesh. There are different forms of harassment such as sexual harassment, rape, physical and verbal abuse etc. In the garment industry, women workers also experience such type of behaviour from their male co-workers or from supervisors. Even, they have to face such type of behaviour either from local “mastan” or from outside street people as every day they have to travel a long distance on foot (Ali, 2008). Almost every women in my study reported that they face some forms of harassment both inside and outside the industry. But the pattern of harassment is different for both married and unmarried women. Aleya, she reported that some outsider people use very abusive words if she came at late night after finishing her duty. She also reported that sometime male supervisor do misbehave if she did not understand work and keep her under pressure to do work hurry which is consistent with the result of Islam (2012). But Nahida as she is young and unmarried, with above problems she faced eve-teasing from outside people, even while living in the industry after night duty, she felt insecure. Some male workers try to get sexual advantage from her. The same opinion I found from Rabeya also when she was in job and unmarried. She told that when she was in job, some of her male colleagues wanted to touch her inappropriately, even some male workers beat her if she did mistake. While coming at dark night, some outsider people used very bad language if they saw her.

They also face some other kinds of harassment apart from sexual or eve-teasing harassments within the industry. Rabeya told that if someone feel sick and ask for sick leave, the industry

usually not allows to give sick leave and if they allow, then they consider one day absent although they present half day. But I could not find this type of opinion from Aleya and Nahida those who are working now. This implies that the situation inside the industry is gradually changing. Some other problems like long working hours, thread of firing job etc. may be termed as different kinds of harassment faced by most of the women workers.

Most of the workers in my study are very aware of their protection to tackle any abusive situation both inside and outside the industry. Beside formal resistance strategies, they have their own personal strategies such as walking in groups, live in close proximity etc. to tackle any oppressive situation. If inside the industry, someone does misbehave with them, then they complain to the manager about him who did misbehave and as action manager suspend that man for few days. Since women garment workers are very busy most of the time due to long working hours and household responsibilities, they have very little time to participate in trade union federation activities. But in my study, most of the women garment workers went to National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) for making cards and expressed positive opinion about the federation. All women workers in my study told that this federation is very cooperative and working to establish their rights.

5.4 Wage structure and workers consciousness

In the study most of the workers who are currently working in the industry know about their minimum monthly wage 5,300 BDT but they do not have idea about their basic wage. Even they do not have idea about yearly increment and what other allowances are included with their minimum monthly wage. Only Aleya who is working many years, she told that when she was junior linking operator, that time her basic was 3,500 BDT but now it increased to 4,200 BDT as a senior operator. Both Aleya and Nahida reported that they are getting minimum monthly salary 5,300 BDT without overtime. The finding is inconsistent with the finding of Islam (2012) where the author found that most of the female workers monthly salary is less than minimum wage (1620 BDT). Rabeya, who has left that job, now she does not know exactly about how much, was her minimum monthly wage when she was in job. This is because many years over she has left the job and now she forgot the exact figure. I also found that most of the workers do not have so much idea about all grades of the workers. Only Aleya and Rabeya know that at first it started as helper, then junior operator and then senior operator. They have very little idea about next

grade in respect to their position. Aleya she told that she will be a supervisor in future since she is working now as a senior operator. But Nahida who is working as a helper now, after getting promotion she will be an assistant sewing operator. Most of the workers do not know about highest grade where they can reach at last. They are not so much conscious about their wage structure too.

At first workers basic was 3,200 BDT in the draft proposal, 1280 BDT as house rent, 320 BDT as medical allowance, 200 BDT for conveyance and 300 BDT as food subsidy but later, after cut down 200 BDT from basic, in the approved proposal 3000 BDT as basic, 1,200 BDT as house rent (40% of the basic), 250 BDT as health allowance, 200 BDT as transport allowance and 650 BDT as food allowance although the minimum monthly wage remained unchanged at 5,300 BDT (Website The Bangladesh Chronicle, 2013). The surprising change happened in food allowance from 300 BDT to 650 BDT. It is not clear here why owners were so keen to reduce the basic of the workers. It might be noted that basic housing allowance (40% of basic) and increment (5% of basic) are directly related with basic salary. So, for this reason, owners might be interested to reduce the basic amount. But the fact is that increased amount for increment or housing are not so significant. For example, in the case of 5% increment, the owners have to pay only 10 BDT more to each worker according to draft proposal. Whereas food allowance in the draft proposal was 300 BDT but in the approved proposal the owners are agreed to increase the amount to 650 BDT. It is not clear why they make some contradiction. Since workers are not conscious about their wage, the owners can get opportunity from this to exploit them. So, workers consciousness on this regard is very important issue.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Background information

In the study, most of the women workers came from different rural areas of different districts. The percentage of respondents is higher from the districts of Mymensingh and Barisal, the origin of these responses is almost similar with results of Akter et al., (2013) although women are moving to work in the garment industry from other districts, such as Jamalpur, Netrokona, kushtia and Shariyatpur. Several factors are responsible for such high proportion of rural women to move more from these two districts to the city. These factors are poverty, river bank erosion and the improvement of communication with Dhaka. The women who are moving out from rural to the urban city are involved in RMG job. These women are mostly very young aged group (below 25 years) and unmarried and have less educational qualification. Very few of them are married or divorced. In the study, three- fourth of the respondents are below 25 years of age and approximately 75% respondents are unmarried. These results are almost the same with Alam (2011), in his research reported about 86 percent of the women are between 18 and 32 years old. In the sample of my respondents, most of them only completed primary education and none of them have followed junior school (between classes V to VIII), this information implies that their education level is very low.

In rural areas, most of the families are not financially solvent which motivate them to get involved in the readymade garment industry. Even, in some cases, some domestic problems, such as divorce, death of the father or the elder brother's marriage may generate dramatic changes in the livelihood of the family; usually a common situation is that members of the family live separately etc. This situation in these days is more often with young rural women moving from rural areas to work in the urban garment industry. The study found that most of the women workers join in RMG to help their family financially (47%). A few of them prefer RMG job as they consider RMG job more prestigious compare to domestic work. As these women garment workers have very low educational qualification, with this education it is difficult for them to get job opportunities in other sectors apart from RMG industry. Family connection and locality of origin also plays a very important role to get this job very easily. Moreover, the producers and multinational corporations (MNC) also gave more preference to take women workers because of their high productivity, more consciousness and traditional passive nature (Kidder and Raworth,

2005) rather than males. On the other hand, due to feminization and labour flexibility strategies opted by RMG owners, rural women are getting more opportunity to be involved in RMG.

6.2 Women Empowerment

Empowerment is the process where women are able to organize themselves and to assert their independent rights to make their own life choices which assists them to face any challenges and to overcome any subordination (Keller and Mbwewe, 2001; Kabeer, 2001). Through this process, a woman increased her capacity to become economically self-sufficient and thus control over decisions (Rao and Kelleher, 1995:70). Whereas women participation means the involvement of women in economic, household, social, cultural or political activities (UNDP: 1993).

Based on the above understanding, this study has tried to show that the process of women empowerment is taken place, mainly through their involvement in the readymade garment industry. The interviews show that in general this experience has enhanced women's ability to organize themselves against their own subordination and to increase their capacity to be economically self-sufficient and increasing women power. Basu and Basu (2001) argued that women have very limited power and they are seen as burden for their family, which results in creating the circumstances that favour a lower status and value of their life. This author argues that one way to counteract this situation is through the development practitioner's interventions (Basu and Basu, 2001). According with the information I obtained, I tend to disagree with the suggestion of Basu and Basu (2001) where he argued that women vulnerable situation can be changed by external influences. In my view, the situation of women can be changed by themselves in the process of participating in the labour market (society) and in repositioning their status within their families.

In this study, I found that women by involving themselves in the industry can help themselves to change their status in society. In this vein, the increasing in participation, their economic and social independence is contributing to an improvement of their position. The fact is that as women receive monthly wage from industry, it confers them a sense of achievement that is contributing to their social status. In the study I found that some of the women are getting more self-sufficient to bear their own expenses and have chances to save some money. It is also possible for these women to buy consumption items as their wish and this indicates that women

economic capacity is increasing and as a result, they can participate in the economic, household decision making activities and other societal activities. Moreover, these women are capable to reduce their social exclusion through their earning. Similar finding, I found in another article where authors (Afsar, 2001; Khosla, 2009) explored the positive effects of sending money (remittance) to rural home. This again is playing an important role to reduce women economic, social and political exclusion.

Women empowerment has impacted women status and wellbeing in society. It is possible to observe the reduction of child marriage, the increasing of children education, the care for children and the increasing distribution of health security services. It is possible to suggest that women empowerment is associated with their economic independence and participation in the labour market and this has helped women to lead a secured life in future.

6.3 Women challenges in patriarchal social system

According to Bhasin (2006) and Lerner (1989), in a patriarchal social system men have comparatively more power to dominate women in the family and society and as a result women have less chance to participate in any kind of activities, this characterized women as part of a vulnerable group. However, the low literacy of women, their lack of access to their own property ownership and their marginalization from taken decision in the family, the cultural issue of dowry during women marriage etc. situate them as a group with not much power in society. These elements shape the characteristics of patriarchal social system in Bangladesh. This in the end influences the context in which women have less opportunity to get jobs and to participate in family decision making. Traditional culture and superstitions among peoples prohibits women to participate in societal activities. I argued that vis-à-vis this situation of women in rural Bangladesh has started to change their condition by involving themselves in the labour market generated by the readymade garment industry. This involvement of women has allowed women to take the challenge of start changing the patriarchal social system. In this, the employment of poor rural women in the garment industry and their access to a monthly salary are important circumstances of these transformations. I also found in this study, that most of the women workers are getting support from their family, relatives and neighbours to do this type of work in the industry, which implies that people's perception on women involvement in this industrial job is changing gradually.

The readymade garment industry has an impact in the reformulation of the gender roles and relationship. Through this study, I came to know that these women workers are contributing financially in their family along with other male family members. This has resulted in women getting more respect and recognition from their family. This is conferring women to have more weight in taking economic decisions and to have more freedom of movement. The women's greater mobility, decision making power and control of resources can help to change gender relations and rules governing women's behaviour within the family and community. In other words, these changes bring with them also change in men's behaviour over women and against domestic violence and this is contributing to make to feel women more secure in society.

Similar findings I also found in the research of Khosla (2009) and this author argued that readymade garment industry helps women to become independent financially and increase respect and social status. In my study, I found that these women workers are gaining self-respect and freedom and this has favoured that women have started to challenge the power of a male-dominated society. The study also found that those women who are unmarried, due to their involvement in the industry, they have managed to delay their marriage. Other changes are related with women taken care of their own health and they have managed to reduce the significance of dowry to get marriage. It is possible to conclude that women involvement in the labour market has conferred to women an improvement in their status in the patriarchal social system. In Bangladesh, those women who are divorced have less financial support from the family and society and often they are excluded from society. This group through their involvement in the garment industry and their earning have obtained a degree of security that leads them to expect a better future.

In Bangladesh women have less opportunity to spend vacation or holidays outside their families circle or to visit some recreational places. This has traditionally increased their sense of isolation and inferiority. The women, who are not financially solvent in the family, do not express opinions and they do not venture to go outside their family circle. The study found that some of the women workers are starting to go outside of their family circle for vacation and try to spend their holidays in different historical and recreational places, breaking their sense of social isolation.

Although such vacations are a relative short periods of time that mostly span for a few days and not for a long duration, this tendency is an expression of the changes that are taken place. However, women working in the industry still tend to spend the long term vacations and festival periods with their family at rural home. Women ability to spend money in vacation times also is evidences that the status of women in the society have been improved significantly.

The study further identified that the act of working with other colleagues and the interactions in the workplace have started to create multiple responsibilities, which sometime generate conflicts with their role as housewife. These conflicts (i.e. worker and housewife) have increased their sense of social and political awareness. This type of finding is consistent with result presented by Zaman (2001). This author found that women multiple responsibilities tend to create consciousness among them. Finally, it can be concluded that women participation in a society that is male-oriented have influence women to become more active agents and they have started to challenge the existing rules, norms and regulation. It seems that is through their financial contributions in the family and society, how women have started to position themselves vis-à-vis their male's counterparts.

6.4 Rural transition

The women participation in the labour market has impacted and change rural society. Women activities are supporting a dynamic exchange economy and their monetary contributions and the sharing of 'new' knowledge, can be considered a radical process of change that is and modifying the existing structural character and composition of rural economic life and the access to resources (Dewulf et. al., 2009; Koppel, 1998). This process of changes happened through the activities and network of individuals, interaction between rural and urban, which are shaping the restructuration of places. This restructure of places is not only depends on materialized network such as flows of capital or goods, but also depends on immaterialized network such as flows of people's feelings, ideas, experiences that are transformed to connect certain places (Stenbacka, 2012). In this study I found that rural women workers, because of their strong place attachment with their origin, they are contributing to change their rural family status and rural society through their participation in the labour market. Although these women move from rural to urban areas, their everyday life and practices are still directed towards the countryside. Through these continuous connections with their rural home, these women workers are not just maintaining, but

significantly contributing to the transformations of economic, social and cultural ties with their country of origin. The mobile phone in this case plays an important role in building network and maintaining social connection which ultimately is strengthening their sense of community.

The fact that these women workers are playing a role to change their rural society structure is an important process. Their everyday communicative practices affect their rural home and on how they look upon themselves and perceive themselves is providing women with more social and political confidence. For example, economic assistance has impacted on generating positive feeling of success among rural home people. If the rural women workers have chance to send money to their home, it makes their rural home people to feel better, to buy commodities not only for families but for others. This cash sometime helps to open a new local business. The opposite scenario, constituted by feelings of despair or hopelessness still may happen if there is no chance to send economic assistance to home.

In short, the sharing of experiences with rural home helps to compare the rural environment with the urban environment and so everyday life is put into a wider context that is involving not only feelings or attachment, but also thought of moving to the urban labour market in order to defend the existing way of life. In this study, I found that most of the women have close bonding with their family and sending them money remittances, goods, knowledge and ideas is an important action that makes rural family life easier and is contributing to change the patriarchal rural family structure. This sending of money remittance to rural home is important to supplement their families' daily income or to increase the family income which helps their home family members to lead a better life.

On the other hand, as women are very obedient and more responsible in comparison to males and have strong bonding with their family, women usually are sending their savings to their rural home. Their financial contribution to rural home, their sharing of experiences and knowledge with their family, relatives and society members are contributing to change their family and society status. Moreover, all these processes, to a degree is changing existing rural lives, family structure and traditional beliefs and practices.

6.5 Women awareness and organization

From the theoretical background, it can be defined that organized labour is an association of workers that works to improve the economic and working conditions of workers through bargaining or negotiating with owners (Website Investopedia, 2014). In this study I found that women are very organized and have their organization to solve problems they are facing, either inside or outside the industry.

As there is no transport facility that the industry provides, women, everyday are coming and going to and fro their houses. During these journeys they faced many harassment and sexual innuendos, eve-teasing, physical and verbal abuse either from road side peoples or from local mastans. Not only outside the industry but also inside the industry, most of the women faced many problems from their male colleagues, supervisors or from line chief. For protecting themselves women workers are becoming well organized and they are starting to develop their own strategies.

According to Arce and Long, *“People develop their own strategies to solve the problems they face through the use of interpersonal networks, community or neighbourhood ties and through an appeal on certain widely-accepted value positions”* (Arce and Long, 2000: 189). In this study, I also found that while commuting, the women workers usually try to walk in groups. If some colleagues inside the industry do misbehave with them, then they complain to the manager. Apart from these problems, they faced some other problems, such as threat of firing from their job, long working hours, low overtime rate etc. In spite of these, their incorporation to the labour market has brought to them a degree of independence and autonomy.

The study found that for solving this type of problems women have a federation which is politically working to solve their problems. Although workers are very busy most of the time with the industry work and their household activities, they are starting to appreciate the benefits of belonging to the “National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF)”. This type of association is named by the women as ‘making a card’. To make a card is a colloquial form to recognise that is helpful and important to be part of the Federation. The active intervention of the Federation has forced the industry to start to provide medical leave and training facility for workers. The study also found that although workers are very conscious to protect themselves from harassment, they

still have very limited knowledge about their basic rights, wages or other allowances which are part of their entitled benefits and gross monthly wage.

6.6 Limitations and future research

The main motive of this study was to select three women workers' life histories in order to know their background information, every day duties and responsibilities in garment industry, economic independence and empowerment. For taking these three women workers, at first I selected 15 women workers just to get some basic idea about workers. Then among 15 women workers, I selected 3 women workers based on some criteria, which were the main respondents of this study. I collected all information by talking with them directly through Skype. Because of my personal reason, I did not go to my country during data collection time. But it would be better if I would be able to collect information after going to their home during their holidays, which would be more convenient for them to talk with me and I might get some more information. Most of the days, they came to my home after finishing their every day duty and in very few days during holidays, at that time maybe it was not convenient for them to talk with me. Another important limitation of the study is that, I collected information from few women workers which might not represent the life experience of other women workers although the findings of this study were almost similar with other previous research.

I collected information from 15 women workers in general and 3 women workers in particular for knowing their whole life histories. The findings of the present study would be more consistent if I could have taken life histories from many women workers instead of taking only three women workers. Since this study is based on 15 women workers in general and 3 women workers in particular from one garment industry, the results may not reflect the real scenario of all women garment workers' life style in Bangladesh. In future research could be conducted considering large sample size for better representation of the role of readymade garment industry on women workers' daily lives.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Readymade garment (RMG) industry is a bright success story of industrial sector in Bangladesh and contributing a lot to the country's economy. This sector provides employment of millions of workers; among them most of the workers are women. Women from different rural areas of different districts move to Dhaka and prefer to involve themselves in RMG because job opportunities are very limited for them in rural areas.

In Bangladesh, most of the women are very family minded and usually they are involved in household activities. They are closely attached with their family and places and naturally have strong affection to their family members rather than men. Men are involved in outside work and responsible to provide financial support to all family members. As there is limited job opportunity in rural areas of Bangladesh, it is very common scenario that men are moving from rural places to urban city in order to get better job opportunity and to meet their family demand. Actually, people's movement is not a new concept, it is a continuous process. But due to the influence of readymade garment industry, rural women are getting chance to move from rural to urban industry which creates new dimension with the continuous movement process. As women have strong bond to their rural home compare to men; their earnings, feelings and ideas are helping substantially to change the status of their rural home and contribute in rural transition. Frequent and regular communication of women workers to their rural family through mobile phones subsequently changes the values and responsibilities of both women workers and rural peoples.

Although some peoples of the society still have some negative opinions about this type of work for rural women but this was not the motive of this study. Instead, by analyzing women workers life history, this study clearly indicates that employment in the garment industry has significant positive impact for rural women workers in terms of income, empowerment and improved social condition. This is reflected in the forms of economic independence, increasing decision making ability and getting more respect from their family as well as from society which have important role on women to take challenges in the patriarchal social system of Bangladesh. Through opportunities for new experience, women workers discover that their status has increased in the family and society than before due to their involvement in the industry. They create new images

about the future, reinterpret social norms and generate a new sense of local identity that may challenge existing order.

On the other hand, People's perception on this type of activity is also changing now. The study revealed that most of the women are getting support from their family members and from society to work in the industry as this sector gives new opportunity for rural women to contribute financially in their family and to change their family status. Women working in the garment industry, their status have increased in the family as a result of their monetary contribution and in society their position has improved apart of their involvement in industry. The findings of the study also suggest that their decision making ability is increasing because their family members are asking them before taking any decision relates to family and this type of recognition from their family members helps them to increase their self respect and confidence. Poor women also prefer to do work in the industry rather than to involve as maid servant of other people's home because of favourable working environment inside the industry. Most of the times they can do work in the industry rather than to go outside and to do work in an open place, which are also considered as responsible factors for women to choose garment industry job. Although in some cases workers reported negative opinion about working environment such as congested working place, poor ventilation, poor quality of drinking water, no emergency exit etc. which creates problems for them while working in the industry. But in spite of all those problems, working in the garment industry empowers the women workers both socially and economically through their involvement in buying and selling, food selection and delay in marriage. Since this sector plays crucial role to empower women and to change life style of small part of rural population, it has a great effect on the overall economy of the country. In future policy could be taken in such a way that this sector would be a sustainable option for rural women to change their family status and rural society through becoming economically solvent.

The study also revealed that most of the workers have very limited working experience but while working they get support from their colleagues which helps them to do work better. Even, in sometime while working with other co-workers they share their problems with their colleagues and it helps to increase their knowledge and consciousness and to aware about their rights both in the industry and in the home as well. They get support from "Federation" too which is working to solve their problems inside the industry.

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Annexure

Annex I: Detailed Questionnaire

For Respondents1 & 2: (who is working for more than 2 years and who is working for less than 2 years)

A. Background:

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) How old are you?
- 3) Your place of birth:
- 4) Home district:
- 5) How many classes have you read?
- 6) Are you married? (Yes/ No)
- 7) If yes, what your husband doing?
- 8) At what age you got married?
- 9) When did you come to Dhaka and with whom?
- 10) Why did you come to Dhaka? Who motivated you for this job and why you were motivated?
- 11) How did you obtain this job? Or who helped you to find this job?
- 12) What is your father doing?
- 13) How many brother and sister do you have and what they are doing?

B. Duties and responsibilities:

- 1) How many years are you working here?
- 2) How many workers generally work in each floor?
- 3) What type of work you are doing there?
- 4) Are you still doing the same type of work what you did at the very beginning?
- 5) Do you have any previous experience? How did you learn this type of work?
- 6) Do you know about the normal hours of duty?
- 7) When do you start and finish your everyday duty? How many hours every day you work?
- 8) How many pieces you can complete every day? Is there any rules?
- 9) Do you involve in overtime or night duty? How many hours per day or per week?
- 10) Is there any punishment from RMG if you come at late?

- 11) What type of support you get from others (co-workers, supervisors) while working?

C. Present lifestyle:

- 1) Where are you living now?
- 2) With whom you are living?
- 3) What types of facilities are available in your home?
- 4) What do you usually do after finishing your everyday duty?
- 5) What do you usually do during weekend (Friday) or holiday?

D. Economic independence and empowerment:

- 1) How much salary do you get per month? With or without overtime?
- 2) What is your total monthly expenditure?
- 3) In what purposes do you spend this amount?
- 4) How much money do you spend for rent purpose per month?
- 5) Do you ask money to your family members for your expenditure purpose?
- 6) Can you save money? If yes, where do you put your money?
- 7) What factors motivate you to save money?
- 8) Is it possible for you to spend money as your wish?
- 9) What do your husband, relatives and other neighbour think about your work? Do they support you or not?
- 10) Does your husband or other family members ask you to take any kinds of decision relate to family or others? If yes, can you give an example of a situation where you participated and gave your own opinion?
- 11) Before involving in RMG, did your family members evaluate you as they are evaluating now? What do you think?
- 12) Do you think that this type of work give you more opportunity and freedom to increase your social network, decision making ability as well as helps to improve your status?

E. Wage structure and workers consciousness:

- 1) Do you know the minimum monthly wage of the workers? How much is the basic wage?
What other allowances are included in gross monthly wage?
- 2) Do you know about the yearly increment on your basic salary?
- 3) Do you know about the categories or grades of the workers in respect to their positions?
- 4) Do you know which one is the next grade/position you can reach after getting promotion?
What will be your wage then?
- 5) Do you know which one is the highest grade/position you can reach as a worker? Do you know about the wage of this position?
- 6) Are the workers conscious about the details of the wage structure?
- 7) For increasing such kind of awareness among workers, what need to do? Give your own opinion.

F. Services provided by the industry:

- 1) Does the RMG provide weekend holiday? If yes, when?
- 2) Does the RMG provide vacations during festivals?
- 3) Does the RMG provide medical leave?
- 4) Is there any maternity leave?
- 5) Does the RMG arrange any kind of training programs for the workers?
- 6) How is the working condition and health safety measure inside the industry? (sufficient light and fan, toilet, rest room, pure drinking water, leisure time, canteen, first aid, safety from fire/ emergency exit etc.)
- 7) What is the duration of lunch break? Is there any separate room for lunch?
- 8) Is there any transport facility provided by RMG? If no, how do you usually travel from home to industry and how long it will take?
- 9) After night duty, does RMG provide any accommodation facility?

G. Harassment:

- 1) Do you face any kind of problems while going and coming to industry?
- 2) Do you face any kind of harassment in the working place from your co-workers or from owner of the industry?

- 3) Do you face any problem while doing overtime or night duty?
- 4) What do you do if you face any harassment?

H. Workers organization :

- 1) Do you have any organization for solving your problems?
- 2) Do you know the name of that organization?
- 3) Have you ever gone to that organization? If yes, why?
- 4) Can you mention any incidence where this organization took steps to solve your or your colleague's problem?
- 5) Is this organization very cooperative?
- 6) What is the relationship between the industry owner and the organization?

Annex II: Detailed Questionnaire

Respondent - 3: (who has left the industry job)

A. Background:

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) How old are you?
- 3) Your place of birth:
- 4) Home district:
- 5) How many classes have you read?
- 6) Are you married? (Yes/ No) If yes, what is your husband doing?
- 7) At what age you got married?
- 8) What is your father doing?
- 9) How many brother and sister do you have and what they are doing?
- 10) When did you come to Dhaka and with whom?
- 11) Why did you come to Dhaka?
- 12) Who motivated you for this job and why you were motivated?
- 13) How did you obtain this job? Or who helped you to find this job?

B. Duties and responsibilities:

- 1) How many years did you work in RMG?
- 2) What type of work you did there?
- 3) Did you have any previous experience? How did you learn this type of work?
What type of support you get from others (co-workers, supervisors) while working?

C. Present lifestyle:

- 1) Where are you living now?
- 2) With whom you are living?
- 3) a) What types of facilities were available in your home while working in RMG?
b) What types of facilities are available in your home now?
- 4) a) What did you usually do after finishing your everyday duty while working in RMG?
b) What are you doing everyday now?

- 5) a) What did you do during weekend (Friday) or holiday while working in RMG?
b) What do you do during Friday or holiday now?

D. Economic independence and empowerment:

- 1) a) How much salary did you get per month? With or without overtime?
b) How much salary do you get per month?
- 2) a) What was your total monthly expenditure when you were in RMG?
b) How much are you spending now?
- 3) a) In what purposes did you spend your monthly salary when you were in RMG?
b) In what purposes do you spend your money now?
- 4) a) How much money did you spend for rent purpose per month while working in RMG?
b) How much money are you spending now for rent purpose per month?
- 5) a) Did you ask money to your family members for your expenditure purpose while working in RMG?
b) Do you need to ask money now to your family members for your expenditure purpose?
- 6) a) Did you have chance to save money while working in RMG? If yes, in what ways (in bank or in other places)?
b) Do you have chance to save money now?
- 7) a) For what purposes did you save money while working in RMG?
b) For what purposes do you want to save money now?
- 8) a) Was it possible for you to spend money as your wish while working in RMG?
b) Do you have chance to spend money as your wish now?
- 9) What your husband, relatives and other neighbour thought about your work? Did they support you or not?
- 10) Did your husband or other family members ask you to take any kinds of decision relate to family or others? If yes, can you give an example of a situation where you participated and gave your own opinion?
- 11) After involving in RMG, did your family members evaluate you as they are evaluating now, what do you think? After leaving how they are evaluating you?

- 12) Do you think that this type of work give you more opportunity and freedom to increase your social network, decision making ability as well as helps to improve your status?

E. Services provided by the industry:

- 1) Did the RMG provide weekend holiday?
- 2) Did the RMG provide vacations during festivals?
- 3) Did the RMG provide medical leave?
- 4) Was there any maternity leave?
- 5) Was there any training program for the workers?
- 6) How was the working condition and health safety measure inside the industry? (sufficient light and fan, toilet, rest room, pure drinking water, leisure time, canteen, first aid, safety from fire/ emergency exit etc.)
- 7) What is the duration of lunch break? Was there any separate room for lunch?
- 8) Was there any transport facility provided by RMG? If no, how did you usually travel between home and industry?

F. Harassment:

- 1) Did you face any kind of problems while commuting?
- 2) Did you face any kind of harassment in the working place from your co-workers or owner of the industry?
- 3) Did you face any problem while doing overtime or night duty?
- 4) What did you do if you face any harassment?

G. Worker's organization:

- 1) Did you have any organizations for solving your problems?
- 2) Did you know the name of that organization?
- 3) Did you ever go to that organization? If yes, why?
- 4) Can you mention any incidence where this organization took steps to solve your or your colleague's problem?
- 5) Was this organization very cooperative?
- 6) What was the relationship between the industry owners and the organization

Annex III: One sample questionnaire with one respondent's information

Respondent - 1: (who is working for more than 2 years)

A. Background:

1) What is your name?

Aleya Akhter

2) How old are you?

25 years

3) Your place of birth:

Dhaka

4) Home district:

Chandpur

5) How many classes have you read?

Class five, I went school near to my home but my parent's financial condition was not good, for this reason, after class five I did not continue my study.

6) Are you married? (Yes/ No)

Divorced, my husband liked another girl, so we got divorced. At first I couldn't understand that my husband like another girl. But sometime when he came to home it was late night and didn't behave well with me. Her attitude was totally different which surprised me. In some days, whole day he was busy outside. Then one day, my neighbour told me that he has relation with another woman. My husband had a Mudi dokan. In that shop, that woman came to buy soap, salt, oil etc. and talked with my husband. It gave me pain and we decided to divorce. After my divorce, my husband got married with that woman.

7) If yes, what your husband doing?

N/A

8) At what age you got married?

18-19 years, then 4 years of conjugal life with my husband

9) When did you come to Dhaka and with whom?

Over 25 years, I forgot, my parent, brother and sisters, whole family came, my birth place is in Dhaka

10) Why did you come to Dhaka?

My parents lost everything due to river bank erosion

11) Who motivated you for this job and why you were motivated?

One of my neighbours told me that this is a good job and gives good salary. I wanted to become independent and help my family financially.

12) How did you obtain this job? Or, who helped you to find this job?

One of my neighbours was involving in the industry at that time. She helped me to get this job.

13) What details about your father and mother?

My father's name is Rashid Miah and in Dhaka city he works as a gate keeper (guard) in another people's home. Monthly he earns almost 6000 Tk. My mother Nasrin Banu, is a housewife. When we were in our village, my father was involved in producing and marketing of agricultural products. He also did work as day-labourer on other peoples land. That time we had 4 bighas of agricultural land to produce paddy, vegetables, pulses and some seasonal crops.

14) How many brother and sister do you have and what they are doing?

I have two sisters and three brothers. All are married....living separately except one brother. My brother with whom I am living, is younger than me, he works in one garage of car.

B. Duties and responsibilities:

1) How many years are you working here?

Almost 10 years

2) How many workers generally work in each floor?

Around 300 workers, 7-8 lines, do not know exactly, depends on size of room. For 25-30 workers, one supervisor

3) What type of work you are doing here?

As a senior operator in production section, working in linking machine, after coming product from cutting section, I joint all parts of a product (complete sewing)

4) Are you still doing the same type of work what you did at the very beginning?

No, worked as a helper (helped to bring all products in one place). At first when I came to industry, first five or six months I did not do any work. I just helped other workers as an

assistant. Before getting promotion of senior linking machine operator, I was promoted as a junior linking machine operator.

5) Do you have any previous experience? How did you learn this type of work?

No, by seeing I have learned this work. During break time/lunch time, other colleagues helped me to learn this work

6) Do you know what the normal working hour of duty is?

Yes...8 am till 5 pm

7) When do you start and finish your everyday duty? How many hours every day you work?

Start at 8 am and finish duty at 9 or 10 pm. Sometimes till 12 o'clock, it depends on pressure of work

8) How many pieces you complete every day? Is there any rules?

If the work is difficult, everyday 1 dozen but if it is easy 2 or 3 dozen every day, depends on order of buyers

9) Do you involve in overtime or night duty? How many hours per day or per week?

As I am working in production section, here, after 5 pm they do not count as overtime, count as every day normal duty

10) Is there any punishment from RMG if you come late?

Yes...if I come 3 days continuous late, then they consider one day absent and deduct one day salary from my monthly salary

11) What type of support you get from others (co-workers, supervisors) while working?

Most of the workers are very helpful, if I do not understand, they help me to understand. But sometimes male supervisor do misbehave.

C. Present lifestyle:

1) Where are you living now?

Kazipara

2) With whom you are living? How do they behave with you?

I am living with my father, mother and one married brother with his wife. Two years over, my brother got married and they do not have child. As I involve in job, rarely my family members do misbehave with me. I try to play a gentle role with my parents and brothers as I am living with them. My parents all times support me and I share my all

problems with them. They are very worried about my marriage also but I do not want to marry again. Everything is going on well without husband.

3) What types of facilities are available in your home?

No gas, use wood, lakri for cooking purpose, surrounding of home brick wall and roof is in tin, for 11 rooms (varatia), there is two bathroom, we have TV, refrigerator, showcase in room

4) What do you usually do after finishing your everyday duty?

When I finished my duty, that time it's already dark outside. I go back to home, after get fresh I finish my dinner with my family members if I came early,...then I sleep. Sometime, only my mother waits for me to eat together until my reaching from industry. My brother and brother's wife slept early because my brother feels tired after coming from work place and he needs to get up at early morning.

5) What do you usually do during weekend (Friday) or holiday?

I woke up little bit late, after get fresh and having breakfast, help to cook. As for breakfast, we usually eat rice with curry. But in some weekend morning, my mother tries to make ruti because of my brother and father likes ruti as breakfast than rice. Then after taking bath and finishing lunch, afternoon sleep, sometimes saw TV at that time, do not do anything special, during evening time I just walk in front of my home. In some weekend, go outside to see my colleague, colleague children.

D. Economic independence and empowerment:

1) How much salary do you get per month? With or without overtime?

8000Tk/month including overtime which is count as normal duty, usually we get salary first week of a month.

2) What is your total monthly expenditure?

Almost 6000Tk/month

3) In what purposes do you spend this amount?

House rent, foods, clothes (how much), medical, every month I give 2000Tk. to my brother for food purpose

4) How much money do you spend for rent purpose per month?

3000Tk/month, not alone, sharing with brother, my father do not needs to contribute as for house rent purpose but he spends his money for other household expenditure purposes.

5) Do you ask money to your family members for your expenditure purpose?

No, I am self-sufficient to bear the monthly expenses.

6) Can you save money? If yes, where do you put your money?

Yes..I can, 1000Tk/month in bank (Islami bank)

7) What factors motivate you to save money?

I save mainly for my future security. Now I do not know exactly for what purpose I am saving, future will tell in what purpose I will spend. Two years back, I bought one gold chain for me with my savings; there is no loss if I buy gold. I can sell it during my crisis moment.

8) Is it possible for you to spend money as your wish?

Yes. I can buy everything as my wish, last month I visited my sister's home, before going I bought sweet, fruits, one sharee for my sister. I do not need to ask others, 2 or 3 months before, I also bought one lungi for my father.

9) What do your husband, relatives and other neighbour think about your work? Do they support you or not?

Everyone tell that this is good job, they respect me also because I am involving in job

10) Does your husband or other family members ask you to take any kinds of decision relate to family or others? If yes, can you give an example of a situation where you participated and gave your own opinion?

Two years over, we bought refrigerator, that time while taking decision to buy refrigerator, I also participated in that family meeting with my father and brother and gave my own opinion. For buying refrigerator, I also contributed financially with my father and brother.

11) Before involving in RMG, did your family members evaluate you as they are evaluating now? What do you think?

Now they are evaluating more than before. Before taking any decision, my family members think that they have to ask me.

- 12) **Do you think that this type of work give you more opportunity and freedom to increase your social network, decision making ability as well as helps to improve your status?**

Now I have more power to play role in family and involve myself in decision making capacity than before. I have mobile which helps to connect me with my relatives and colleagues and other peoples.

E. **Wage structure and worker consciousness:**

- 1) **Do you know the minimum monthly wage of the workers? How much is the basic wage? What other allowances are included in gross monthly wage?**

Yes, 5,300 Tk/month without overtime. I do not have so much idea about my basic wage but I know that when I was junior linking operator, that time my basic was 3,500 and now 4,200 Tk as a senior operator. I do not have idea about other allowances that are included with my gross monthly wage.

- 2) **Do you know about the yearly increment on your basic salary?**

No, I do not know

- 3) **Do you know about the categories or grades of the workers in respect to their positions?**

At first, workers start their work as helper, then junior operator, then senior operator and at the end cutting master or supervisor.

- 4) **Do you know what is the next grade/position you can reach after getting promotion? What will be your wage then?**

Yes, I can reach upper at position; maybe I will be supervisor in future but do not know exactly. Also I do not want to get promotion as a supervisor because of low salary compare to my salary.

- 5) **Do you know what is the highest grade/position you can reach as a worker? Do you know how much the wage of this position?**

No, I do not know which one is the highest grade and how much salary for that grade.

- 6) **Are the workers conscious about the details of the wage structure?**

No, most of my colleagues do not have idea about their basic

- 7) **For increasing such kind of awareness among workers, what need to do? Give your own opinion.**

F. Services provided by the industry:

- 1) **Does the RMG provide weekend holiday? If yes, when?**

In a month three Friday, duty till 1 o' clock but one Friday just after getting salary, the industry is closed

- 2) **Does the RMG provide vacations during festivals?**

Yes, during two Eid (6-7 days) in a year, 21 February, 26 March, 16 December.....

- 3) **Does the RMG provide medical leave?**

Not before, it has started recently, 15 days in a year

- 4) **Is there any maternity leave?**

Yes, 4 months

- 5) **Does the RMG arrange any kind of training programs for the workers?**

Yes, recently the industry arranged for short training for 1 week. Those who are senior in a floor, talk nicely...only for them garment has arranged training. After getting training, they will teach other workers in floor. In one time 10-15 workers. Outsider provides them training, peoples from fire service. But still I have not taken training

- 6) **How is the working condition and health safety measure inside the industry? (sufficient light and fan, toilet, rest room, pure drinking water, leisure time, canteen, first aid, safety from fire/ emergency exit etc.)**

No separate rest room, no leisure time, no canteen but if I want I can buy from shop near to factory. If we involve in duty after 10 pm, they give us 1 piece cake and 1 piece banana to eat.

- 7) **What is the duration of lunch break? Is there any separate room for lunch?**

1-2pm (1 hour), I brought food from home, no separate room for eating, we all eat by sitting the corner of the room where we are working

- 8) **Is there any transport facility provided by RMG? If no, how do you usually travel from home to industry and how long it will take?**

No transport facility provided by RMG, by walking it takes 30-35 minutes

- 9) **After night duty, does RMG provide any accommodation facilities?**

Yes, after night duty, we sleep inside the factory. Morning time, at 6.30 or 7am, I go back to home, after taking bath and eating breakfast, again come back to factory and continue my normal duty

G. Harassment:

1) Do you face any kind of problems while going and coming to factory?

Yes...sometimes I feel afraid while coming to home if it is late night because of insecurity for women in our society. Some outsider people use very bad words if I come at late night.

2) Do you face any kind of harassment in the working place from your co-workers or owner of the factory?

Sometimes supervisor and line chief do misbehave with me, most of the time they keep me under pressure to do work hurry. If I do not finish my work at exact time, they get angry with me and use abusive words.

3) Do you face any problem while doing overtime or night duty?

No

4) What do you do if you face any harassment?

We complain about him to manager, manager takes necessary action.....suspend from work for few days

H. Worker's organization :

1) Do you have any organizations for solving your problems?

Yes.

2) Do you know the name of that organization?

Federation

3) Have you ever gone to that organization? If yes, why?

Yes..for making card so that I can contact with federation.

4) Can you mention any incidence where this organization took steps to solve your or your colleague's problem?

Till now I did not face any problems for which I need to go to organization. But my one female colleague was working for many years. While leaving that work, garment was not providing any financial help. She went to federation and complained there. Then

federation forced garment owner to help her financially. Garment provided her 20,000Tk while leaving, this was possible only for federation.

5) Is this organization very cooperative?

Yes...while making card, one woman helped me to make card and told that if I face any problem in future, I can come to federation with this card and can explain my problem.

6) What is the relationship between the industry owners and the organization?

Not good relationship.

Annex IV: Activity schedule

Time	March	April	May	June	July	Aug.
Activities						
Start proposal writing and literature review	√					
Submit proposal and presentation of proposal	√					
Preparation of questionnaire	√					
Data collection from respondents	√	√				
Data analysis and start writing draft report			√	√	√	
Result presentation					√	
Oral defence and final report submit						√