

**The Political Economy of Industrial Accidents in Readymade  
Garments Factory in Bangladesh: A Case Study of Rana Plaza  
Tragedy**

MSS, 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester

Exam Roll No: 4456

Registration No: Ha-4667

Session: 2011-2012

**Department of Sociology  
University of Dhaka**

**January 2014**

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The present Advanced Research Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Sciences (MSS) in Sociology

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## Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ATC	Agreement on Textile and Clothing
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BGMEA	Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association
BILS	Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies
BNBC	Bangladesh National Building Code
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
CRP	Centre for the Rehabilitation and the Paralyzed
EPB	Export Promotion Bureau
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GITI	Garments Industries Transparency Initiative
GSP	General System of Preferences
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LDC	Less Developed Countries
MFA	Multi-Fibre Arrangement
MNC	Multinational Corporations
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-Government Organization
OSHE	Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation
Rajuk	Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha
RMG	Readymade Garment
SAFTA	South Asian Free Trade Area
SCF	Social Compliance Forum
TCC	Tripartite Consultative Committee
TIB	Transparency International Bangladesh
TNCs	Transnational Corporations

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The readymade garment (RMG) sector stands at the core of the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. It is hardly exaggeration to say that economy of Bangladesh is what it is today mainly because of readymade garment industry. While a population of around 160 million for a small country like Bangladesh is considered a serious burden, with the rapid growth of RMG sector, it has turned into an invaluable asset. It employs around 4 million workers; more than 85% of them are women who are mostly illiterate, disadvantaged, vulnerable and economically poor portion of the population. This sector has become the largest foreign exchange earning sector, exporting apparel of all sorts to the USA, Europe and other developed countries. More than 79.6% of Bangladesh's export earnings come from the garment industry in 2013. This industry enjoyed a steady rise from 30 enterprises in 1980 increased to about 5600 in 2012-13 fiscal year. Now, in terms of GDP, RMG's contribution reaches around 15% in FY 2012-13 which was only 3% in FY 1990-91. This is a clear indication of the industry's contribution to the overall national economy.

The readymade garment industry of Bangladesh is the third-biggest exporter of clothes in the world, after China and Italy. While global market size export of RMG is US\$ 400 billion, Bangladesh's share is about 5 %. Bangladesh has been successfully supplying apparel products consistently to the premier international fashion brands like H&M, C&A, M&S, Wal-Mart, GAP, Levi's, s.Oliver, Tesco, Zara, Carrefour, JCPenney and many more. In 2011, McKinsey & Company, a global management consulting firm forecasted Bangladesh's apparel exports could grow double by 2015 and triple to \$42 billion by 2020 (McKinsey CPO Survey, November 2011). They also mentioned that Bangladesh will be the apparel sourcing hot spot over the next five years. This is only because of the fact that Bangladesh offers the global retailer special advantages: High volume; cheap labour; low prices; good quality and predictable service. Millions of workers quickly churn out huge amounts of well-made underwear, jeans and T-shirts for the lowest wages in the world.

With the rapid growth of RMG sector (21.5 billion in the last year), it has become a regular newspaper heading for the last few years that workers have died of some sort of accident at their garment factories. The Sammilita Garments Saramik Federation statistics show that some 530 workers died in 30 fire incidents in several RMG factories between 1990 and 2013. At least 1,383 workers also died in several incidents including building collapse (Haque

2013). According to recorded documents it was started in 1990 with the Sarika Garment then the collapse of the Savar Spectrum Sweater factory, the Phoenix Fabrics Mill Ltd., the fire at Garib and Garib garments factory, KTS Fabrics Mills, Chowdhury Knitwear Garments and Tazreen Fashions factory. On the 24 April 2013, Bangladesh experienced it's the worst man-made industrial disaster. The collapse of Rana Plaza, which housed five ready-made garment factories, a commercial bank and a market, claimed 1,133 lives.

In spite of the continuous occurrence of such industrial accident, there is hardly any study of these accidents from sociological perspective. With the beginning of the process of Industrial Revolution in England in the 18th century and its spread out to other parts of the world, we have been experiencing increasing industrial accidents. Thus, these accidents in RMG sector are not any isolated phenomena. They are rooted in existing economy and political factors at local and global level. That's why we need to study industrial accidents from sociological perspective which enable us to break free from individual circumstances and put things in a wider context.

Globally, the Rana Plaza accident can be explained as an outcome of the expansion of global capitalism. The global apparel business was established by multinational enterprise through their flexible capital accumulation. On the other hand, the cheap labour (mostly poor women) in the peripheral state is a part of global division of labour in today's global economy system. The comprador bourgeoisies in peripheral also have an interest in this flexible accumulation process. Because of corruption and political abuse of power, the government in peripheral state is unable to ensure safety and security of its labour. We have to understand the role of women in the context of a global division of labor under the dictates of accumulation. Violence against women and extracting women's labour through coercive labour relations are part and parcel of capitalism. In other words, capitalism has to use, to strengthen, or even to invent, patriarchal men-women relations if it wants to maintain its accumulation model. Ultimately, the poor female labors in the periphery are the victim of super-exploitation. The deadliest accident in the history of RMG sector, the collapse of Rana Plaza in Savar that killed over 1,133 people is a stark reminder of the taste of cheap labour in the global retail industry's search for cheap production. Thus, it is sociologically very important to study the Rana Plaza accident from a political economy perspective.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Bangladesh witnessed its the deadliest industrial accident on the 24 April 2013. The collapse of Rana Plaza, which housed five ready-made garment factories, a commercial bank and a market, claimed more than thousand workers lives, injuring and maiming many others. A total of 1,133 workers died in the accident, 2,438 workers came out alive, and about 332 workers are still missing. Many workers were severely injured and had to undergo major operation and long term treatment process. A number of workers lost their both legs or both hands, some lost their eyes and a large number of survivors experienced hand injury, leg injury, traumatized, severe backbone injury, head injury, pelvic fracture, crush injury and compartmental syndrome and others. In other words, these workers seem to lose their earning ability and become burden to their family. Thousands of the family lost their earning member and become hopeless.

The Rana Plaza accident is not the only single accident in readymade garment (RMG) sector. During the last two decades, there was frequent reoccurrence of such deadly industrial accident in RMG sector. According to recorded documents it was started in 1990 with the Sarika Garment then the collapse of the Savar Spectrum Sweater factory, the Phoenix Fabrics Mill Ltd., the fire at Garib and Garib garments factory, KTS Fabrics Mills, Chowdhury Knitwear Garments and Tazreen Fashions factory. According to the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS), from 1990 to 2013, 439 workers died in 15 major fire incidents in several RMG factories.

As it is a social phenomenon, it is important to study such accident from sociological perspective. It took place in society and has specific social causes and consequences. Here, sociological understanding is important because the individual can understand his own experience only by locating himself within his period and becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances. The sociological understanding enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. No social study that does not come back to the problems of social background, of history and of their interactions within a society has completed its intellectual journey (Mills 2000).

To study the Rana Plaza accident sociologically, we have to look beyond the occurrence of the accident. It is inherent in the global economy system (e.g. uneven economic relationship between core and peripheral state) and the deindustrialization of advanced countries and

industrialization of the third world. Accordingly, it related to existing social norms, values and practice about capital accumulation. The pattern of relationship among the various social groups (e.g. patron-client relationship among businessmen, politicians and muscleman) and the interaction among different social institutions (e.g. whose responsibility is to ensure the safety of the building and security of working environment) also related to the accident. The poor socioeconomic condition of cheap labour is also relevant to such accident. Thus, sociological study is important to get comprehensive understanding of the accident.

However, this industrial accident is not an isolated phenomenon. It is a part of the globalization of capital accumulation. It can be explained sociologically both from local and global political economy perspective. This accident can be seen as an outcome of expansion of global economy. It is related to post-Fordist flexible accumulation. In the post-fordist era, globalization provides flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption through the process of deindustrialization of advanced countries and industrialization of third world countries. Technological developments in transportation and communications in the late twentieth century enable multinational company, global apparel brand for example, to outsourcing their readymade garment product using the cheap labour of third world industries which now become death trap like Rana Plaza. It is a kind of accumulation by dispossession of third world cheap labour. According to the Worker Rights Consortium, a worker advocacy group, the average worker in Bangladesh earns the equivalent of 24 cents an hour, compared with 45 cents in Cambodia, 52 cents in Pakistan, 53 cents in Vietnam and \$1.26 in China. The collapse of Rana Plaza in Savar that killed over 1,133 people is a symbol of the taste of cheap labour in the global retail industry's search for cheap production.

The role of peripheral countries in this global economy system is also accountable for such industrial accidents. The ruling classes of peripheral state also dreamt of quick 'development' of their own interests and became willing mates in accumulation by dispossession. The saddest thing of the Rana Plaza accident is that it was avoidable. When cracks were detected in the building a day before the collapse, the tenants were advised to stop all activities in the building but instruction was not followed even forced the workers to join work. This is also related to the corruption and abuse of political power for private profits. The Rana Plaza was allegedly constructed in an illegally occupied piece of land in collusion with the powerful from both sides of the political spectrum, supported by commission or omission by officials

in the municipality, Rajuk and other authorities whose responsibility it was to ensure compliance to laws, regulations and codes relevant to the design, content and quality of construction and use of the building. There were gross violations a to z by power or transaction. From this point of view, the accident is related to social, political and economic condition of the peripheral state. In other word, it is the worst example of failure of governance of a peripheral state to ensure safe and secure working environment in RMG sector.

Thus, the Rana plaza accident is the outcome of the negligence of everyone concerned ranging from the global retailer, factory owner, building owner, approver, engineer, contractor, politicians, to manufacturers of construction materials. All are engaged in capital accumulation through dispossession e.g. corruption and exploitation. A nexus between the politics and corruption is working in the flexible capital accumulation process. Neither global retailers nor local compradors took their responsibilities. So, it is not just industrial accident. Sociologically, this accident can be studied in relation with political and economic aspects of global readymade garment (RMG) industry and flexible capital accumulation at local and global economy. In this paper, I would like to study these political and economic aspects of industrial accident in RMG sector.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

In this paper, the focus is on the comprehensive understanding of the Rana Plaza accident to get a critical point of view to explain such an industrial accident in readymade garment (RMG) sector. For this, I have taken a political economic approach that integrates economic and political aspects related to this accident. Specifically, this paper attempts to attain the following objectives:

- I. To analyze the accident as a part of expansion of global capital accumulation process. To understand how multinational companies' fast and restless drive for flexible accumulation and high profit responsible for such deadly industrial accident.
- II. To understand the role and structure of peripheral state in this global economic system.

- III. To study the cause, nature and consequences of the accident in connection with global and local economic and political factors regarding readymade garment industry.
- IV. Through analyzing the accident, to find out overall legal and institutional failures of the governance at periphery to ensure the safe and secure working condition and to prevent such a deadly accident.
- V. To study how a nexus between politics and corruption working behind the negligence and gross violation of rules and regulations at every step.

## **1.4 Conceptualization**

### ***1.4.1 Political Economy***

The term ‘Political economy’ is fraught with ambiguity. In the most general sense, the economy can be defined as the system of producing, distributing, and using wealth; politics is the set of institutions and rules by which social and economic interactions are governed. Political economy has a variety of meanings. For some, it refers primarily to the study of the political basis of economic actions, the ways in which government policies affect market operations. For others, the principal preoccupation is the economic basis of political action, the ways in which economic forces mold government policies. Thus, the two focuses are complementary, they are in ‘a constant state of mutual interaction’ (Frieden and Lake 2003).

Political economy, branch of social science that studies the relationships between individuals and society and between markets and the state, using a diverse set of tools and methods drawn largely from economics, political science, and sociology (Encyclopedia Britannica 2013). According to Gilpin, the tensions and interactions between politics and the economy constitute the stuff of political economy. Although the relative influence of politics and the market changes over time, the two forces are forever linked (Gilpin 2001).

There are different theoretical perspectives in the study of political economy: broadly, Liberalism, Marxism and Realism. In this study, I have taken the term ‘political economy’ from Marxist perspective, which assumes capitalism and the market creating extremes of wealth for capitalists and poverty for workers. As readymade garment in Bangladesh is part of global apparel business, the political economy of industrial accident in readymade garment industry could be studied in both global and national level. Multinational company at global



level and national capitalist at local level accumulate capital through cheap labour exploitation.

### ***1.4.2 Industrial Accident***

Industrial accident means, in general sense, any accident occurred in any type industry: manufacturing industry, food industry, energy industry, mining industry, textile industry etc. In this study, industrial accident means accident in readymade garment industry in Bangladesh specially Rana Plaza accident. Recently, accident in readymade garment industry has become more common phenomena. In most of the cases, accident caused by fire and building collapse. The epic tragedy of “Rana Plaza” is one of the most unfortunate mass deaths this country has seen. Before this, with the collapse of the Savar Spectrum Sweater factory, the Phoenix Fabrics Mill Ltd., the fire at Tazreen Fashions factory, Garib and Garib garments factory, KTS Fabrics Mills and Chowdhury Knitwear Garments, industrial compliance and safety issues have been identified as a burning issue in the RMG sector. Here, the focus is on the Rana Plaza accident occurred on 24 April, 2013.

### ***1.4.3 RMG Sector***

Readymade garment (RMG)largest industrial sector in Bangladesh. Although it has local demand, mostly it is export oriented sector. Around 80% of total export of the country is come from RMG export. According to Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), there are 5600 garment factories where 4 million workers employed (BGMEA 2013). Most of the readymade garment industries located in Dhaka, Savar, Ashulia, Gazipur, Narayangong and Chittagong.

## **1.5 Scope of the Study**

As stated earlier, this paper will study the Rana Plaza accident not only as an industrial accident but relate it to global and local economic and political aspects. This paper will be the first attempt to study such industrial accident from sociological perspective. Previously, there was very few academic work on industrial accident. These were about statistical reporting on the accident which lack sociological insight.

At first, this study will review the relevant literature on the industrial accident in RMG sector to get an idea about this study area. Then this dissertation will discuss the theoretical perspective from which the accident can be explained more sociologically. For this, I have

taken Marxist political economy approach which will explain the accident as an outcome of post-fordist flexible capital accumulation by dispossession. The next chapter will present a discussion on the emergence, history, promoting factors and the overall contribution of readymade garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh.

After that the study will provide a brief description of major industrial accidents in RMG sector in Bangladesh. Then the next three chapters will describe a comprehensive picture of the Rana Plaza accident. At first, it present a description of the accident and its aftermath based on primary and secondary data collected during field work. An account of the victims in terms of case study will be presented based on in-death interview carried out after the accident took place. Then the dissertation will discuss the responses to the accident including compensation, safety measures and legal actions taken by global and local stakeholders. Finally, the Rana Plaza accident will be explained in relation with global capital accumulation at macro-level and the failure of peripheral government and compradors to prevent such deadly industrial accident.

## **1.6 Methodology of the Study**

Methodology in the research deals with the issues of data collection, data processing and data analysis. It could be qualitative or quantitative or mixed method in nature. In this paper, I would like to study the research issue from qualitative approach because the political economy of industrial accident involves a set of complex political and economic aspects both global and local perspective. Here, I have used the case study method to study the case of Rana Plaza accident in detail, using multiple sources of data seem appropriate.

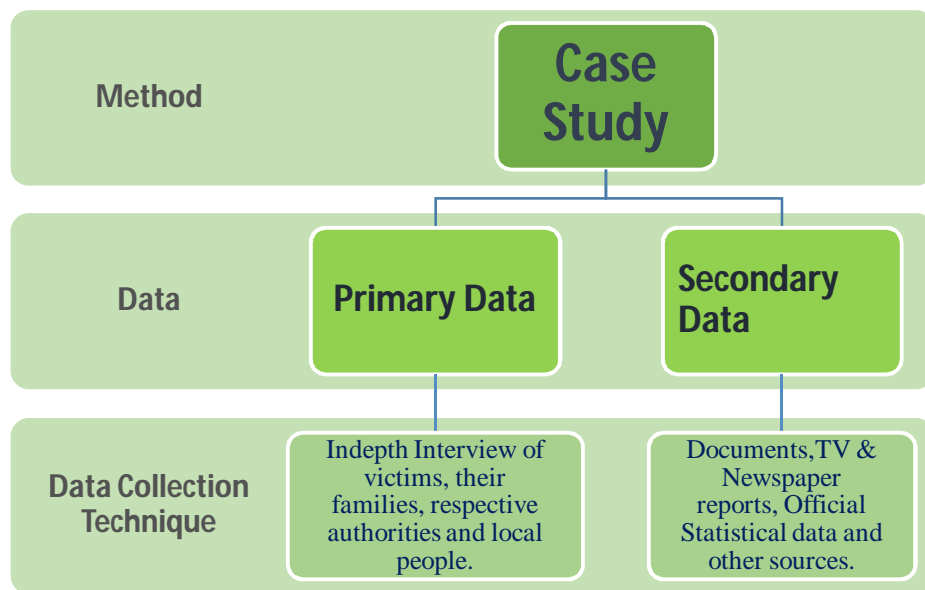
The case study method is useful to understand the case in depth, recognizing its complexity, wholeness and its multiple contexts. In general, a case study can be defined as a method of studying social phenomena through the analysis of an individual case. Yin (1984:23) defined case study as following-

A case study is an empirical inquiry that

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which
- Multiple sources of evidence are used.

In the case study, a case can be defined as a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context (Miles and Huberman 1994). Thus, the case may be an individual; a role; a small group; an organization; a decision; a policy; or an accident or event of some sort (Punch [1998] 2001). There is a long tradition of using case study method in social research. The famous book *The Children of Sanchez* by American anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1961) based on the case study of a Mexican family living in the Mexico City slum of Tepito. A classical example of a descriptive case study is *Street Corner Society: the Social Structure of an Italian Slum* (Whyte 1955), which describes an Italian-American subculture, ‘Cornerville’, covering one neighborhood in Boston in the 1940s. In this paper, the Rana Plaza accident studied as a case using the case study method to get holistic and comprehensive understanding of its complex political economic aspect.

Figure 1.1 *Methodological Framework of the Study*



Here, I used multiple techniques for collecting both primary and secondary data. The field work of this study conducted immediately after the accident took place. The primary empirical data were collected through in-depth interview of the victims of the accident including factory workers, their families, respective authorities and local people. As the field work conducted initially after the accident and most of the survivors were severely injured and hospitalized for treatment it was not compatible to interview them in a formal way. For this why, I had to rely on the in-depth interview of my respondents.

As an instrument of data collection, I used a check list in my field work (attached to appendices). The in-depth interview focused on the issues of background information, experience of the workers, accident experience, treatment, compensation, rehabilitation process and their present condition. As my respondents were victim of the accident, I conducted my in-depth interview of survivors of the accident immediately at first phase for 10 days in different hospitals including Centre for the Rehabilitation and the Paralyzed (CRP), the Enam Medical College and Hospital and NITOR (Orthopedic) Hospital, Dhaka. At the second phase again I went to the CRP, where most of the severely injured workers shifted after immediate treatment. I also studied those who live near the Savar Bus stand like Majidpur. In the first phase, I was concern about their background, work experience and accident experience. In the second phase, I studied their treatment, compensation and rehabilitation, coping process and present condition. I also conducted a short survey of 52 victims of the accident based on a questionnaire.

I also interviewed different stakeholders including factory managers, labour Union leaders, local law enforcement agency etc. I followed different statements or interviews of BGMEA and government authorities and reporting on Television and Newspaper. Besides, the secondary data were collected on relevant issues from various sources. The information from different sources including reports, article and interview presented on Television, Newspaper (printed and online) and others social media have been used. I did a content analysis of the Television and News paper reports. The statistical data were collected from different official websites including Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). The articles and reporting in many international labour right organizations' website were followed for required information. This study sought to analyze political and economic aspects behind the Rana Plaza accident based on these primary and secondary data.

## **1.7 Limitations of the Study**

In such a social research dealing with the complex socio-political and economic explanation of a deadly industrial accident, I confronted with a variety of obstacles. During the study, I encountered many limitations as following:

- i. There was a little sociological work on the industrial accident in ready-made garments industry. For this reason, literature review added a few significant ideas to this study.

- ii. Since most of the survivors were seriously injured and got admitted in hospital after the accident, it was not compatible to interview them in a formal way.
- iii. Since there was no central authority or coordinator about treatment, rehabilitation, compensation or monitoring of these processes, it was difficult to get any required information. Sometimes I had to depend on secondary information.
- iv. Time frame for such an important research work is too narrow to take a larger number of case for the in-depth study.
- v. This study forms a part of my academic curricula. Since I needed also to devote my time and energy to other parts of the curricula, I face severe time constraints.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Reviewing the previous accumulated knowledge about a topic is an essential step in the research process. The purpose of this literature review are: to demonstrate a familiarity with a body of knowledge and establish credibility; to show the path of prior research and how the present study is linked to it; and to learn from others and stimulate new ideas (Neuman 1997). There is a lot of literature on readymade garments industry, but most of them deal with the issues of growth and contribution of this sector, labor rights (e.g. wage and union right), child labor, irregular payment, gender discrimination, health and safety issues etc, which are not relevant to this thesis. A very few literature with relevance to sociological analysis of industrial accident are found. This chapter reviews some relevant works to industrial accident in readymade garment industry.

### 2.2 Review of the Literature

With the beginning of the process of industrial revolution in England in the 18th century and its spread out to other parts of the world, we have been experiencing increasing industrial accidents in many sectors including defense industry, energy industry, food industry, manufacturing industry or mining industry. For example, the Pemberton Mill collapse in Lawrence, Massachusetts on 10 January 1860 killed 145 workers, the Grover Shoe Factory disaster on 20 March 1905 killed 58 people in Brockton, Massachusetts, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York on 25 March 1911 killed 146 workers, the Kader Toy Factory fire on 10 May 1993 in Thailand killed 188 workers, a fire at the Ali Enterprises garment factory in Karachi in Pakistan on 11 September 2012 killed 289 people, the: Dhaka Tazreen Fashions fire in Dhaka on 24 November 2012 killed 112 workers and the Rana Plaza accident in Savar on 24 April 2013 killed 1133 workers are the reminder of deadly industrial accident in manufacturing factories.

However, there is a little academic work on such industrial accidents. Beck (1992) explained the issue of risk in modern society with the concept of reflexive modernization. Risks are defined by Beck (1992) as the probabilities of physical harm due to given technological or other processes. Such physical risks are always created and affected in social systems. Beck

(1992) stated with reference to the Chernobyl accident that the magnitude of the physical risks is therefore a direct function of the quality of social relations and processes. The primary risk, even for the most technically intensive activities, is therefore that of social dependency upon institutions and actors who may well be and arguably are increasingly alien, obscure and inaccessible to most people affected by the risks in question. Beck is one of the few theoretically informed sociologists who have escaped the wider tendency towards timidity or complacent ethnocentrism, and grappled with some central dimensions of the role of risk discourses in structuring, reproducing and repairing the modernist historical project.

Oickle (2008) described one of the worst industrial calamities in American history, the accident of the Pemberton Mill factory in Lawrence, Massachusetts collapsed without warning on 10 January 1860. An estimated 145 workers were killed and 166 injured in the accident. Workers in nearby factories watched with horror as the Pemberton Mill buckled and then collapsed, trapping more than six hundred workers, many of them women and children. Word of the disaster spread quickly and volunteers rushed to the scene. As survivors called out for help, a lantern fell, and within minutes fire engulfed the building, burning those trapped inside. It took days for rescuers to complete the grim task of removing the charred bodies of the dead. The collapse of the Pemberton Mill was determined to have been caused by a number of preventable factors. Ignoring already questionable load limits, extra heavy machinery had been crowded into the upper floors of the factory. Investigators also discovered substandard construction. The brick walls were improperly mortared and supported. The iron pillars supporting the floors were cheap and brittle but had been installed nonetheless. In the wake of the disaster, area ministers delivered "sermons on God's inscrutable wrath," but it was apparent that blame lay in the manner in which the factory was built and operated. The tragedy became a rallying point for efforts to improve safety standards in industrial workplaces. Oickle's riveting account illustrates why, nearly a century and a half later, the Pemberton collapse is still considered one of the worst industrial calamities in American history.

Drehle (2003) described the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire on 25 March 1911, was one of the deadliest industrial disasters in the history of the city of New York and resulted in the fourth highest loss of life from an industrial accident in U.S. history. The fire caused the deaths of 146 garment workers 123 women and 23 men who died from the fire, smoke inhalation, or falling or jumping to their deaths. Most of the victims were recent Jewish and

Italian immigrant women aged sixteen to twenty-three. Because the managers had locked the doors to the stairwells and exits – a common practice at the time to prevent pilferage and unauthorized breaks many of the workers who could not escape the burning building jumped from the eighth, ninth, and tenth floors to the streets below. The fire led to legislation requiring improved factory safety standards and helped spur the growth of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, which fought for better working conditions for sweatshop workers. Drehle (2003) puts a human face on the men and women who died, and shows how the fire dramatically transformed politics and gave rise to urban liberalism.

Eckerman (2005) attempted to bring order from the chaos of events before, during, and after the Bhopal accident of December 1984. Eckerman (2005) summarized events leading up to the accident of December 1984 and the relief work in the ensuing two decades. It occurred on the night of 2–3 December 1984 at the Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) pesticide plant in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. Over 500,000 people were exposed to methyl isocyanate gas and other chemicals. The toxic substance made its way in and around the shanty towns located near the plant. Estimates vary on the death toll. The official immediate death toll was 2,259. The government of Madhya Pradesh confirmed a total of 3,787 deaths related to the gas release. Eckerman describes comprehensively the long-term health effects documented in the exposed population and suggests what might be done to improve health care for the victims. The paucity of data on certain end points, notably women's reproductive health, childhood outcome, and cancer, is stressed. Also included is a summary of the positive and negative effects of various interim relief efforts on the population. Eckerman includes societal, economic, environmental, and political aspects that she considers imperative for integrated long-term health care.

During the last two decades, Bangladesh witnessed many accidents in readymade garment industry. The major deadly accidents include the collapse of the Savar Spectrum Sweater factory, the Phoenix Fabrics Mill Ltd., the fire at Tazreen Fashions factory, Garib and Garib garments factory, KTS Fabrics Mills and Chowdhury Knitwear Garments. In very recent time, the deadliest accident took place at Rana Plaza. However, there was a little academic work on these accidents in RMG sector. Most of the work deals with numerical facts that lack sociological insights.

As it took place only few months ago, there is no remarkable academic work on the Rana Plaza accident. However, there are some reports on the accident presented by some non-



government organizations. Most of them focus on the statistical data about the number of death, injured and missing workers, treatment, compensation and present condition of the survivors.

ActionAid Bangladesh (2013) also presents an assessment report of the rehabilitation and reintegration of Rana Plaza victims. The report was based on the survey carried out using a compiled database based on information from different organizations who conducted assessments and surveys immediately after the disaster. A total of 2297 people were surveyed of which 1509 were survivors of the collapse and 788 were family members of those that died. This survey conducted to assess the needs of the Rana Plaza victims in order to develop a reintegration and rehabilitation programme to respond to their current and future needs. It also aimed to identify the active partners in the rehabilitation and reintegration programme through a comprehensive mapping. To do this, the report covered several issues: demographic and socio-economic status; physical and mental state of the survivors; social and economic vulnerability; medical and livelihood needs; services received; and future concerns and plans.

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) (2013) presented an independent Monitoring Report on Rana Plaza. It is one of the first independent monitoring initiatives. It presented a profile of Rana Plaza worker. Number of casualties in the Rana Plaza incident includes dead, missing and injured workers. The report discusses major pledges and commitments made by different organizations and its implementation. It also discussed treatment, rehabilitation and safety measures taken by different governmental and non-governmental organizations at both national and international level. The report provided some recommendations to cope with the accident. However, this report attempted to present numerical data and facts about the accident. It lacks sociological views about the accident specially socio-political and economic explanation of the accident.

However, both of these report focus on statistical information regarding major lose in the accident in terms of death, injury or sufferings of the workers and their families. There was no sociological analysis about causal factors including political and economic aspects of such frequent occurrence of deadly accident in readymade garment industry. There was no linkage between these reports and social theory. Beside these, there are several writings about the compliance and safety issues related to the accidents took place before this accident.

In another paper, Ahmed and Hossain (2008) presented an overview of the safety issues in the RMG industry of Bangladesh with the case study of several accidents in RMG sector during the last decade. They discussed immediate reasons of collapse of and fire at the factory. According to Ahmed and Hossain (2008), the present situation in most of the Bangladesh's garments industries (excluding a very few) are due to the following reasons:

1. The air circulation is congested
2. The working space is not ventilated
3. Poor natural and artificial lighting system
4. Escape routes are crammed with work tops and haphazardly kept combustible materials
5. Improper wiring and electrical design, illegal connection
6. Careless smoking and spitting habits
7. Narrow staircase
8. Insufficient number of staircases
9. Exit points at ground level are locked or made very narrow for security
10. Improper, indiscriminate and exposed wiring system
11. Overload on electricity and electrical machines
12. Heat generated from steam iron and boiler section. Air circulation is congested.
13. Presence of highly combustible materials create excessive fire load.

They also mentioned measures and activities by concerned authorities. Both the Government and BGMEA have taken several measures to address the safety issues in RMG sectors. A high level Social Compliance Forum (SCF) was constituted on 11 June 2005 headed by the Commerce Minister with Labour Minister as co-chair. In addition, in order to meet various requirements on social compliance including occupational safety and security, labor welfare and improvement of working conditions in the export oriented RMG industry of Bangladesh, Government has constituted two Taskforces and one Compliance Monitoring Cell. One Task Force is on Labor Welfare in RMG and the other is on occupational safety in RMG.

Ullah (2013) discussed immediate causal factors of fire accident in the Tazneen Fashion in reference with investigation carried out by the Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE). OSHE's the findings of the investigations were:

1. There was no fire or emergency exit s or stairways.
2. There was only 1 main entrance and exit way which is situated on the ground floor which was in itself not wide enough to accommodate the number of workers in the factory.
3. Fire extinguishes hers and other fire defense materials were inadequate and were not to be found during the fire.
4. 111 workers lost their lives out of which 58 have been identified.
5. 53 bodies are still unidentified.
6. DNA samples have been taken from the victim's families and report is awaited. It was told that the results will be disclosed only when all samples are collected.
7. Most of the workers died due to suffocation and burns. Only 6 workers died due to fall from height
8. The second floor collapsible gate was locked and the highest numbers of dead bodies (69) were recovered from this floor. Supervisors on the 2nd and 3rd floors stopped the workers from vacating the factory when the fire alarm went off stating the alarm as a false.
9. Owner did not follow building code, had a nine storey factory but had permission only for three floors.
10. Raw materials were stored on the ground floor and in close proximity to the high voltage electric transformers which resulted in the flames spreading at a fast rate.
11. The factory did not have a renewed fire safety certificate either.
12. Compensation of BDT 600,000 has been handed over to 45 families so far out of 58 deaths.
13. Almost 300 workers are injured, some seriously although BGMEA has so far prepared a list of only 63 injured workers. The OSHE team has compiled a list of 89 injured and 58 cases of death due to the fire tragedy.

14. Only 40 workers out of 1200 had received a basic fire safety introduction.

He also stated several recommendations emerged out of the consultation to address the needs of the Tazreen fire victims and for ensuring fire safety in the RMG sector of Bangladesh.

Because of repeated occurrence of industrial accident, some papers discussed worker safety in other industries. Tazneen and Sabet (2013) in their writing, aimed to explore the issue of worker safety in the garment industry in the wake of the Tazreen fire, but they also sought to expand the discussion, highlighting worker safety concerns in the ship breaking, leather; and construction industries.

Firoz (2011) focused on literatures, expert interviews and case study on previous incidence to find out the major reasons for casualty in case of fire in a RMG factory. It has been discovered that there are a few triggering points for various events that ultimately result in catastrophic accidents. The reasons for fire and the reason for casualty are identified in the dissertation; It has discovered that in more than 70% of the cases fire was ignited from electrical short circuit. Therefore in the electrical design must be considered as a prime issue of concern while a factory is being designed and constructed. There are some reasons of casualty: (1) Building permissions are given on the basis of open plan. From the analysis it has been discovered that in some cases, the interior design and machine layout causes a massive change in use pattern, circulation system etc. which might sometimes be hazardous for the buildings' users and (2) the circulation issues contribute largely in determining the casualty level in case of fire in an RMG factory. Stampede and being unable to exit together came up as the major reasons for casualty. Simultaneously the need for proper interior design and necessity for proper circulation and location of emergency exit is also highlighted by the space syntax simulations.

On the other hand, Wadud, Huda and Ahmed (2013), developed a Fire Risk Index (FRI), the first of its kind in Bangladesh. FRI for 60 random garment factories are developed through surprise inspections to understand the current fire safety status in the readymade garment industry in Bangladesh. Results show that the mean FRI is 2.8 on a scale of 5.0, which indicates an alarming condition. Locked exit doors, lack of emergency announcement system and lack of fire drills are the three worst performers among the 24 investigated parameters and require immediate attention from the regulators and stakeholders. They also observed a

U-shaped relationship between FRI and factory size. Factories that are members of the industry's trade lobby generally have better fire safety practices than the non-members.

Some papers are written on the issue of compliance practices in readymade garment industries which is accountable for such accident. Ahmed (2012) discussed social compliance and working condition in RMG sector. He reviewed the literature on working conditions in Bangladesh's RMG sector and the failure of its existing labor laws. While reviewing the literature and background history of the RMG growth, it was found that the key focus group (the garments workers themselves) was grossly illiterate and limited knowledge on human rights, working conditions and labour standards. On the other hand, most of the garments factories owners maintain good links with political parties and maintain a regimented environment in the factory through an alliance between the police force and their own security personnel.

Ahmed (2012) proposed that impediments to establishing social compliance in the sector can be overcome by a combination of international pressure, better monitoring and better human resources management (HRM) citing Cambodia as an example. An approach that pays attention to labour rights, global labour standards, fair labour practices, safety workplace as well as decent work in improving working conditions is needed. Further the Fair Labour Act, the Factory Act, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Core Labour Standards, Code of Conduct, the ILO and the WTO Conventions are all contribute to a better work environment.

Some researcher sought to find out the acceptability of compliance provisions among the existing employee group and the problems and prospects of compliance in garment industry. For example, Rahman and Hossain (2010) provided an overview of the present compliance situation in the garment factories in Dhaka city. Both descriptive and inferential research were conducted to identify different dimensions of compliance of garment industry, such as housekeeping storage, working environment, production layout and controlling system, and management policies and practices in Bangladesh. They found out a close relationship between compliance and productivity.

Women's vulnerability to accident in RMG sector was covered by few researchers. Mahmud and Kabear (2003) discussed the compliance issue in relation with gender perspective. They presented so many topics without any theoretical linkage. They provided social context of poverty and patriarchy in labor-surplus economy. They discussed so many issues: monopoly power and consumer clout in buyer-driven global value chains; the state and public policy in

an era of deregulation; employers' strategies and the informalization of the labor contract; trade unions and the politics of collective action etc. Form compliance perspective in readymade garments in Bangladesh.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

Although there is a lot of literature on RMG sector in Bangladesh, most of them focused on the issues of growth and contribution of this sector, labor rights (e.g. wage and union right), child labor, irregular payment, gender discrimination, health and safety issues etc. There is hardly any work on industrial accident in RMG sector from sociological perspective. These work deals with the immediate causes, technical aspects and the loses in the accident. But there is a lack of sociological explanation of the factors behind these industrial accidents. These accidents are not isolated phenomena. They are related to existing socioeconomic and political norms and values in relation with capital accumulation process. The theoretical framework that could explain these factors will discuss in the next chapter.

## Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

### 3.1 Introduction

The term of ‘political economy’ is ambiguous one. It has a variety of meanings. In general sense, political economy is an interdisciplinary social science field of study that investigates, analyzes and proposes changes in the processes of economic flows and political governance (Miller 2008). The parallel existence and mutual interaction of ‘state’ and ‘market’ create “political economy”. For some, it refers primarily to the study of the political basis of economic actions, the ways in which government policies affect market operations. For others, the principal preoccupation is the economic basis of political action, the ways in which economic forces mold government policies. Thus, the two focuses are complementary, they are in ‘a constant state of mutual interaction’ (Frieden and Lake 2003). Because of this difference in point of view, there are different theoretical perspectives on political economy.

### 3.2 Major Theoretical Perspectives on Political Economy

The theories of political economy can be categorized into one of three perspectives: Liberalism, Marxism, and Realism. Each of the three perspectives has a specific set of assumptions upon which political economists view the world in very different ways. The liberal perspective of political economy is drawn primarily from the field of economics. It can be traced to the writings of Adam Smith (1723-1790) and David Ricardo (1772-1823).

Liberals asserts that national wealth was best increased by allowing free and unrestricted exchange among individuals both in the domestic and international economies. Many liberal theorists regard foreign direct investment in less developed countries as a mutually rewarding exchange between entrepreneurs (Frieden and Lake 2003). From liberal perspective, the individual is the unit of analysis. The central assumptions for liberal theorist are: (1) individuals are the principal actors within the political economy and the proper unit of analysis, (2) individuals are rational, utility-maximizing actors who make cost-benefit calculations across a wide range of possible options and (3) they maximize utility by making trade-offs between goods (Frieden and Lake 2003). Liberals assert that a fundamental harmony of interests exists between as well as within countries.

While liberals view the political economy as inherently harmonious, Marxists believe conflict is endemic. Many Marxists saw capitalism and market creating extremes of wealth for capitalist and poverty for workers (Frieden and Lake 2003). They Marxists assume that classes are the appropriate unit of analysis and the dominant actors in the political economy. These classes act in their material economic interests. They assume that the basis of the capitalist economy is the exploitation of labor by capital.

On the other hand, Realists believe that nation-states pursue power and shape the economy. Unlike liberals and Marxists, Realists view politics as determining economics. They assume that nation-states are the dominant actors and proper unit of analysis. For Realists, nation-states are power maximizers and rational actors in the same sense that liberals assume individuals are rational (Frieden and Lake 2003).

Table: 3.1 *Major Perspectives in Political Economy*

	<b>Liberalism</b>	<b>Marxism</b>	<b>Realism</b>
<i>Focus</i>	Individual	Class	State
<i>Nature of economic relationship</i>	Harmonious	Conflictual	Conflictual
<i>Relationship between economics and politics</i>	Economy drives politics	Economy drives politics	Politics drives economy

*Source: Compiled by researcher.*

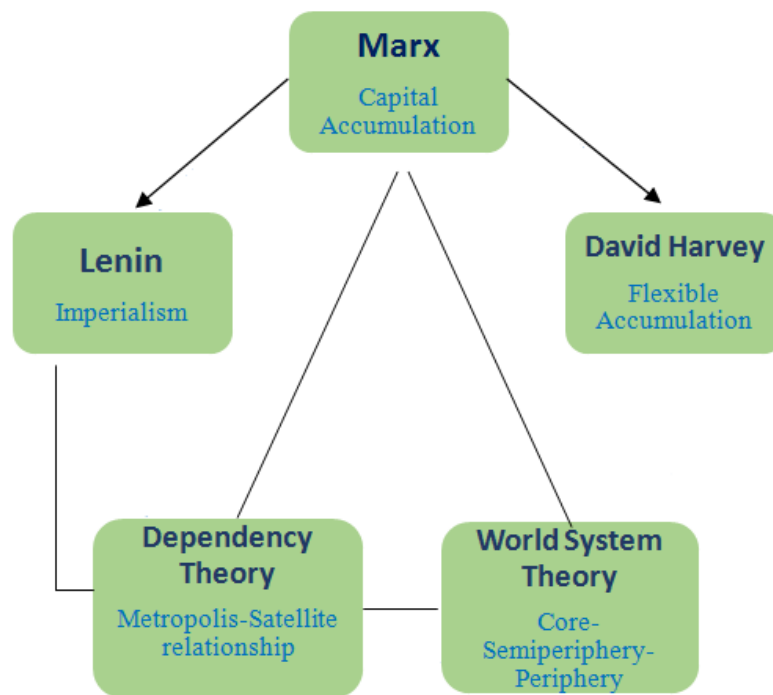
In this study, to understand political economy of industrial accident in readymade garment industry, Marxist perspective has been used. It is because, the Marxist framework continues to be one of the most comprehensive and systematic theoretical critiques of capitalism ever created. Here, both classical and neo-Marxist theories have been used to study what are the role of global capital in peripheral state and role of peripheral government in the third world. Capital accumulation at global and national level analyzed from the Marxist political economy.



### 3.3 Marxist Perspective of Political Economy

Marxism originated with the writings of Karl Marx. While liberalism emerged in reaction to mercantilism, Marxism was a response to the spread of liberalism in the nineteenth century. Marx saw capitalism and the market as creating extremes of wealth for capitalists and poverty for workers. He perceived capitalism as an inherently conflictual system (Frieden and Lake 2003). Marxist political economists make three central assumptions: (1) classes are the dominant actors in the political economy and the appropriate unit of analysis, (2) classes acts in their material economic interests and (3) the basis of the capitalist economy is the exploitation of labor by capital (Frieden and Lake 2003).

Figure 3.1 *Theoretical Framework for Marxist Political Economy*



Source: Compiled by Researcher

For Marx, “*The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles*” (Marx and Engels 1848:1). To Marx, the political economy is necessarily conflictual, since the relationship between capitalists and workers is essentially antagonistic. As the means of production are controlled by a minority within society—the capitalists, labor does not receive its full return; conflict between the classes is inevitably caused by this exploitation.

Marx took materialist conception of history. He postulates that economic organization especially ownership of property, determines the organization of rest of the society. To understand any society it is useful first to understand what is produced, how, and by and for whom. Historical materialism thus begins by attempting to understand the development of relations between what Marx called the ‘forces of production’, people’s capacity to produce, and the ‘relations of production’. This historical materialism is perhaps the most important element in his social and political thinking. In order to look more closely, it will be useful to quote from the preface of Marx’s *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Marx wrote,

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or -- this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms -- with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.

(Marx 1859: 20-1)

Marx’s critique of political economy then understands capitalism as a historically specific mode of production. Exploitation becomes masked by the apparent equity of market relationships. Labour power, the ability to work, is itself reduced to a commodity, which can be bought and sold. Its value, like that of other commodities, is determined by the work needed (to produce the commodities needed) for its reproduction. So in a sense workers do receive a ‘fair wage’ (Dunn 2009). Even market relationships between capital and labour are iniquitous; workers have no other choice but to work for capital, while capital’s ability to draw on a reserve army of unemployed workers exerts downward pressure on wages. However, the fundamental inequity and exploitation comes in production, as workers can be made to work longer or more intensely than is needed to produce goods equivalent to the value of their labour power. Exploitation in production creates surplus value, which can become profit for capitalists (Dunn 2009).

Thus, exploitation, in capitalism as in any other class society, is the necessary basis for the production of surplus. The relationship between capital and labor is zero-sum; any gain for the capitalist must come at the expense of labor. On the other hand, Competition between capitals drives an imperative to accumulate, to produce more and more cheaply than competitors. Capitalism involves displacing workers, as living labour the ultimate source of profits, with machines, 'dead labour'.

Marx was a witness to the oppressive working conditions in the textile and steel mills. Women and children worked long and arduous hours in the factories for very low wages with no social or legal protections against abuse. Workers lived in grimy, unsafe, and unclean slum environments that surrounded the pollution-spewing factories. Marx shared with many other intellectuals and social activists an abhorrence of these terrible conditions of industrial capitalism (Miller 2008).

Owing to the extensive use of machinery, and to the division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him. Hence, the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for maintenance, and for the propagation of his race. But the price of a commodity, and therefore also of labour, is equal to its cost of production. In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases. Nay more, in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labour increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by the increase of the work exacted in a given time or by increased speed of machinery, etc.... Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois state; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself.

(Marx and Engels 2008:43-44)

Marx's this description is like the description of the condition of garment workers in Bangladesh. Garment workers in Bangladesh become appendage of the machine. They experience prolonged working hours and insufficient wage only for maintenance, and for the propagation of their race. Even, Marx is more relevant to today's globalization of production and consumption pattern. This can be gleaned from the following passage in *The Communist Manifesto*:

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilized nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations.

(Marx and Engels 2008:38-39)

### ***3.3.1 Imperialism***

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924) extended Marx’s ideas to the international political economy to explain imperialism and war. Lenin was one of the first theorists who examined the international growth of capitalism from Marxist perspective. The descriptive arguments of Lenin’s theory of imperialism were borrowed from Hobson’s analysis. While Hobson used the dialectic method of tracing the contradiction of contemporary capitalism, his solution and policy prescription were liberal and reformist (Hoogvelt 2001). However, Lenin argues that imperialism is basically a new stage in the development of capitalism, at which crisis appears in capitalist profitability. Imperialism is primarily a result of the capitalist system attempting to resolve its crisis of profitability (Webster 2002). Lenin came up with the following definition of imperialism:

we must give a definition of imperialism that will include the following five of its basic features: (1) the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life; (2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of this ‘financial capital’, of a financial oligarchy; (3) the export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance; (4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves, and (5) the territorial division of the whole world among the biggest capitalist powers is completed. Imperialism is capitalism at that stage of development at which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital is established; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.

(Lenin 1917: 83)

According to Marx, as capitalism grew through industrialization and mechanization it became more and more difficult for it to maintain its level of profit as capital investment in plant and equipment increased. The rate of profit therefore always tended to decline. But this tendency could be offset in a number of ways: the cost of machinery could be reduced; the rate of exploitation of labour could be increased through increasing labour productivity; cutting wages; and demanding longer hours. Lenin argued that one of the most important ways in which the rate of profit could be sustained was through advanced capitalism expanding overseas. Such imperialism would allow (1) control over the global market, (2) access to cheap foreign labour and (3) a cheap supply of raw materials (Webster 2002). Today, Lenin is relevant in the sense that global multinational retailers access to the cheap labour of the third world like Bangladesh for manufacturing their cloths. According to Lenin, external outlets had to be found to ensure the continuity of capitalist advance and accumulation. Thus, the consequence of imperialism was the integration of the dependent nations into the international market, where imperialist profit was based on unequal trade and financial exploitation. In its economic essence imperialism is monopoly capitalism, he writes, identifying four principal manifestations of monopolies:

Firstly, monopoly arose out of the concentration of production at a very high stage. (...) Secondly, monopolies have stimulated the seizure of the most important sources of raw materials. (...) Thirdly, monopoly has sprung from the banks. (...) Some three to five of the biggest banks in each of the foremost capitalist countries have achieved the 'personal link-up' between industrial and bank capital. (...) A financial oligarchy, which throws a close network of dependence relationships over all the economic and political institutions of present-day bourgeois society – such is the most striking manifestation of this monopoly. Fourthly, monopoly has grown out of colonial policy. (...) To the numerous 'old' motives of colonial policy, finance capital has added the struggle for the sources of raw materials, for the export of capital, for spheres of influence, i.e., for spheres for profitable deals, concessions, monopoly profits and so on, economic territory in general.

(Lenin 1917: 114–115)

On the other hand, Rosa Luxemburg, in *Accumulation of Capital* (2003), also portrayed the capitalist system as inherently imperialistic and violent. But Luxemburg, in contrast to Lenin, does not see imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism, or as something that arose in the late 19th century due to the consolidation of multinational corporations under the influence of finance capital. For her it has existed as an integral part of capitalism from its very beginning.

### ***3.3.2 Dependency Theory***

A group of Latin American Marxist scholars, adherents of dependency theory, are concerned with the poverty and continued underdevelopment of the third world. According to dependency theory, the growth of the advanced industrial centres in the world today meant the simultaneous underdevelopment of those countries whose economic surplus the west exploited. Raul Prebisch, an Argentinian economist, argues that the international economic order was divided between an industrial core and an agrarian periphery whereby core countries dominated world trade and geopolitics and systematically deprived colonized peripheral nations. Paul Baran who has been called the 'father of dependency' argued that capitalist development had been disastrous for the developing world. He suggested that in the interests of capitalism to keep what he called the 'backward world' as an 'indispensable hinterland' to provide valuable raw materials and economic opportunities for the world (Brewer 1986).

Andre Gunder Frank (1969), most closely associated with the dependency theory, argued that development of the core depends on the exploitation and underdevelopment of the periphery. The Underdevelopment was and still is generated by the very same historical process which also generated economic development. For him, underdevelopment is the product of capitalism with a system of world-wide links of exchange, characterized by monopoly and by exploitation. Incorporation into the world capitalist system leads to development in some areas and to the 'development of underdevelopment' elsewhere. According to Frank, the world capitalist system is characterized by a 'metropolis- satellite' relation. The metropolis exploits the satellite, so that surplus is concentrated in the metropolis; the satellite is reduced to a state of dependence which creates a particular sort of local ruling class (Lumpenbourgeoisie) which has an interest in perpetuating underdevelopment and follows a policy of lumpendevelopment (Brewer 1986). The satellites experience their greatest economic development if and when their ties to their metropolis are weakest.

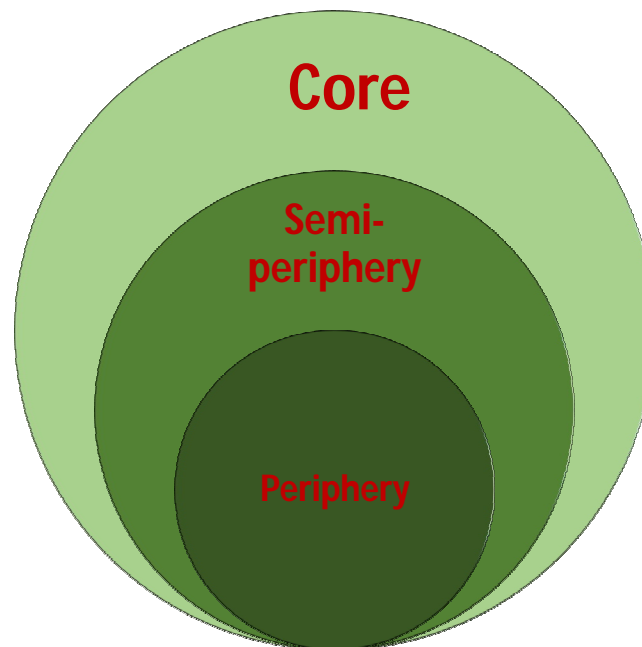
The dependency theory is historically relevant in this sub-continent. Prior to the British colonial arrival in India the industry was large and widely spread with secondary manufactures. However, after the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was no growth of new industries in India in a process called de-industrialization. Cotton textiles for instance made a large portion of India's exports. Within a few decades cotton textiles vanished from India's export list. This was because the British discouraged manufacturing in India and pushed for

extraction of raw materials. At the same time there were massive imports of cheap textiles from England. By the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century de-industrialization was completed and India became the source of raw materials required for industrialization in England (Bagchi 1985). However, dependency theory was more concerned about colonial exploitation of peripheral countries by the core capitalist countries.

### 3.3.3 World System Theory

Immanuel Wallerstein, the main proponent of the world system, developed the theory within broadly Marxist terms. The main difference between world system and dependency theory was that underdevelopment in the former was attributed to the global operation of capitalism, rather than the two-way interactions between poor countries and their former colonial masters. World system theory also incorporated the idea of dynamism: at different times certain regions rise and fall in terms of their development potential. Thus, World system theory is a macro sociological perspective that seeks to explain the dynamics of the ‘capitalist world economy’.

Figure 3.2 *Wallerstein's World System Model*



*Source: Compiled by Researcher*

For Wallerstein, a world system is a ‘world economy’, integrated through the market rather than a political center, in which two or more regions are interdependent with respect to necessities. He said that a world system is a ‘multicultural territorial division of labor’. He proposes four different categories, core, semi-periphery, periphery and external. The core regions benefited the most from the capitalist world economy. On the other end of the scale lay the peripheral zones. These areas lacked strong central governments or were controlled by other states, exported raw materials to the core, and relied on coercive labor practice.

### ***3.3.4 Globalization and Multinational Corporation***

In the second half of the 1980s, the term “globalization” came into popular usage in the international political economy in connection with the huge surge of foreign direct investment (FDI) by multinational corporations (MNC). Following the end of the Cold War, globalization has been the most outstanding characteristic of international economic affairs and, to a considerable extent, of political affairs as well. Globalization had become the defining feature of the international economy at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Globalization and increasing economic interdependence among national economies are indeed very important. The major economic achievement of the post–World War II era has been to restore the level of international economic integration that existed prior to World War I (Gilpin 2001).

The term ‘globalization’ has been used in a multiplicity of senses: concepts like the global interdependence of nations; the growth of a world system; accumulation on a world scale; or the global village. In general sense, globalization refers to cross-national flows of goods, investment, production and technology (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001). According to Immanuel Wallerstein, “globalization represents the triumph of a capitalist world economy tied together by a global division of labour.” (Holton 1998:11). Anthony Giddens define the term as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.”(Giddens 1990:64). For David Harvey, globalization is the compression of time and space (Harvey 1997).

According to International Monetary Fund (IMF),“Globalization refers to the growing economic interdependence of countries worldwide through the increasing volume and variety of cross-border transactions in goods and services and of international capital flows, and also



through the more rapid and widespread diffusion of technology.” (IMF 1997:45). David Henderson described globalization process as “...free movement of goods, services, labour and capital thereby creating a single market in inputs and outputs; and full national treatment for foreign investors (and nationals working abroad)so that, economically speaking, there are no foreigners.” (Wolf 2004:14). According to James Petras (2001), “Globalization is both a description and a prescription. ...As a description, “globalization” refers to the widening and deepening of the international flows of trade, capital, technology and information within a single integrated global market.” (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001:11).

Although, in a sense, the end of the Cold War provided the necessary political condition for the creation of a truly global economy, it is economic, political, and technological developments that have been the driving force behind economic globalization. As Gilpin (2001) summarized this,

“Novel technologies in transportation have caused the costs of transportation, especially transoceanic travel, to fall greatly, thus opening the possibility of a global trading system. In addition, the computer and advances in telecommunications have greatly increased global financial flows; these developments have been extremely important in enabling multinational firms to pursue global economic strategies and operations. The compression of time and space resulting from these technological changes has significantly reduced the costs of international commerce. Globalization has also been produced by international economic cooperation and new economic policies. Under American leadership, both the industrialized and industrializing economies have taken a number of initiatives to lower trade and investment barriers. Eight rounds of multilateral trade negotiations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the principal forum for trade liberalization, have significantly decreased trade barriers. In addition, more and more nations have been pursuing neoliberal economic policies such as deregulation and privatization. These developments have resulted in an increasingly market-oriented global economy.”

(Gilpin 2001:8)

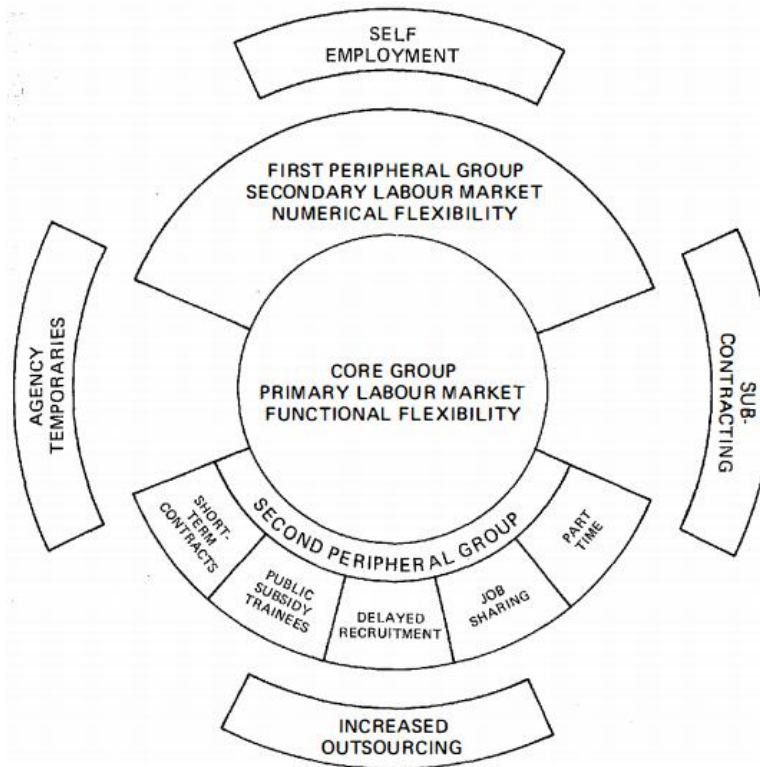
Through this globalization process, in the mid-1980s, a revolution in international economic affairs occurred as multinational firms (MNCs) and foreign direct investment (FDI) began to have a profound impact on almost every aspect of the world economy. In the 1960s and 1970s, increased international trade transformed international economic affairs. Subsequently, in the 1980s, the overseas expansion of multinational firms integrated national economies more and more completely. Most importantly, MNCs led the way in internationalization of both services and manufacturing (Gilpin 2001).

### ***3.3.5 Flexible Accumulation: Accumulation by Dispossession***

The Marxist theorist who has most influentially highlighted these processes is David Harvey. For him, globalization understood as an on-going process of accumulation by dispossession has now entered a new phase which can be called a shift towards global post-Fordism. Harvey have argued that during the last few decades there was a shift, as a result of intensified globalization, from Fordism to post-Fordism. Fordism (1945-1975), coming out of the Great Depression and World War II, was an accumulation regime characterized by rigid accumulation. After that post-Fordism emerged during the period from 1980 to the first decade of the twenty-first century which is characterized by flexible accumulation.

Since the demise of Fordism the capitalist ruling class has used a number of tactics to increase its rate of profit at the expense of labor. Consequently, non-unionized corporations such as Wal-Mart can keep wages as well as health and pension benefits at a minimum. Corporations that have provided higher wages and benefits in the past are now trying to escape their obligations. One way to do that is the deindustrialization of industrialized countries and industrialization of third world. During the last decades of the twentieth century, there was a significant shift in the distribution of world industry away from the older industrial economies—the United States, Western Europe, and Japan—toward Pacific Asia, Latin America, South Asia and other rapidly industrializing economies.

According to Harvey, flexible accumulation is marked by a direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism. It rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption. It is characterized by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation. It has also entailed a new round of ‘time- space compression’ (Harvey 1997).

Figure 3.3 *Labour Market Structure under Conditions of Flexible Accumulation*

Source: *Flexible Patterns of Work*, ed. C. Curson, *Institute of Personnel Management*, cited in *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1997) by David Harvey.

Harvey argued that in this post-Fordism regime, the labour market has undergone a radical restructuring. Faced with strong market volatility, heightened competition, and narrowing profit margins, employers have taken advantage of weakened union power and the pools of surplus (unemployed or underemployed) labourers to push for much more flexible work regimes and labour contracts.

It obliges the employee to work much longer at periods of peak demand, and compensate with shorter hours at periods of slack, are becoming much more common. But more important has been the apparent move away from regular employment towards increasing reliance upon part-time, temporary or sub-contracted work arrangements. According to Harvey, the most radical shift has been either towards increased sub-contracting or towards temporary rather than part-time work. This whole network of sub-contracting and 'outsourcing' give greater flexibility in the face of heightened competition and greater risk. The current trend in labour markets is to reduce the number of 'core' workers and to rely increasingly upon a work force that can quickly be taken on board and equally quickly and costlessly be laid off when times get bad. This revival parallels the enhanced capacity of multinational

capital to take industrial mass-production systems abroad and there to exploit extremely vulnerable women's labour power under conditions of extremely low pay and negligible job security (Harvey 1997).

According to Harvey, such flexible production systems have permitted, and to some degree depended upon, acceleration in the pace of product innovation. Flexible accumulation has been accompanied on the consumption side, therefore, by a much greater attention to quick-changing fashions (fast fashion) and the mobilization of all the artifices of need inducement and cultural transformation that this implies (Harvey 1997).

Advertising is everywhere. The “buy and be fulfilled” message is ubiquitous. Consumption pattern defines the good life. As a result, as long as people are absorbed in the latest consumer fad, they are not focusing much on income inequality, even while they sink more and more into debt. For example, in 2006 the net savings rate in the United States was zero. Customers still flock to Wal-Mart, making it the largest retail operation in the United States, even though it is widely known that their employees are poorly compensated and that its cheap Bangladeshi-made goods undoubtedly caused the loss of good manufacturing jobs in the United States. Few Americans even think or care about the working conditions that Bangladeshi workers must endure in order to make products at such low cost. Consumers have little concern about frequent occurrence of deadly industrial accident like Rana Plaza accident in peripheral state. The working-class solidarity that the Marxists expected is almost absent.

Technological developments in transportation and communications in the late twentieth century enable multinational company, global apparel brand for example, to outsourcing their product from third world industries which now become death trap like Rana Plaza. Manufacturing processes could now be located in multiple countries, with the result that it has become almost impossible to tell what the home-production country of any product such as readymade garment product actually is. Transnational corporations operate globally with decreasing loyalty to any particular nation-state.

He calls them instances of 'accumulation by dispossession' -the plunder of resources to enable the profitable expansion of capital. It is a politically driven process which occurs simultaneously with capital accumulation. It works in a variety of ways from the subtle commodification of once communal property to outright theft and relies on a more overt use of force.

Harvey (2003) introduced the concept of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ that reconceptualized Karl Marx’s concept of primitive accumulation. Karl Marx in his classic *Capital* (volume 1) describes primitive accumulation as a set of processes that take place at the formative stage of capitalism. The long list includes, as summarized by Harvey (2005),

The main substantive achievement of neoliberalization, however, has been to redistribute, rather than to generate, wealth and income. I have elsewhere provided an account of the main mechanisms whereby this was achieved under the rubric of ‘accumulation by dispossession’. By this I mean the continuation and proliferation of accumulation practices which Marx had treated of as ‘primitive’ or ‘original’ during the rise of capitalism. These include the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations(...); conversion of various forms of property rights (common, collective, state, etc.) into exclusive private property rights (...); suppression of rights to the commons; commodification of labour power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources); monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; the slave trade (which continues particularly in the sex industry); and usury, the national debt and, most devastating of all, the use of the credit system as a radical means of accumulation by dispossession.

( p. 159)

Today, theorists, who study the international political economy from Marxist perspective, are primarily concerned with the fate of labor in a world of increasingly internationalized capital. With the growth of multinational corporations and the rise of globally integrated financial markets, the greater international mobility of capital appears to have weakened labor’s economic and political power. If workers in a particular country demand higher wages or improved health and safety measures, for example, the multinational capitalist simply shift production to another country where labor is more compliant (Frieden and Lake 2003).

### **3.4 Feminist Perspective: Super-exploitation of Female Labour**

As ready-made garment (RMG) industry is dominated (almost 80 percent) by female labor, for theoretical understanding of the political economy of accident in RMG sector, it must also be explained from gender perspective. According to feminism, Marxist theory of political economy is a male dominated theory. Feminists argue that there is no critique of capitalism without a critique of patriarchy. Maria Mies (1986) is one of them who studied global capital accumulation from feminist perspective. Mies’ theory is a kind of blending of radical

feminism and Marxist feminism, and she combines them into an extremely powerful theory analyzing the patriarchal origins and practices of capitalist accumulation. Mies although deeply influenced by Marxism sought to go beyond it and formulate a critique of patriarchal relations and of the use of technology within a patriarchal structure as a historical and political-economic foundation of exploitation deeper still than the class relations analyzed within Marxist thought. For Mies, patriarchy is to be found in the social relations of production themselves, and is perhaps the single most important shaper of these relations. It is therefore not 'just' a form of oppression, but in the full sense a form of exploitation.

The exploitation of 'productive' labor is only possible because of the exploitation of 'unproductive' labor, and this is precisely what Mies holds most against the Marxist interpretations of capitalism and patriarchy alike. Mies argues that Marxists have always seen the integration of women into the working class as the prerequisite for the emancipation of women. Simultaneously, liberal feminists were argued that the oppression of women was either an ideological holdover from feudalism, to be eradicated by political and cultural struggle, or that it was the result of the exclusion of women from productive labor, which could be solved by unified class-based activism for employment, unionization, etc. For Mies, what these viewpoints ignore is a vast amount of the actual economic exploitation under capitalism, namely the exploitation of labor productive of life. Not just housework and care for children, but vast amounts of women's labor even in the direct production or maintenance of commodities is ignored in this perspective.

According to Mies, women's oppression and violence against them are the ongoing 'primitive accumulation' process – a kind of what David Harvey has since theorized as 'accumulation by dispossession'. It is the exploitation of women's labor that is fundamental to all patriarchal societies. Much of theory of political economy and theory of Marxism have not really grappled with the fact of socially reproductive labor, the informal sector, and the centrality of women to both in an adequate way. Marxist political economy fails to comprehend the really productive nature of the supposed 'unproductive' production of life.

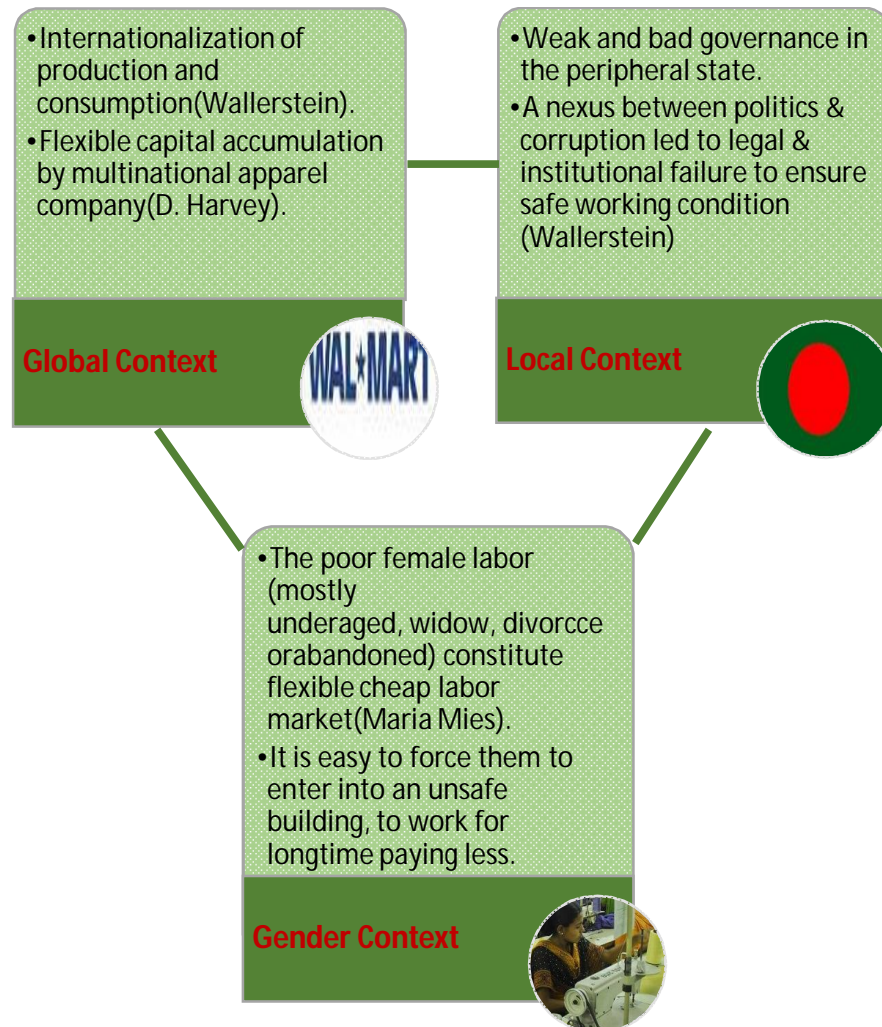
Mies discusses the place of women in the international division of labor. According to Mies, a close relationship exists between the exploitation, other oppression of women and the ceaseless accumulation and growth. We have to understand the role of women in the context of a global division of labor under the dictates of accumulation. Violence against women and extracting women's labour through coercive labour relations are, therefore, part and parcel of

capitalism. In other words, capitalism has to use, to strengthen, or even to invent, patriarchal men-women relations if it wants to maintain its accumulation model.

Mies goes so far as to claim even that the modern capitalism cannot take place without the maintenance of patriarchal structures and practices and their institutionalization in the nuclear family. Thus, women constitute the 'last colony' also for the socialist accumulation process. The free trade labor policies of neoliberal globalization have added a new dimension to the exploitation of labor. The deindustrialization in developed countries allows transnational corporations (TNCs) to utilize cheap foreign female labor markets in global supply chains.

### **3.5 Theoretical Framework of this Study**

In the context of the above discussion, the theoretical framework for this study can be summed up in the following section. From a political economy perspective, the Rana Plaza accident can be viewed in the context of three inter-related factors: changing global capitalism with its new regime of flexible accumulation; a peripheral state with extremely weak structure of governance and an abundant supply of cheap female labour.

Figure 3.4 *Theoretical Framework of this Study*

*Source: Compiled by Researcher*

Readymade garments manufacturing industries originated in the developed countries of West Europe and United States in the 50's of the last century. In those countries, during that period, organized trade union movement was able to exact relatively high price of labour power. From the beginning of the 1960's, because of high competition as a result of globalization of production, the relatively big capitalists investing in the garment industry began to explore the possibility of taking advantage of the cheaper labour power available in the 'developing' countries like Bangladesh for decreasing the production cost.



Through this process, multinational apparel companies have been converted into just ‘brand-name companies’. Garments manufactured in production facilities scattered throughout the ‘developing’ countries worldwide are brought together and stamped with their brand-names before coming to the market. If we look into the process how does this global chain work, we will get this picture.

Figure 3.5 *Global Ready-made Garment (RMG) Production Chain*



*Source: Compiled by Researcher*

This global readymade garment production process is a part of Wallerstein’s world economy system. The global apparel business involves a world division of labour where multinational companies of the core countries utilize cheap labour of the third world peripheral state. As a part of this process, the Ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh started in the late 1970s (The history and prospect of RMG sector in Bangladesh will be discussed in the next Chapter). This RMG sector in Bangladesh expanded heavily in the 1980s and boomed in the 1990s as a result of globalization of production and consumption and flexible accumulation in this post-fordist era. While in 1978 there were only 9 export-oriented garment manufacturing factories, at present the number of these factories reach around 5600 (BGMEA 2013).

This rapid growth in RMG sector was possible only because of high volume, cheap labour, low prices, good quality and predictable service in Bangladesh. The deadliest accident in the RMG sector, the collapse of Rana Plaza in Savar that killed over 1,133 people is a stark reminder of the taste of cheap labour in the global retail industry’s search for cheap production. Order dockets found in the rubble of Rana plaza factory show just why it pays foreign stores to buy from Bangladesh – clothes made for as little as a tenth of what they sell for in the West. In the case polo, shirts of a brand sold in London for \$46 were offered for sale from Rana Plaza for just \$4.45, a typical transformation in an industry where

manufacturers across Asia and retailers in Europe and North America are locked in war to get catwalk trends ever faster, and ever cheaper, to consumers (Bangladesh rubble, 2013).

According to a 2011 report by O'Rourke Group Partners, a consulting firm based in New York, a generic \$14 polo shirt sold in Canada and manufactured in Bangladesh costs a retailer only \$5.67. To achieve such low numbers, workers receive 12 cents per shirt—or just 2 percent of the wholesale cost. It's this glaring inequity that accounts for Bangladesh's booming garment industry (<http://www.ecouterre.com>).

### Illustration 3.1 *Manufacturing cost of a Polo Shirt*



Source: O'Rourke Group, April 2011.

Thus, from Harvian perspective, today's neoliberalized free market provides multinational companies an opportunity for high profit from flexible capital accumulation. The global apparel business rests on flexibility with respect to production processes, labour markets and patterns of consumption. However, this flexible accumulation involves a high risk; health and life of poor cheap labour in peripheral state. With the rapid increase of garment manufacturing factories, Bangladesh increasingly experiences worse to worst accident in RMG sector. When an accident take place in any garment factory in the peripheral state that sourcing RMG product for multinational company like Wall-mart and consumers put

pressure for ensuring safe working place then these company leave this country and look for another cheap labor market without taking any responsibility for such accident like the collapse of Rana Plaza or fire in Tazneen fashion. These accidents are a clear symptom of the global apparel industry's outsourcing of responsibility for labor and environmental conditions in factories.

From dependency and world system theory, there is a scope of discussion about the peripheral state. Weak governance, corruption and role of comprador bourgeoisie in the peripheral state also responsible for such industrial accident. Legal and institutional framework of the peripheral government unable to ensure the safety and security of the factory labor. It is also the interest of comprador bourgeoisie to cut the cost on labour safety. They only concern about making high profit rather than labour safety.

On the other hand, although there is much blame to go around for the these accidents: irresponsible factory managers; overworked and under-resourced building inspectors; a highly corrupted government, but American and European brands and retailers also shoulder much of the blame. The tight delivery times, competitive pricing and penalties embedded in apparel contracts played a critical role in motivating factory managers to cut corners on safety and to push workers back into a dangerous factory. These all are reminder of high cost of flexible accumulation (e.g., outsourcing RMG product from the peripheral state).

From feminist perspective, the poor female garment workers constitute the more flexible labour market for global apparel business. Most of them are under-aged, widow, and divorcee or abandoned by husband. It is easy to control and force these poor female workers to work for long time (16 hours working day including long overtime) without any leave facility. They had to work on holiday. Although they were paid for overtime work on weekly holidays, no alternate holidays are given. They become appendage of the machine. They experience prolonged working hours and insufficient wage only for maintenance and for the propagation of their race (as Marx described the condition of factory workers in England many years ago). According to Feminist theorists, it is a super-exploitation of cheap female labour by multinational apparel company. There is a close relationship exists between the exploitation, other oppression of women and the ceaseless accumulation and growth.

### 3.6 Conclusion

From Marxist political economy perspective, the accident in RMG sector is the outcome of multinational companies' flexible accumulation by dispossession of poor cheap labour in the periphery. The globalization of markets for manufactured goods has intensified competitive pressures to produce at lower cost with shorter lead times and increasingly differentiated product lines. These pressures have led to an increasing emphasis on "flexibility" in the manufacturing industry, to enable shorter production runs, facilitate rapid shifts between different products and product specifications for different markets, and to do so at ever lower costs. Thus, the ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh is a part of this flexible accumulation by dispossession. The next chapter will discuss the growth and prospect of RMG sector in Bangladesh.

## Chapter Four: Readymade Garment (RMG) Sector in Bangladesh

### 4.1 Introduction

The export-oriented apparel industry of Bangladesh, generally known as readymade garment (RMG) or simply the garment industry occupies a unique position in economy of Bangladesh. It will not be excess to say that economy of Bangladesh is what it is today mainly because of readymade garment industry. Average annual GDP growth rates rose from an average of 3.2 per cent in the 1980s to 4.8 per cent in the 1990s and then to 5.8 per cent in the past decade (ILO 2013). This period of sustained economic growth was driven mainly by exports in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector. As a result, in 2011 Bangladesh accounted for 4.8 per cent of global apparel exports, compared with only 0.6 per cent in 1990. Over the same period, total exports as a share of GDP increased from around 5 per cent in 1990 to over 23 per cent in 2011. Even during the financial and economic crisis, exports remained rather resilient, only falling by 2 percentage points at the height of the crisis, i.e. between 2008 and 2010 (ILO 2013).

While a population of around 160 million for a small country like Bangladesh is considered a serious burden, with the rapid growth of RMG sector, it has turned into an invaluable asset. Now, according to official estimate, the annual turnover of the readymade garments (RMG) industry in Bangladesh is now almost \$21 billion. It employs around 4 million workers, more than 85% of them women. RMG account for nearly 80% of the country's export earnings and are the second largest source of the nation's foreign currency after remittances. The major contributions of this sector are accelerating industrialization process in the country, attracting foreign direct investment, alleviating poverty through creating employment opportunities for millions, mobilizing business, empowering women and creating a positive image of Bangladesh abroad (Khan 2011).

Though the history of Readymade Garment Industry is not older one but Bangladeshi clothing business has a golden history. Probably it started from the Mughal age in Indian subcontinent through Dhakai Musline. It had global reputation as well as demandable market around the globe especially in the European market. After industrial revolution in the west they were busy with technological advancement & started outsourcing of readymade garments to meet up their daily demands. Many least developed countries (LDC) took that chance and started readymade garment export at that markets. As an LDC Bangladesh took

this chance enjoyed quota and other facilities of them. Thus readymade garment industry started to contribute in the economy of Bangladesh from late eighty's.

## **4.2 History of Growth of RMG Sector in Bangladesh**

In the history of economic development through industrialization, the role of textile industry is found very prominent in both developed and developing countries. Economic history of Britain reveals that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the cotton mills of Lancashire ushered the first industrial revolution in the world. Moreover, during the last 200 years or more, many countries of the world have used textile and clothing industry as an engine for growth and a basis for economic development (Khan 2011).

Bangladesh has an impressive history of producing world-class fabrics. In the pre-colonial period, Bengal, the eastern half of which constitutes the present Bangladesh, was once a center of cotton textile and silk manufacturing. During the Mughal period, muslin and jamdani cloth of Dhaka achieved worldwide fame and this country was used as the luxurious garments of the royal figures in Asia and Europe. But the British rulers in India did not develop our cloth industries at all. Rather they destroyed them through the deindustrialization process; convert them as the source of cheap labour and raw materials for industries in England. According to Andre Gunder Frank, dominant dependency theorist, Bengal once provided the life blood of mercantile and industrial capitalist development in the metropolis.

British colonists' inhuman torture upon craftsmen of Moslin popularly is known in history. The British colonist even cut the fingers of craftsmen of Moslin. On the other hand, to ensure the supply of raw materials of textile mills of Britain, they imposed compulsory indigo cultivation upon the farmers of Bengal. The 'Nil Bidroho' (Revolution against compulsory cultivation of indigo) in early 1860s by the agrarian class of Bengal was one of the major shakes against British Imperialism in India (Khan 2011).

During the Pakistan period, though Bangladesh was a fertile land for jute and other raw materials, industrialization did not flourish here mainly because of economic exploitation and discriminatory policies of government of Pakistan. Like the British period, based on the raw materials of Bangladesh industrialization took place in West Pakistan. The following table shows the difference of West and East Pakistan in terms of number of textile mills between 1947 and 1971.

Table 4.1 *No. of Textile Mills in East and West Pakistan between 1947 and 1971*

	1947	1971
East Pakistan	11	26
West Pakistan	09	150

*Source: First five- year plan (1973-78)*

After independence, Bangladesh inherited some big industrial enterprises in jute, textile, steel and sugar. Most of these were initially established with state patronage or with huge subsidies, and later owned by Pakistani big business houses. They were abandoned by them after independence in December 1971. In 1972, the first government of Bangladesh decided to run the country on the basis of socialist ideology and nationalized most of the mills and factories. These enterprises formed the industrial mainstay of the newly independent country (Muhammad, 2011). However, the successive military administrations from 1975 to 1990 gradually liberalized the economy.

#### **4.2.1 Early Initiation: Contribution of Korean Firm (1980s)**

The Readymade industry in Bangladesh started in the late 1970s, expanded heavily in the 1980s and boomed in the 1990s. This successful economic development story was started in Bangladesh during 1978. In 1978, there were only 9 export-oriented garment manufacturing units, which generated export earnings of around one million dollar. Some of these units were very small and produced garments for both domestic and export markets. Four such small and old units were Reaz Garments, Paris Garments, Jewel Garments and Baishakhi Garments (Yunus and Yamagata 2012).

The first consignment of garments was exported from the country in 1977 by Reaz and Jewel Garment. Reaz Garments, the pioneer, was established in 1960 as a small tailoring outfit, named Reaz Store in Dhaka. It served only domestic markets for about 15 years. In 1973 it changed its name to M/s Reaz Garments Ltd. and expanded its operations into export market by selling 10,000 pieces of men's shirts worth French Franc 13 million to a Paris-based firm in 1978. It was the first direct exporter of garments from Bangladesh (Yunus and Yamagata 2012).

However, the actual milestone was led by the Desh Garments Ltd established in 1977. It was set-up in joint venture with Daewoo of South Korea and at that time emerged as the single largest and most modern garment-manufacturing unit in the sub-continent. A contract signing of collaborative arrangement for technical and marketing between Desh-Daewoo during 4 July of 1978 enabled Desh garments to send 130 workers and management trainees to be trained at Daewoo's state-of-the-art technologies at Pusan plant in South Korea in 1979. After that, Desh's modern factory constructed with Daewoo's specification and technical assistance with capability of 6 lines, 600 workers, 5 million pieces per year capacity worth \$1.3 million investment goes into operation. Another South Korean firm, Youngones Corporation formed the first equity joint-venture garment factory with a Bangladeshi firm, Trexim Ltd in 1980. Bangladeshi partners contributed 51 percent of the equity of the new firm, named Youngones Bangladesh. It exported its first consignment to Sweden in December, 1980 (Yunus and Yamagata 2012).

#### ***4.2.2 Promotions by the Government (1990s)***

To promote the RMG industry in Bangladesh the role of governments is quite remarkable. The first export consignment of shirts from Bangladesh made by the state-trading agency, the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh, in the mid-1970s was destined to some East European countries under counter trade arrangements. The government issued licenses to many entrepreneurs for the duty-free importation of machinery during the early 1980s to produce garments for export purposes. As a result, the number of firms in the garments industry increased rapidly and reached 594 in numbers in FY85-86. Export increased from US \$ 1.3 million in FY80-81 to US \$ 116.2 million in FY84-85 (Yunus and Yamagata 2012).

In case of RMG in Bangladesh the innovative ideas and strategies from the entrepreneurs were well accommodated by the policy makers of the government. Among them two most important financial features that play key role to expansion of rapid growth of manufactures are back-to-back L/C and bonded warehouse facilities (Robbani 2000). The policy of the back-to-back L/C system eliminated the need for cash for working capital and the need for foreign exchange in the RMG industry and this allowed the entrepreneurs to set-up factories with low capital investment and thus allowed rapid growth of the industry.

During 1980s government modified import policy regime for 100 percent export oriented garments industries that added extra edge towards the industry's competitiveness as it readily



removed the bottleneck of trade barriers in terms of bureaucratic hazards, rent-seeking power and effective lead time reduction of production.

Table 4.2 *Growth of RMG Unit and Employment*

YEAR	NUMBER OF GARMENT FACTORIES	EMPLOYMENT IN MILLION WORKERS
1985-86	594	0.20
1986-87	629	0.28
1987-88	685	0.31
1988-89	725	0.32
1989-90	759	0.34
1990-91	834	0.40
1991-92	1163	0.58
1992-93	1537	0.80
1993-94	1839	0.83
1994-95	2182	1.20
1995-96	2353	1.29
1996-97	2503	1.30
1997-98	2726	1.50
1998-99	2963	1.50
1999-00	3200	1.60
2000-01	3480	1.80
2001-02	3618	1.80
2002-03	3760	2.00
2003-04	3957	2.00
2004-05	4107	2.00
2005-06	4220	2.20
2006-07	4490	2.40
2007-08	4743	2.80
2008-09	4925	3.50
2009-10	5063	3.60
2010-11	5150	3.60
2011-12	5400	4.00
<b>2012-13</b>	<b>5600</b>	<b>4.00</b>

Source: BGMEA, 2013.

However, during the 1990s, the government started a gradual process of trade liberalization. “The share of import goods subject to quantitative restrictions declined from 33 to 10 per cent between 1988–89 and 1992–93, while the average tariff rate for imports declined from 60 to 21 per cent between 1991–92 and 1997–98. The process of reducing tariffs has continued in the past decade: since 2000–01 Bangladesh has been following the Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) tariff scheme, and the MFN unweighted import average decreased from 21.4 in 2000–01 to 14.9 in 2009–10” (ILO 2013:22).

#### ***4.2.3 Phasing out of Multi-Fiber Arrangement (2000-04)***

In the decade from 1995 there was much discussion of the uncertainties looming over the future of the industry. In 1994, with the conclusion of the Uruguay Round, the Multi Fibre Agreement (MFA) which had governed global trade in textile and clothing since 1974 was succeeded by the Agreement on Textile and Clothing (ATC) that called for a gradual phasing out of all MFA restrictions by the year 2005.

**Table 4.3** *Some Important Phases of the Bangladesh RMG Industry*

<b>Period</b>	<b>Event</b>
1977-1980	Early period of growth
1982-1985	Boom Days
1985	Imposition of quota restrictions
1990s	Knitwear sector developed significantly
1995	Child labor issue and its solution
2003	Withdrawal of Canadian quota restriction
2005	Phase-out of export-quota system
2009	Accounted 80% of total export
2013	GSP suspension by USA

*Source: Compiled from different documents.*

The expiry of the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) regime has brought a great deal of uncertainty about Bangladesh's future export earnings. Taking advantage of the MFA quota system, Bangladesh demonstrated a spectacular export performance, with exports of readymade garments (RMG) rocketing from just \$10 million in FY 1985 to about \$6,400 million in FY 2004-05.

Table 4.4 *Comparative Statement on Export of RMG and Total Export of Bangladesh*

YEAR	EXPORT OF RMG (IN MILLION US\$)	TOTAL EXPORT OF BANGLADESH (IN MILLION US\$)	% OF RMG'S TO TOTAL EXPORT
1990-91	866.82	1717.55	50.47
1991-92	1182.57	1993.90	59.31
1992-93	1445.02	2382.89	60.64
1993-94	1555.79	2533.90	61.40
1994-95	2228.35	3472.56	64.17
1995-96	2547.13	3882.42	65.61
1996-97	3001.25	4418.28	67.93
1997-98	3781.94	5161.20	73.28
1998-99	4019.98	5312.86	75.67
1999-00	4349.41	5752.20	75.61
2000-01	4859.83	6467.30	75.14
2001-02	4583.75	5986.09	76.57
2002-03	4912.09	6548.44	75.01
2003-04	5686.09	7602.99	74.79
2004-05	6417.67	8654.52	74.15
2005-06	7900.80	10526.16	75.06
2006-07	9211.23	12177.86	75.64
2007-08	10699.80	14110.80	75.83
2008-09	12347.77	15565.19	79.33
2009-10	12496.72	16204.65	77.12
2010-11	17914.46	22924.38	78.15
2011-12	19089.69	24287.66	78.60
<b>2012-13</b>	<b>21515.73</b>	<b>27018.26</b>	<b>79.63</b>

Source: BGMEA, 2013.

It was feared that with the phasing out of MFA the biggest threat will be the fierce competition from efficient producers like Hong Kong, China, India, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and Caribbean countries. But Bangladesh experienced steady growth in export earning through apparel business only because of cheap labour.

Table 4.5 *Country-wise per Hour Wage of Garment Workers*

Country	Per hour Wage(US\$)
Turkey	2.44
Mexico	2.17
China	1.88
Pakistan	0.56
India	0.51
Sri Lanka	0.44
Vietnam	0.44
<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>0.22</b>

*Source: The New Age, 13 Aug, 2010*

#### **4.2.4 Aftermath: Global Economic crisis and Counteraction (2005-13)**

Because of the financial and economic crisis, there was a slight slowdown in both exports and imports in 2009 and 2010. This stemmed mainly from the weakened external demand from the United States and the European Union. However, Bangladeshi exports demonstrated higher resilience than other countries in the region. “The annual growth rate of exports reached 15 per cent in 2008–09, but during the height of the crisis fell to 0 per cent. However, the decline in Bangladesh’s exports was relatively mild compared with other countries in the region such as India, Nepal and Pakistan – all of which registered negative growth rates between 2008 and 2010. The specialization of the national economy in the export of low-cost products, whose demand during the crisis was only marginally impacted, explains in part these trends” (ILO 2013:26).

The counter measures implemented by the government in order to sustain exports during the crisis proved to be helpful. Also, consumers in the advanced economies substituted towards lower-priced goods, and a large share of the RMG exports from Bangladesh go to the apparel companies that focus on lower-end clothing items. As a result, the recovery in exports was relatively quick, reaching new highs as a share of GDP (ILO 2013).

Beside this, the government eased considerably the bureaucratic burden related to international trade. For example, between 2005 and 2011, the number of days needed to export decreased from 35 to 25, while the number of days needed for import declined from 57 to 31. On the other hand, regional trade agreements such as the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA), the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and the Trade Preferential System among OIC countries (TPS-OIC) have facilitated international trade with main regional counterparts.

In addition, the stimulus packages approved by the government also helped to support the export sector. During the initial stages of the crisis, the strategy adopted by the government was to monitor the financial situation and to control the foreign exchange reserves of Bangladesh (Rahman and Hossain 2010).

As the export promotion policies, the second stimulus package worth 50 billion BDT announced in June 2009, introduced new programmes, notably cash incentives that were extended to the export of ready-made garments. In particular, the government provided small and medium-sized garment exporters with an additional 5–10 per cent increase in cash incentives on the total value of exports (ILO 2013).

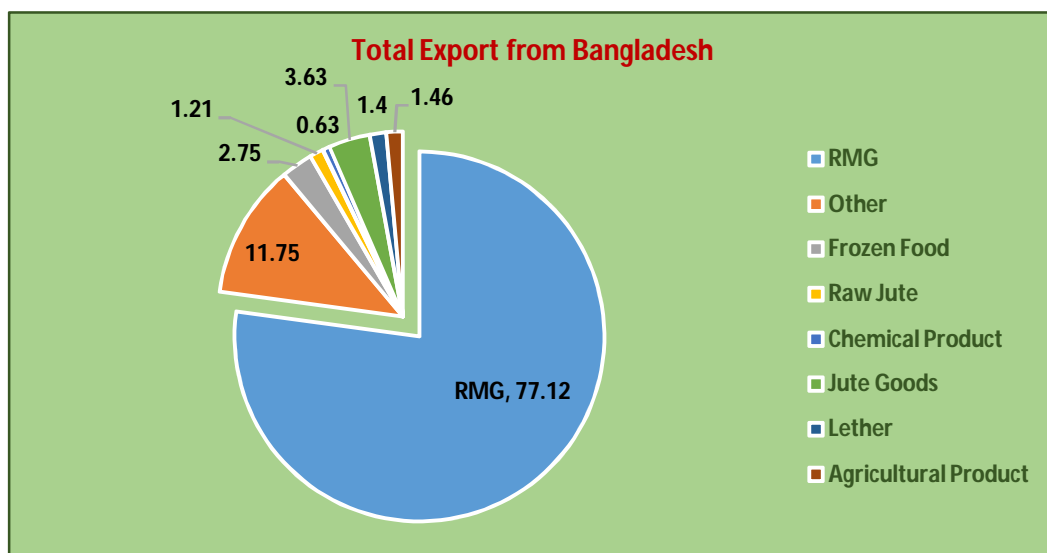
As mentioned earlier, now ready-made garment (RMG) is highest export earning sector in the economy of Bangladesh. Since the 1990s, there has been a significant change in the portfolio of products exported from Bangladesh (Table). For example, between 1989-90 and 2010-11, exports of hides, skins and leather, as well as of fish and prawns, declined from 11 to 3 per cent and exports of jute declined from 20 to 4 per cent (ILO 2013).

Table 4.6 *Export by Product*

Product	1989-90	1996-97	2008-09	2010-11
<i>Tea</i>	2%	1%	0%	0%
<i>Hides, skins and leather</i>	11%	5%	2%	3%
<i>Fish and prawns</i>	11%	8%	4%	3%
<i>Jute manufacturers</i>	20%	11%	3%	4%
<b><i>Ready-made garments</i></b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>77%</b>
<i>Others</i>	17%	14%	11%	13%

*Source: Compiled based on Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.*

These declines have been compensated by a rapid increase in the export of ready-made garments, whose share of total exports has more than doubled, reaching 80 per cent in 2008–09 (Table). And despite a modest decline following the crisis, the sector continues to account for more than three quarters of all exports.

Figure 4.1 *Major Products Export from Bangladesh*

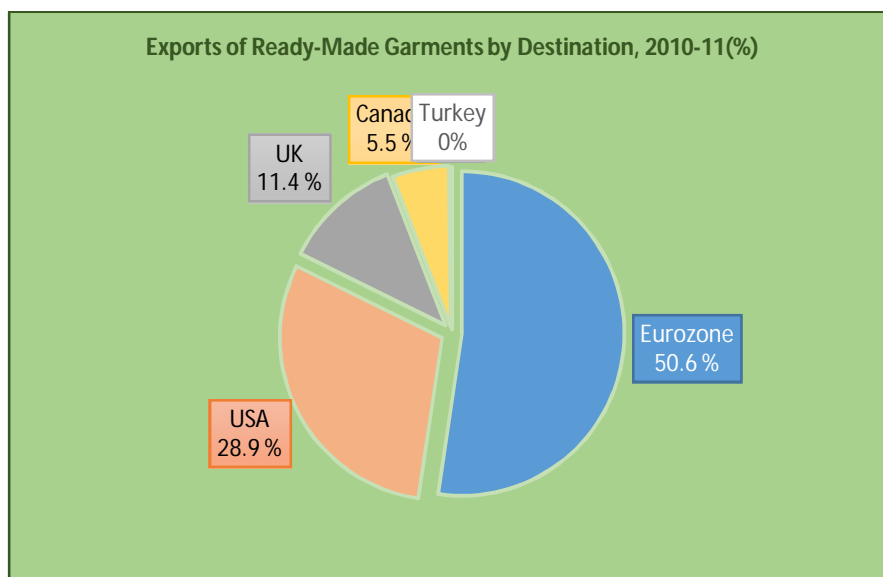
*Source: BGMEA, 2013.*

The country has increased its contribution in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector, becoming one of the main exporters of RMGs worldwide. In 2012, Bangladesh accounted for

5.0 per cent of global apparel exports, compared with only 0.6 per cent in 1990. Now Bangladesh has become second largest exporter in global apparel market.

At present Bangladesh accounts for 5.0 per cent of world RMG export while China's share is 30 per cent. But China is slipping from its top position, losing 5.0 per cent of its contribution annually due to labour shortage and high labour costs. The market of Bangladeshi exports is mainly the United States and key Eurozone countries: in 2010–11, the Eurozone alone accounted for more than half of the total Bangladeshi exports, while the United States accounted for another 28.9 per cent (Figure 1.5). Other key market include the United Kingdom (11.4 per cent) and Canada (5.5 per cent).

Figure 4.2 *Market of Bangladeshi Ready-made Garment Product*



Source: Compiled based on Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

#### 4.2.5 Top Retailers and Fashion Brands in Bangladesh

While global market size export of RMG is US\$ 400 billion, Bangladesh's share in the global market is about 5 %. This mere 5% share alone is literally strong to indicate that there is a great opportunity of expansion. Bangladesh has been successfully supplying apparel products consistently to the premier international fashion brands like H&M, C&A, M&S, Wal-Mart, GAP, Levi's, s.Oliver, Tesco, Zara, Carrefour, JCPenney and many more.

In 2011, McKinsey & Company, a global management consulting firm forecasted Bangladesh's apparel exports could grow double by 2015 and triple to \$42 billion by 2020 (McKinsey CPO Survey, November 2011). They also mentioned that Bangladesh will be the apparel sourcing hot spot over the next 5 years.

Table 4.7 Top Global Retailers and Fashion Brands in Bangladesh

Brand Names	Brand Logo	Country
H&M		Sweden
Wal-mart		USA
C&A		Germany
Target		USA
Tesco		UK
Carrefour		France
GAP		USA
Levi's		USA
JCPenney		USA
K-Mart		USA
Zara		Spain
M&S		UK
UNIQLO		Japan

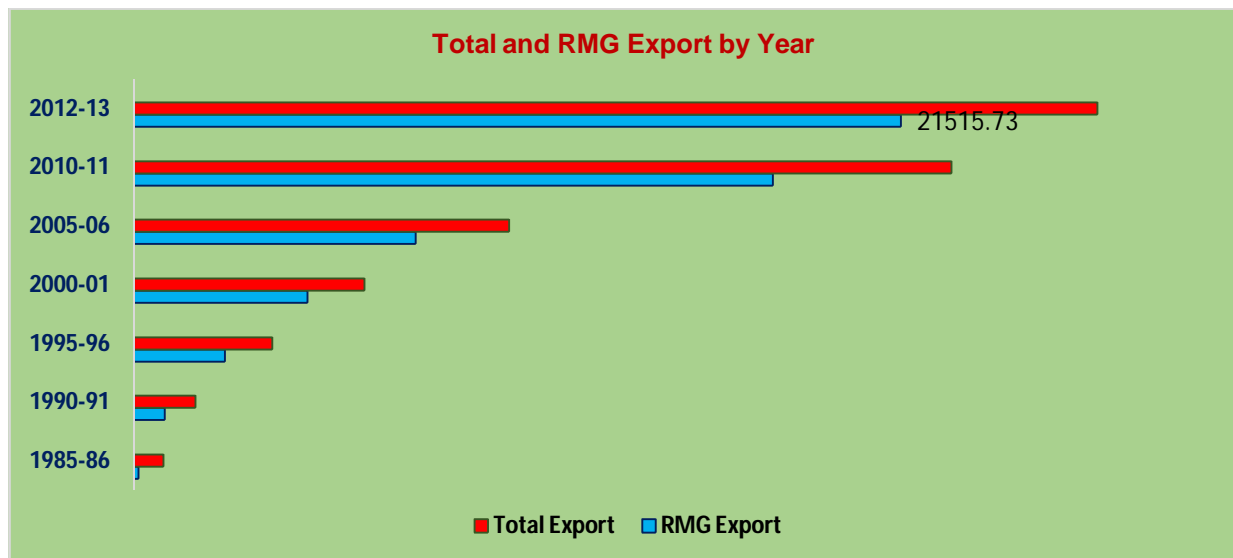
Source: Compiled based on relevant companies' website.



### 4.3 Factors Promoting the Growth of RMG Industry

According to Mckinsey& company report, while China was once considered “the place to be” for sourcing, the light is starting to shine ever brighter on Bangladesh. Since the start of its garment export industry in 1970s, the country has seen its RMG export levels grow steadily and has become a top global exporter. The total export from the RMG sector has almost doubled from \$10.69 billion in FY 07-08 to \$21.5 billion in FY 12-13 which is almost 80% of total export earnings. There are both domestic and external factors which promoted growth of RMG sector in Bangladesh.

Figure 4.3 *Total and RMG Export by Year*



Source: BGMEA, 2013.

#### 4.3.1 Domestic Factors

##### Cheap labor

As RMG is a labor-intensive sector in nature, the historical evolution of world apparel business reveals that comparatively lower wages rate countries were always the major apparel supplier in the world. On the other hand, as Bangladesh is an over-populated country burdened with unemployment problem. The private entrepreneurs in the late 1970s and early 1980s got an opportunity to use cheap labor to flourish this sector over-night. Nowhere in the world is labor as cheap as it is in Bangladesh. The following table shows a comparative study of per hour labor wage in major RMG exporting countries.

Table 4.8 *Garments Manufacturing Labor Costs (US\$/hour) by Countries*

Asian Competitors		US Regional Suppliers	
		Mexico	2.54
Bangladesh	0.22	Honduras	1.72-1.82
Cambodia	0.33	Dominican Republic	1.55-1.95
Pakistan	0.37	Nicaragua	0.97-1.03
Viet Nam	0.38	Haiti	0.49-0.55
Sri Lanka	0.43	EU Regional Suppliers	
Indonesia	0.44	Turkey	2.44
India	0.51	Morocco	2.24
China(remote/inland areas)	0.55-0.80	Russia	1.97
China (other coastal/core areas)	0.86-0.94	Tunisia	1.68
China (Prime coastal areas)	1.08	Bulgaria	1.53
Malaysia	1.18	Jorden	1.01
Thailand	1.29-1.36	Egypt	0.83

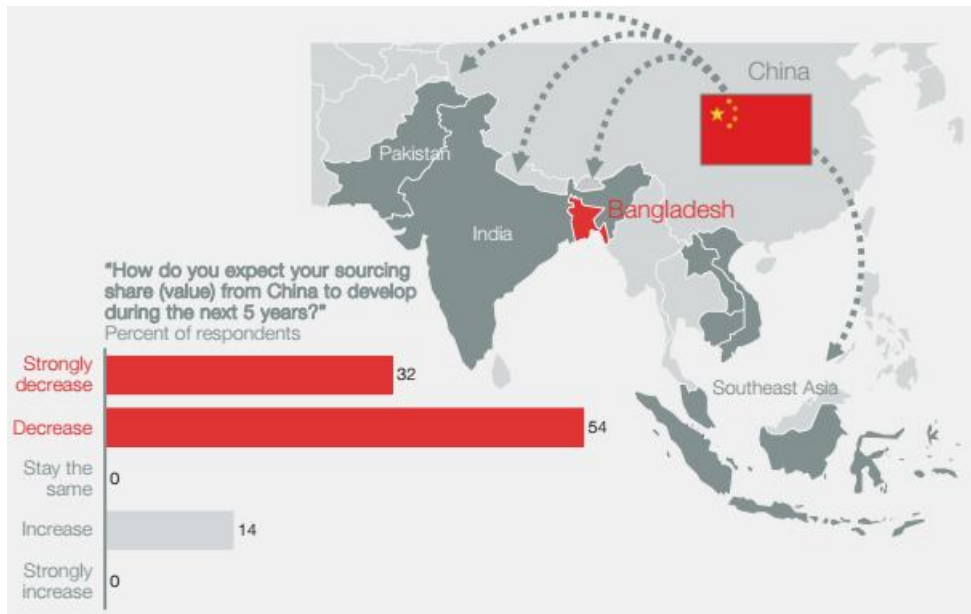
*Source: ILO Report, 2011 & NCM-April, 2013*

### **Low Production Cost**

For decades, European and US apparel buyers were benefiting from continually decreasing purchasing price by moving their sourcing activities to low-cost countries in Asia. As labor cost is very low, RMG factories in Bangladesh can produce quality garment at lower cost which has attracted the foreign buyers.

International companies like Wal-Mart, JC Penney, H&M, Zara, Tesco, Carrefour, Gap, Metro, Marks & Spencer, Kohl's, Levi Strauss and Tommy Hilfiger all import in bulk from Bangladesh.

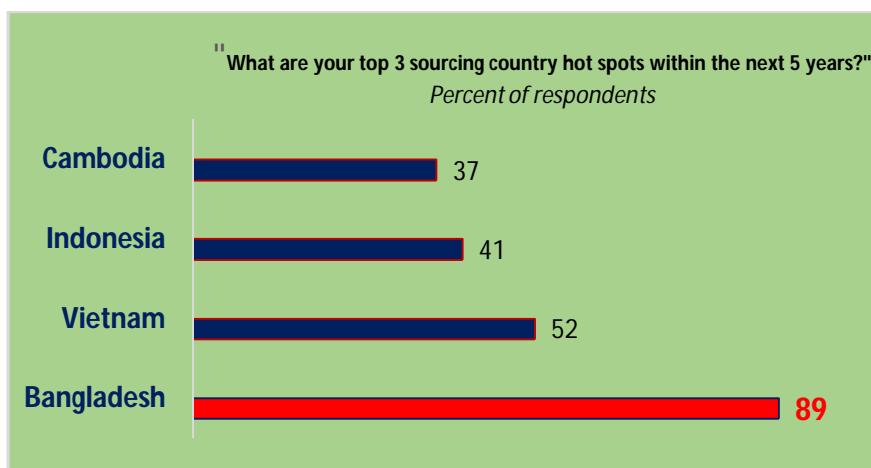
Illustration 4.1 *Chief Purchasing Officers Plan to Shift from China to other Countries Over Next Five Years*



Source: McKinsey CPO survey, 2011.

The comparative advantage of low production cost also attracted foreign direct investment. As a result, all the retailers participating in the McKinsey study named low production cost as the first and foremost reason for purchasing in Bangladesh.

Figure 4.4 *Retailers Target about Top Sourcing*



Source: McKinsey CPO survey, 2011.

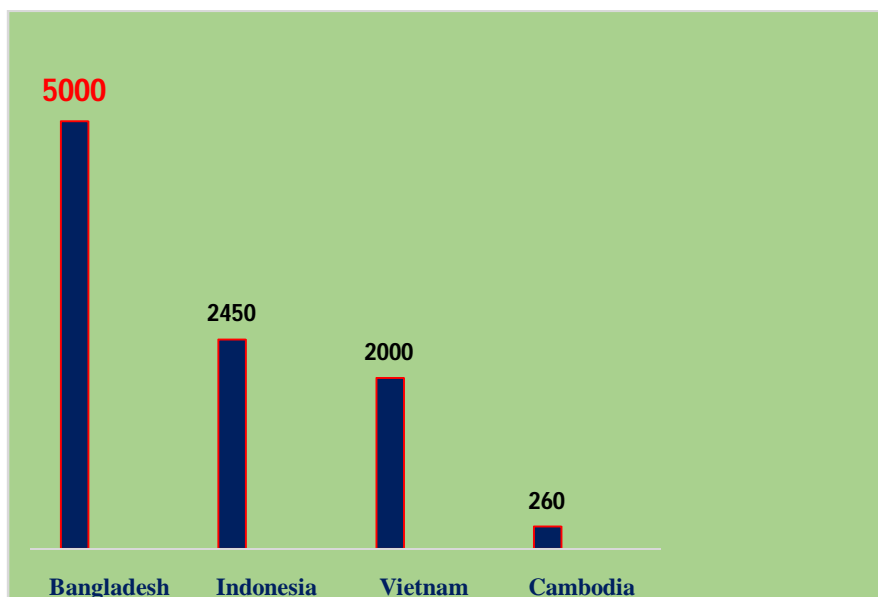
## Local Market

Clothing is a basic need. As Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and traditionally Bangladeshi people like to wear new cloths on the various festivals like Eid, Puja, Pohela Baishakh etc. Thus every year Bangladesh needs a huge quantity of garment for its local demand.

## High Capacity and Capability

High capacity and capability of production is one of the biggest advantage for Bangladesh's RMG industry. With a current 5000 RMG factories employing about 3.6 million workers from a total workforce of 74 million, Bangladeshi is clearly ahead of Southeast Asia RMG suppliers in terms of capacity offered while other countries like Indonesia has about 2,450 factories, Vietnam 2,000 and Cambodia 260 factories.

Figure 4.5 *Capacity of Southeast Asian RMG Suppliers*



*Source: McKinsey CPO survey, 2011.*

Bangladesh also enjoy high capability. Its suppliers are known for supplying good quality and large order sizes for the value and lower mid market. At the same time, suppliers have started to expand into more value-added services.

Table 4.9 *Clothing Exports of Asian Countries (US\$ Million)*

Country	2009	2010	2011
Bangladesh	12,525	15,660	19,939
Cambodia	2,441	3,041	4,051
China	107,264	129,820	153,774
Colombia	592	650	650
Hong Kong	22,826	24,049	24,505
India	12,005	11,229	14,365
Indonesia	5,915	6,820	8,045
Japan	484	531	595
Korea	1,396	1,610	1,840
Malaysia d	3,126	3,880	4,567
Pakistan	3,357	3,930	4,550
Philippines d	1,534	1,764	1,402
Singapore	1,045	1,069	1,190
Sri Lanka c	3,265	3,491	4,211
Taipei Chinese	904	979	994
Thailand	3,724	4,300	4,561
Turkey	11,556	12,760	13,948
Vietnam	8,540	10,390	13,154

*Source: Online Clothing Study (OCS)*

### **Government Policies**

The Readymade garment industry of Bangladesh has received support from the government. During the post-independence period, industrial development of Bangladesh has been directed by several industrial policy: Industrial policy of 1973, the new Industrial policy of 1982, the revised Industrial policy of 1986, Industrial policy of 1999 followed by a number of other policies, with the latest being the Industrial policy of 2010. These policies involve several measures like duty drawback facilities, tax holidays, cash assistance, income tax rebate, creation of export processing zones, zero tariff on machinery inputs, rebate on freight and power rate, bonded warehouse facilities, provision of import under back-to-back letters of credit, loans at concessional rate, export development fund, etc.

### **Back to Back Letter of Credit**

In 1980 the Bangladesh Bank granted the back to back letter of credit so that the exporters of RMG are able to import input against the export orders placed in their favor by the RMG importers and this considerably eases the financing requirement of garment business for the local entrepreneurs. Now the entrepreneurs are able complete the complicated process of manufacturing and export with very little of their own funds for working capital. Even if the turnover is Tk. 50 million and the profit is only 5% the returns are still decent since the funds are borrowed largely from the banks (Yunus and Yamagata, 2012). But in the absence of back to back L/C, it would have been very difficult for the new entrepreneurs to raise funds from local financial institutions to import fabrics and accessories.

### **Bonded Ware House Facilities**

Emergence of the global trade and Multi fiber Arrangement (MFA) phase-out, lead the textile and clothing industry more competitive in the apparel market. Bangladeshi garment industry faces the challenge to maintain high export percentage in the RMG sector, it is not only possible supported by cheap labour, but also speed of delivery is vital. Bonded ware house provide facility that the imported inputs can be cleared through the customs against export orders without paying any import duty and the export oriented RMG units can access imported inputs at zero-tariff.

#### ***4.3.2 External Factors***

##### **Preferential Treatment under MFA and GSP**

The influential factor behind the rapid growth was the quota system under the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA). The General System of Preferences (GSP) facilities and RoO (Rules of Origin) offered by the developed nations also helped Bangladesh to accelerate its export. Bangladeshi entrepreneurs took advantage of MFA and GSP facilities to successfully enter into the US, Canada and EU market. While quota restrictions on giant competitors provided a guaranteed market for Bangladeshi garments in USA and Canada, Preferential treatment under GSP allowed Bangladeshi apparels a zero-tariff access to markets of the European Community. During the initial stage of development of Readymade garment industry, Quota and GSP played a significant role in Bangladesh.

## **Political Problem and Anti-export Environment in Sri Lanka and India**

India and Sri Lanka were the major South Asian suppliers of RMG to USA and Western Europe until the early 1980s. Because of the onset of political problems in Sri Lanka and a consistent anti export environment in India, Western buyers and Eastern producers became interested in trying their luck in Bangladesh (Spinanger, 2000). Civil War in Sri Lanka which started in late 1970s proved to be boon for Bangladesh in respect of RMG industry. Due to the civil war, the western buyers turned away from Sri Lanka and were looking for substitute of Sri Lanka. On the other hand till 1990s, India had adopted anti-exporting policy. Finally Bangladesh came forward to replace Sri Lanka in RMG business based on its huge cheap labor force.

### **4.4 Contributions of RMG Industry to National Economy**

Contribution of the Readymade garment sector in national economy is great in terms of export earnings, employment generation, poverty alleviation, empowering of women and progressive socio-economic change. It is the highest foreign exchange earning sector. It has been able to create employment opportunities for about 4 million of people, most of whom are poor, uneducated and unskilled women from the rural area. Besides, it has been able to attract foreign direct investment, accelerate industrialization process, alleviate poverty to a certain extent and create a good image of Bangladesh in the world. To a certain extent, it has been able to bring about a positive change to the socio-economic condition of the country.

#### ***4.4.1 Contribution to GDP***

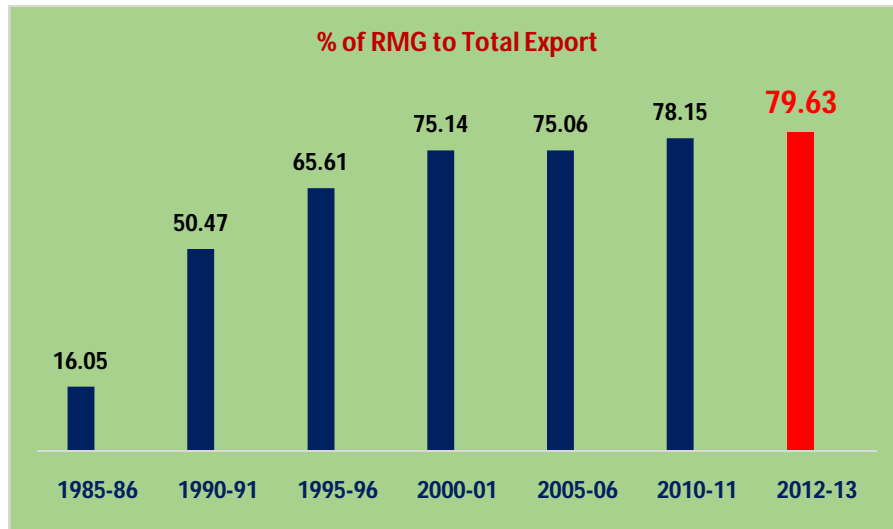
Average annual GDP growth rates rose from an average of 3.2 per cent in the 1980s to 4.8 per cent in the 1990s and then to 5.8 per cent in the past decade. This improved economic growth performance stems from ready-made garments (RMG). In terms of GDP, RMG's contribution is highly remarkable. Now it reaches around 15% in FY 2012-13 which was only 3% in FY 1990-91. This is a clear indication of the industry's contribution to the overall economy. It plays a vital role to promote the development of other sectors like banking, insurance, shipping, hotel, housing, transport etc.

#### ***4.4.2 Export Earning***

Readymade Garments (RMG) Industry is the largest exporting industry in Bangladesh. Recently readymade garment alone earned nearly 80 of the yearly foreign exchange earning

of the country. While in the FY 1983-84 only 3.89 percent of total export earning came from RMG sector, in the FY 2012-13 this sector's contribution was 79.63 percent.

Figure 4.6 *Contribution of RMG to Total Export*

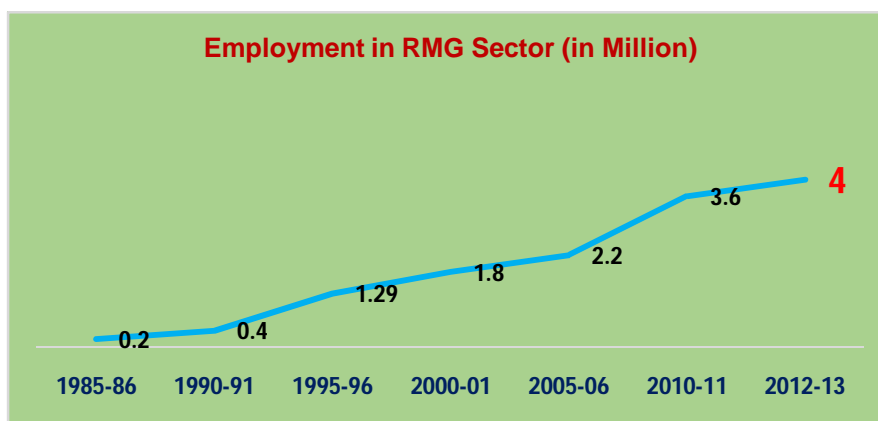


Source: Based on BGMEA, 2013

#### 4.4.3 Employment Generation

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries of the world. With limited land area and natural resource, the increasing population is creating heavy burden on unemployment problem. As a labour intensive sector, the readymade garment industry has been able to relieve the country from the burden of unemployment by creating employment opportunities for more than 4 million people.

Figure 4.7 *Employment in Readymade Garment Industry*

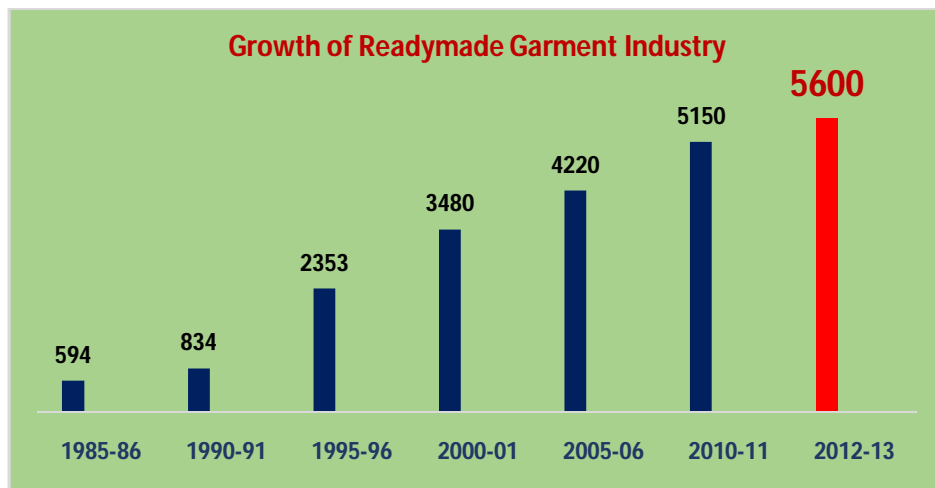


Source: Based on BGMEA, 2013.



The growth rate of RMG export was over 20% per over the last two decades. While in 1990-91 around 0.4 million workers employed in this sector nearly 4 million workers employed in 2012-13. This industry enjoyed a steady rise from 30 enterprises in 1980 increased to about 5600 in 2012-13 fiscal year. The growth of the industry in terms of number of units is shown in table - below:

Figure 4.8 *Growth of the Readymade Garment Industry*



*Source; Compiled from Newspaper*

#### **4.4.4 Women Empowerment**

Out of 4 million manpower employed in BGMEA member factories, 3.4 million are women (85%), majorities of them are disadvantaged and economically poor. It is well recognized that women's participation in income generation activities lends them a better status within the family and provides them with considerable freedom. A job ensures equitable access to household resources and larger investment on female human capital. As the income by the female member reduces dependency on male income it reduces their vulnerability. It also reduces the possibility of domestic violence against women.

#### **4.4.5 Socio-economic Progress**

This readymade garment sector has uplifted the neglected and deprived section of the population, thus radically transforming the socio-economic condition of the country. Such empowerment and employment raised awareness regarding savings, children education, health safety, population control only so far. Beside this, RMG sector carrying the label of "made in Bangladesh" that create a positive image of the country in the global apparel industry.

## 4.5 Conclusion

The RMG sector is now country's largest export earning sector. It contribute to all most 80% of the total GDP. The major contributions of this sector are accelerating industrialization process in the country, attracting foreign direct investment, alleviating poverty through creating employment opportunities for millions, mobilizing business, empowering women and creating a positive image of Bangladesh abroad. On the other hand, the issues of safe and secure working condition become burning issue not only for the protection of human right but also for the future of this RMG sector. Now, it becomes the common phenomena that workers have died of some sort of accident to at their workplaces. The last but not the least, industrial accident is the collapse of Rana Plaza, the deadliest accident in the history of the world. The next chapter will describe some of the recent deadly industrial accident in the readymade garment industry of Bangladesh.

## Chapter Five: Industrial Accident in RMG Sector in Bangladesh

### 5.1 Introduction

It has become a common newspaper heading for the last few years that workers have died of some sort of accident to at their workplaces. The epic tragedy of “Rana Plaza” is one of the most unfortunate mass deaths this country has seen. Before this, with the collapse of the Savar Spectrum Sweater factory, the Phoenix Fabrics Mill Ltd., the fire at Tazreen Fashions factory, Garib and Garib garments factory, KTS Fabrics Mills and Chowdhury Knitwear Garments, industrial compliance and safety issues have been identified as a burning issue in the RMG sector and lots of pressure have been imposed on industry proprietors as well as on the government regarding the safety of workers.

According to the Safety and Rights Society (SRS), which monitors news accounts of worker deaths, 388 workers were killed in occupational accidents in 2011 and 490 in 2012. In fact, the ILO contends that 11,000 workers die each year in work-related accidents in Bangladesh (Tazneen and Sabet 2013). In 2012, according to the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS), at least 906 workers died and 1,108 others were injured in workplace related accidents and violence. The highest number of workplace accident deaths occurred in the transport sector (249 worker) while the readymade garments sector is in second position (155 worker) followed by the construction sector (113) (906 died in workplace, 2013).

According to the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS), from 1990 to 2013, 439 workers died in 15 major fire incidents in several RMG factories. However, according to Bangladesh Fire Department, 414 garment workers were killed in 213 factory fires between 2006 and 2009 alone ( Tazneen and Sabet 2013). The BGMEA statistics show that 387 workers were killed in factory fires from 1990 to 2012. Labour leaders, however, reject the BGMEA statistics and claim that the number of deaths from factory fires and other incidents will be close to 600. The year-wise statistics of deaths of workers in some factories due to fire and other accidents are shown in Table 5.1.

## 5.2 Industrial Accidents in the Readymade Garment Sector

It is very clear from the frequent reoccurrence of accident that the health and safety issues are alarmingly low in RMG sector. The Sammilita Garments Saramik Federation statistics show that some 530 workers died in 30 fire incidents in several RMG factories between 1990 and 2013. At least 150 workers also died in several accidents including building collapse, excluding Rana Plaza Tragedy (Haque, 2013). There have been several accidents which caused the death of many workers.

Table 5.1 *Major Incidents in RMG Sector During 1990 to 2013*

Year	Garment	Died
1990	Saraka Garments, Dhaka	32
1995	Lusaka Garments, Dhaka	22
1996	PallabiSuntex Ltd	14
1996	Tahidul Garments	14
1997	Shanghai Apparels, Dhaka	24
1997	Rahman & Rahman Apparels, Dhaka	22
1997	Tamanna Garments	27
1997	Jahanara Fashion, Narayanganj	20
2000	Macro Sweater, Dhaka	23
2000	Globe Knitting, Dhaka	12
2000	Chowdhury Knitwear and Garment Factory, Dhaka	48
2001	Kafrul Capital Garments	26
2004	Chowdhury Knitwear, Narsingdi	23
2005	Shan Knitting, Narayanganj	23
2005	Spectrum Garments, Dhaka	80
2006	KTS Garments, Chittagong	62
2006	Phoenix Textile Mills, Dhaka	21
2010	Ha-Meem Clothing Factory, Dhaka	29
2010	Garib&Garib Sweater Factory,Dhaka	21
2012	Tazneen Fashion, Dhaka	113
<b>2013</b>	<b>Rana Plaza Tragedy</b>	<b>1132</b>

*Source: Based on different Newspapers' report.*

Some of the major incidents of fires in factories in RMG sector include deaths of 51 workers in fire at Garib and Garib, Matrix Sweater and HaMeem Group in 2010, death of 65

workers in factory fire at Chitagong KTS compos it etextile mills in 2006, death of 20 workers at Narayangonj Sun Knitting in 2005, 48 workers killed in a fire at a garment factory in Narshingdi in 2004, 53 workers killed in 2000 in a fire at Narshingdi Chowdhury Knit wear , death of 22 workers at Mirpur Rahman & Rahman Apparels in 1997, death of 27 workers at Mirpur Tamanna Garments in 1997, and 27 killed in fire at Mirpur Sareka Garments in 1990. Here, I would like to present brief discussion on couple of these accidents.

### ***5.2.1 Case One :Tazreen Fashions***

On the night of 24 November 2012, a fire broke out in Tazreen Fashions, an eight-story garment factory in the Ashulia district on the outskirts of the capital Dhaka. Of the estimated 1,150 people working that night to fill orders for various international brands, 113 were killed and another 200 wounded (Tazreen and Sabet 2013). The fire reportedly originated from an electrical malfunction on the ground floor, where bales of yarn and fabric were improperly stored. While many workers managed to escape to an adjacent building, others were burned or suffocated to death. On the worst affected third floor sewing unit, sixty-nine bodies were recovered.

Several of standards that required for all RMG factories were violated at Tazreen Fashions: The fire originated in the warehouse, which was improperly located on the ground floor beside the generators. If the fabric had been stored in an enclosed, fireproof room, as required by law, the fire could have been contained. Instead it not only spread but blocked the ground floor exit. The factory did not have any emergency fire exits that would have allowed workers to circumvent the ground floor fire. The factory failed to annually renew its fire certificate. The factory lacked a sprinkler system or an outdoor fire escape. Despite only having permission for a three-story building, the owners had added five extra floors to the building illegally. Some fire extinguishers did not function, and, despite fire drills, workers were not properly trained in fire extinguisher use or fire evacuation procedures.

Perhaps more disturbing than these failings, was the response of the supervisors on the day of the fire. The supervisors dismissed the fire alarm and told the workers to continue working. The fire took around 30 minutes to spread, while it should have taken only five to seven minutes for the workers to evacuate the factory.

### ***5.2.2 Case Two: Garib & Garib Sweater Factory***

On Thursday, February 25, 2010, twenty-one workers died when the Garib&Garib Sweater Factory in Gazipur. Twenty-one workers, fifteen of them women, suffocated to death and dozens were seriously injured when a fire erupted at the facility, whose current buyers – as listed on the company’s website – include H&M, Otto, 3 Suisses International, and Men’s Work Wearhouse (Scott 2010).

The fire broke out around 9:00 pm on the first floor of Garib and Garib’s seven story factory building, apparently due to an electrical short circuit. At the time, most of the factory’s workers fortunately had left for the day, but several dozen workers were still sewing garments on its fifth and sixth floors. With the factory’s electrical system disabled, the facility – which lacked emergency lighting, a basic safety provision in such circumstances – was rendered completely dark. Due to poor ventilation as a result of the factory’s windows being sealed with heavy metal shutters, smoke and fumes rapidly filled the building.

As workers sought to flee the building and find fresh air to breath, they were blocked at all turns. After the fire started, the factory’s security personnel –apparently to prevent theft of garments by workers leaving the facility – locked two of the factory’s main gates with deadbolts, which required keys to unlock, leaving only one gate open. Boxes obstructed the factory’s stairwells, and access to its roof was blocked by unauthorized sheet metal structures used to store materials. Fire fighters had to cut through the metal window grills to reach the workers, succeeding in saving several lives. All of the victims were found on the top floors of the building with no burn marks on their bodies, apparently having succumbed to smoke inhalation while unsuccessfully attempting to reach the roof.

The Dhaka Fire Service and Civil Defense reported after the incident that the factory’s fire fighting equipment was “virtually useless.” None of the security guards on duty knew how to operate fire extinguishers and hydrants that were installed at the factory. Precautions ordered by authorities after a previous fire just six months before, in August 2008, had not been implemented.

### ***5.2.3 Case Three: KTS Composite Textile Mill***

On February 23, 2006, a horrific fire raged through KTS Fabrics Industries in Chittagong. This incident killed an estimated 54 and badly injured approximately 150 workers of whom mostly were female. At the time of the fire, workers estimate that up to 1200 people were working inside and outside the building (Ctg RMG factory, 2006).

According to the rescued workers, the victims could not escape because the main emergency gate was locked. Rescuers cited that the fire was likely caused by a boiler explosion and that the fire spread quickly because of stacks of yarn piled on the factory floor.

According to the regulations a garment factory should have three gates. At the end of a shift and during any emergency all the gates including the emergency route have to be completely opened. But in the case of KTS the survivors said both the main gates were closed, with only the small entrances in them open during the accident, while the fire escape was full of smoke and flames, making it hard for them to come out that way. The factory was reportedly violating numerous additional serious labour rights including forced overtime, seven-day work weeks, suppression of workers' rights to freedom of association and bargain collectively (<http://www.cleanclothes.org>).

It is clear that fire hazards in the garment factories become dangerous when the employers keep the main door locked. This is a serious violation of the revised Factory Act of 1965 which provides that "In every establishment the doors affording exit from any room shall any person is within the room, and all such doors, unless they are of the sliding type, shall be constructed to open outwards or where the door is between two rooms, in the direction of the nearest exit from the building and no such door shall be locked or obstructed while work is being carried on in the room". [Act VI, Article 62; Section III](Ahmed and Hossain 2009).

### ***5.2.4 Case Four: Phoenix Textile Mills***

On 25 February, 2006 the six-story Phoenix Building in the Tejgaon industrial area in Dhaka collapsed following unauthorized renovations to convert the upper stories of the building into a 500-bed private hospital resulting in 21 dead and 50 injured (Ahmed and Hossain 2009).

At the time of the collapse the garment factory was still running. According to local media, the top two floors of the building were constructed without any approval from the planning

authority. There were also Show-rooms of Phoenix Fabrics and Phoenix Electronics on the ground and first floors and a number of tin-shed rooms on the rooftop.

Construction of three extra floors on top of the building with a foundation for only three storey and unplanned renovation works could be the reasons for the collapse of the factory building of Phoenix Fabrics. Some local residents said the first three floors were constructed on concrete pillars about 25 years ago. Construction of the fourth and fifth floors started around a year and a half ago using only bricks, said a local resident. Here it was a strong violation of existing building codes. In such conditions, the owners of Phoenix Fabrics dared to operate their garments business in such a building made of poor quality bricks and other raw materials.

#### ***5.2.5 Case Five: Spectrum Garments at Palashbari Savar***

The Spectrum Sweater Factory, nine-storied factory building at Palashbari near the Savar collapsed early April 11, 2005 leaving at least 80 people killed. The death toll caused by the collapse of the concrete building, which was packed with about 300 night-shift workers of the Spectrum Sweater and Knitting Factory, is likely to rise, rescue workers fear. Fire-fighters, army personnel, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), volunteers and relatives used shovels, hammers and bare hands throughout the day to remove the rubble as survivors screamed and called for help from beneath the debris (Ahmed and Hossain 2009).

Many survivors and garment factory officials said the collapse of the building was caused by the explosion of a boiler, but rescuers and civil engineers blamed the faulty construction of the building for the tragic incident. This incident shows how insecure and vulnerable the workers are in this RMG sector.

Local authorities said that the building, built just three years ago, was structurally unsound, reportedly not properly designed, and constructed in a faulty manner using materials not suited for a nine - storied building. Some reported that the building was erected on marshland without permission. Some sources report that the explosion of a boiler on the ground floor triggered the collapse; others allege that the collapse was already underway when the boiler exploded.

We can learn from this incident that the collapse is generally being attributed to faulty design and construction. It is also part of the fault of the authorities that they did not inspect the



condition of the garment factory before giving them the license. This kind of negligence takes away lives of innocents who simply work hard to earn their living. They did not have a proper emergency exit and the workers were trapped inside.

#### ***5.2.6 Case Six: Chowdhury Knitwear and Garment Factory***

When a fire broke out in the Chowdhury Knitwear and Garment factory at Shibpur, near Dhaka, on the night of November 25, 2000, workers were prevented from escaping death because the only exit gate was locked. At least 48 workers were killed and more than 150 injured (Dharmasena 2000).

It is reported that up to 800 workers were on overtime when the fire broke out at 7 p.m. The blaze is thought to have originated on the third floor of the four storied building. Immediately, panic-stricken workers on the second and third floors rushed to exits but the first floor gate on the single staircase had been locked.

A shortage of water delayed extinguishing of the fire. Four workers were burnt alive, and others suffocated or were electrocuted or trampled in the scramble to escape. Some bodies were burnt beyond recognition. The stairwell was so tightly packed that workers tried to break windows and throw themselves out. According to witnesses, some were impaled on the pointed tops of the iron railings surrounding the factory.

Analyzing Case of this fire accident, we can see that the main reason for the serious accident at Chowdhury Knitwear may have been due to negligence of the safety measures and compliance by the owners which caused the life of almost 50 workers. The factory building did not have a proper fire exit.

The fire exits were locked and the workers were trapped inside the factory building. It is clearly written in the safety rules and compliance that they have to have a proper staircase of a certain width and that the exits should not be locked. There were no trained workers who could help the unfortunate to escape off.

### 5.3 The Reasons Behind all of the Accidents

Now, in readymade garment industry, state safety regulation and intervention are extremely poor. Like everything else, it is also relegated more to a routine than any prevention or inspection function - based only on the whims and desires of the factory owner. Over decades no worthwhile safety audit has been seen, not even any kind of investigation or positive measures from the RMG factory owners or inspection authorities who are primarily responsible for safety in the work place. After the analysis of the above cases it is possible to figure out some common reasons for the tragic accidents. There are some common reasons behind all of the accidents.

- ∅ The factory buildings were not properly designed.
- ∅ The buildings were not made for garment factory.
- ∅ Poor construction materials used for the buildings.
- ∅ No safety inspections both for building and working condition.
- ∅ The air circulation is congested.
- ∅ The working space is not ventilated.
- ∅ Poor natural and artificial lighting system.
- ∅ Escape routes are crammed with work tops and haphazardly kept combustible Materials.
- ∅ Improper wiring and electrical design, illegal connection.
- ∅ Careless smoking and spitting habits.
- ∅ Narrow staircase.
- ∅ Insufficient number of staircases.
- ∅ Exit points at ground level are locked or made very narrow for security.
- ∅ Improper, indiscriminate and exposed wiring system.
- ∅ Overload on electricity and electrical machines.
- ∅ Heat generated from steam iron and boiler section. Air circulation is congested.
- ∅ Presence of highly combustible materials create excessive fire load.

### 5.4 Initiatives taken by Respective Authorities

A number of measures have taken to address the safety issues in readymade garment sectors. A high level Social Compliance Forum (SCF) was constituted on 11 June 2005 headed by the

Commerce Minister with Labour Minister as co-chair. In addition, in order to meet various requirements on social compliance including occupational safety and security, labor welfare and improvement of working conditions in the export oriented RMG industry of Bangladesh, Government has constituted two Taskforces and one Compliance Monitoringn Cell. One Task Force is on Labor Welfare in RMG and the other is on occupational safety in RMG (Ahmed and Hossain 2009). The Compliance Monitoring Cell was formed in the office of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) in order to monitor the activities relating to social compliance including safety and security, labour welfare and improvement of working conditions in RMG sector of Bangladesh. The Government's recent interventions through these Forums require a well-designed institutional structure to ensure safety compliance of the RMG factories in Bangladesh.

BGMEA has been playing an important role in enforcing the safety issues in their members' factories. The main objective of Safety Section of BGMEA is to strengthen Safety Measures in BGMEA Member Units and to raise awareness among the employees/workers (male and female) of garment factories regarding fire or other accidents. A Standing Committee on Safety Measures of BGMEA is following-up all the activities regarding Fire Safety in RMG Units.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Although safe and secure working condition is the fundamental right of the workers, due to lack of the enforcement mechanisms and unwillingness of some people these rights are remain out of reality. Garment manufacturers continuing to build garments factories without proper infrastructure and facilities cannot be justified.

Deterrent punishment for those who locked the gates after such accidents and accountability of the owner should be ensured. Roles and regulations regarding workers safety should be enforced at any cost. Otherwise in the near future because of these types of gross human rights violations country's largest employment generation sector will be turned into death trap. The government and the owners of garments factories should be more concerned about industrial safety related rules and regulations which will minimize their expenses as well as the severe losses due to accidents rather than only about profit maximization.

## **Chapter Six: Rana Plaza Accident**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The Rana Plaza accident is the deadliest industrial accident in the history of Bangladesh as well as in the history of the world. The news of the accident is widely covered by national and international media. This chapter will present a detail description of the accident based on both the primary and secondary data collected in the field work for the study. The primary data were collected through in-death interview of the victims, witnesses, stakeholders, local people and relatives of the victim at several phases. The secondary data were documentary in nature that include national and international printing and electronics media reports, interviews and articles, initial assessment reports by different research and aid organizations and records of government institutions and trade organizations. This study is concerned not only about ‘numbers’ of victims e.g. death, injuries or missing, but also sociological especially political-economic aspects of the accident. As readymade garment (RMG) industry is mostly export-oriented industry, to understand the national and international political economy behind the accident both primary and secondary data were combined with based on necessity.

### **6.2 The Rana Plaza Accident**

On 24 April 2013, Rana Plaza, a nine-story commercial building, collapsed in Savar, a sub-district in the Dhaka division. The search for the dead ended on 13 May with the death toll of 1,133 people, injuring and maiming many others. The rescue operation was carried out for over 17 days. A number of government agencies including Fire Service and Civil Defense authority, the army, police, BGB, official volunteers took part in the rescue activities. A number of private organizations and individuals took part in different activities in the rescue operation. A total of 1,133 workers died in the accident, 2,438 workers came out alive, and about 332 workers are still missing. A number of Savar-based hospitals and clinics even with their limited resources provided support to injured workers at free of cost including the Enam Medical College and Hospital, Upazila Health Complex, new Dip Clinic, Super Clinic and Diagnostic Centre and Afnan Hospital and Diagnostic Centre, etc. A number of private sector organizations including hospitals, labour organization, banks and insurance companies, and multinational companies have undertaken a number of support measures for the injured workers.

After the Rana Plaza accident a number of local and international organizations made their pledges and commitments with regard to compensation, treatment and rehabilitation. Both the government and private including national and international NGOs took several initiatives for rehabilitation of the victims of the accident which are inadequate compare to reality. In the initial phase, a lot of commitments made by government, BGMEA, different organizations, and international buyers who involved in Rana Plaza to compensate the victims. Although initially they gave some compensation but now a large number of the victims and their families yet to receive proper compensation six month after the accident although they were entitled to get a number of compensation and benefits.

### ***6.2.1 Pre-accident Phase***

#### **The Rana Plaza**

The Rana Plaza was a nine-storey building owned by Awami League youth wing Jubo League's Savar town unit senior joint convener Md Sohel Rana (30). The first eight floors were completed and 9<sup>th</sup> floor was under-construction. The construction of the building started in 2006 and fully opened in 2010. The building was 1,000 square feet in length and 250 square feet in breadth. Local people said during the field work, 10 years ago Rana first set up Rana Oil Mill in a tin-shed structure on a small piece of land his father had given him. Then he moved to grab the large pond behind it belonging to someone else. All this was done to build Rana Plaza.

The building never had any approval from Rajuk while supervision during its intermittent construction to raise more and more floors was virtually absent. Savar municipality approved a layout plan of 5 storey building, but extra four floors constructed above it illegally. The vertical expansion of the structure on a floor space of 24,416 square feet (around 56 decimal of land) had taken place in several phases over the last five years. The pillars of the illegal structure contained only nine thin iron rods each. And its floors were constructed in phases. Poor construction materials and thin road used in the building. Filled-up pond made weak foundation area. The building had two entrances. The back one was solely used by hundreds of workers of five garment factories on the upper floors while people coming to markets on the ground and first floor used the front access on the Dhaka-Aricha highway.

## Sohel Rana: Symbol of Bad Politics and Mass Corruption

Sohel Rana, 30, is the owner of Rana Plaza. Rana, who studied up to eighth grade at a high school in Savar, originally came from Singair, Manikganj. His father Mohammad Khalek worked at a small traditional mustard oil mill in Namabazar area of Savar. With the land prices soaring 10 years ago, Khalek became a land broker and at some point brokered a deal to get a small plot on the site of Rana Plaza.

Having dropped from high school, Rana became a political activist and a cadre of the ruling Awami League under direct patronage of its top local leaders. "Sohel Rana is known as an Awami League muscleman in the area and he maintains gangs of youths," said a local businessman. Savar area is known for drug trade and various sorts of illegal activities controlled by several gangs. Extortion, drug trade and illegal land brokering are some of the activities of these gangs. Other local sources also said Rana nurtures gangs of youths in Savar area and organises anti-opposition processions. He is mainly used by local lawmaker Murad Jong in retaining domination in the commercial areas of Savar.

Rana has risen to the top of Savar's underworld in the last four years under the direct patronage of local MP Murad Jong. A dropout at class-VIII and born to a very poor family, Rana emerged as one of the richest men in Savar in a decade or so. His power and money drew the attention of the local politicians and law enforcers. As a reward for his loyalty to Murad Jong and Fakhru Alam Samir, president of Dhaka district Chhatra League, Rana was made general secretary of its Savar municipality unit in 1998. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told parliament that she had seen the list of Savar Jubo League office bearers and Sohela Rana was not on the list.

Watched over by local political leaders, Rana conducted Phensedyl transactions in Savar, an important point for drugs in transit to Dhaka, locals said. He spent quite a lot of money buying property in different places in Savar. Despite his direct involvement in Awami League politics, he enjoyed immunity from prosecution during the last BNP-Jamaat rule, as he also had close contact with some BNP leaders and senior police officers.

Rana amassed wealth in the 10 years. He has another four-storey market in Savar and a house nearby. He owns two brick kilns in Dhamrai and recently he grabbed several acres of land in the area. The Savar Model Police Station said he used to run his smuggling business from the basement of Rana Plaza, where he had an office. But the police never dared to take action against him as he was sheltered by Murad Jong. Murad Jong, however, denied protecting Rana when he spoke to a national newspaper. He said, *"I just know him as the owner of Rana Plaza and as a supporter of Awami League. I have no direct involvement with him as regards my family, social, business and even political affairs."* He also said, *"I will give up politics if anyone can prove that I had deep involvement with him."* About Rana's immunity from prosecution, Murad said he had occasionally heard about his drug trafficking but no one had filed any complaints against him with the police.

Rana not only defied laws of the land in constructing the nine-storey building but also used his political muscle to grab most of the 56 decimals of prime land on which it was built. Sources in Savar said that 10 years ago, he first set up Rana Oil Mill in a tin-shed structure on a small piece of land his father had given him. Then he moved to grab the large pond behind it belonging to someone else. All this was done to build Rana Plaza. *"Over 60 percent of Rana Plaza was built on a portion of the pond he grabbed, and later negotiated a deal with its owner who was terrified. The pond was then filled up to complete building Rana Plaza,"* said a local businessman.

Land helped create Mr. Rana's power. His father had been a poor peasant who sold his plot in a village and bought a small parcel in Savar. As prices began to rise, the father sold a portion of that land and used his profits to start a small factory making mustard oil. He also became involved in politics with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, then in power, and slowly grew richer. By 2000, land prices were rising, and Mr. Rana was helping his father. They could see other hurriedly constructed buildings rising in Savar, and they decided to build Rana Plaza- except they did not have clear title to all the land.

Rabindranath Sarkar, who had bought land in partnership with Mr. Rana's father, said the family sent thugs to seize part of his share of the land and then retaliated when he filed a complaint with the local police. Sarkar said, *"Rana chased me through Savar with weapons. The police wouldn't even dare to protect me. The police were always scared of them."* Another adjacent family said Mr. Rana sent representatives to try to persuade them to sell a plot, including a small pond, beside Mr. Rana's land. By 2005, a year before construction started on Rana Plaza, the family said Mr. Rana simply falsified a land deed to take possession of the pond.

Police and local sources said he defied orders of the mayor and officials on 23 April to keep Rana Plaza closed as it developed cracks. He told the ill-fated garment workers that he had been assured by an engineer that the building was in no danger, and would last a hundred years. The following morning hundreds of garment workers were forced to return to work at around 8:00 am when their first shift started. The building collapsed in less than an hour.

On 24 April morning, Rana was having a meeting at the building with a crowd of his own people, planning for an anti-hartal procession. On April 23, a problem arose. Workers on the third floor were stitching clothing when they were startled by a noise that sounded like an explosion. Cracks had appeared in the building. Workers rushed outside in terror. By late morning, Mr. Rana's representatives had brought in Abdur Razzaque Khan, an engineer. Taken to the third floor, Mr. Khan examined three support pillars, and became horrified at the cracks he found. *"I became scared," Mr. Khan said. "It was not safe to stay inside this building."*

He rushed downstairs and told one of Mr. Rana's administrators that the building needed to be closed immediately. But Mr. Rana was apparently not impressed; he was holding court with about a dozen local journalists. According to Shamim Hossain (local newspaper reporter), Rana said *"this is not a crack. The plaster on the wall is broken, nothing more. It is not a problem."* On 23 April night, in an interview with private channel Ekattortv, Rana claimed that the building was not risky. An engineer was called in and he checked it. Asked if the engineer named Razzak was a fake one, he said Razzak was a site engineer. He had hit the crack in the building with a bamboo stick and assured that it was just broken plaster on the wall. The next morning, Rana Plaza collapsed. Mr. Rana managed to escape from his basement office, but was eventually discovered hiding near the Indian border. He was flown by helicopter to Dhaka and thrust before the news media, looking dazed and disheveled.

The National Board of Revenue plans to investigate the income tax irregularities of Rana. Officials said the NBR has found irregularities in Rana's income tax records. Rana accumulated large sums of money through legal and illegal means but he paid Tk 67,000 in tax last year, a tax official said. Rana's mother Morzina Begum, who died of a heart attack after the Rana Plaza collapse, paid around Tk 78,000, which is more than what her son paid, the official said. Taxmen started working on the income tax files of Rana and his family members. The NBR will form a panel soon to probe tax-related allegations.

Rana's tax file shows that he owns a 40 percent share of Rana Plaza while his father Abdul Khaleque owns the remaining 60 percent. Rana has another six-storey building, Rana Tower, in Savar. He is also the owner of other properties, including Rana Oil Mills. In the income tax return for fiscal 2012-13, Rana showed his income to be Tk 1.64 crore. However, most of the people in Savar remained unconvinced that Mr. Rana will be punished, or that his style of business will be cleaned up. For example, Mr Sarkar the man whose land was taken said "Rana is not the only one. Now, we have so many Ranas."

*Source: Based on various Newspaper reports and collected data in the field work.*

## What was inside the Building

The Rana Plaza, at Savar Bus-station on the Dhaka-Aricha highway, was a commercial building. It contained five garment factories, a bank, apartments, and several other shops. From third to eighth floor contained five factories, ninth floor was under construction, in ground floor hundreds shops and the second floor contained a branch of Brac bank, electronic shops, citycell customer care and office of different organizations.

## Factory in the Rana Plaza

The Rana Plaza housed five garment factories from the third to the eighth floors, several shops, and a bank. During the tragic incident, all the five factories — Ether Tex, New Wave Bottoms, New Wave Style, Phantom Apparels and Phantom Tac— were open. All are members of BGMEA.

Table 6.1 *Factories at the Rana Plaza*

New Wave Style Ltd.	7 <sup>th</sup> & 8 <sup>th</sup> Floor
New Wave Bottom Ltd.	3 <sup>rd</sup> Floor
Phantom Apparels Ltd.	5 <sup>th</sup> Floor
Phantom Tac Ltd.	4 <sup>th</sup> Floor
Ether Tex Ltd.	6 <sup>th</sup> Floor

*Source: Based on News Papers*

The factories manufactured apparel items for many leading global brands, including Benetton, Bonmarché, Cato Fashions, the Children's Place, El Corte Inglés, Joe Fresh, Mango, Matalan, Primark, and Walmart.

*Ether Tex Ltd*, which had its factory on the fifth floor of the building, shows in its website that it produces clothes for Wal-mart and Atlantic Sportswear of Canada, C&A and Kik of Germany, and Libra of the Netherlands, to name a few.

According to the website of *New Wave* — whose units New Wave Bottoms and New Wave Style were operating on the second, sixth and seventh floors respectively — lists as its buyers



UK's Matalan and Bon Marche, Italy's Benetton, Spain's Mango, and Ireland's Primark, among others (Rahman and Chowdhury 2013).

*Phantom-Tac*, which was on the fourth floor, is a 50-50 joint venture with Spain's Textile Audit Company SL, according to its website. However, its buyers were not listed on the site. Its sister concern, Phantom Apparels Ltd, too, was sited at the complex, on the third floor. The list of its buyers also could not be found.

### **6.2.2 Accident Phase**

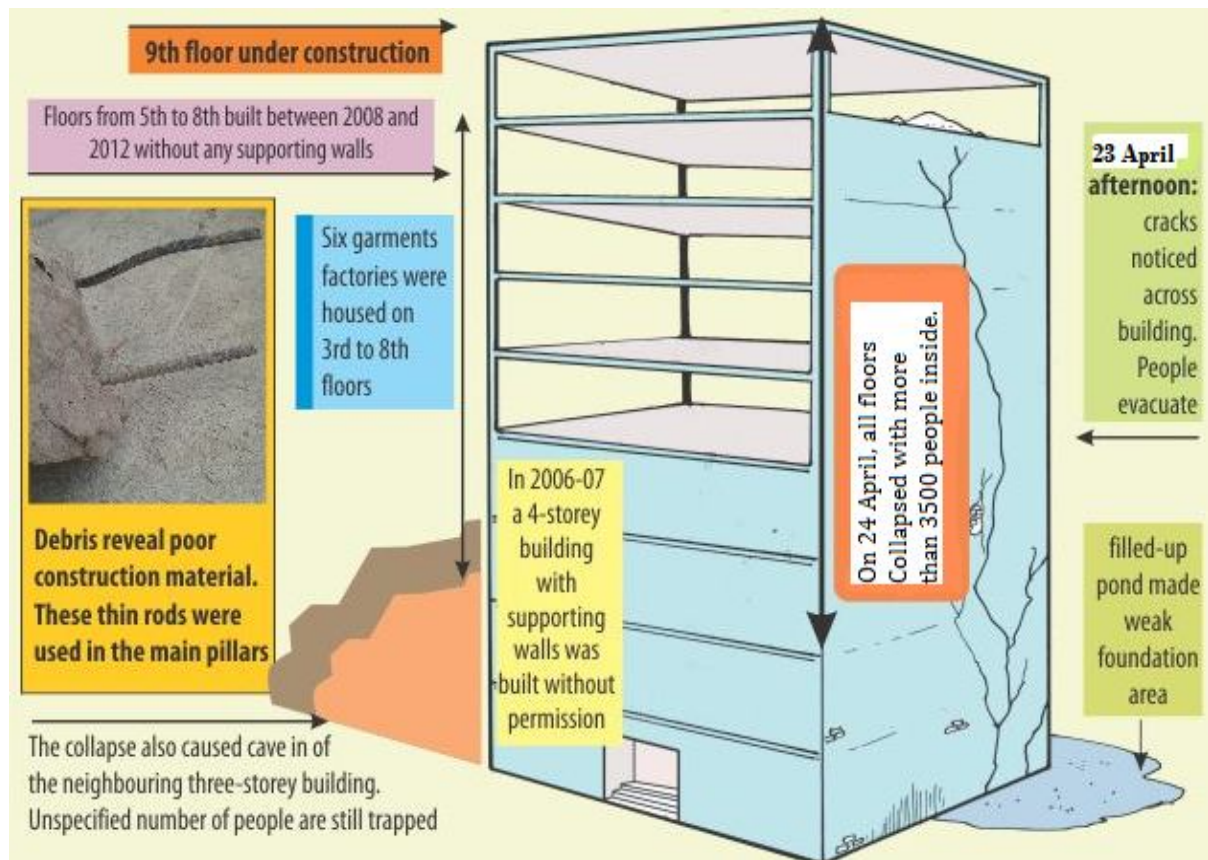
#### **Cracks in the Building**

On April 23, the day before the accident, a problem arose. Workers on the third floor were stitching clothing when they were startled by a noise that sounded like an explosion. Cracks had appeared in the building. Workers rushed outside in terror and some even got injured in the process, said a number of garment workers and locals. The industrial police visited the building that day and asked them not to open the building.

Director of Industrial Police-1 said in media after the collapse, *"We had asked them [the building authorities] not to open the building but suspend operations of the factories after the cracks were noticed yesterday, but they ignored us."* (Ahmed 2013). According to media report, by late morning, Mr. Rana's representatives had brought in Abdur Razzaque Khan, a local engineer. Taken to the third floor, Mr. Khan examined three support pillars, and "falsely" certified that the building would sustain another 100 years. A worker rescued from the accident said, *"Management at the five factories assured us that the small cracks did not pose a real threat as an engineer gave a safety report."*

After that, Rana was holding court with about a dozen local journalists. According to Shamim Hossain (local newspaper reporter), Rana said *"this is not a crack. The plaster on the wall is broken, nothing more. It is not a problem."* On 23 April night, in an interview with private channel Ekattortv, Rana claimed that the building was not risky. He had hit the crack in the building with a bamboo stick and assured that it was just broken plaster on the wall.

Figure 6.1 Graphical Image of the Rana Plaza



Source: Compiled from Collected data.

The owners of the garments closed their factories around 23 April noon but asked the workers to show up for work the next day. The shops and the bank on the lower floors immediately closed after cracks were discovered in the building. Eleven officers and employees of Brac Bank's Savar branch emerged as the lucky few after its management decided to suspend all operations of the branch over safety concerns. The management suspended the activities of the branch, located on the second floor of Rana Plaza, after it was informed about cracks in the pillars of the building. "When the branch manager reported to us that cracks in the pillars seemed too risky, we did not delay. We suspended the operations of the branch immediately," said Zeeshan Kingshuk Huq, head of communication and service quality, Brac Bank.

### **Workers forced to join work**

Still shaken by the scare they got the day before, the workers turned up for work but many were hesitant about getting into their factories. Mizan, an operator of Phantom Apparels Ltd, which was on the fourth floor of the building was saying during the interview “*Security guards and other employees of the factory told us that some engineers had certified that the building was safe.*” Although workers knew about the cracks in the building, they came next day only because it was to end the month and to get salary. They were concern about any trouble with the salary.

Survivor Rehena, while explaining why she felt the need to go on that day, said that the month was about to end and she did not want any trouble regarding her wages. “*The authorities deduct salaries for three days if we don’t work a single day,*” She told researcher during field work. Many other survivors stated that they didn’t come to work on that day, rather they only went to see what happened to the building. As Aklima, a mechine operator, shared with researcher “*Generally I used to go factory at morning with tiffin box (lunch). But on the day of collapse I went at work without any tiffin as I thought that factory will not running because of the cracks.*”

In a media briefing, BGMEA President said that after cracks were detected on the building, the association asked the owners of the five factories to discontinue operations until further examination by qualified engineers. Factory owners opened their factories relying on assurance by the building owner, who said that engineers had checked and certified that the building was okay.

Shahadat Hossain, brother of a garments worker in one of the factories in the building and a shop-owner near Rana Plaza, said, “*The factory management threatened the workers that their month’s salary would not be paid if they did not show up at work.*” Even many workers said that they were threaten by owner that if they didn’t join the work, they will not paid salary and cut from the job.

### **Collapse the Building**

On 24 April, top officials of the garment factories held meetings in the morning and ignoring the warning, the authorities, including the building owner Sohel Rana, decided to keep the

building open for business. Workers of the garment factories at Rana Plaza were forced to join their workplaces following a false assurance on the building's safety from a local engineer

It was 8:45am, a bright glorious morning. The nine-storey Rana Plaza in Savar was humming with life. Sewing machines whirred; irons steamed. Nobody was much bothered about the cracks that had developed in the building the day before. In fact, more than 3,000 people working there had forgotten it in the flurry of activity. Within seconds, the nine-storey building was reduced to rubble with dusts rising up slowly. A part of the plaza tipped onto another three-storey building that also collapsed trapping at least 17 people inside.

Babu Bepari, a fruit-seller near Rana Plaza, said, *"I saw the building collapse with a big bang at about 8:30 in the morning."* His brother worked for Phantom Garments in the building. Amena Khatun, a sewing machine helper, was working on her machine next to a pillar on the third floor. Suddenly, she felt that the floor started tipping, as if it had come alive. The first thing that came to her mind was the cracks in the building. Amena jumped up. As she was running down the stairs, she heard a thunderous sound. She saw the pillars and beams coming down. Along with many others, she got trapped inside the building. Shahina Begum was gazing out of the window at her garment factory opposite Rana Plaza. Suddenly, she heard a loud noise. She could not believe her eyes, as she saw the plaza crumbling down like a deck of cards.

Table 6.2 *Victims of the Rana Plaza Accident*

	<b>No. of People</b>
Dead Worker	1133
Rescued Alive	2438
Dead Rescuer	2
Unidentified Body	321
Identified Body	842
Missing	332
Buried in Jurien	291

*Source: Compiled from newspaper.*

At the beginning, survivors cursed the owner of the building and the engineers “*who took bribes and forced us into the building to kill us*”. The workers, their relatives and locals said the casualty figures would not have been so high had the authorities kept the building closed. Nazrul Islam, owner of a mobile phone shop in a nearby the building, said, “*It was like killing people by inviting them.*” The building owner Sohel Rana was inside the building when it collapsed. Sohel Rana and some others were in a meeting at his basement office around 8:45am, although Sohel Rana was rescued at around noon and taken to a hospital for treatment.

### **Survivors’ Experience**

During the field work survivors shared their horrible experience of the accident. Among them rescued on that some rescued after one day even some rescued after four days. Some are seriously injured (spinal code injury), some lost their hand, leg and eyes. In addition to physical injuries, survivors psychologically traumatized and experienced post disaster disorder. Laboni (22), lost her left hand, rescued after 36 hours from the collapse of building. Minutes before the disaster struck, her father had asked her over the cell phone to leave the building. But she did not get time for that. Recollecting the incident, Laboni said: “*It was around 8:40am and I was just thinking of running out of the factory as my father told me. I had earlier told him about the cracks in the building.*” Soon afterwards she felt the building shaking, as if it had been hit by a tremor. According to her, the building took a few seconds to come crashing down.

When the building was collapsing, she instantly sat down and laid her head on the floor and folded her legs in a crawling position. It was dark and dust was all around. “*I realized that a pillar had fallen on my left arm. Blood was coming out of my head, eyes and nose,*” she said. For 36 hours, she was trapped on the fifth floor of Rana Plaza until she was pulled out. Squeezed by concrete jumble and buried under the rubble, she could not move her body even an inch.

Two of her colleagues were also trapped on the same floor. One of them, Dipa Patra, died shortly after the collapse as a big piece of concrete fell on her chest. But Laboni heard the other friend, Sabiha, asking in a feeble voice: “*Are you alive, Laboni?* She replied in the positive, she said, adding: “*Sabiha and I used to ask the same question to each other until we were pulled out.*”

At the time of the collapse, Sofura Begum, joined the garment factory three years ago, was working at Phantom Apparel on the third floor. *“I was afraid to go to the factory [on the day of accident] as cracks had developed in the building the day before. But the factory owner had threatened that the workers would not get their arrears if they remained absent”,* Sofura said. All of a sudden the rooftop caved in, carrying her along to the second floor where she remained sandwiched for the next 27 hours in rubble. It was not pain but fear that was killing her during the time she was stuck in the mangled wreckage.

Trapped under a sewing machine and pressed against a concrete wall on the other side, she could only move her eyelids in futile attempts to see in the dark. At one point she felt very thirsty but there was no water. Sofura said, *“One worker was then kind enough to give me saliva. I also heard of people urinating and some others drinking that thing.”*

Mahmudul Hasan, a quality inspector of Ethar Tex Ltd, was on the fifth floor. During the accident he suddenly felt a jolt. Within a moment, he noticed his colleagues running back and forth, screaming. It took Mahmudul a moment or two to realize that something was going to happen. As soon as he along with others moved 20 feet towards the staircases, the building began collapsing, giving him the feeling of a lift going down at speed.

As described his experience during field work, *“Darkness engulfed the entire place with thick clouds of dust. I heard screams around me. My heart started pounding; I lay down near a pillar, thinking that perhaps I was going to die. A lot of things and memories came across my mind. I was thinking about my wife and children.”* The roof caved, leaving a space of three feet above him. After sometime, a ray of hope emerged when he saw a faint light. It was a mobile phone light of one of his colleagues. Many of his colleagues tried to make phone calls but to no avail, due to poor network coverage. He found a few more colleagues and together they pondered how they could find a way out of the horror.

Rehana (25), sewing operator, was working on the third floor when the building crumbled like a pack of cards on 24 April morning. As she described her experience of the day *“It was around 8:20am. I just started sewing. Power went off and the building collapsed in no time. My right hand was trapped.”* However, as the day wore on, she thought her heart would stop for want of oxygen. There was no air. With time she grew hungrier and thirstier still. *“I could not take it anymore. So at one stage I drank my urine,”* she said.

Time was running out for Rehana. She was hungry and thirsty and drained. Two days had passed since she was trapped inside Rana Plaza. Nobody came. So when someone did come after tow, about 45 hours after the collapse, she wondered: *“Am I still alive?”* She alleged it was their immediate bosses who forced them to work in the risky building and said that she had even been forced to work till late night every day without any weekly holiday over the past one month.

Shapla (23) and her husband, were both machine operators on the second floor of the nine-storey Rana Plaza. They were separated when the building started to collapse. *“I ran near the stairs to get out of the building, and a pillar fell on me,”* she said. Her left hand was crushed and pinned under the pillar as she lay there bleeding with a big fracture in her skull.

Pakhi Begum (25), a helper on the fifth floor, was pinned down, while conscious the whole time, by a pillar which crushed both her legs. She described as *“Lying there amid blood in the pitch dark, I could only think about my two daughters because I saw death so closely. Two others were lying dead beside me.”*

Merina (19) was trapped under the rubble of Rana Plaza for 66 hours during which she had lost all hope of rescue. All the time, she lived in a cycle of fear, hope and despair, and when that seemed an eternity, she waited for death. Merina said they had also been told that the building owner had the building checked by engineers and that nothing was found alarming during the inspection. The group of nine garment workers found food items in tiffin boxes and that sustained them for some time in confinement.

On the first day, they got water in a bottle, the second day they shared tiny bits of pickle and the third day they had some rice. Some of the food had already rotted but *“we had no choice”*. When water ran out, some of them could not bear thirst and drank urine, Merina said. One of the fellow workers lost her mind and at one point started biting Merina, saying, *“Give me water; get me out of here; take me to my son.”*

Many times, they thought rescuers were nearby, hearing the drone of the drilling machine. The next moment everything went quiet, convincing them that death was what awaited them. With hopes of survival fading away, they at last wrote their names and addresses on pieces of paper and then stuffed those into their clothes so that their families could identify them even

if their bodies decomposed. As Merina says *“We even promised each other to relay our last words to our families if one of us could make it out alive.”*

Lipi and his husband Biplob joined New Wave Bottoms Ltd in Rana Plaza just a month ago. She had been on the sixth floor and Biplob on the third floor when the nine-story building. Lipi described the day-*“we were already scared of the cracks [in the building]. Minutes before the collapse at 8:45am, electricity went off and the building came crashing down as the power generator turned on with a tremble. I hid under a table on which the roof fell, and there was nothing but the darkness of a grave”*. With mobile phone’s light, Lipi saw 12 persons around her, two of them dead. *“We are chanting the name of Allah. Rescuers reached us five hours later”*, she stated. Lipi received only some scratches but passed out at the sight of a mountain of concrete jungles what used to be her workplace hours ago.

### ***6.2.3 Post-Accident Phase***

#### **Rescue Operations**

After the collapse of the Rana Plaza the rescue operation was carried out for over 17 days. A number of government agencies including Fire Service and Civil Defense authority, the army, police, BGB, official volunteers took part in the rescue activities. A number of private organizations and individuals took part in different activities in the rescue operation. The 9th Division of the Army located in Savar was in overall charge of the rescue operation. A number of units of the army were involved in the operation which include engineers, medical and infantry.

The rescue operation had been carried out with limited available equipments including excavator, dodger, loader (chain), loader (wheel), 160 ton crane, locator, excavator hammer, rod cutter, glass cutter, stone cutter, etc. Because of limited equipments, rescue operation had been slowed down. There was allegation about lack of coordination at the initial phase of rescue operation between different authorities. Similarly, participation of the private organisation and individuals, although appreciated, without having specialized training their involvement in the operation was risky. Support from all corners of the society for the rescued workers as well as for the rescue teams are well appreciated. Among the many private initiatives for example, Manusher Jonno Foundation and CDD provided cash and medicines to 288 survivors during 24-30 April, 2013. Teachers, students, alumni and others



of the Jahangirnagar University provided support through donating blood, volunteering rescue operation and providing ambulance services.

Initially volunteers, with bare hands, engaged themselves in all-out efforts to rescue the survivors or recover the dead. The civilian volunteers and local residents, putting their lives at risk, continued the rescue efforts along with a small number of firefighters and military personnel since the collapse. The situation was narrated like that...

*Rana Plaza was then a mountain of jumbled concrete debris. Concrete pillars of every shape dangle precariously, ready to snap and crash down. Close to the top just under a bundle of cloth lies the half-buried body of a woman. A huge pillar lies across her. Her blood-spattered hair has grown stiff. Nobody takes much notice of her.*

*Rescuers clamber around, peeking into hundreds of crevices of the heap of debris that was once a nine-storey building. The dead can wait for now. More important are those who are trapped alive. Nobody can actually say how many are trapped but it would not be less than 3000. Time is running out and the extreme heat is taking a toll on the survivors buried under the collapsed building (Habib and Fazlur 2013).*

But the rescue operation has proved to be painstakingly difficult. The pillars and ceilings have collapsed at so many angles and in such precarious ways that any wrong move could cause a fresh tragedy. The army has brought in huge cranes to pull the concrete blocks apart. But until late afternoon, these could not be used for fear of further disaster. “*We are going to bore holes through the roof and go inside. We have to be extremely careful.*” said Brigadier General Mohammad Siddiqui Alam Sikder, who was supervising the rescue operation.

Fire brigade men have assembled too. The body of a six-year-old boy was the first they pulled out from beneath the rubble. A fireman said, “*We cannot go in for fear of further collapse.*”

Oxygen cylinders have been taken to the site to supply fresh air into the holes and crevices. Cutters and machines to bore holes have been assembled too. Generators have been installed to supply electricity at night. But the local rescuers and families of the victims are trying to do the job on their own. They are frenziedly burrowing into the rubble with bare hands and whatever tools they can get hold of. Volunteers have lined up to pass the rubble away. And they are getting some successes too.

However, lack of an adequate number of basic equipment like torches, hammers and metal cutters made their attempts harder at every step. They needed oxygen cylinders with masks, torches, protective eyeglasses, bullhorns, rubber gloves and air-fresheners to carry out the operation.

Confusion, mess, rush of crowds and absence of central coordination were what characterized the entire site of the disaster and the rescue efforts. Red Crescent, different voluntary and medical organizations and private individuals provided drinking water, dry food, clothes and whatever electric equipment was available to the help of the rescuers and the trapped.

Md Yunus, a local electrician who dared to enter the narrow space between the ceilings in search for survivors and dead bodies, said, *“There are still innumerable bodies under the debris.”*

Brig Gen Mohammad Siddiqui Alam Sikder, who was supervising the rescue operation, said, *“Army men are making holes on collapsed ceilings and sending voluntary rescuers inside, as they know the building’s positions well.”*

The deputy general manager of Ether Garments that was on the sixth floor was rescued alive. *“It was pitch dark all around and I have seen many people crawling around in the light of their mobile phones,”* he said. Ether DGM Kamruzzaman said he and many of his colleagues survived because the ceiling crashed on furniture and empty space.

Roksana Akhter, another survivor, was working on the sixth floor. She survived because the ceiling crashed on the sewing machine tables and the empty space around it. She says *“There were at least a dozen others with me. One of them died. But the rest were alive.”*

It was a group of civilian rescuers who found Rikta (25) around 5:30am under the rubble on the third floor of the nine-storey building. Her right hand was trapped under a sewing machine. The rescuers tried all means they could think of to pull her out. When all attempts failed, they had to improvise. They brought a hand saw, tied both her legs and hands, held her tightly so that she could not move and then cut off her hand from above the elbow. *“I somehow managed to bear the pain when they were cutting my flesh. But when it reached my bone ... I don’t know how to describe the pain,”* she told researcher at Enam Medical College Hospital in Savar. She then fainted.

Anisur Rahman Raihan, one of the 24 rescued, said those trapped in the debris had severe difficulties breathing inside. *“We could hear people working outside, but none heard us screaming.”* According to firemen, the lack of oxygen was the main threat to the lives of those trapped alive. Rescue workers are making frantic efforts to save more lives. But they are facing difficulties in speeding up the operation due to the precarious situation the survivors are in. Shortage of equipment is also slowing down their efforts.

Babul Mia, a day labourer, joined the rescue efforts around 6:00pm on 24 April and was seen working side by side with the professional rescuers evening without any safety gear on. He said, *“I pulled out 23 trapped workers and 21 bodies from the rubble”*.

It was around 9:00pm on April 25 when rescuers spotted the two worker, Sabiha and Laboni. Having seen Laboni’s left hand pinned under a pillar, they first considered removing the pillar by cutting it. But they changed their mind, fearing that doing so would mean further collapse and if that happened, Laboni and Sabiha would die. Then the rescuers decided to cut off Laboni’s left hand to save her lives. Laboni was given some anesthesia. Even so she had lost her senses when the rescuers finished cutting her hand off.

Altaf Hossain (40), a sewing operator in New Wave Style, had died trapped inside the collapsed building at morning of the day of accident. His body was crushed under a huge beam and left hand under a collapsed wall. With his free hand Altaf was seen appealing to rescuers and journalist. In his feeble voice he said, *“Please save me. I have two children and a wife. I must live.”* A firefighter, who went to rescue Altaf, however, could not go for any drastic measure fearing further collapsed. Altaf’s relentless appeal came to a final halt 25 April around 6:00am.

Pakhi Begum shouted for help as she saw light coming through a hole morning after one day. Rescuers tried, but failed to free her legs. She pleaded them to cut her legs off. *“I told them I’d rather live as a beggar to support my daughters than die there.”* The rescuers complied with her request using machetes.

### ***Rescue Operation: People's Mission.***

The rescuers were relentless in their efforts as people trapped inside were alive by what could only be described as a miracle. No safety gear, no training, no proper equipment. But they have brave hearts to help the workers trapped in a mangled mess of concrete and rods. As the Rana Plaza tragedy unfolded, many ordinary people joined the rescue effort. A large number of students, street vendors, garment workers and religious leaders joined hands with fire fighters, army and police.

In some cases, the unequipped civilians were seen leading the desperate operation putting their lives at risk. They entered the building by breaking the walls, and pulled out people — dead or alive, while law enforcers were just busy controlling the crowd. One of the brave men managed to rescue a pregnant woman alive. Another rescuer, without any medical knowledge, untangled a garment worker from the debris by cutting her leg.

**Shah Alama** local electrician, Shah Alam joined the rescue operation on 24 April morning. He said he pulled out 23 bodies and rescued 12 people alive. He rescued several people who had somehow found themselves tied with electric cables. There was no cutter, so he cut the cables with his teeth. "There was no light, no equipment. But we did not stop for a second," he stated.

**Abu Barkar Hazra** a 23-year-old BBA student of Pirojpur Government College, Abu Bakar Hazra joined the rescue effort on 25 April morning. "I could not hold myself back when I saw the footage on TV. So I decided to come to Dhaka to join the rescue operation as I have experience of working with a rescue team in Bagerhat during the Cyclone Sidr [in 2007]," he said. He entered the crumbled building through a small hole where no one, even the trained fire fighters, dared to go. "A female garment worker was bleeding inside. I was continuously calling for a doctor who can stop the bleeding, but no one dared to go inside," Abu Bakar said, adding that he then pulled out the worker himself from a pool of blood.

**Salman** a student of Natun Bazar JamiaMadania Madrasa at Baridhara in the capital went to Savar on 24 April evening along with his classmate Nazrul Islam. "Actually I came here to donate blood, but they did not take my blood due to insufficient blood transmission equipment," Salman said, "Having failed to donate blood, I decided to join the rescue operation to save as many lives as possible." Salman told the other rescuers as he entered the building on hearing someone, "Allah is great...no worries. I'm going down, please answer back when I call for help. I shall bring him out Inshallah,"

*Source: The Daily Star, April 27, 2013.*

### **Exhausted Relatives**

Hundreds of relatives and neighbours were waiting in the hope that they will get some news about their loved ones. As bodies are pulled out and carried to a nearby school ground, they rush for identification. Photos of dozens of victims are pasted on the boundary walls of the school.

But the relatives have to go from one place to another in desperate search of their loved ones due to the absence of a central coordination team that will keep the records of the victims. The air of Savar Adharchandra High School was heavy with the stench of corpses and the despair of family members searching for their loved ones from the row of decomposing bodies.

As an ambulance enters the school ground, everyone rushes towards it with photographs in their hands. Some make queries in hushed tones while others scream, anticipating the worst. The anxious relatives queue up and one by one they inch towards the corpses. Some pray, some cry, while some get too traumatized to betray any emotions.

Meanwhile, the surroundings of Rana Plaza and neighboring hospitals teem with helpless relatives. They run from one hospital to another, clutching the latest photographs of the missing. The list hung outside each hospital with the names of the injured can only placate some. The majority, disappointed, are forced to begin their search all over again. In the absence of a central coordinating committee, the relatives have no choice but to drift around in panic.

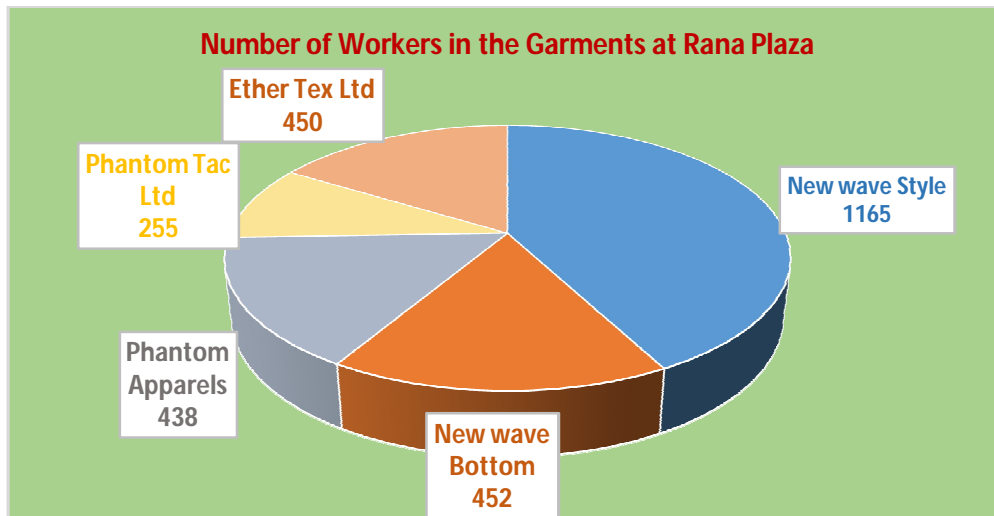
## **6.3 Aftermath of the Accident**

### ***6.3.1 Immediate Impact***

#### **Victims in the Incident**

As mentioned earlier that five garment factories housed in the Rana Plaza – New Wave Style Ltd., New Wave Bottom Ltd., Phantom Apparels Ltd., Phantom Tac Ltd. and Ether Tex Ltd. According to the BGMEA, about 2,760 workers had been working in these factories; this number seems to be low compared to the information available from different official sources. A total of 1,133 workers died in the incident, 2,438 workers came out alive, and about 332 workers are still missing. This makes a total of 3,903 workers in five factories. So there is no exact information about the workers.

Figure 6.2 Number of Workers Worked in the Garments of the Rana Plaza

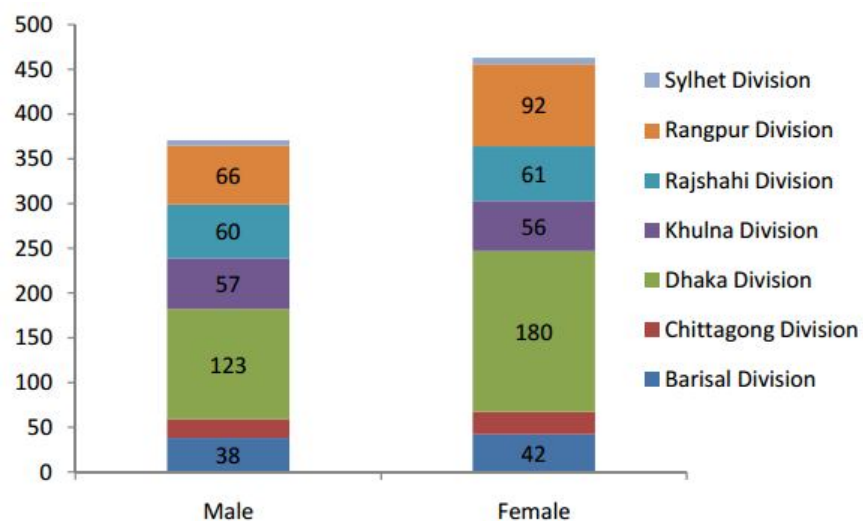


Source: BGMEA, 2013

### Dead Workers

The total number of death toll stands at 1,132 including the 17 who died while undergoing treatment at hospital. From the field data collection and different document it is observed that most of the workers were from Dhaka division followed by Rangpur, Rajshahi and Khulna divisions. A monitoring report prepared by Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) presents information about 834 dead workers.

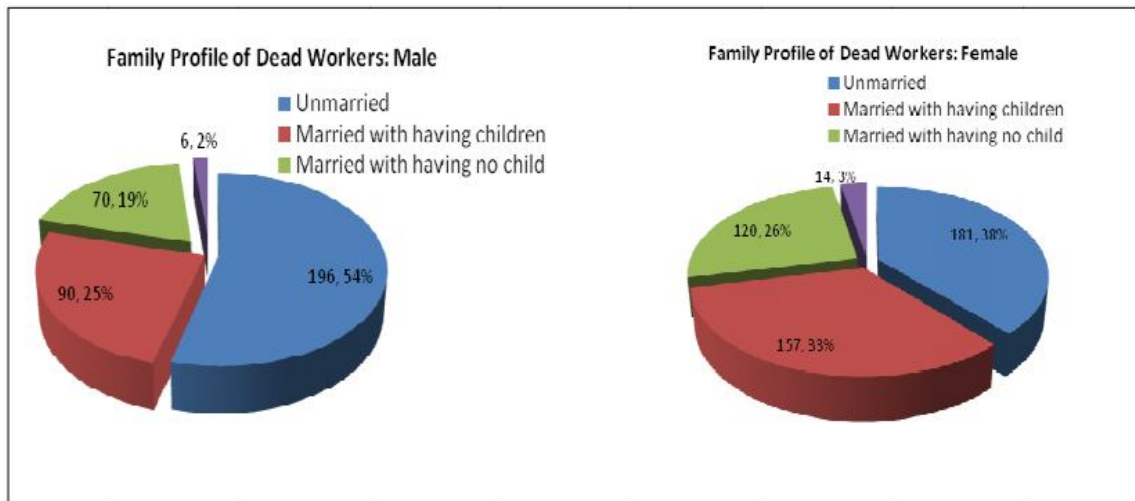
Figure 6.3 Division-wise Distribution of the 834 Dead Workers



Source: CPD, 2013.

There were a large number of dead workers who were married and a significant number of them had one or more child. Thus the Rana Plaza disaster brought multi-dimensional impact on the livelihood of the poor people of the country.

Figure 6.4 *Nature of Family of the 834 Dead Workers*



Source: CPD, 2013.

### Missing Workers

A large number of workers are missing since the incident of Rana Plaza. According to the official estimates, a total of 332 workers have not been identified. Relatives of the missing workers have authenticated documents such as appointment letter, ID cards, payslip, etc. in support of their identification. Among the missing workers, 233 were female, while another 99 workers are male.

For Hazera Khatun, the news of the Rana Plaza collapse in Savar meant making urgent arrangements to go there, from her home in Kotchadpur village in Jhenidah. Hazera's daughter Maya Rani worked in the building. With no news of her daughter, Hazera endured the agonising wait at Adhar Chandra High School. But Hazera had fears not only for her daughter, but also for her two-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter Rouza, who lived with her mother in a slum. "After Rani was abandoned by her husband six months ago, she fled to Dhaka with her daughter and joined the garment factory," said Hazera.

Dukhu Miah, who was looking for his wife Jahanara, who worked in one of the clothing factories housed in Rana Plaza, said, ‘No one told me anything about my wife who is missing. I have lived at Adharchandra High School until two days ago. I have stayed on the road for the past two days,’ he said.

Masuda Begum, who was waiting for her daughter Barna at the collapse site, said, ‘How can I go back without my daughter?’ Like her, many others such as Sagar, Alam and Sagarika were also waiting for their missing relatives.

### Children of the Victims

**Tasnur Islam and Tahseen Islam**, two young siblings, know not that she is gone for good, that her remains lie buried somewhere in that accursed soil. There is a world of innocence, yet to pass into the sadness of experience. And yet sadness is what awaits them, for tragedy has already cast its pale shadow on their lives. Their mother Helena Akhter has gone missing, under all that concrete and rubble which claimed so many hundreds of lives through the Rana Plaza collapse.

For eight days these brothers have played happily on the grounds of Adhar Chandra School, as the very young are wont to do. Having made their way to Savar from Gaibandha with an aunt and uncle, the boys have lingered. They have played. They do not know of the reality. They will, sooner or later. Will they come by the body of the woman who gave birth to them? Surely they would want her remains. But they would not want any unclaimed or unidentified corpse to be passed off as their mother’s.

**Limon (10)** holds out the photo of her missing mother, Nilufa, at Adharchandra High School playground in Savar. Nilufa was at work in Rana Plaza when it collapsed on April 24. “Mom, where are you...I can’t sleep, Mom...” the words left the mouth of 10-year-old Limon as he waits for her mother’s return with a photograph in hands and tears in eyes at Adharchandra High School playground in Savar. With his father Moktar Hossain, Limon has been visiting the school ground every day for the last nine days since the collapse of Rana Plaza where his mother Nilufa worked. Limon repeatedly demands of his father to bring her mother back to him. “Every night Limon asked me why I allowed Nilufa to Rana Plaza, as, in the absence of his mother, he can’t go to sleep. What should I tell Limon, I don’t know,” Moktar wailed.

He said on the fateful day, Limon’s mother, who used to work on the sixth floor of the nine storey building, went to work ignoring his request. “She said if she did not join work, she would not get paid.” Moktar said Nilufa requested him to let her go as she had to buy some medicines for her mother. Two of Moktar’s brothers-in-law, Helal and Solayman, worked as sewing machine operators in the Rana Plaza garment factories. They were wounded in the collapse. Moktar said the two of them refused to enter the building along with other colleagues as cracks appeared there. They were forced to join work, he said. Moktar said, “I, on behalf of the bereaved families, demand hanging of the wild man, Sohel Rana, immediately.” Nine days into the catastrophe, many people still do not know what happened to those missing, nor was there any assurance from the authorities about it. Moktar said, “We have not got any government help yet.”

While everyone was losing hope and searching for words to comfort grieving relatives of the Savar building collapse victims, eight-year-old **Rima Akter (8)** was still optimistic that her father was alive. “Let us search for him at the hospital (Enam Medical College and Hospital) ma,” she said, blocking her



mother's path which leads to Savar Adhar Chandra High School where the bodies are being kept for identification. The class II student of a Savar madrasa believes her father, Mohammad Raju, is either undergoing treatment or trapped inside the rubble. Consoling and asking her mother, Khushi Begum, not to mourn for Raju, she said, "My father did not die...he will come back." But these words could not erase the shade of helplessness etched on her face. Raju, 33, was a quality inspector working on the third floor of the nine-storey Rana Plaza. His family left no stone unturned in their search for him, strolling from one hospital to another, even for several times, and to the school playground since the building collapsed on April 24. "My father used to give me some money or buy me some snacks before leaving for office, even on 24 April (the day of the collapse) he told me that he would return home with many snacks." she said. There were other children like Rima, coming with their family in search of their loved ones, still looking for their missing father or mother.

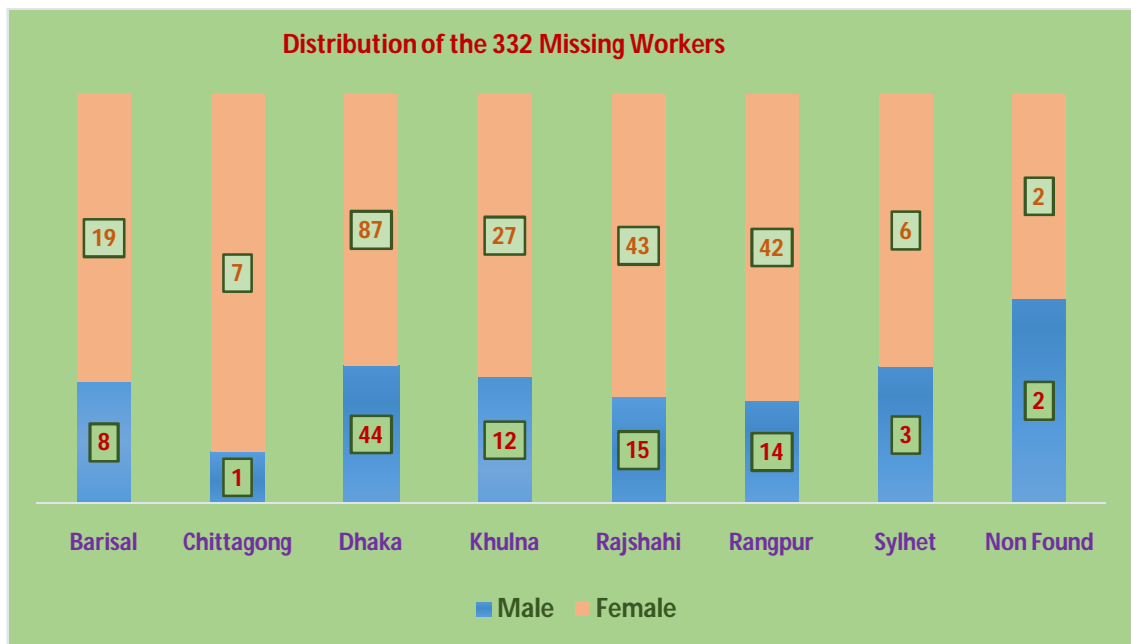
Three sisters, **Akhi Akter (12), Urmi Akter (11), and Eti Akter(7)**, have been frantically searching for their mother, Shahnaz Begum, and maternal uncle, Abdul Malek. On 26 April, they were seen waiting at the school. They rushed towards any vehicle carrying the dead. But hope turned to helplessness as the disfigured bodies were no longer identifiable.

"Their father died four months before Eti was born," said Eti's grandfather, Shaharuddin Bapary. "Shahnaz came to her younger brother Malek in Savar when Eti was one-year-old to bring up the girls. Both Shahnaz and Malek struggled hard for a better life. Their fate started to change as the children were enrolled in schools. "But everything has been shattered, the children became orphans," he said, adding that Eti, always cheerful, was the apple her mother's eye. But now she hardly says anything. She just stares blankly like her two sisters towards an apparently bleak future.

*Source: Based on several reports in The Daily Star.*

According to different newspaper reports, a total of 234 unidentified dead bodies have been buried from which 200 samples were collected for DNA test. Thus part of these missing workers is supposed to be among these 234 unidentified workers even though another 98 workers still remains untraced. Families of these missing workers are in distressed condition.

Media reports show that about 550 people are waiting for the DNA test results. Due to the lack of skilled personnel, and more importantly, lack of Mass Fatality Identification System (MFIS) software, the DNA tests have been delayed. Although a total of 400 samples from family members have been collected for DNA test, still the identification work is not completed. According to the newspaper reports, 80 per cent testing of DNA samples has been completed; but the tested specimen could not be matched with the family members due to lack of necessary software. Without any identification, these families have not been considered 'eligible' for any government support; hence their sufferings will linger.

Figure 6.5 *Distribution of the 332 Missing Workers*

*Source: compiled from Newspaper.*

### Injured Workers

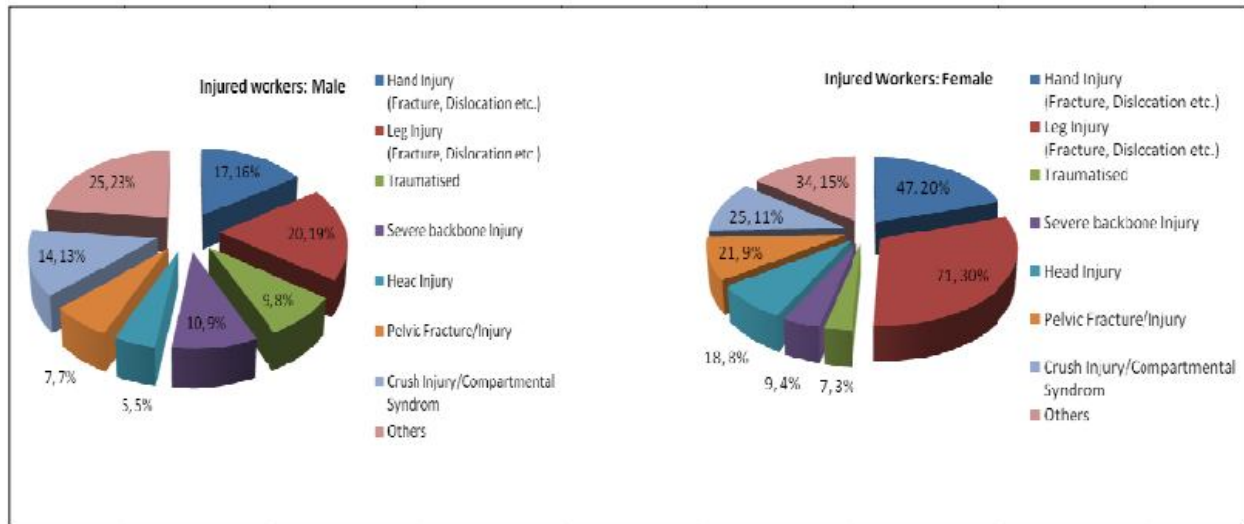
A total of 339 workers were severely injured and had to undergo major operation and long-term treatment process. Most of these workers were admitted in different medical institutes including Orthopedic Hospital, Savar CMH, Dhaka Medical College, Enam Medical College and Hospital, Savar, CRP Hospital, Savar, and Dip Clinic, Savar. A large number of, who were partially injured and were discharged after treatment, had to undergo treatment in other local hospitals and clinics.

Enam Medical College and Hospital inform that, a total of 1,800 workers have taken primary treatment here, of which 1,000 workers were released within a week. Among the rest, 700 were released after taking treatment for one to two months. A total of 34 injured workers who needed special treatment were shifted to CRP, Savar CMH and Orthopedic Hospital, Dhaka.

In most of the cases, severely injured workers have eight kinds of wounds which include hand injury, leg injury, traumatized, severe backbone injury, head injury, pelvic fracture, crush injury and compartmental syndrome and others. The extent of severity of the injuries can be comprehended by the number of people losing hands or legs or with backbone

injuries. Male workers were injured with all of these kinds of wounds proportionately, while female workers were injured with more specific types, in legs and hands.

Figure 6.6 *Severely Injured Workers*



Source: CPD 2013

In other words, these workers seem to lose their earning ability by working in the industrial sector. Injuries such as backbone injury and trauma etc. are also severe, which needs long time to rehabilitate and get back to normal condition.

### 6.3.2 Immediate Response

#### Treatment of the Victims

There was no official estimate about how many workers were injured and what kinds of support these workers have received from the factory authority. For the injured workers, other than a financial package, the government has agreed to provide physiological treatment of two years and rehabilitate their family members. Beside this government has declared at initial stage that they will bear all the cost of treatment.

A number of private sector organizations including hospitals, labour organization, banks and insurance companies, and multinational companies have undertaken a number of support measures for the injured workers. According to the Enam Medical College and Hospital, which provided initial medical support to majority of victims, a total of 1,800 workers got

medical treatment of different kinds which cost an amount of Tk. 1.9 crore. A part of this expense was met by the financial support provided by different organizations and individuals.

Dip Clinic, a Savar-based small hospital has provided treatment facilities to the injured workers at free of cost. Medical treatment for the injured workers has been continuing at CMH, Savar, NITOR (Orthopedic) Hospital, Dhaka, BIRDEM General Hospital and Japan-Bangladesh Friendship Hospital, Dhaka Medical College, Dhaka.

A number of Savar-based hospitals and clinics even with their limited resources provided support to injured workers at free of cost including Upazila Health Complex, new Dip Clinic, Super Clinic and Diagnostic Centre and Afnan Hospital and Diagnostic Centre, etc.

Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) has set up a support centre at Savar to assist victims and their families with proper information, arrange psychological treatment for injured workers, provide financial support to pregnant victims and their families, and helped the seriously injured workers to get admitted in different hospitals. A number of banks have provided wheel chairs to injured workers.

Development partners particularly EU has agreed to provide support to the permanently disabled workers under an agreement of social contact. German government pledged to provide support for job reintegration measures for workers who lost limbs and sustained permanent disabilities. Indian government has committed to provide support for transplantation of organs to victim families. Experts from India and Thai are supposed to work in this regard. It is important to monitor in the future how those commitments are fulfilled as per announcement. A Canada-based NRB organization called 'Young Canadians for Global Humanity' provided financial support (Tk. 5,000-25,000) to different categories of disabled workers who were admitted at the Enam Medical College and Hospital and CRP, Savar.

According to medical professionals, a large number of injured workers after getting released from the hospital will have to undergo physiological treatment for six months to one year. But during the research it is found that hospitals and clinics have started charging fees and cost of medicines for those injured workers. These workers will be unemployed for over a year before they would be able to work in any factory. Even, there are objection about wrong treatment in some instances. The fact remains that most of these workers even after getting the treatment would either permanently or partially loss their capability to do heavy works. As a result, a large number of efficient and productive workers have turned to be

unemployed. Unless proper support is provided to these workers, they would become the burden of these families.

### **Psychological Impact on the Victims**

Nearly five months after the deadliest incident in garment manufacturing history, the suffering is far from over for the victims, their relatives and the rescue workers. Many families have received only part of their promised financial compensation. After the tragedy, people are so concerned with the physical impact, but they are completely ignoring the psychological problems faced by survivors. Survivors are struggling to cope with not just physical and financial burdens but also with deep emotional wounds. But mental health is not taken seriously at all in this case. Many survivors still now suffering from post-disaster trauma, memory lapses fear of high rise building.

Any minor sound can cause panic among this type of victims so much that they may start to hallucinate in any situation. Depression, loss of temperament and enthusiasm for work, sleep disorder and panicking in any minor incident are among a few symptoms the trauma victims can develop. Others, including victims' relatives, rescuers, witnesses and even journalists, may develop post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms.

*Rikta Moni*, (18), was a sewing machine operator worked on the third floor of Rana Plaza. She suddenly attempts to sit up on her bed, forgetting that a fracture in her spinal cord and several wounds in her body will not let her do so. Groaning in acute pain, she starts screaming, "Sister, get me out of here. The building is crumbling down!"

The building was not falling down. She just heard a very low sound of thunder. Neither was there Asha Begum, her elder sister whom a shuddering Rikta was calling out as she lay in a bed at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on Sunday evening. Haunting memories, "intrusive thought" in medical terms, traumatize victims like Rikta, who had been trapped 24 hours in the wreckage of the nine-storey building, are a cue to hallucination and fear.

Facing the risk of complex and permanent health hazards, many victims of the collapse will become physically and mentally disabled in the long run. Those who were hurt in different parts of their bodies, even if there is no sign of cut or fracture in bones, will develop various problems like paralysis, urinal problems due to the fall of heavy objects like a pillar.

A young mechanic named *Omar Faruque Babu* (26), the owner of Faruq Engineering Workshop, volunteered for the rescue operation in Savar. He had been tormented by sights of helpless people crying for help underneath the wreckage of Rana Plaza. Then he started to have nightmares and hallucinations. As his condition got worse, he was taken to hospital. He hanged himself in a bathroom after three days into his admission to the hospital with high fever and symptoms of mental illness.

“The cries of trapped people started to haunt him after he joined the rescue work. When he returned home the third day after he joined the rescue work, he looked very upset. He repeatedly told me how hard it was for him to leave behind trapped people crying for help,” said Irin, who married Faruq only four months ago. “He was so traumatized that he wouldn’t even let me use the bathroom, saying I would get trapped there,” said Irin with tears welling up in her eyes.

A part-time teacher, *Faizul Muhid* (27), spent three days and nights mining the rubble for the living, and then moved on to a local high school where victims’ bodies were left for relatives to claim. As the corpses rotted in the heat, he did what no one else would do: searched the rows of remains for items — cell phones, nose rings, scraps of paper — that might help with identification. Late one night, he and another volunteer had to fight off a pack of dogs that had gotten hold of an open body bag with a corpse inside. These days, he self-medicates with a cocktail of antidepressants that he buys with assistance from friends. “Am I gonna be psycho?” he asked one recent afternoon. Muhid initially resisted psychological help. Now he thinks he could use it, but it is expensive and scarce.

To fill the void in psychological services, several grass-roots organizations are working in hospitals with victims of Rana Plaza, forming support groups that encourage patients to share their stories. Groups are also training counselors to canvass neighborhoods and offer help. Though the outreach is generally well received, it remains “pretty ad hoc” and covers just a fraction of those affected, said Sadaf Saaz Siddiqi, who works at Naripokkho, a nonprofit group that helps garment workers.

No one has yet reached Islam, the rescue volunteer. A medal from a local workers’ rights organisation sits on the nightstand of his tin shack, the only nod to his sacrifice. After spending three weeks in a hospital facility, largely unattended to, he left to be with his wife

before the birth of their fourth child, a son. He wants to support them, he said, but thoughts of the bodies he left behind still make him angry and restless.

*Laboni (28)* springs up on her bed whenever anyone tries to wake her up. Screaming and groaning, she frequently asks her father: “Get me out of the building. It terrifies me.” The 22-year-old lost her left hand while being rescued 36 hours after the most tragic building collapse in the country’s history on the morning of April 24. Her traumatic experience of coming back to life from death’s door is agony too heavy to bear.

Minutes before the disaster struck, her father, Mobashwer Ali, had asked her over the cellphone to leave the building. But she did not get time for that. “Whenever we need to wake her up ... she springs out of her bed, scared and stupefied,” says the grief-struck father. “Laboni often trembles with fear as she looks at the [hospital] building.”

Laboni now fears that the hospital building, too, will crumble and wants her father to take her out of it. “But I don’t want to see the life of any other man or woman ruined like mine. I request the government to do something for me so I can live my life in a way so that none can neglect me or hurt me,” she said.

*Rafiqul Islam* cannot recall how many people he pulled from the rubble of Rana Plaza, the eight-story factory complex that collapsed in April, killing more than 1,100 people. But he knows how many he cut out with a hacksaw blade — eight. He did so in spaces so cramped that at one point he became trapped himself.

Those 18 days as a volunteer rescue worker left their scars. Islam has suffered memory lapses and had a series of violent outbursts, and wound up losing his job. Now he wanders alone most days, not sure where to go — until the voices bring him back to the place where he saved so many people and lost himself. “I hear them still, calling for me,” he says, staring into a mound of broken concrete, torn fabric and twisted iron.

*Billal Hossin, 20*, a sewing machine operator, was luckier than most when the factory complex collapsed April 24 on the outskirts of Dhaka. Pinned by a heavy slab, he eventually managed to dig himself out with the help of a local man.

But spending hours in the dark amid muffled screams took its toll: The young man has fresh scars on his wrists from cutting himself with a knife while locked in his bedroom. Sometimes

when his mother has tried to bring him food, she said, he has beaten her. Without his \$70-a-month salary to support them, the family relies on handouts.

The Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP), a large private facility in Savar, has worked beyond its capacity to care for Rana Plaza's injured. But because of a dearth of trained mental health professionals, patients with symptoms of acute psychological trauma receive "a minimum" of counseling before they are discharged, said Hossain Mehedi, a doctor at the centre. Other victims may refrain from seeking help because of the social stigma attached to mental problems.

*Kamrun Nahar*, a 35-year-old sewing machine helper on the third floor, haunted by her three-day stay under the rubble surrounded by bodies of dead colleagues, insists on not staying under a concrete roof as a building took away her daughter Elina, a 17-year-old helper who is still missing. "She [Elina] is calling me every now and then, telling me not to live in any concrete-walled room," said KamrunNahar.

*Amina Khatun*, 22, another garment factory employee, grapples with severe headaches, disorientation and a paralyzing fear of closed indoor spaces. She lives within walking distance of the rehabilitation centre, which provides her with free medication — but that's only if she manages to show up, and these days she tends to get lost. She said 'Am I gonna be psycho?'

### **Rehabilitation of Survivors**

It is very important to ensure rehabilitation and reemployment of survivors from Rana Plaza. The Army of Savar cantonment has prepared several lists of workers categorizing into three: a list of 1,000 workers who need to be given jobs, a list of amputated workers who need to be rehabilitated and employed, and a list of severely injured workers.

Both the government and private initiatives are inadequate compare to reality. The Government initiatives are unsatisfactory. Government has made the employment of 100 workers in leather factories. BGMEA's commitment to reemploy the workers or employing the family members of disabled workers is not yet implemented.

The private sector initiatives are rather few. Grameen Phone made an arrangement of mobile phone service business for 300 injured workers with proper training. Trade union associations have been working to get jobs for the workers in different factories. The worker 'Reshma'



who was rescued from the debris of the collapsed building after 17 days, got the job at the Westin Dhaka.

Centre for the Rehabilitation and the Paralyzed (CRP) made a great contribution to treatment and rehabilitation of Rana Plaza victims. The centre has treated 333 people related to the Rana Plaza disaster-168 as in-patients (admitted to the facility) and 165 as outpatients. The injuries suffered by the victims are various, ranging from fractures, traumatic pain, spinal cord injuries, to amputations. The treatment provided to the victims includes surgeries, physiotherapy, orthotics and prosthetics and counseling. The CRP worked with the German Red Cross and the International Red Cross, with monetary support from the German government, to coordinate the physical rehabilitation of those affected by the tragedy.

The CRP and its partners are also working with potential employers to change their perspective about disabled workers. The centre works with a range of employers to create opportunities for job placement for its patients. In this endeavor it receives valuable support from CBM international and the German development agency GIZ, who are working on capacity building of employers to create more acceptances of disabled workers and also to improve workplace environments to make them friendlier to the disabled. The centre provides various types of vocational trainings to its patients and among the Rana Plaza victims. Seventy-six have received/are receiving trainings at the centre: 35 in dress making and tailoring, 13 in general electronics, 20 in shop management and 8 in operating computers for office work. In the wake of Rana Plaza, the CRP and its partners have been working closely with the BGMEA to create opportunities for disabled workers to return to the RMG sector. (Nawaz 2013). The CRP is also assisting the patients through counseling in order to boost their self-confidence and willingness to reengage with working life.

From the Rana Plaza building collapse, the International Labour Organization (ILO) is helping survivors develop new skills and find jobs. ILO's Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Reform Project in partnership with BRAC, a major non-governmental organization. The programme, funded by the European Union, is equipping survivors with the skills they need to get jobs in local workplaces (ILO 2013).

The TVET Reform Project has developed a number of models focusing on better delivery of skills. This particular model focuses on high employment trades, particularly those found in regional and rural areas, such as tailoring, motorcycle servicing and mobile phone repairing.

The model fits well with the needs of the survivors because, in just a short time, it gives people quality skills which they can then use to enter a sector in which almost all are guaranteed employment (ILO 2013).

Minu Aktar (29), had been working in Phantom Apparels on the fourth floor of Rana Plaza for four and a half years, trapped under the building. She still suffers from physical injuries sustained during the collapse, as well as ongoing trauma, from being trapped under the building. Six months on, however, Minu is starting to overcome her grief with the support of her family and through the YVET program. She is now working in a tailor's shop in Savar, mentored by an ILO/BRAC supervisor and master craftsperson.

*Minu says "I did not think that I would ever be able to work again, because of my fear and because of my injuries, but now I am learning new skills and it feels really good. Tailoring and dress making is interesting and I have a good supervisor. I am also working together with another survivor called Khaleda, so we support each other and learn together. Seeing my family, having a job – I finally feel like I am alive again,"*

Shafiqul Islam, a machine operator in New Wave Bottom of Rana Plaza, had his right leg crushed in the collapse. He trapped between steel rods in the collapsed building and thought he would never be able to get out of the building. He wanted to return to work in a factory but has been unable to because he cannot stand for long periods of time or walk for long distances. He is now an apprentice in the programme and learning to repair mobile phones, a useful trade in a country where there are over 100 million active mobile phone users.

Now he is looking forward to new skills, a new job and a new career path. Shafiqul says *"I wanted to return but it was impossible and I also cannot do other types of jobs so I am happy that I now have a way to make money. I am learning a lot from the shop owner here. If there is any problem in a mobile phone set, we can repair it."*

### **Labor Unrest and All RMG Units Shut Down**

Thousands of garment workers vented their anger on vehicles in and around the capital leaving the public transport system on the brink of a collapse. Angered by the deaths of their fellow workers in Savar Rana Plaza collapse and following a rumour that two demonstrators were killed, they vandalized at least 160 vehicles in Dhaka, Gazipur and Narayanganj.

Having suffered from labour unrest in the first two days after Rana Plaza collapse, garment makers across the country decided to suspend production in their factories for two days from 27 April mainly to avoid massive unrest. Production was suspended at majority of factories in Dhaka, Gazipur, Savar, Ashulia, Maona for the second consecutive day, fearing a further labour unrest, stemmed from deaths at Rana Plaza.

### **Sohel Rana Arrested**

Although at first Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had denied the membership of Rana in the Jubo League, after intense criticism of her speech she ordered the arrest of Sohel Rana and four of the owners of the garment factories operating in the building. Four days after the building collapsed, the owner of the Rana Plaza, Sohel Rana, was arrested at Benapole, on the Indo-Bangladeshi border, in Jessore District by security forces. According to the Rapid Action Battalion, Rana went to Benapole to cross the border without a passport and was hiding at a human trafficker's house in Ball Field area, about 0.5 kilometres from the Indian border.

While ruling-Awami League lawmaker Murad Jong has been denying any kind of association with Sohel Rana. Rana's mobile phone record shows how close they were. According to RAB sources, at 9:05am on that day, just 20 minutes after the collapse, Murad Jong had called Rana over the mobile phone to enquire about his condition. After his arrest Rana told RAB that he had gone to his office in the basement of Rana Plaza around 8:00am that day. He was holding a meeting with his five aides on an anti-hartal procession. When the building collapsed about 45 minutes later, he had fainted. Rana was rescued with a minor injury in a hand, he told RAB.

Witnesses said soon a microbus owned by local parliamentarian Murad Jong took him to Insaf Hospital in Ashulia. Earlier, Murad Jong had claimed that he had no link— familial, social, economic or political — with Rana. He also challenged that he would quit politics if anyone could prove his association with Rana. But Sohel Rana told RAB that Murad Jong was like an elder brother to him. Law enforcers and locals say with the blessing of local AL MP and the administration, Rana used to enjoy impunity for all his criminal activities, including illegal drug business, extortion, control over jhut [garment wastage] business and land grabbing. He earned his fortune through these. However, Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha filed a case against Sohel with Savar Police Station in connection with violating

building construction rules while police filed an another case against him with the same police station.

### **Response of the Global Retailer**

The global retail giants have gone into well-practiced damage control—a few crocodile tears, and, where possible, denials of any involvement, or current involvement, with the particular suppliers in the Rana Plaza complex, followed by empty promises to improve conditions in the future. Labels for the world’s largest retailer, Wal-Mart, the Spanish chain El Corte Ingles and PC Penney have been found in the rubble. Web sites for the factories in the building indicate that they also supplied Germany’s Kik, Belgium’s C&A, Benetton UK, Spain’s Mango, Canada’s Trimark and Premark in Ireland, to name a few.

These companies’ expressions of “shock” at the disaster are particularly cynical. All these corporations know very well the sweatshop conditions that are required to produce garments at the prices they demand. They operate through a complex system of middlemen and subcontractors to distance themselves from the actual production processes. Many have a system of factory audits, not to improve safety and conditions, but to provide a face-saving façade to protect their corporate images and brand names.

The Facebook pages of Joe Fresh, Mango and Benetton, a few of the brands whose clothing or production documents were found in the rubble of the collapsed building, are peppered with angry comments from shoppers. Some warn they’re going to shop elsewhere now. The rising death toll may force Western brands to make a choice: Stay and work to improve conditions. Or leave and face higher costs, similar or worse worker conditions in other low-wage countries and criticism for abandoning a poor nation. Most retailers have vowed to stay and promised to work for change. Wal-Mart and the Swedish retailer H&M, the top two producers of clothing in Bangladesh, have said they have no plans to leave. Other big chains such as The Children’s Place, Mango, JC Penney, Gap, Benetton and Sears have said the same.

### **6.4 Conclusion**

The collapse of Rana Plaza is the outcome of negligence of everybody including building owner, factory owners, engineer, construction contractor, building inspection authorities etc. From broader perspective, the causes of the accident are mass corruption, bad politics and

restless drive for profit. However, the ultimate victims of this accident are the poor cheap labors. Their life is very cheap (2/3 lakh taka) like their labour. It seems that they proved by their death that they are very cheap. After the accident, now it is high time to focus on the treatment, rehabilitation and compensation of the survivors of accident. The next chapter provides an account of the victims of Rana Plaza accident in the form of case study.

## Chapter Seven: Case study of the Victims

### 7.1 Introduction

As mentioned earlier, the Rana Plaza accident is not only an accident; it is the outcome of the expansion of global economy as well as failure of weak and corrupted governance in the peripheral state to ensure the safety of the workers. In other words, this accident is the result of flexible capital accumulation through the dispossession of the cheap peripheral workers. So, the victims of the accident are also part of this flexible capital accumulation process. Global capitalists make their high profit through the exploitation of these labors paying less than one-third compare to labour in the developed countries. Now, they have become the part of global division of labour. Thus, to understand the whole political-economic aspects of industrial accident in readymade garment industry like the case of Rana plaza accident, it is very important to study, sociologically, the victims of the accident.

In the Rana Plaza accident, workers in the five garments are the main victims of the accident. So, it is important to study the socio-economic background of the workers: origin of the workers, their family background, causes of the migration and the causes of joining in garment factories in the context of domestic socio-economic condition. It is also important to study the pre, during and the post-accident period to know the role of respective authorities: what type of preventive measures were taken by concerned authorizes; what are their accident experience; in post-accident phase, what are their condition now; what type of assistances they received including treatment, rehabilitation and compensation; what are their present condition and what type of help they need. And for all of these, I used in-depth interview method.

As my respondents were victim of the accident, I conducted my in-depth interview immediately at first phase in different hospitals including Centre for the Rehabilitation and the Paralyzed (CRP), the Enam Medical College and Hospital and NITOR (Orthopaedic) Hospital, Dhaka. At the second phase again I went to the CRP, where most of the severely injured workers shifted after immediate treatment. I also studied those who live near the Savar Bus stand like Majidpur. In the first phase, I was concern about their background, work experience and accident experience. In the second phase, I studied their treatment, compensation and rehabilitation, coping process and present condition. Here, I present some of those case studies.

## 7.2 Socio-economic Profile of the Victims of Rana Plaza Accident

In this study I conducted a short survey interview of 52 victims of Rana Plaza accident. The purpose of this survey interview is to get background information of the victims that would be helpful for analyzing Rana Plaza accident from the Victims context. Some findings of the survey interview discuss in the following section.

(a) *Gender*: In the present study we found that majority of the victims was female who was working in the factories in the Rana plaza. In this study, 35 victims (more than 67%) out of 52 were female workers. A number of these female victims are divorcee, separate, widow or abandoned. On the other hand 17 victims (around 33%) were male workers. Although the sample size was small but it is also proved by many other statistical data that more than 70% of labor market constituted by female labour.

Table 7.1 *Gender Distribution of the Victims*

Gender	No. of Worker	Percent
Male	17	32.69
Female	35	67.31
Total	52	100.00

*Source: Field Work, 2013.*

(b) *Age*: A large number of victims are in the age cohort 15 to 24 years old (table 7.2). The average age of the victims is years old. It should be noted that while existing labour law do not permit any labor under 18 years old, more than 36% of the victims in this study is less than 19 years old and more than 60% of the victims is less than 25 years old.

Table 7.2 *Age Distribution of the Victims*

Age	No. of Worker	Percent
Below 15	2	3.85
15-19	17	32.69
20-24	14	26.92
25-29	9	17.31
30-34	5	9.61
35-39	2	3.85
40-44	2	3.85
45-49	1	1.92
50-Above	0	0.00
Total	52	100.00

*Source: Field work, 2013.*

The cause of this younger labor market, as observed in this study, is the extreme poverty in the respective families. Another important issue is that during the field work I found 6 cases where workers used false birth certificate to prove that they are not child. Thus existing labor law is unable to stop child labor in the garment factory.

(c) *Educational Status*: This study found that more than 38% of the victims have got only primary education. Out of 52 victims more than 71% were under SSC. Only 5 victims completed Higher Secondary certificate. As victims themselves stated that their educational life stopped mostly due to poverty.

Table 7.3 *Educational Status of the Victims*

Class	No. of Worker	Percent
No Schooling	1	1.92
1-5	19	36.54
6-9	17	32.69
SSC	8	15.38
HSC	5	9.62
Honors/Degree	2	3.85
Total	52	100.00

*Source: Field work, 2013.*

Because of this poverty victims had to stop their schooling at the primary level and to join in the factory. Another social factor is that as most of these young labors are female, it considered by the family that woman did not to get higher education. It batter to join in a factory rather than schooling in that poor economy condition. However, I also found some victims who still continuing their study parallel with the job. I found 2 victims who are now honors student and working in the garment to manage their educational expenditure.

(d) *Marital Status*: In this study a large number of victims are married. More than 46% of the victims are married and most of case they have 2 or 3 child. That means since most of them now unable to work, their families are now in financial crisis and helpless. Among the married victims 75% are female because of their early marriage. As these female workers are amputated or severely injured in the accident many of them abandoned by their husband. Another fact is that most of these abandoned female are very young.



Table 7.4 *Marital Status of the Victims*

Marital Status	No. of worker	Male	Female	Percent (in total)
Unmarried	17	11	6	32.69
Married	24	6	18	46.16
Divorcee	7	-	7	13.46
Separate	1	-	1	1.92
Widow	3	-	3	5.77
Total	52	17	35	100.00

Source: Field work, 2013.

Among the unmarried victims more than 50% are female and many of them severely injured. Thus it is difficult for them to get married later. A number of victims are either divorcee or widow that means now these victims are totally helpless.

(e) *Migration*: Most of the garments workers migrated from their rural areas across the country side. In this study, 98% of the victims are migrants. The magnitude of this migration is directly related to their economy condition in the rural areas. Specifically, there is a nexus between the workers' poverty, unemployment, impoverishment and living condition in rural areas and migration to garments factory.

Table 7.5 *Time of Migration*

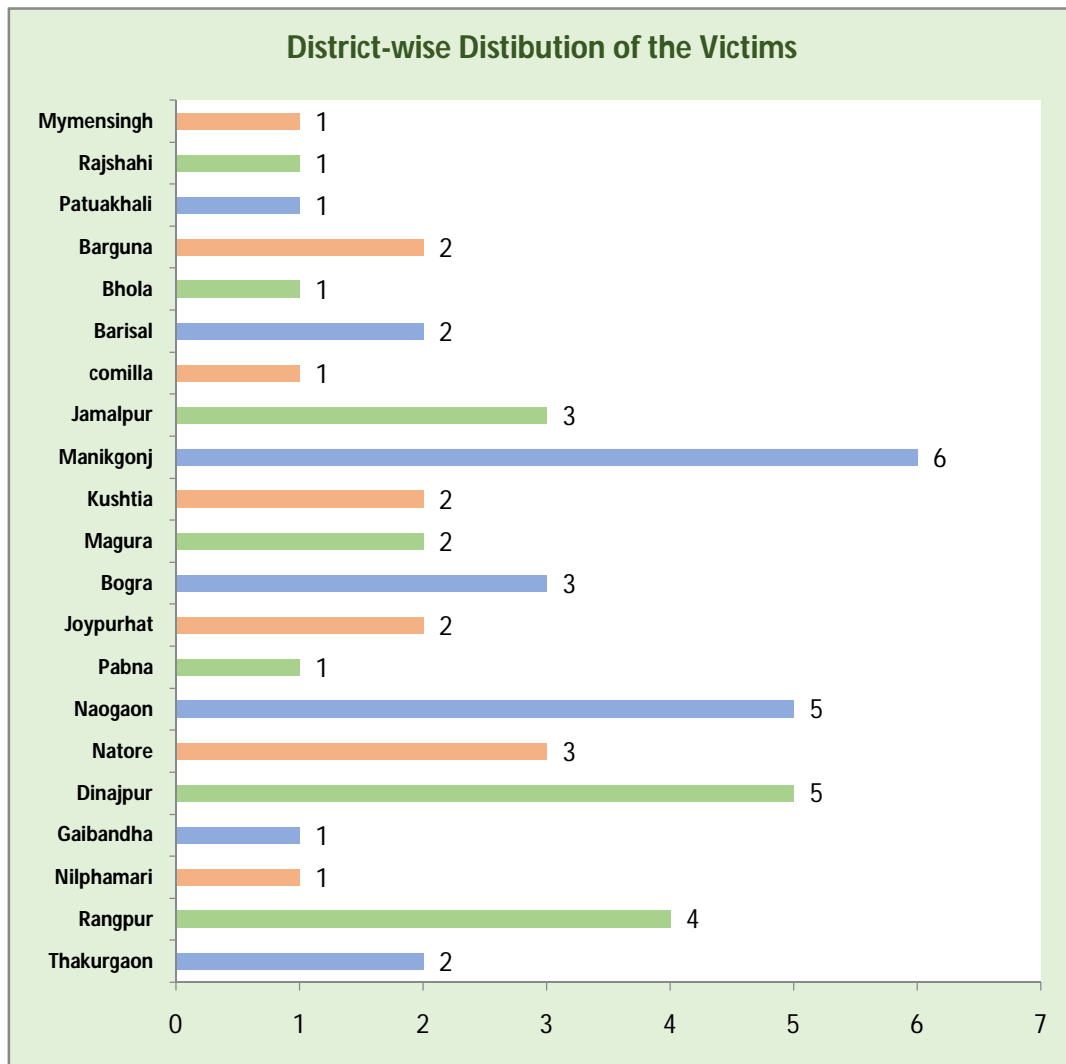
Time of Migration	No. of Worker	Percent
Less than 6 month	9	17.31
6-12 month ago	11	21.15
1-3 year ago	13	25.00
4-6 year ago	9	17.31
7-10 year ago	6	11.54
More than 10 year ago	3	5.77
Non-migrant	1	1.92
Total	52	100.00

Source: Field work, 2013.

A large number of the victims in this study migrated to Dhaka just 2/3 years ago. The possible reason is that Rana Plaza built just 6 years ago. More than 45% of the victims migrated among the last three years. Most of the victims in this study migrated from northern part of the country. Most of the victims were from Dhaka division followed by Rangpur,

Rajshahi and Khulna divisions (figure 7.1). As Rana plaza located at Savar, a number of victims were from Manikgonj which close to Savar. Then a large number of victims came from Rangpur division due to high unemployment rate in that district.

Figure 7.1 *District-wise distribution of the victims*



*Source: Field work, 2013.*

(f) *Designation of workers:* In this study machine operators constituted the majority of the victims (more than 54%). It should be noted that most of the operators were female workers. Besides, Most of the low paying position occupied by female workers. On the other hand, most of the high positions were occupied by male workers.

Table 7.6 *Position of the workers*

Job Status	No. of Worker	Male	Female
Production Manager	1	1	-
Quality Inspector	3	3	-
Line Chief	2	2	-
Supervisor	2	2	-
Cutting Section	3	1	2
Sewing Operator	13	3	10
Machine Operator	19	4	15
Ironer	2	1	1
Finishing Operator	2	-	2
Helper	4	-	4
Other	1	-	1
Total	52	17	35

Source: *Field work, 2013.*

(g) *Working hour:* Duration of the working day is an important issue for labour right in the garment factory. In general, garments factory is characterized by long working hour. Average working day for garment workers is 14.30 hours.

Table 7.7 *Working Hour of the Rana Plaza workers*

Working Hour	No. of Worker	Percent
11-12	2	3.85
13-14	21	40.38
15-16	23	44.23
More than 16	6	11.54
Total	52	100.00

Source: Field Work, 2013.

Although formal working day is from 8.00 am to 8.00 pm, most of the victims in this study stated that they work in the factory from 8.00am to 10/11.00 pm on average. Most of the cases it was forced working hours. Some also stated that they willingly worked for long overtime just to earn more.

Table 7.8 *Overtime Working hours of the Rana Plaza Factory Workers*

Overtime working hour(monthly)	No. of worker	Percent
0-30	5	9.61
31-60	19	36.54
61-90	17	32.69
91-120	9	17.31
Above 120	2	3.85
Total	52	100.00

Source: Field work, 2013.

On average, workers paid 29.00 Tk per hour for overtime and who were in senior position got 30/31.00 Tk per hour. Normally, a worker had to 60 to 90 hours as overtime. With these overtime a machine operator earned up to 8/9,000 Tk where basic salary was 4500/5000 Tk. A quality inspector or supervisor got 13/14,000 Tk.

Table 7.9 *Monthly Salaries of the Victims*

Monthly Salary (with overtime)	No. of Worker	Percent
Less than 5,000	7	13.46
6,000-10,000	35	67.31
11,000-14,000	6	11.54
15,000-19,000	3	5.77
20,000 -above	1	1.92
Total	52	100.00

Source: Field work, 2013.

(h) *Problems for Female workers:* Female victims in this study shared some problems faced by them because of their gender identity. 31.43% of the victims complained that they harassed by their male colleagues and around 23% of the victims harassed by managers. Besides, 54% of the victims stated about bad behavior of managers.

Table 7.10 *Problems Faced by the Female Worker in the Factory*

Type of Problem	No. of respondent	Percent
Harassment by Colleagues	11	31.43
Harassment by Managers	8	22.86
Bad behavior by Managers	19	54.29
Forced Work	23	65.71
Work related illness	17	48.57
No leave	15	42.86

Source: Field work, 2013.

A number of victims noted that there is no leave opportunity for them. Even they had to work for Friday although they paid for this. An important fact is that it is easy to control and force these poor female workers for long overtime. Around 48% of the female victims stated about different work-related physical problems.

(i) *Injury Pattern:* Around 2438 workers rescued alive and a large number of them were severely injured. Most of these workers were admitted in different medical institutes including Orthopedic Hospital, Savar CMH, Dhaka Medical College, Enam Medical College and Hospital, Savar, CRP Hospital, Savar, and Dip Clinic, Savar. In this study, most of the victims had some specific injury including amputation, hand, leg, head injury, severely backbone injury, pelvic injury and trauma. I found 7 amputated workers who lost their hand or leg or both of them. These amputated workers are now totally dependent on others. A number of the victims had hand, leg or head injury who trapped in the rubble. Among the female workers, a large number of the victims had severe backbone injury.

Table 7.11 *Types of Injury*

Type of Injury	No. of worker	Male	Female
Hand Injury (Fracture, Dislocation etc.)	19	6	13
Leg Injury (Fracture, Dislocation etc.)	16	5	11
Head Injury	4	2	2
Amputated	7	2	5
Severe Backbone Injury	17	3	14
Pelvic Fracture/Injury	8	1	7
Crush Injury	11	6	5
Traumatized	24	5	19
Other	2	1	1

Source: Field work, 2013.

However, most of the victims still now traumatized. Any minor sound can cause panic among this type of victims so much that they may start to hallucinate in any situation. Depression, loss of temperament and enthusiasm for work, sleep disorder and panicking in any minor incident are among a few symptoms the trauma victims can develop. During the field work, I found some victims who suddenly screaming and frequently ask relatives or doctors “Get me out of the building. It terrifies me.”

(j) *Compensation:* A number of local and international organizations made their pledges and commitments with regard to compensation, treatment and rehabilitation after the Rana Plaza accident. But during field work, I found that although victims got some financial support from government and different organization immediately after the accident, now they are in financial crisis. Most of the case, victims were the only earning member in the family and as now they are unable to work, now they are helpless and looking for compensation.

Table 7.12 *Compensation*

Amount (BDT)	No. of Worker	Percent
1-5,000	4	7.69
5,000-10,000	10	19.23
11,000-20,000	17	32.69
21,000-30,000	11	21.15
31,000-50,000	6	11.54
51,000-1,00,000	2	3.85
1,00,000-2,00,000	1	1.92
Above 2,00,000	1	1.92
Total	52	100.00

Source: Field work, 2013.

Majority of the victims got 10,000 Tk from prime minister’s fund. Beside this, *Primark*, one of the retailers involved in the Rana plaza factories, provided compensation to the victims. In this study, victims got 20,000/25,000 Tk on average. However, there was no central coordination or monitoring for these activities. On the other hand, although victims immediately provided free treatment but later hospitals started to charge for treatment. Even a number of victims complained that they provided wrong treatment and still suffering from this wrong treatment. Some amputated victims stated that they lost their hand or leg only because of the wrong treatment or lack of proper treatment.

From above discussion we got a overview of the demographic information and accident experience of the victims of the Rana Plaza accident. In the next section an account of victims in the form of case study.

## Case Study-1

Merina Khatun, 22 years old, was eldest of six living children of her parents. Her father was a farmer, now he is a rickshaw puller/laborer. No formal education was completed. Her home district is Dinajpur. When she was 15, she came to Dhaka because of poverty. After arriving in Dhaka she worked as domestic worker. After one year, she returned to village for three months and asked parents' permission, and then she returned to Dhaka and started work in garment factory as helper (Tk.2000). She moved to new factory (Tk.2500), but after two months returned to old factory.

Her father is illiterate and very poor. He does not have any cultivable land. So he works as an agricultural labour in his village, on daily basis. But his employment is very irregular and uncertain. Merina's mother is a housewife. But sometimes she husks paddy for other farmer families in the harvesting season and thus earns something in cash or kind. It supplements the family income to some extent but not enough to maintain a family of 8 members. Merina has two brothers and three sisters - all of whom are younger than her i.e. below 10 years. None of them goes to any school nor is engaged in any work. The family lives in abject poverty.

However, in 2011, Merina joined at Phentom Apparels Ltd. Before the collapse of the building both Merina and her sister Shirina Begum used to work at Phantom Apparels Ltd on the third floor of the building.

At the beginning, they cursed the owner of the building and the engineers "who took bribes and forced us into the building to kill us". Cracks had developed in the building the day before it collapsed on 24 April. Though Brac Bank and other shops evacuated their staff immediately, the owner of five garments at the building forced their employees to return to their job the following day.

Merina said they had also been told that the building owner had the building checked by engineers and that nothing was found alarming during the inspection. The group of nine garment workers found food items in tiffin boxes and that sustained them for some time in confinement.

On the first day, they got water in a bottle, the second day they shared tiny bits of pickle and the third day they had some rice. Some of the food had already rotted but "we had no choice". When water ran out, some of them could not bear thirst and drank urine, Merina said.

One of the fellow workers lost her mind and at one point started biting Merina, saying, “Give me water; get me out of here; take me to my son.”

Many times, they thought rescuers were nearby, hearing the drone of the drilling machine. The next moment everything went quiet, convincing them that death was what awaited them.

With hopes of survival fading away, they at last wrote their names and addresses on pieces of paper and then stuffed those into their clothes so that their families could identify them even if their bodies decomposed, Merina said.

“We even promised each other to relay our last words to our families if one of us could make it out alive.” Finally they all were rescued alive from that spot after three days. Another five workers were rescued from a nearby spot. The two groups, separated by a wall, could communicate with each other.

She passed out several times in 66 hours at the mangled wreckage of Rana Plaza in Savar and cannot recall how she was finally rescued. Discovering herself in an ambulance, she looked around, bewildered at how she had come into that state. Later, she felt a bit relaxed meeting her sister in the hospital “We are lucky to be back from the jaws of death,” Merina says. All the time, she lived in a cycle of fear, hope and despair, and when that seemed an eternity, she waited for death. She had eight other companions — five women and three men — in a cramped space with debris all around.

## Case Study-2

ShumiAkteer and her husband, Mehedi Hasan, were both machine operators on the second floor of the nine-storey Rana Plaza. Shumi, 23 years old, was Born in 1990, second of five children of her parents. Her father is a farmer in Jamalpur. She completed class 4. Her family lives in village and her mother stayed with her father. When she was 14, she left school after failing class 5. At the age of 15 her Parents arranged marriage. Lily avoided marriage by moving to Dhaka with cousin. After five days in Dhaka, she started work at a garment in Ashulia as helper (Tk.2000); started living with sister. She moved twice from one place to another after row with sister and to avoid rent increase.



She ignored the wishes of her family and left the village to find factory work in the city in order to avoid being forced into a marriage she did not want: *'I knew my father wanted to marry me off, so I went to my cousin who was a garment worker in Dhaka and had come home for a holiday and told her I wanted to go with her to Dhaka.'*

Shumi describes her own experience:

*"Five days after coming to Dhaka with my cousin, we got a neighboring factory worker to take us to the factory, and she introduced us to the supervisor. First, the supervisor told me to match two numbers, and then she asked me to cut a piece of thread with the cutter. We (me and my sister) started working that day, and she asked us to bring in an application with a photograph, which we submitted five days later."*

Shumi describes her experience simply, but the process can be complicated. She must have had to go to several workers to find a factory that was hiring at the time. She was relying on the generosity of her cousins to support her, so she was in a rush to find a job. Finding a place to be photographed and filling out an application form must have been difficult for a young village girl.

Shumi, much later, after working for four years, after learning how to handle a machine, has become an operator. It was her expectation that she will marry whoever her parents choose for her. But they needed to have Tk.20,000 for the dowry. Then she said, "It's best to marry a boy from your own area . . . someone who has passed high school, has a job in an office or as a line chief or supervisor in a garment factory. . . . If the boy is a metric fail (less educated), as long as his family owns land and a big house, that will be all right too."

Then in 2010, Shumi got married to Mehedi Hasan who also worked at Rana Plaza. Both Shumi and Mehedi together earn around 15000 taka monthly. They lived at a rented house. They paid 2500 taka for one room with gas supply. They have a son Morsalin 2 years old. Their days were going well.

But on 24 April 2013, when Rana Plaza collapsed they were working inside the building. They were separated when the building started to collapse. *"I ran near the stairs to get out of the building, and a pillar fell on me,"* she said. Her left hand was crushed and pinned under the pillar as she lay there bleeding with a big fracture in her skull. She was taken to the Orthopaedic Hospital, after being rescued one and a half hours after the incident.

Shumi stared at her left hand in disbelief. Her arm below the elbow was gone. Everything looked blurry, including her future. “I have destroyed my only son’s future,” the 22-year-old moaned in fear of the gloomy days ahead, as she thought of the future looking at her amputated hand.

As she lay on a bed at the Orthopaedic Hospital, the hapless garment worker blamed herself for not heeding her husband and neighbours’ advice not to go to work on the day of accident. “The purpose of my whole life was only to work and save enough money to provide a good education for my son.”

Shumi regained consciousness after one day afternoon and looked for her son, Morsalin, whom she had left with her father in Jamalpur. She was not aware that her husband was still missing. Shumi’s father Mohsin Ali said, “*Please do something, at least for this child,*” as he is not well-off enough to ensure Morsalin’s future.

### **Case Study-3**

Shefali Begum (28), a divorcee and mother of two children, was born in the village of Shibason, district of Barisal. She was the last of nine children. She lost her father, before she was born and her mother and elder brother decided to marry her off at an early age. She never attended any school. However she learned some Arabic from a local religious preacher (hujur). At the age of twelve years she got married to a small retail shopkeeper in their village. Her husband did not take anything in cash or kind from her family at marriage. On the other hand, he gave some jewelry made of silver to Shefali as wedding gift.

Her husband failed to make any profit in his business. After running a loss in his business and having no other means to survive, he decided to migrate to Dhaka. That was 8 years back. They arrived to the city by train, and first two days lived in the platform of Dhaka railway station. Then her husband found a room in the Kamlapur bastee with the help of a village acquaintance. Rokeya and her husband tried to get a job for several days but failed. Suddenly one of her cousin named Ratan, informed her about the construction work. Then Rokeya and her husband enquired about any place left for them in that job. Somebody told them to meet the contractor. Fortunately they met the supervisor and were given work on a daily basis.

After getting the job they shifted to their present place as the workplace is near to the present residential location.

Shefali's husband Latif is also a construction worker (brick crusher). He gets 100 taka per day, higher than her wife's wage. But their working hours are same. Shefali gave birth to her first child after 4 years of her marriage. She has two sons. Her husband's brother (10 years old) also lives with them. Her eldest son who is ten years old goes to school. Another is learning Arabic in the mosque.

Shefali worked in a construction site at Jhigatola and starts breaking bricks from 9 in the morning till 5 in the evening. She gets half an hour for lunch at noon. One of her cousin helped her in getting the job. She has a helper with her. For building (residential) construction, contractors employ few poor workers on contract basis for breaking bricks and stones. Maximum brick breakers are women. Sometimes she cannot go to work due to various reasons.

In 2007, her husband got married to another woman and live in another house. Her husband did not provide any financial support to his family. At a stage, her husband divorced her. Then Shefali came at Saver and with the help of a relative she got a job as a helper at a garment in Savar. In 2009, Shefali has joined at Phentom Apparels at Rana Plaza as machine operator.

Shefali lives in a one-roomed house, which is about 80 sft. Her dwelling place is congested and not very clean. The room has one door but no window. They get water from tube-well. It is near her house. Shefali's family shares one latrine with four other families. There is a small enclosed space for bathing.

Shefali cook food by using fuel wood. She has to wake up very early in the morning to prepare food for the family and then go for work at factory. There is a 'chowki' (cheaply made wooden bed) and some utensils needed for cooking purpose in the house. Her basic salary was 4500 and with overtime she got around 6000. She used to work from 8.00 am to 10.00 pm with 2 hours overtime, 14 working hours per day. Some time she had worked till 12.00 pm 16 hours in a day.

At the time of the collapse on 24 April, was working at Phantom Apparel on the third floor where She joined three years ago.

She shared her experience of the Collapse of the building that all of a sudden the rooftop caved in, carrying her along to the second floor where she remained sandwiched for the next 27 hours in rubble. It was not pain but fear that was killing her during the time she was stuck in the mangled wreckage of the nine-storey Rana Plaza in Savar.

She had not blacked out even for a moment before she was rescued around 11:00am. Trapped under a sewing machine and pressed against a concrete wall on the other side, she could only move her eyelids in futile attempts to see in the dark. At one point she felt very thirsty but there was no water, Shefali said. *“One worker was then kind enough to give me saliva” to wet her throat. I also heard of people urinating and some others drinking that thing.”*

Her injuries to the head, arms and legs had not worried her. All the time she had been wondering whether she would see her five-year-old son Sohel again. There had been a lot of people like her trapped on the second and third floors, she said. Some were buried under debris while some were trapped but unhurt.

*“I was afraid to go to the factory [on the day of accident] as cracks had developed in the building the day before.”* But the factory owner had threatened that the workers would not get their arrears if they remained absent, Shefali said. She had not received her payment for the last two months. Akkas Ali, a plumber who was looking after her at the hospital, said she borrowed Tk 50 from him on Tuesday to buy a kilogram of rice. Shefali expresses her condition of helplessness by saying *“Now I don’t know how she will bear the costs of treatment.”*

## Case Study-4

Rokeya, 24-year-old the mother of a nine-year-old son and wife of a car driver, was sewing operator. Rokeya was born in a village under Kustia district. Her father was a farmer. She was the third among the seven children in the family. She went to *Madrasa* for few months before her marriage. Her education ended there.

Rokeya got married at the age of sixteen. Barkot Ali, husband, took Tk. 30000 as dowry from her father. Her father had to sell his small plot of land to pay that money. One the other hand,

her husband gave her some jewelry made of silver at the time of marriage. After marriage Rokeya started to live with her husband and his parents and siblings, in a village situated near her father's place.

Rokeya migrated to Dhaka 5 years back with her husband and children. They had no land means of survival at their native village at that time and acute poverty and unemployment compelled them to come over to Dhaka in search of jobs. After coming to Dhaka they first started to live in a slum at Pustokala. They changed their place of residence because of eviction. They are living in their present address, Savar, Majidpur for last 3 years.

Rokeya's husband Barkot is disabled now because of a major injury in the leg and cannot work. Previously he worked as an unskilled day laborer. Now he has no income. She gave birth to three children. Rokeya lives in a small one roomed house. She gives rent for the house. She has to pay Taka 1500 for the room and TK. 100 for water to the *basteesardar*. She has electricity facility in her room. They get water from municipality supply. According to her water is not sufficient. She has no separate kitchen in her house.

After her husband's accident Rokeya joined in a garment, New Wave Style, at Rana Plaza, as a helper. In 2012, she became an operator and got 4500 taka. Her family was dependent on her income. She used to work from 8.00 to 12.00 pm including overtime, 16 hours in a day.

She was working on the fifth floor when the building crumbled like a pack of cards on 24 April morning. As she described her experience of the day "*It was around 8:20am. I just started sewing. Power went off and the building collapsed in no time. My right hand was trapped.*" Her battle to hold on to life began. With the entire building almost sandwiched and thick dust all around, she was suffocating. "*But it was all right in the first few hours.*"

However, as the day wore on, she thought her heart would stop for want of oxygen. There was no air. With time she grew hungrier and thirstier still. "*I could not take it anymore. So at one stage I drank my urine,*" she said.

Time was running out for Rokeya. She was hungry and thirsty and drained. Two days had passed since she was trapped inside Rana Plaza. Nobody came. So when someone did come after two, about 45 hours after the collapse, she wondered: "Am I still alive?"

It was a group of civilian rescuers who found her around 5:30am under the rubble on the fifth floor of the nine-storey building. Her right hand was trapped under a sewing machine. The

rescuers tried all means they could think of to pull her out. When all attempts failed, they had to improvise. They brought a hand saw, tied both her legs and hands, held her tightly so that she could not move and then cut off her hand from above the elbow. *“I somehow managed to bear the pain when they were cutting my flesh. But when it reached my bone ... I don’t know how to describe the pain,”* she told researcher at Enam Medical College Hospital.

She alleged it was their immediate bosses who forced them to work in the risky building and said that she had even been forced to work till late night every day without any weekly holiday over the past one month. In the garment factory where she worked, she used to earn Tk 4,700 a month. But with one of her hands now gone, how she would support her family is a thought she cannot bear to think.

### **Case Study-5**

Monir Hossain, 29 years old, was a quality inspector of Ethar Tex Ltd, which was on the fifth floor. He was from Kurigram, Rangpur. He was third of four children of her parents. He completed class 4. But when he was 12 he left school because of financial crisis. And then he join with his father as a helper. His father, Romizuddin, was a farmer. But Romizuddin had no land to cultivate. He only worked in others land. That’s why it was difficult for him to educate his children.

In 2001, Monir moved to Dhaka only for a work. As they had no land it was very hard to live on temporary sessional day labour. For the first two years in Dhaka he was a rikshapuller. In 2004, for the first time he started to work in garments factory in Gazipur. In 2008, he came at Rana plaza as a machine operator. Finally 2012, he become a quality inspector at Ether Tex Ltd.

During the accident he suddenly felt a jolt. Within a moment, he noticed his colleagues running back and forth, screaming. It took Monir a moment or two to realise that something ominous was going to happen. As soon as he along with others moved 20 feet towards the staircases, the building began collapsing, giving him the feeling of a lift going down at speed. *“Darkness engulfed the entire place with thick clouds of dust. I heard screams around me. My heart started pounding,”* said Monir, *“I lay down near a pillar, thinking that perhaps I*

*was going to die. We were being crushed inside,*” he said. The roof caved, leaving a space of three feet above him.

After sometime, a ray of hope emerged when he saw a faint light. It was a mobile phone light of one of his colleagues. He found a few more colleagues and together they pondered how they could find a way out of the horror. *“A lot of things and memories came across my mind. I was thinking about my wife and children,”* Monir said at the Enam Medical College and Hospital.

Many of his colleagues tried to make phone calls but to no avail, due to poor network coverage. Some lucky ones, however, called their loved ones seeking help. After an anguished wait of around five hours, rescuers finally pulled them out. *“It was like getting a second life,”* Monir said, his eyes brimming with tears.

As severely injured, now he unable to do any heavy work. He is now concern about his family, how he will bear cost of his treatment? How feed his family? He only got 10,000 taka as compensation from prime minister’s fund. Because of financial crisis, his treatment and children’s schooling become uncertain.

## **Case Study-6**

Nasreen, 23 years old, was second of three of her parents. Her father was a small businessman. She studied to class five. When 14 years old, she left school because her father was unable to bear the expenditure of schooling. And because of financial crisis she moved to Dhaka to find work from Barguna. She got a job in a garment factory in Gazipur.

In 2009, she joined in Ether Tex Ltd at Rana Plaza. Before the building collapse she were working for four years at this factory. On that day (24 April) minutes before the disaster struck, her father, Mobashwer Ali, had asked her over the cellphone to leave the building. But she did not get time for that. The Late at night on April 25, she was taken to the Intensive Care Unit of Enam Medical College Hospital in Savar from the wreckage of the nine-storey Rana Plaza. Nasreen lost her left hand while being rescued 36 hours after the most tragic building collapse in the country’s history on the morning of April 24.

Recollecting the incident, Nasreen said: “It was around 8:40am and I was just thinking of running out of the factory as my father told me. I had earlier told him about the cracks in the building.” Soon afterwards she felt the building shaking, as if it had been hit by a tremor. According to her, the building took a few seconds to come crashing down.

Having realised the building was collapsing, she instantly sat down and laid her head on the floor and folded her legs in a crawling position. It was dark and dust was all around. “I realised that a pillar had fallen on my left arm. Blood was coming out of my head, eyes and nose,” she said.

For 36 hours, she was trapped on the fifth floor of Rana Plaza until she was pulled out. Squeezed by concrete jumble and buried under the rubble, she could not move her body even an inch. Two of her colleagues were also trapped on the same floor. One of them, DipaPatra, died shortly after the collapse as a big piece of concrete fell on her chest. But Nasreen heard the other friend, Sabiha, asking in a feeble voice: “Are you alive, Nasreen? She replied in the positive, she said, adding: “Sabiha and I used to ask the same question to each other until we were pulled out,”

It was around 9:00pm on April 25 when rescuers spotted the two. Having seen Nasreen’s left hand pinned under a pillar, they first considered removing the pillar by cutting it. But they changed their mind, fearing that doing so would mean further collapse and if that happened, Nasreen and Sabiha would die.

“Then the rescuers decided to cut off my left hand to save our lives.” Nasreen was given some anaesthesia. Even so she had lost her senses when the rescuers finished cutting her hand off. “When I regained my senses, I found myself lying on the hospital bed,” she said.

She springs up on her bed whenever anyone tries to wake her up. Screaming and groaning, she frequently asks her father: “Get me out of the building. It terrifies me.” She is now being treated in a ward on the seventh floor of the 10-storey hospital. Her traumatic experience of coming back to life from death’s door is agony too heavy to bear.

“Whenever we need to wake her up ... she springs out of her bed, scared and stupefied,” says the grief-struck father. “Nasreen often trembles with fear as she looks at the [hospital]



building.” Nasreen now fears that the hospital building, too, will crumble and wants her father to take her out of it.

“My life is ruined. But I don’t want to see the life of any other man or woman ruined like mine. I request the government to do something for me so I can live my life in a way so that none can neglect me or hurt me,” said Nasreen.

## **Case Study-7**

Lipi, 23 years old, came from Rajshahi. She was younger daughter of her parents. She has two elder brother. Lipi’s father was a school teacher. They have their own land and properties. She studied to class ten. When she was reading at class nine she fall in love with Biplob who was reading at class ten.

Lipi’s father has died suddenly at heart attack and and her two brother separated after their marriage. At this stage it was difficult for Lipi to continue her study. Then she got married to her lover Biplob by their own decision and moved to Dhaka for getting a work. At first they went in Tonggi, where Biplob used to work as construction worker. In 2010, this couple joined New Wave Bottoms Ltd in Rana Plaza which collapsed and killed Biplob under the rubble on 24 April. Lipi survived only to wonder how to support herself and two daughters aged 2 and 5 now.

She had been on the sixth floor and Biplob on the third floor when the nine-storey building, housing the garment factory, crumbled into ruin. *“We were already scared of the cracks [in the building]. Minutes before the collapse at 8:45am, electricity went off and the building came crashing down as the power generator turned on with a tremble,”* she said.

*“I hid under a table on which the roof fell, and there was nothing but the darkness of a grave,”* she stated. *With mobile phone’s light, Lipi saw 12 persons around her, two of them dead. “We are chanting the name of Allah. Rescuers reached us five hours later.”* Lipi received only some scratches but passed out at the sight of a mountain of concrete jungles what used to be her workplace hours ago. She learned of Biplob’s death after regaining consciousness in hospital.

She said Biplob used to run a charcoal factory in Rajshahi and their family was quite solvent until a theft there left them broke and forced them to migrate to Dhaka. The widow was given a packet of Tk 20,000 by the authorities at Savar, but Lipi said she found Tk 1,000 less. Now Lipi worried about her daughters future. Before this accident she dreamt her daughters will gain higher education and get big job. She injured severely in the accident and now unable to do heavy work. That's why she concern about how she maintain her family.

### Case Study-8

Ayasa (20), came from Magura, Gupranga. There are seven members in her family, 3 daughters, 2 brothers and parents. Her father, Razzak, is a farmer. At first he used to work at other's land and later he bought a piece of land and cultivate in his own land. Razzak also had business of cow at cattle market. Now he is too weak to do any heavy work. Ayasa studied till class nine and left schooling because her father was unable to buy books.

She came to Dhaka two years ago. Her husband used to work as construction worker. Now they live in Majidpur at a rented house. Here they pay 1800 taka for a single room. She has a daughter who is reading at Brac school.

At first she joined at sixth floor of Rana Plaza for eight month and before accident she was working at third floor for ten month. She was cutting helper and was working from 8.00 am to 11/12.00 pm. When she talk about accident she said that on earlier day owner suddenly announced at mike to go out from garment and to enter inside later. But after lunch Police did not allow to entry. That's why on next day we thought that garments will be closed and for this we didn't bring regular lunch from home. Only came with ID card. She said, "*On that day nobody wanted to go inside the building. Everybody said that if we go inside we will die*".

She was also unwilling to go inside. However, one time she decided to go inside relying on Allah. It was announced through mike that "*the building has ten-storeyed foundation. There is no problem with the building. We fixed people at the point of crack, you be attentive in your work. Engineer is coming....*"

When we were working at one time electricity has off and generator started and that time building collapsed. “After few minutes I found myself under the rubble. *“I realized that a pillar had fallen on my left arm. Blood was coming out of my head, eyes and nose”*. Many of her colleagues were also trapped on the same floor. *“They were saying me that sister get out of here and save us”*. After been rescued she admitted at Enam medical but there was no proper treatment. After two days they did x-ray and found that her spinal code severely injured. After passing another two days doctor only bandage her.

Later she brought to Orthopaedic Hospital and stay here for 27 days. Ayesa complained that in orthopedic hospital didn't any treatment, just provided government medicine. She is now admitted at Centre for the Rehabilitation and the Paralyzed (CRP). As compensation she only receive 10,000 taka and 3000 Tk from buyer ( Ptimark). Now she unable to bear her treatment cost. She is concerned about her coming days.

## Case Study-9

Nazrul Islam (30) was born in a village under the district of Jessore. He was the eldest of the 5 children of his parents. His two sisters and youngest brother are living in village along with his parents. His immediate sibling, Shahidul is in Dhaka and doing job in a garment factory.

Islam completed secondary education from the local school. But due to financial difficulties he could not continue his education. He first tried to get an employment in his locality. But he could not manage any job in his locality. Finding no other alternative, he left his village and migrated Dhaka. Islam arrived in Dhaka 12 years back.

During the initial days he faced many difficulties, e.g. to secure a job, finding an accommodation, etc. He started as *rickshapuller*. He continued this for three years. Then he returned to his village. He stayed in village 2 years. During that time he got married with Salma, who was 17 years old and has junior level education. After 2 months of his marriage, he again left for Dhaka along with his wife. He started as *rickshapullar*. Meanwhile, one of his village folks gave him an opportunity to work an a bus helper, which he hoped for a long time.

After that joined at a garment in Ashulia and worked for two years. Then in 2011, he joined in Ether Tex Ltd as operator. He was working here for three years. He got 4500 taka as basic

salary. Islam and his wife live in a rented house. He pays a monthly rent of Tk. 1,800/- for the accommodation. He has a legal electricity connection.

On 24 April, he didn't know about crack in the building because crack was developed in third floor. However, the situation of Islam, was somewhat different. He was trapped for five hours on the sixth floor. There were around 12 people with him. There was a caved-in ceiling two to three feet above them. Around them were a few bodies on which pillars had crashed. *"We were restless and afraid in the beginning, but then we realized we were lucky to be alive,"* he said.

In the darkness, they distributed the bottle of water one of them had. *"Kneeling the whole time, we offered Johr and Nafl prayers in the hope of being rescued,"* he said. Later they crawled towards the staircase, which was approximately 25 feet away from them.

*"We could see a ray of light coming through a crack. We shouted through the crack, and after a while, rescuers came and pulled us out one after another around 2:00pm,"* he said, as he received treatment at Enam Medical College and Hospital.

Now jobless, after the collapse of Rana Plaza, Islam is left wondering how he would be able to support his wife and two children through Eid-ul-Fitr, the country's biggest religious festival. He was the lone bread earner of his family. *"I'm desperately looking for a job. Had I received something from the government, I might have gotten by. A miserable Eid now awaits us,"* he said.

So far, he received Tk 12,000 from the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) as salary, Tk 16,000 from British retailer Primark and Tk 3,000 as individual donations, most of which have already been exhausted. Like him, many of the victims of Rana Plaza collapse are yet to receive their due compensation, three months after the tragic incident.

Many say the faulty data collection is to blame for the botched disbursement of compensation. The local administration compiled a list of victims of the building collapse from hospital registrations. As a result, the ones who received minor injuries and therefore needed little medical attention, like Islam, were most definitely left off the list of beneficiaries.

## Case Study-10

Harun Sarkar (28), was born in a village under Barisal district. He was the 2<sup>nd</sup> among the five children of his parents. His father was farmer who cultivates his own land and had a small business at local market. His brother Almas and Shafiq work as wage laborer in the farm of other peasants. He went to school and read up to class Viii.

He got married at the age of 20. His father had a good quantity of land but gradually they became landless due to pauperization. When he was asked the cause of their pauperization and landlessness- he reported it as God's will.

Harun migrated to Dhaka 5 years back with one of his relatives. Due to acute poverty and unemployment he was compelled to migrate to Dhaka in search of jobs. After coming to Dhaka he first started as a *rickshapullar* and lived in Kutubkhali slum. After a few months, he brought his wife and children to Dhaka.

In the meantime, he changed his occupation and started to work in garment factory. In 2010, he shifted at Rana Plaza at third floor at New Wave Bottom as sewing machine operator. As he was working at third floor he knew about the crack. But as all worker entered and joined in the work, he also go inside and started working.

Suddenly, he felt that the floor started tipping, as if it had come alive. The first thing that came to his mind was the cracks in the building. Harun jumped up. As he was running down the stairs, he heard a thunderous sound. She saw the pillars and beams coming down. Along with many others, he got trapped inside the building.

Unfortunately he lost the left eye in the collapse. He rescued after 40 hours and admitted at Enam Medical College before being shifted to the National Institute of Eye Science and Hospital at the capital's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. He had been treated there for 51 days and then returned to his home in Savar. "I didn't get any financial help from anyone. I was at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, and none visited me there or extended

He is fighting a battle for survival when most people around him are preparing to celebrate the Eid festival. Even he sold off a piece of land at his village home spent the money for treatment for his wounded eye, nose, and head.

His four-member family is now totally dependent on charities for housing and food, as he has almost lost the capacity to work and needs more treatment, including a nose surgery. With the hope to get some financial assistance, Harun came to Garment Workers' Trade Union Centre in Genda, near Savar, where some donations arrived for the victims. A total of Tk 2,000 is all he got there.

Harun did not receive any aid either from the government or the garment factory owners association, BGMEA, other than Tk 15,000 as his salaries. He said, *"I cannot manage milk and barley for my four-month-old daughter. What will Eid mean to me?"* The baby was born four days before the nine-storey Rana Plaza in Savar crumbled on April 24, killing 1,132 people and leaving hundreds of others, including Harun, maimed or injured.

## **Case Study-11**

Shukhi, 19 years old, was second of three living children. Her home district is Vhola. Her father is a textile-mill laborer. She completed class 5. When she was 11 years old she left school. Her father lost land through gambling and failed attempt to go abroad. Her entire family moved to Dhaka to live with uncle and get jobs. Shukhi asked parents to join in garments factory and started garment work as a helper (monthly Tk.1750).

Brother and mother also found garment factory jobs. After one year Shukhi became an operator in a new factory for salary Tk.3000. Then she returned to old factory to earn Tk.4000. Her mother gave up garment work because of ill health. Family moved to new house (house rent Tk.1800). Shakti suffered from ill health but could not afford to take time off from work. Father moved back to home village and uncle moved into Shukhi's house. She moved to current factory after being involved in wage protest at old factory.

Shukhi came to the city with their parents, and both started working in factories when they were about 11. Shukhi's younger sister, Shireen, was taken to work at the garment factory where her mother and brother worked because alternative child care was unavailable. As she grew older, Shireen helped with various tasks until she was deemed to be sufficiently productive to draw her own wage. Thus, in contrast to the experience of Shukhi, whose entry into garment work shortly after the family's arrival in Dhaka meant a clear break with her previous life, Shireen's transition was gradual.

However, Shukhi moved at New Wave Bottom at Rana Plaza six month ago. Like other workers, she was working on that day. When building collapsed she pinned down, while conscious the whole time, by a pillar which crushed both her legs.

*“Lying there amid blood in the pitch dark, I could only think about my two daughters because I saw death so closely. Two others were lying dead beside me,”* she said, now at Enam Hospital. She shouted for help as she saw light coming through a hole morning after one day. Rescuers tried, but failed to free her legs.

She pleaded them to cut her legs off. *“I told them I’d rather live as a beggar to support my daughters than die there.”* The rescuers complied with her request using machetes. Shukhi’s husband Jahangir Alam, a worker at another garment factory in Savar, did not visit her since the collapse and she knows he does not care much about the daughters. Now, she becomes helpless and unable to carry on her treatment. Because of poverty her unable to bear her treatment cost. Although immediately after accident she received some financial support from government and different NGOs, all these run out for her treatment. At present she is a burden for her family.

## **Case Study-12**

Anwara (32) was born in a village in Jamalpur near the Jamuna river in a landless family. She was born in poverty but happy with her parents. They were five brothers and two sisters. She was married to Kadam Ali at the age of 14. Kadam Ali was 18 years old. His father owned 6 katha of land but had five sons. So the economic condition was poor.

Kadam Ali the second son, used to make baskets with bamboo and cane- but did not have a good income. The household was run by the mother in-law, whose torture on Anwara, which was supported by the father in-law, had no end since Anwara could not bring any dowry from home. Anwara had to do all the household chores and many times she had to go without food. She had her first child, a son, at the age of 18.

The situation was unbearable and Anwara wanted to leave the place to look for a job. Her husband, however, would not accompany her due to her mother's command. So along with

her son Anwara left her home with a cousin brother and came to Dhaka sitting on the roof top of a train- without any ticket.

In Dhaka, they took shelter in Taltola bastee. She tried to look for a job but could not find any because of her child, which she had to carry around. Being penny less she started begging on the street. After two years she found a group of women working in the construction site where a building was being constructed. With the help of a woman from her same region, she joined the group and started her life as a construction labourer. For two/three years she worked and saved money to send home to her husband. Then she again went back to the village to bring her husband.

Then Anwara came back to Dhaka with her husband. But her husband was unable to manage any job. Again Anwara has to work under the scorching ray of sun at the site without any protection for hands or feet, inhaling dust all the times with her two children hanging around and helping her. As a result of brick breaking with bare hand she sometimes get injured. For these injury usually she does not take any medicine.

It was difficult for him to continue such hard working. Then she decided to join in garments factory. At first she joined in a garment in fotullah, Narayangong. In the meantime, her husband also joined at New Weave Style Ltd in Rana Plaza. Finally she also moved at Rana Plaza. During the building collapse both were working at the building.

Although she narrowly survived from the collapse but lost her husband who too had worked in the building. She needs around Tk 2,500 a month to feed her eight-month-old son but she has no income now. *“My father helps us as he doesn’t want me to work in any garment factory,”* said Anwara. She does not want to work either cause if she dies like her husband *“who will look after my son”*. She had been pulled out of the tangled wreckage of the building. But she could not move out of the time of her misery and helplessness and fear of imminent death as the memories still haunt her. *“I cannot focus on anything whenever I remember the building collapse.”*

Anwara got only Tk 16,000 as compensation from an international buyer Primark through bKash, a mobile money transfer service. She wants to open a tailoring shop to raise her child. For that she needs money and so she urged the government to give the compensation soon.



## Case Study-13

Hossain (27) was born at Bancharampur, in the district of Comilla. He is the 2<sup>nd</sup> among the three children of his parents. His two siblings, Anwar and Hasina are living in his village home. Hossain often visits his village home and siblings also visit him.

Hossain went to school and read up to class X. His father has some land. Before migration to Dhaka, Hossain along with his brother cultivated the land. But the land was quite insufficient to bear their needs. So, they had to work as wage laborers in the farm of other peasants. But it was not easy to get employment in the village. Therefore, finding no other alternative, once, before 10 years age, he left his village in search of employment.

Leaving the village, Hossain migrated to Dhaka. First time he came alone. First he put up with in a slum, situated at Agargaon. For 15 days he could not join in any job. But later, he started as peddler and sold tea, biscuit and so on. But he could not be satisfied with this, because, it was not so profitable to him. However, he did it one year. Then he started a petty business, at Mirpur area.

Five years back he got married in his village home. The spouse was selected by his parents. His wife Rahima, in 18 years old. After the marriage he came to Dhaka leaving his wife back in village. Two years ago he brought his wife to Dhaka. His wife is a housewife. The couple has a one year old son, named Ratan.

Hossain and his family lived in a one-roomed rented house. He pays Tk. 1800.00 per month for the room. So it has become very difficult for him to maintain family in costly city. Then in 2006, Hossain joined at a garment in Gazipur with the help of a neighbor. After working three years in Gazipur he moved to Savar and joined in another factory as machine operator. Two years ago Hossain joined in New Wave Style at Rana Plaza.

During the collapse, Hossain was working inside the building. Workers of at least two garment factories at Rana Plaza were forced to join their workplaces following a false assurance on the building's safety from a local engineer. Hossain said "*Management at the five factories assured them that the small cracks did not pose a real threat as an engineer gave a safety report. The factory management threatened the workers that their month's salary would not be paid if they did not show up at work.*"

However, he entered in the building but it was around 8:40am felt a jolt. Within a moment, he noticed his colleagues running back and forth, screaming. Then *“I ran near the stairs to get out of the building, and a pillar fell on me,”* he said. His left hand was crushed and pinned under the pillar as he lay there bleeding with a big fracture in his skull.

*“We could see a ray of light coming through a crack. We shouted through the crack, and after a while, rescuers came and pulled us out,”* he said. After that he received treatment at Enam Medical College and Hospital. His four-member family is now totally dependent on charities for housing and food, as he has almost lost the capacity to work and needs more treatment.

So far, he received Tk 10,000 from the government fund, and Tk 16,000 from British retailer Primark and Tk 3,000 as individual donations, most of which have already been exhausted. Hossain’s is not an isolated story. Like him, many of the victims of Rana Plaza collapse are yet to receive their due compensation, three months after the tragic incident.

## **Case Study-14**

Mizanur Rahman, 45 years old, came from Doulatpur, under Manikgong district. Mizan born in a family of five members. His father was farmer, who had enough land for cultivation. He studied to class ten. His two elder brothers also completed SSC. But as their village was affected by river erosion several time and lost all of their land and properties, finally they had to move to Dhaka.

After migration to Dhaka, Mizan stopped his study and joined in construction work as a labour. Now he has three daughters and a son. His two daughters also got married and live in Savar. Mizan’s wife Kulsum, 40, and daughter Arati worked at New Wave Style on the sixth floor of Rana Plaza. Three days into the crash, he found Kulsum’s body at Adhar Chandra High School, a kilometre from the building, where the dead were being brought for identification.

Arati was rescued on the same day from the wreckage. Her right leg had been so badly squashed between the piles of concrete that it had to be amputated to keep her alive. Mizan

does not mourn his wife anymore. He has lost his job. His eldest daughter 18-year-old Arati has been taking treatment at a hospital with her right leg cut off. At home, his three children — Rumi, 9, Laily, 7, and Akhi, 2, await their father to get food for them.

*“God only knows how they [the children] will survive. I don’t know how I will take care of them”* Mizan says. Worries seem to have taken over the loss of his wife Kulsum, a garment worker, who died in the collapse of Rana Plaza at Savar outside Dhaka on April 24. Mizan (45) a construction worker, who was working on the rooftop of the nine-storey building that day, narrowly escaped the disaster with minor injuries. He saw his three fellow workers die while another one broke one leg.

Before the tragedy, Mizan, Kulsum and Arati together earned Tk 15,000 a month, with Mizan contributing the biggest chunk of Tk 8,000. Arati is being treated at Enam Medical College Hospital for free. But Mizan is now all by himself to meet the day to day expenses of the five-member family. Mizan was an employee of the building owner, Sohel Rana. “Rana is in jail. The other office staffs are not answering phone calls. Where will I go to claim my salary for the month of April?” he said. Arati got Tk 10,500 in salary and benefits from Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association but that will not pay off the living and education expenses of her three siblings for long.

No compensation has been fixed yet for the garment workers who died in the collapse. “I do not know whether her [Kulsum] arrears will be paid,” said Mizan who is in desperate need for money. Unfortunately, her company ID card is lost and neither Arati nor Mizan can remember the card number.

When asked as to how he would prove to the authorities that Kulsum had been an employee of New Wave Style, he said her colleagues in the machine operation section would speak for her. Suddenly brushing aside all the problems, Mizan remembers his youngest daughter, Akhi. *“My two-year-old child often looks for her mother. I cannot even give her the care she should get as I am to be with Arati.”*

## Case Study-15

Jhorna Begum, 28 years old, came from Kurigram, under Rangpur division. She was elder daughter of her parents. They are two sister and one brother. Her father, Sobur Ali, was a farmer. Sobur Ali had his own land to cultivate. As Rangpur is a 'monga' area it was very hard for Sobur Ali to educate his children. His elder son Hasan (30) came to Dhaka when he was 15 years old, only for a job.

Jhorna studied till class five and left school because of financial crisis. She got married when she was 17 years old. Her husband Jahangir was a day labour who worked in others land. After the birth of their first baby they moved to Dhaka in the search of a better work. At first they went in Gazipur and Jahangir got involved in construction work. After their second baby they moved in Savar and Jahangir joined in a factory at Rana Plaza.

Two years later Jhorna also joined in the factory. During the collapse of the building she was a sewing helper in the New Wave Style factory, on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the Rana Plaza building, Jhorna and her husband have two young daughters and a son. She earned just 18 cents an hour, \$1.45 a day, and \$37.69 a month.

Jhorna's older brother Hasan said that:

*"My younger sister, Jhorna, has been missing since 24 April, when the building collapsed. She has been missing for more than a week. Every day we go to the Savar Adhar Chandra High School, and to the perimeter of the Rana Plaza area to search for her. Her husband is sick with grief."*

*"Jhorna called her husband (narrowly escaped from accident) on her cell phone on the morning of April 24<sup>th</sup> saying that she was trapped under a massive concrete slab. She begged to be rescued. But no one came to get her out of the rubble. 'I want to live for my kids.' 'Save...save...save me'! were the last words her husband, Jahangir, heard. Her words still haunt him.*

Her brother Hasan said that Jhorna's three children are now motherless. Who will take care of them? How will they survive? Who will cook for them? She was not willing to go to work on that day but the factory people forced her into working. They killed her. The government did

nothing to ensure the safety of the workers. Jhorna wanted to live for her children but the government failed to reach her. Jhorna was a very loving and caring mother and wife. The rescue operation is very slow. It seems that the authorities hid her dead body like many other workers. At least 3,500 to 4,000 workers toiled in this building, but just a few hundred dead bodies have been found in the rubble. Where are the rest of the dead bodies?

Hasan was saying, *"Thousands of people like us are roaming around to look for the dead bodies and we are so frantic. Our tears have dried up. We have no tears now. We beg the government to hand over the body of my sister."*

Since Jhorna was missing and her family has no proof about her job, they did not get any compensation. Her parents are now concern about her children. The sad thing for them is that they don't know about their mother, whether she alive or dead.

## **Case Study-16**

Nazma Sultana (18) born in Jossor in 1995. Nazma is only Daughter. Her father was a day labour. But his income was insufficient for bear the family cost. That's why Nazma was grown up with poverty. Because of financial crisis she studied only to class four. Nazma lost her father when she was a child and her mother deserted her to get married again. She always dreamt of standing on her own two feet. And she was the only one for her poor old grandmother to depend on. She was brought up by her widowed granny Anwara. Despite abject poverty, Anwara tried her best to educate Monica and give her a decent life. The girl had to drop out of school when she was in class IX and went to Dhaka for a living.

She got a job at a garment factory housed in Rana Plaza three months ago. But the 18-year-old girl is now among the ill-fated garment workers killed in the country's worst ever building collapse in Savar. On 24 April morning, the nine-storey building caved in, shattering all her hopes. Her grandmother Anwara showed her photographs to journalists repeatedly and wailed. While recollecting the days with her granddaughter, she lost consciousness.

She said Nazma would decline to get married, as she wanted to become self-reliant first. The girl's uncle Abu Jayed said her niece wanted to change her lot working at a garment factory, but that was not to be. Nazma was back home after three days but as a corpse.

## **Chapter Eight: Local and Global Response to the Rana Plaza Accident**

### **8.1 Introduction**

After any deadly industrial accident like Rana Plaza accident, it is very important to take both short-term and long-term initiatives to cope with the accident and to ensure the prevention of reoccurrence of such accident. Short-term initiatives include treatment, rehabilitation and compensation for the victims. In the long term, it is necessary to find out possible causes of the accident: who are responsible, what are the major faults, what are the structural, legal and institutional weakness and to take the proper measures to address it. These are not only matter of making commitment but also proper implementation of the measures. After the Rana Plaza accident, a lot of commitments made government, trade bodies, and international buyers and labour rights organizations regarding the compensation, safety measures for workers and legal aspect of labour rights and safe working condition. But there is little and slow implementation of these commitments.

### **8.2 Compensation for the Victims**

#### ***8.2.1 Major Pledges and Commitments***

After the Rana Plaza tragedy a number of local and international organizations made their pledges and commitments with regard to compensation, treatment and rehabilitation. Government made a number of commitments with regard to compensations for the family of dead victims, providing treatment to injured workers and rehabilitating family members of dead workers. The government pledged to provide Tk 1 lakh to each of the deceased workers' families together with financial assistance of up to Tk 15 lakh in the form of savings certificate and life insurance benefit of Tk 1 lakh ( Pledges not fulfilled, 2013).

Besides this government take two year plan for physiological treatment for the injured workers including treatment abroad for seriously wounded workers, and rehabilitating the family members of the injured workers. Savar Cantonment authority prepared three lists which include a list of 1,000 garment workers who need to be given jobs, a list of amputated workers who need to be rehabilitated and employed, and a list of severely injured workers (CPD 2013).

On the other hand, BGMEA has committed to raise Tk 25,000 from each of its 5,000-odd member factories and forward the proceeds to the Prime Minister's Funds and to provide employment for able family members of disabled workers. Few organizations have committed to donate in support of the victim workers and their families.

At the international level a number of development partners, international organizations and retailers have made commitments both for immediate needs, as well as for medium-term measures. The United States (US) government has offered victim workers artificial limbs, DNA testing kits and transplantation of organs. German government has pledged to support the disabled workers to job integration. ILO assured to provide support to the victims of Rana Plaza. Retailers who were in contractual terms with the factories at Rana Plaza such as H&M, Inditex, Primark, C&A announced to spend USD 5 million for the victims. Besides, Loblaws and Primark pledged to compensate families and children of victims.

It is to be noted that the Geneva-based negotiations on compensation for the victims had not yet been endorsed by many international brands and retailers. So far, only nine brands that sourced clothes from the Rana Plaza have joined in the negotiation talks: Bon Marché, Camaieu, El Corte Ingles, Kik, Loblaws, Mascot, Matalan, Primark and Store Twenty One. Twenty other companies, all of whom were invited, failed to show up at the last negotiation meeting held on 12 September 2013: Adler, Auchan, Benetton, C&A, Carrefour, Cato Corp, The Children's Place, Dressbarn, Essenza, FTA International, Gueldenpfennig, Iconix Brand, Inditex, JC Penney, Kids Fashion Group, LPP, Mango, Manifattura Corona, NKD, Premier Clothing, PWT Group, Texman and Walmart (Mirdha and Ahamad 2013).

### ***8.2.2 Disbursement of Compensation***

The victims of the factories at the Rana Plaza yet to receive proper compensation six months after the accident although they were entitled to get a number of compensation and benefits. According to ActionAid, who surveyed 2297 people - nearly two thirds of survivors and families of those who died in the factory collapse, 94% reported they have not received any legal benefits from their employers since April, including sick pay or compensation. Most of them are not currently working and have no regular income, living in extreme poverty. They have debts, no savings, no other breadwinner in the family and have severe difficulty meeting their daily needs.

In the initial phase, 14 institutions provided cash support. The government of Bangladesh, particularly the Prime Minister's Relief and Welfare Fund is the biggest financial contributor with Bangladeshi Taka (BDT) 175.4 million or US\$2.19 million (ActionAid 2013). The Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) said that they have provided BDT 55 million (US\$687,500) so far, out of which BDT 20 million was provided to the Prime Minister's Relief and Welfare Fund. BGMEA also said that they ensured payment of salary and allowances to the workers of the five factories within 15 days of the incident and provided the lion-share of surgical and treatment costs (BDT 35 million or US\$437,500). Primark, one of the brands that sourced from Rana Plaza, provided BDT 15,000 (US\$190) to each victim, covering a total of 3300 survivors and family members through the mobile banking system, BKash (ActionAid 2013).

**Salaries:** BGMEA has arranged salaries for workers, overtime benefit and other benefits. According to the information of the BGMEA, a total of 2,759 workers received those benefits, of which 2,438 workers received their benefits from BGMEA and another 321 workers received their payment at hospitals (CPD 2013).

Since total number of worker is supposed to be 3,900, about 1,150 workers or their families did not receive any kind of benefits because of confusion with the number of missing workers, lack of identification documents in support of dead workers, etc. A total of Tk. 7 crore has been disbursed for the payment of workers' salaries (Pledges not fulfilled, 2013). From the field work it was accused that workers did not get the full compensation for their overtime work.

**Dead workers:** According to the announcement of the Prime Minister, families of dead workers were supposed to receive the life insurance benefit of Tk. 1 lakh each. A total of 777 families have received this benefit so far, meaning at least another 355 remain. This is mainly due to the problems raised in identifying the authentic families of the dead victims.

It is important to have clarification on whether the donation of BGMEA to the Prime Minister's Fund (Tk. 3 crore) is the insurance claims of the workers or is it a fresh fund. A simple calculation is: families of 1,132 victim workers are supposed to receive an insurance benefit of Tk. 11.32 crore. It is alleged that factories often do not cover all its workers under group life insurance scheme in order to reduce the cost for insurance. In fact, BGMEA maintains the process of group insurance by providing a lump sum amount. In other words,



all the workers in the Rana Plaza are most likely not to be covered under insurance (CPD 2013). Prime Minister has announced to provide financial assistance up to Tk. 15 lakh in the form of savings certificate to the victim's families. But only 30 families have received on average Tk. 10 lakh.

Prime Minister's Fund have received donation from government, non-government, private organizations, NGO, bank and from individuals. In total, Prime Minister's Fund amounted 127,67,33,349 Tk. But only 17,54,64000Tk distributed from this fund so far (Prothom Alo, 24 October). Some funds were collected by different organizations and were distributed to the victims. For example, Prothom Alo collected a total of Tk. 1.9 crore and spent Tk. 36.8 lakh so far. CRP received fund from different sources which was equivalent to Tk. 34.9 lakh (CPD 2013).

***Missing Workers:*** Families of the missing workers are in the worst situation. Because of unidentification of over 260 dead persons as well as a large number of untraced workers, these victims' families have not been recognized under any official process. Only small number of these families has received benefit of Tk. 15,000-16,000 from one of the buyers 'Primark' as part of their commitment to support the victims.

*Firoz Hossain* was a worker at New Wave Bottoms Ltd, a garment factory that was housed at ill-fated Rana Plaza. Every month he would send a good portion of his monthly salary of Tk 11,000 back home in Rajbari. Now jobless, after the collapse of Rana Plaza on April 24, Hossain is left wondering how he would be able to support his wife and two children through Eid-ul-Fitr, the country's biggest religious festival. He was the lone bread earner of his family. "I'm desperately looking for a job. Had I received something from the government, I might have gotten by. A miserable Eid now awaits us," he said.

So far, he received Tk 42,000 from the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) as salary, Tk 16,000 from British retailer Primark and Tk 3,000 as individual donations, most of which have already been exhausted. Hossain's is not an isolated story. Like him, many of the victims of Rana Plaza collapse are yet to receive their due compensation, three months after the tragic incident.

Many say the faulty data collection is to blame for the botched disbursement of compensation. The local administration compiled a list of victims of the building collapse from hospital registrations. As a result, the ones who received minor injuries and therefore

needed little medical attention, like Hossain, were most definitely left off the list of beneficiaries.

*Mousumi Akter*, 19, who had worked at New Weave Style Ltd in Rana Plaza. She narrowly survived the collapse but lost her husband who too had worked in the building. She needs around Tk 2,500 a month to feed her eight-month-old son but she has no income now. “My father helps us as he doesn’t want me to work in any garment factory,” said Mousumi. She does not want to work either cause if she dies like her husband “who will look after my son”.

She had been pulled out of the tangled wreckage of the building. But she could not move out of the time of her misery and helplessness and fear of imminent death as the memories still haunt her. “I cannot focus on anything whenever I remember the building collapse.”

Mousumi got only Tk 16,000 as compensation from an international buyer Primark through bKash, a mobile money transfer service. She wants to open a tailoring shop to raise her child. For that she needs money and so she urged the government to give the compensation soon.

*Amena Begum*, with her fractured hand, since eight in the morning of the day after two month of Rana plaza tragedy was waiting outside the capital’s Sundarban Hotel, with high hopes that someone would come out with some financial help. Amena said. She along with her daughter used to work at Phantom Apparels Ltd on the third floor of the high rise.

Jobless and facing mounting medical bills, they are now desperate for financial assistance. “One of my neighbors informed me yesterday that they have received financial help here from an organization. That’s why, we’ve come here,” Amena’s husband has been sick for sometime now and depends on their income.

She has been struggling to manage her treatment costs. She even cannot pay off house rent. About 150 garment workers brought out a procession from near the hotel around 1:00pm demanding compensations and wages from the factory owners, said Md Sumon, a worker of New Wave Style Ltd.

However, none of the workers knew the name of the organization which would pay compensations to them. “We all left the city around 3:30 pm, as no one came out of the hotel with help. Nobody assured us of anything, either,” said Zahid Hossain, who waited with Amena at the spot under open skies.

*Niru Sardar (30)*, a garment worker who lost the left eye in the Rana Plaza collapse, is fighting a battle for survival when most people around him are preparing to celebrate the Eid festival. The 30-year-old sewing machine operator sold off a piece of land at his village home in Rajbari sadar upazila and spent the money for treatment for his wounded eye, nose, and head.

His four-member family is now totally dependent on charities for housing and food, as he has almost lost the capacity to work and needs more treatment, including a nose surgery. With the hope to get some financial assistance, Niru came to Garment Workers' Trade Union Centre in Genda, near Savar, where some donations arrived for the victims.

A total of Tk 2,000 is all he got there. Niru did not receive any aid either from the government or the garment factory owners association, BGMEA, other than Tk 15,000 as his salaries. Niru said, "I cannot manage milk and barley for my four-month-old daughter. What will Eid mean to me?"

The baby was born four days before the nine-storey Rana Plaza in Savar crumbled on April 24, killing 1,132 people and leaving hundreds of others, including Niru, maimed or injured. Six hours after he was pulled out alive from the rubble, Niru was sent to a local clinic before being shifted to the National Institute of Eye Science and Hospital at the capital's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. He had been treated there for 51 days and then returned to his home in Savar. "I didn't get any financial help from anyone. I was at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, and none visited me there or extended any help. But I have heard that many people helped the victims," Niru said.

*Taslima Khatun (19)*, Employed in a garment factory housed on the third floor of the nine-storey Rana Plaza. She, sewing machine operator, went missing following the collapse on April 24. This caused the world of her dependants living in Rajbari district to come crashing down. Her five family members include a rickshaw-puller father too ill to work regularly, a housewife mother, a fifth-grader brother and a widowed sister-in-law with a three-year-old son. "She used to send us Tk 3,000, and sometimes a thousand or two more," said her father, Ayub Sheikh. With no proof of her employment and of Taslima being related to them, the family is ineligible for any compensation, Talima's arrears for one month and her overtime payments.

The family waits for a DNA match confirming that they are related to Taslima, presumably one among the unidentified bodies recovered from the site. “Our mother provided blood to get a DNA match, but we have not gotten the results yet. We do not know when we will be getting them,” said Taslima’s elder sister Aklima Khatun. Against this backdrop, Taslima’s family has not received the Tk 20,000 compensation given from the Deputy Commissioner’s Office to families of those whose bodies were found. Moreover, many families of the missing informed that they have been left out from the compensation being provided from the Prime Minister’s Office as long as the body can be shown as proof.

Those receiving treatment at different healthcare institutions have also been provided monetary support by philanthropists. “Some of the injured patients admitted to my hospital were given up to Tk 7 or 8 lakh from various places,” said Dr Abdul Awal Rizvi, director of National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation.

In the search for Taslima, Ayub Sheikh has had to spend quite a considerable amount of money and has been living with Aklima in Savar’s Majidpur, right behind Rana Plaza. A housewife with a day labourer husband and a four-and-a-half year old daughter, Aklima is now struggling to support her father’s family.

*Zohura Begum* (22) residing in Majidpur. Though she made it out alive from beneath the rubble, she could not find her husband, Motiur Rahman, 26, who also worked there. Still reeling from the trauma, Zohura is now unable to work. “I cannot stay inside any high-rise building now due to a fear that it might collapse. I took up a job recently but had to quit it,” Zohura said.

She has been struggling to manage her treatment costs. She even cannot pay off house rent. Jobless and facing mounting medical bills, they are now desperate for financial assistance. “I have spent all of my savings and I need the compensation to survive till I get better,” she said.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Savar Kamrul Hasan Mollah estimated the number of missing victims at 329, as per lists drawn up on May 14, after rescue operations were declared over. Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association President Atiqul Islam said the arrears of the victims cannot be handed over to the families until a biological association was established via DNA tests. “A lot of false claims to the money may appear, and we want to make sure the money goes to the right person,” he said.

### **8.3 Safety Measures: Building and Fire Safety**

After the collapse of Rana Plaza the issue of building and fire safety has become key aspect of industrial safeties. Both at national and international level, various initiatives including plan, accord and compact agreements have undertaken with regard to building safety. The government has decided not to allow set up of any garment factories in vulnerable buildings in order to ensure the safety of the workers. In an immediate reaction, Ministry of Commerce mentioned that at least 200 factories are to be shut down immediately due to poor physical condition.

A high-powered committee of the Government headed by the Minister for Textiles and Jute, has been working on inspecting the safety and security of factories. A total of 11 teams which comprised officials of factory inspection authority, Fire Service Civil Defense authority, PDB, RAJUK and others have completed inspection of at least 20 factories.

The tripartite agreement was signed in two phases on February 20 and July 25 after two deadly factory accidents — Tazreen Fashions fire on November 24 last year and Rana Plaza collapse on April 24. It was said by government official, a group of 30 expert panels led by Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology will start inspection of garment factories from mid-September to check structural flaws and ensure worker safety. The teams plan to inspect around 2,000 garment factory buildings in three months under a tripartite agreement between the government, trade unions and the International Labour Organization.

This Garment factory inspection on a full-fledged basis began from 22 November, with 200 units to come under the microscopes of BUET experts over the next eight weeks. The 200 factories to be inspected, both for structural integrity and fire and electrical safety, would fall under the 2,000 factories that the government agreed to as part of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) efforts to improve factory safety in Bangladesh.

The inspection teams have already been formed with experts from other universities, the ILO, donor agencies, trade unions, Bangladesh Employers' Federation, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association. inspect the buildings, which were not included on the lists of IndustriALL and North American Alliance, to avoid repetition.

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) says of the roughly 2,500 operational export factories, 620 have been inspected and 20 shut down by owners who don't want to jeopardize the industry's standing (Motlagh 2013).

BGMEA has committed to inspect the physical condition of the factory buildings, and therefore, asked members to submit building design and soil test reports. Out of 2,425 running factory members of BGMEA 1,819, and out 1,000 running factory of BKMEA 353 have submitted their required papers to the authority (Daily Star, 2013). However, it has yet to set any policy about how to examine the documents and take appropriate actions. BGMEA has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Institute of Planners, Bangladesh and Institute of Architects to identify the indicators for building standard (CPD 2013). BGMEA has also ordered its member factories to remove generators placed above the ground floor of the buildings by 30 May. But there is no update information about the implementation of this order.

The major initiatives after the collapse include three separate platforms for factory inspection. The government signed the National Action Plan (NAP), European retailers signed an accord, and US retailers signed a separate agreement. Of the three, two are global initiatives — one led by IndustriALL, an international trade union, and the other is North American Alliance, a platform of 20 US-based retailers and brands. The third one, initiated by the government, will be led by Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

The group of 90 European global retailers that represents global giants including Hennes&Mauritz AB, Inditex SA, PVH Corp, and Benetton SpA, will inspect more than 1500 factories that account for a third of all garments units in the country's \$21.5 billion industry. They already have published a list of more than 1500 factories across Bangladesh that they will inspect to ensure fire and building safety (Retailer group list, 2013).

North American Alliance, another platform of 22 US-based retailers, who will inspect more than 500 factories, is yet to come up with their list. The government will survey the rest of the 5,000 factories in Bangladesh's garment sector. All of these three separate platforms have agreed to follow a common action plan drawn by the government.

On the other hand, the central bank has created a fund of Tk 100 crore with the assistance of Japan Agency (JICA) to improve safety standards in the apparel sector. Factory owners will receive the loan from commercial banks at a maximum of 10 percent interest for rebuilding or relocating of factories and purchase of equipment (Tk 100cr for garment factory, 2013).

There were some other agreements like Compact, a joint initiative of the government and the EU under the auspices of International Labour Organization (ILO), for fire and building safety in Bangladesh's garment sector. It has established the neutral chair for the 'Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh'. Under its RBSA programme, a number of initiatives will be undertaken including training of 200 factory inspectors, procurement of equipment for building inspection, workers' education and preparing a full-fledged 'better work programme'(German envoy, 2013).

US Department of Labour earlier announced to provide USD 2.5 million for improvements in the enforcement and monitoring of fire and building safety standards to better protect workers in the RMG sector. Another 17 leading US and Canadian clothing retailers established a 5-year long Bangladesh Worker Safety Initiative to enforce safer conditions for workers in Bangladesh garment plants. Beside these a global initiative is currently ongoing to do a transparency exercise on the governance of the garment industry under 'Garments Industries Transparency Initiative (GITI)'. An index will be prepared for individual major garment producing country, based on a set of indicators such as security against fire, building codes, minimum wage standards, child labour, social security, job security, and transparency of terms and conditions of hiring and firing and working environment (CPD 2013).

All these have produced a lot of papers. But the problem is in implementation even when funds are not a problem. There is a lack of coordination in the implementation of so many agreements.

## **8.4 Legal Measures after the Accident**

### ***8.4.1 Labour Law Amendment***

After the Rana Plaza Tragedy, on July 15, Bangladesh parliament amended the labour law of 2006 to improve worker rights and ensure freedom to form trade unions, a breakthrough that is expected to help Bangladesh regain the GSP status in the US market. It seems that the amendments were made to appease the US administration to regain the duty benefits suspended by the US in June on grounds of poor labour rights and unsafe working conditions in Bangladeshi factories. The changes in the law also ensure freedom to associate, one of the sticking issues for Western countries and advocacy groups. The major changes in the new labour law are as following.

Table 8.1 *Comparison of two Labour laws, 2006 and 2013*

<b>Labour Law 2013</b>	<b>Labour Law 2006</b>
Allows up to five trade	Allows only two Union
Owners can't interfere in how trade union will be formed	Owners used to decide who would be the trade union leaders
If 20 % of workers are women, there should be a woman union leader in the factory	It was optional
Owners can't change factory layout without the permission of factory inspector	Layout plan will approved automatically two month after application
No exit can be locked	Role was not specific about it

*Source: Compiled by Researcher.*

Employees would no longer need approval from factory owners to form trade unions. They will only need to apply to the labour directorate to collect registration of trade unions. An owner can sack a worker if he/she remains absent in the workplace for 10 consecutive days without prior notice, according to the amendments.

The owners will have to introduce an insurance scheme if a factory employs at least 10 workers.

If a worker is injured in an accident, he/she will get assistance for treatment from the insurance scheme. There should be a woman union leader in the factory if 20 percent of the total workforce are women, the amended law says. No member of a trade union's executive committee can be transferred to another factory of the same owner after a labour unrest.

Moreover, up to five trade unions can now be formed in one factory instead of just two permitted in the previous law. The amendments also allow trade unions in the different administrative wings of a factory, which was restricted in the previous law.

To improve the living standards of workers, the government, buyers and owners will have to form a 'central fund' for the beneficiaries of 100 percent export-oriented industries and wholly foreign-owned companies. The law also requires a company to deposit 5 percent of its



annual profit in provident and welfare funds. No change can be made in the factory layout plan without an approval from factory inspectors, according to the amended law.

If a worker dies after two years in service, the management of the factory will pay compensation equivalent to his/her one month's salary. And, if a worker dies in an accident during service, his relatives will get a compensation equivalent to 45 days' salary.

If an owner sacks a worker who has served the company for more than a year, he/she will get 15 days' salary for every year of service. But if the worker is sacked for misconduct, he/she will not be entitled to any compensation. Theft, embezzlement, vandalism, arson and disruptive behavior will be considered as misconduct under the amended law.

The American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organization (AFL-CIO) criticized the recently amended Bangladesh labour law, saying it has failed to address key concerns raised by workers and their rights advocates. Celeste Drake, trade and globalization policy specialist at the AFL-CIO said, "Given the problematic history of government actions in Bangladesh, both the lack of specificity in the law as amended and the absence of firm deadlines to issue regulations are worrisome." (AFL-CIO slams labour law, 2013).

According to Industrial Regulation Ordinance 1969, 25% leadership could be elected from outside if the workers wished. This law was scrapped in 1977. This is a conspiracy to weaken the trade union movement. Our workers are not educated, trained and equipped with bargaining techniques to face the employers. In the Tripartite Consultative Committee (TCC) meeting, the labour ministry said that if the members of the union so desired, they would be entitled to elect 20% of the members in the executive committee who are not employed in the establishment. The government has not followed this proposal; rather it proposed 10% for public sector and none for the private sector (Islam 2013).

The new law has not changed the existing requirement of 30% membership for forming a union. This is very important for workers. At present, there are factories where the number of workers is more than 20,000 or even 40,000. It is hardly possible to form unions in those factories following the present system of registration. It will take 7-8 months. In this time employers could dismiss the organizers. As there is no provision for ex-workers to join the union, it will not be possible to form a union with this lengthy registration process.

The Labour Law 2006 had the provision for payment of 5% profit to the garment workers. But now it will be applied sector-wise, where workers of a profit making industry will have to share their profit with non-profit-making industries of the same sector. If an industry fails to profit it is because of the inefficiency of the employers, not of the workers. Then why should workers have to share the burden.

The laws are restrictive in other ways, too. Unions will not be permitted in factories in special export zones, where many plants that cater to Western companies are based. More than two-thirds of union members would have to authorize a strike (in the United States, a simple majority usually suffices). The government would also have the right to stop any strike it determines to be a “serious hardship to the community” or is “prejudicial to the national interest,” according to Human Rights Watch.

#### ***8.4.2 Increase of Wages for Readymade Garments Worker***

Following widespread criticism and unrest after Rana Plaza tragedy, the government on June 26 formed a six-member panel to recommend a new salary structure for the garment workers. Originally, the workers’ representative on the wage board demanded the minimum pay be hiked to Tk 8,114, but the owners were willing to increase to Tk 3,600, which they later raised to Tk 4,500. After a series of meetings, the wage board, through voting, on November 4 locked down the figure of Tk 5,300. The garment owners initially rejected the amount. They also threatened to close down their factories if they are forced to pay more than Tk 4,500 as monthly wage to entry-level workers. But after a meeting with Prime Minister on 13 November, they agreed to it (Mirdha 2013).

Table 8.2 *New Monthly Wage for Garment Workers*

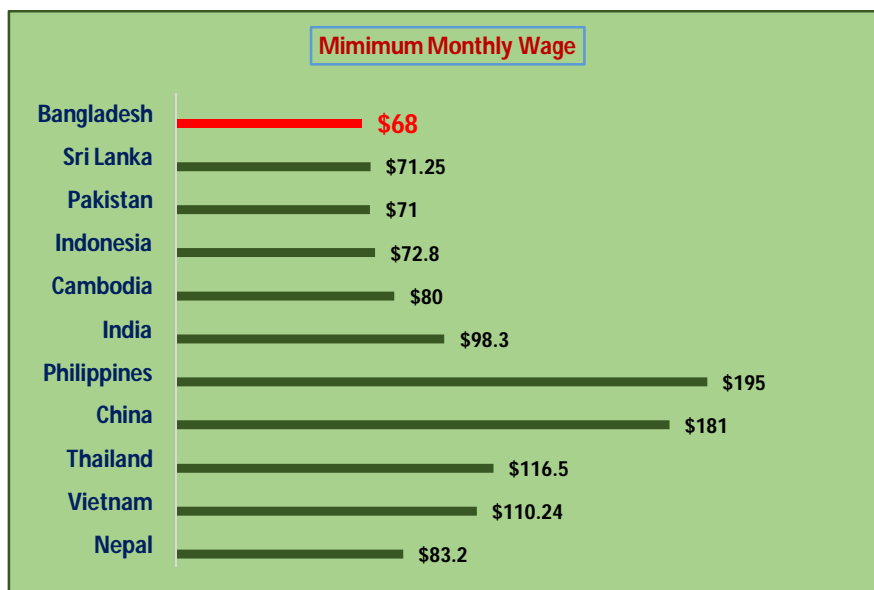
<b>Grade</b>	<b>New Basic</b>	<b>Proposed Total Wage</b>	<b>Existing Total Wage</b>	<b>Rise</b>
Grade-1	Tk 8,500	Tk 13,000	Tk 9,300	39%
Grade-2	Tk 7,000	Tk 10,900	Tk 7,200	51.38%
Grade-3	Tk 4,075	Tk 6,805	Tk 4,218	61.4%
Grade-4	Tk 3,800	Tk 6,420	Tk 3,861	66.27%
Grade-5	Tk 3,530	Tk 6,042	Tk 3,553	70.05%
Grade-6	Tk 3,270	Tk 5,678	Tk3,320	71.02%
Grade-7	Tk 3,000	Tk 5,300	Tk 3,000	76.66%

*Source: compiled from Newspaper.*

Minimum wage rose about 77 percent to Tk 5,300 a month for garment workers, but their basic salary will be lower than the previous recommendation. A trainee or apprentice worker will get Tk 4,810 as the minimum salary. The working period for a trainee worker will be three months, extendable by another three if owners fail to see an improvement in standards. After that period, trainees will be appointed as permanent workers under Grade 7, the lowest rung. As per the revised structure, a Grade 7 worker will receive Tk 3,000 in basic salary that had previously been recommended at Tk 3,200 on November 4.

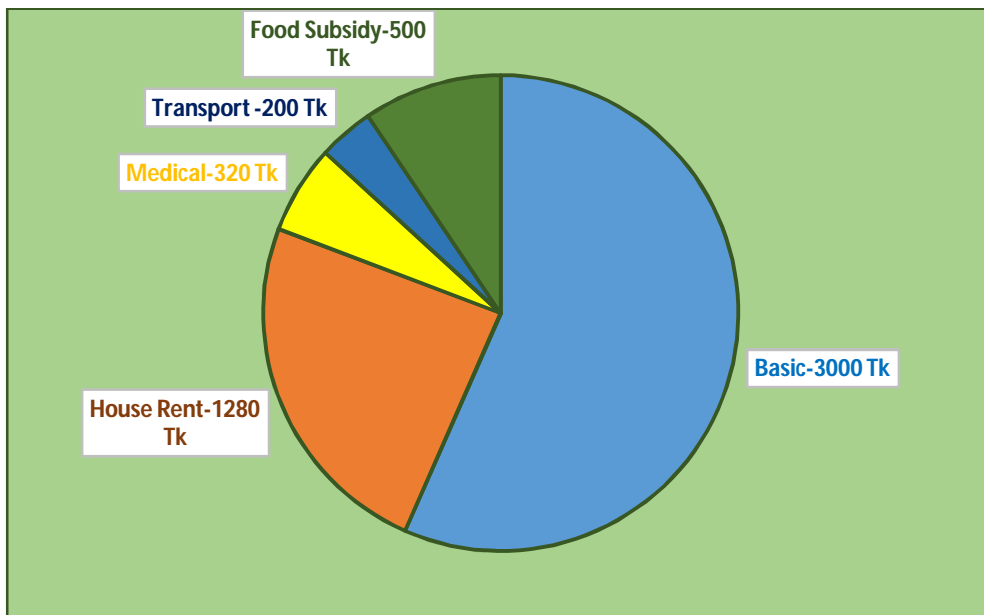
Under the new pay scale, the other six grades of garment workers, too, will enjoy a 77 percent increase in their basic wages from December onwards. Moreover, there would be a 5 percent increment in basic pay every year as well for all workers, a provision which was absent in previous salary structures.

Figure 8.1 *Minimum Monthly Wage of Garments Worker in Asia*



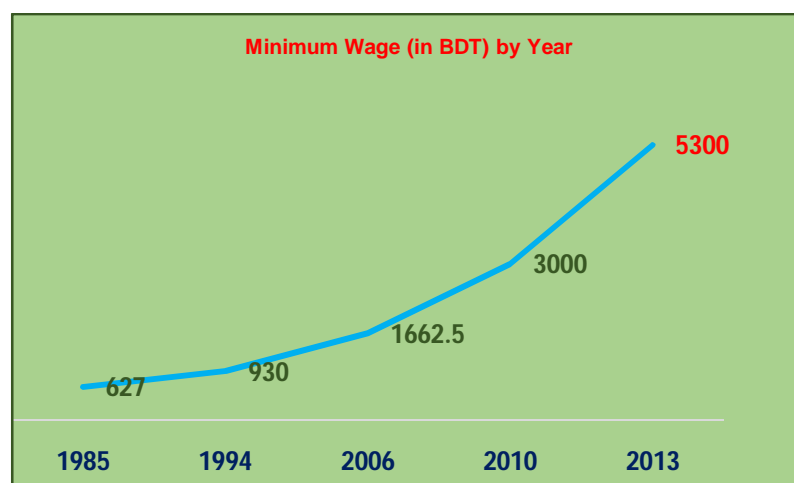
Source: BTUC, 2013

As for entry level workers, Tk 3,000 would be basic pay, Tk 1,280 house rent, Tk 320 medical allowance, Tk 200 transport allowance and Tk 500 food subsidy.

Figure 8.2 *Distribution of New Monthly Wage in RMG Sector*

*Source: Compiled from Newspaper*

However, some worker organizations are unhappy with the new salary structure and are still demanding a minimum wage of Tk 8,114 per month, as originally proposed by labour organizations. The minimum wage for garment workers was last revised in November 2010 to the existing Tk 3,000 from Tk 1,662.50 fixed in 2006. In 1994, it was Tk 930 per month, up from Tk 627 in 1985.

Figure 8.3 *Rise of Minimum Wage for Garment Workers*

*Source: Compiled from Newspaper.*

#### ***8.4.3 Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) Suspension by USA***

The US government suspended Bangladesh from the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) which adopted in 1976 by the US government for more than 5,000 goods from least developed and developing countries. This action comes as a result of Bangladesh government's failure to improve working conditions in the country. Although Washington based lobbyists have been making a case for Bangladesh's suspension for about a year now, the US government finally gave in to their demands after 1,133 workers died in a tragic factory collapse.

Bangladesh met the USTR (United States Trade Representative), the chief trade negotiator for the US president, in Washington on March 28 after the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organization) together with some senators appealed for GSP cancellation to Bangladesh after the deadliest fire at Ashulia-based Tazreen Fashions, where 112 workers died last November. Later, the Rana Plaza collapse at Savar where 1,132 workers died and hundred others suffered severe injuries on April 24 just intensified the claim of AFL-CIO's GSP cancellation.

Bangladesh could rarely enjoy the benefits from the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) in the US as the package does not include the garment sector. Currently, Bangladesh's 97 percent products go to the US market without any duty, but garment items are not included in those 97 percent. Bangladeshi garment exporters have to pay 15.3 percent duty to the US market, the country's single largest export destination. In 2012 Bangladesh paid \$746 million to the US customs for exporting nearly \$5 billion worth of garment products to that country.

Although Bangladesh exports less than 1 percent of \$5 billion annually under the GSP to the US market, the impact of the withdrawal is significant. Economic costs of GSP withdrawal may not seem significant, but it carries reputational costs. The economic impact of the withdrawal could have been much deeper if the garment products had been included in the GSP package. Since garments are not covered by the scheme, Bangladeshi apparel exporters have to pay 15.3 percent duty to enter the US market. Now Bangladesh government try to regain this status by taking several measures such as Labour law amendment 2013, National Action Plan (NAP) and new wage board for garments workers etc.

However, we also witnessed another blame game between two major political parties on the GSP suspension. In the national parliament Leader of the House Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia shrugged off their own responsibilities in retaining the facility and put the onus on each other. Showing a copy of an article written earlier in the year by Khaleda Zia in a US daily, Hasina said it was the BNP chairperson who had appealed to the US administration through the write-up to cancel GSP facilities for Bangladesh. On the other hand opposition leader Bagum Khaleda Zia denied having written the article Hasina was referring to and accused the government of trying to put the blame for the failures of the government on the opposition. Now it becomes a part of political culture to involve in blame game after any accident and it becomes a barrier to solve the problems in the RMG sector.

## **8.5 Conclusion**

Although a lot of commitments made by government, BGMEA, NGOs from both national and international level, and international buyers and labour organizations regarding compensation, safety measures for workers and legal aspect of labour rights and safe working condition. But there is a little and slow implementation of these commitments. The victims of the accident yet to receive proper compensation six month after the accident although they were entitled to get a number of compensation and benefits. There is no official update about the compensation, no regulatory body to coordinate the whole activities. The safety measures which were declared after the accident specially factory inspection are very slow in implementation. Although three separate inspection measures formed after the accident, on one took place still now. While government amended new labour law 2013 after the accident, it contained many weakness and limitation to ensure labour safety and labour rights. Although recently government declared new wage for garment workers, many confusion and dissatisfaction still remain regarding the wage and labour unrest going on.

## **Chapter Nine: the Rana Plaza Accident in Retrospect: Local, Global and Gender Dimensions**

### **9.1 Introduction**

The Rana Plaza accident is not an isolated phenomenon. This accident can be explained from both global and local political-economy perspective. From global perspective, it is the outcome of flexible accumulation by global capitalism, global division of labour and the exploitative and uneven relationship between capitalist core countries and third world peripheral state in global economy. On the other hand, at domestic level it can be seen as the product of the emergence of lumpenbourgeoisie, mass corruption and abuse of political power and overall institutional and legal failure of the government in peripheral state.

The readymade garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh is mainly export oriented industry. The RMG export is around 80% of total export of the country. World's giant retailer: Wal-Mart, El Corte Ingles, PC Penney, Kik, C&A, Benetton UK, Mango, Trimark and Premark etc. operate in Bangladesh only because of its competitive price and low labour cost. This is the flexible accumulation of capital where multinational companies accumulate capital by dispossession: through cheap labour exploitation. Multinational companies' fast and restless drive for high profit to overcome the crisis of profitability of capitalism led developing countries like Bangladesh to just avoid mass death of workers in deadly industrial accident like Rana Plaza accident.

From local perspective, this accident can also be seen as outcome of performance of peripheral state in the world economy system. Weak governance and corruption in the peripheral country like Bangladesh also accountable for such deadly industrial accidents. Peripheral country serves the interest of the core country through their cheap labour. Within the state, a group of people built the mountain of wealth through their corruption and political power. They make profit from both side: exploiting cheap labour and overcrossing and undercrossing rules and regulations. There is a nexus between politics and corruption that works to make profit at the cost of the life of innocent workers. The ultimate victim of these processes is the poor female labors who constituted the most flexible labor market for global apparel brands.

## 9.2 Global Context: Flexible Accumulation by Dispossession

Today's economy is global. In this global era, there is an internationalization of production and consumption pattern. The capital accumulation has become more flexible. During the merchant phase of capitalism, capital was accumulated through trade and plunder that began around the sixteenth century and continued to the late eighteenth century. Then colonialism allowed much greater profits because on the one hand it was the system of production and the marketing of the colonies' raw materials and agricultural products necessary for the further industrial expansion of the west, on the other hand it was protected market outlet for the finished products from the mother country.

Now, in the age of globalization, whatever we called it neo-colonialism or imperialism, neoliberalism established the economic dominance of multinational corporations (MNCs) who increase their economic grip on the raw materials and cheap labour of third world. In this process of internationalization of production and consumption, accumulation of capital become more flexible which in other word called accumulation by dispossession. Now multinational companies produce their products in third world countries using the cheap labour power. To some it is the last but worst form of imperialism. The result of this globalization is that global capital is used for the exploitation rather than development of the less developed parts of the world. For those who practice it, it means power without responsibilities and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress. It is just capital accumulation by dispossession.

In the case of global apparel business, the multinational fashion or ready-made garment companies based in the imperialist countries has now almost shifted their own production in the third world countries as a consequence of the globalization of the production process. They have been converted into 'brand-name companies'. Garments manufactured in production facilities scattered throughout the 'developing' countries worldwide are brought together and stamped with their brand-names before coming to the market. But the brand-name companies are in no way associated with the ownership or management of the production units.

Bangladesh offers the Global garment industry something unique: High volume, low prices, good quality and predictable service. Millions of workers who quickly churn out huge amounts of well-made underwear, jeans and T-shirts for the lowest wages in the world. The



garment industry in Bangladesh is the third-biggest exporter of clothes in the world, after China and Italy. There are 5,000 factories in the country and 4 million garment workers. Latest government figures put the annual value of those exports at \$21.5bn. Manufacturers have easy access to cheap raw materials, and its garment workers command the lowest wages — by far — in the world. The average worker in Bangladesh earns the equivalent of 24 cents an hour, compared with 45 cents in Cambodia, 52 cents in Pakistan, 53 cents in Vietnam and \$1.26 in China, according to the Worker Rights Consortium, a worker advocacy group (Leaving Bangladesh, 2013).

The factory collapse in Savar that killed over 1,132 people is a stark reminder of the risks in the global retail industry's search for cheap production. Labels for the world's largest retailer, Wal-Mart, the Spanish chain El Corte Ingles and PC Penney have been found in the rubble. Web sites for the factories in the building indicate that they also supplied Germany's Kik, Belgium's C&A, Benetton UK, Spain's Mango, Canada's Trimark and Premark in Ireland, to name a few. Despite a series of accidents that have killed hundreds of people in recent months, dozens of major retailers and apparel makers continue to operate in Bangladesh only because of its competitive price.

Order dockets found in the rubble of Rana plaza factory show just why it pays foreign stores to buy from Bangladesh – clothes made for as little as a tenth of what they sell for in the West. In the case polo, shirts of a brand sold in London for \$46 were offered for sale from Rana Plaza for just \$4.45, a typical transformation in an industry where manufacturers across Asia and retailers in Europe and North America are locked in war to get catwalk trends ever faster, and ever cheaper, to consumers (Bangladesh rubble, 2013).

It is no secret that retail price labels, whether for a \$5 T-shirt or a \$5,000 suit, reflect manufacturing costs that are a fraction of what the wearer eventually pays. But the mark-ups revealed by the Rana Plaza documents – of 5 to 10 times from factory gate to store window – offer a precise insight into the relationship of one end of a global supply chain to the other. The price to Mango: \$4.45 each. The chain currently offers similar shirts for sale in Spain for 26 to 30 Euros and for 26 to 30 pounds at its branded stores in Britain (Bangladesh rubble, 2013).

Another set of documents retrieved from the dusty wreckage shows an order, complete with pattern sketches, for long-sleeve, checked shirts under the Danish brand Jack's, owned by

retailer PWT Group. The unit cost was \$5.08, and tags to be attached to each shirt listed a retail price of 24.90 Euros. “A good product – at a competitive price,” runs the slogan for Jack’s menswear, sold in Scandinavia, Russia, Britain and Ireland (Bangladesh rubble, 2013).

Thus it is a kind of capital accumulation by dispossession; dispossession of poor labour in third world. This is making high profit by paying low wage. Bangladesh experienced rapid growth in RMG sector only because of cheap labour. As labour costs in China, long the world’s low-cost factory floor, have been rising rapidly, global retailers and apparel producers are switching to lower-cost alternatives like India, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Bangladesh, where the entry-level wage for garment workers is \$40 a month. A Bangladeshi garment worker, typically paid less than half the wages of counterparts in China, the world’s biggest clothing exporter, would have to spend two or three weeks earnings just to buy one polo shirt at Mango in Madrid. A Spaniard on the minimum wage could afford the same shirt for a day’s labour.

According to Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights, in USA, production cost for a shirt is four time higher than Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, cheap labour is the main reason of low production cost. For USA more than half of the total production cost is labour cost. On the other hand, In Bangladesh, for the same shirt, labour cost is only 0.6 % of total production cost.

Illustration 9.1 *Comparison of Manufacturing Cost between Bangladesh and USA*



Source: *Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights*

This is the imperialist plunder exacted as a result of the economics of this 'global value chain' dominated by the giant multinationals. According to Oxfam Hong Kong Briefing Paper (April, 2004), if it assume that the market price of a branded ready-made garment is Rs. 400, then, out of it, cost of raw materials is Rs. 40, overhead and other costs is Rs.13, quota-fee is Rs. 20, transport expenditure is Rs. 2, worker's wage is Rs.7, profit of the owner of the supply company is Rs.18 and total up to this is Rs.100. Hence, the value appropriated by the brand-name company and the trading company is Rs. 300 (<http://alice.ces.uc.pt/news/?p=1783>).

Thus we see that when ready-made garments are being manufactured in the 'developing' countries, more than 70 % of the value produced is being appropriated by the 'developed' / imperialist countries as profits of their giant multinational companies; while in the 'developing' countries, the workers get 1.75 % and the factory-owners get 4.5 %.

Lets look into the international retailers who outsourcing from factories at Rana Plaza. *Primark*, an Irish clothing retailer, sells clothes at the budget end of the market. Its main competition is that of other cut-price clothing retailers; such as supermarket lines. Primark was a leading customer at one of the garment factories housed in the Rana Plaza, whose collapse on 24 April. Primark, a leading retailer of cut-price attire, had recorded a 24pc increase in sales in the six months to March, its revenue jumping to £2 billion and operating profits leaping by 56pc to £238 million. In the same period, Primark opened 15 new stores across Western Europe.

This is possible only for its expertise in sourcing cheap raw materials and manufacturing facilities. Then, notwithstanding a substantial profit margin, the finished product can still be retailed with a competitively low price tag. The consumer is pleased to bag a bargain; the company is delighted by the bounce in its bottom line. The low-cost, high-profit-margin phenomenon all often entails that at the other end of the capitalist food chain, life is too cheap. It is like cheap clothes at cost of life.

In the case of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., an American multinational retail corporation runs chains of large discount department stores and warehouse stores. The company is the world's second largest transnational enterprise, according to the Fortune Global 500 list in 2013 and is the largest retailer in the world. Wal-Mart's new slogan is "Low prices. Every Day. On everything," replaces the old one "Save money. Live better". However, both show the sad

face of garment business. They also reveal the critical point of the problem: when one want to go cheap, his operation will go cheap too.

One has to get the cheapest thing from the garment manufacturer. And the manufacturer will try to cut corners. The big question is: which corner will he cut? If one looks at the value chain of garment manufacturing, the answer becomes clear. The international buyers want to negotiate orders at the same price, if not less, as last year's. And, for every year, it is always a done deal as an unofficial league of big buyers maintains an identical low price policy in negotiation.

About 18 months before the previous big tragedy in Bangladesh – a fire in November in a textile factory that killed 112 people – shareholders at Wal-Mart Stores Inc had the opportunity to weigh in on the safety question. By a nearly 50-to-1 margin, they rejected a proposal to require suppliers to report annually on safety issues at their factories.

In arguing against the proposal, Wal-Mart's management made its reasoning clear: Having suppliers compile such reports “could ultimately lead to higher costs for Wal-Mart and higher prices for customers. This would not be in the best interests of Wal-Mart's shareholders and customers. Consumers continue to purchase products from brands like Wal-Mart's Faded Glory, found in the Tazreen rubble.

The global brands or retailers no longer wanted to invest in factories – they turned to sub-contractors, offering them very narrow margins for profit and thereby forcing them to run their factories like prison-houses of labour. The sub-contracting regime allowed these firms to deny any culpability for what was done by the actual owners of these small factories, allowing them to enjoy the benefits of the cheap products without having their consciences stained with the sweat and blood of the workers.

The Rana Plaza accident was a clear symptom of the global apparel industry's outsourcing of responsibility for labor and environmental conditions in factories. The tight delivery times, competitive pricing and penalties embedded in apparel contracts played a critical role in motivating factory managers to cut corners on safety and to push workers back into a dangerous factory.

It is possible to identify immediate causes of the accident such as- irresponsible factory managers, overworked and under-resourced building inspectors, a highly corrupted government. But American and European brands and retailers also shoulder much of the blame. As a business partner there are responsibilities of global brands to work to improve compliance of factory. Corporate initiatives to monitor and police these factories have failed to improve conditions. Demanding that factories follow labor and environmental codes while pushing down prices and delivery times has primarily created incentives for factories to hide problems rather than solve them. Mostly, companies have just learned how to pass audits while continuing to fail their workers. Companies need to adjust contracts to guarantee that they pay the real costs of production, including the costs of providing safe and healthy work environments. They must adjust pricing and delivery time requirements so that they can guarantee their garments are produced within legal wage and overtime limits.

The "fast fashion" trend is one of the responsible factors of accidents like Rana Plaza. The entire apparel industry – including inspectors and monitoring firms – has been pushed to speed up production, increase style changes and cut costs. This pressure to simultaneously lower costs while increasing speed and delivery times drives factory managers to insist on long hours for workers at low pay. It also drives apparel manufacturers to seek countries like Bangladesh that are willing to meet these demands. Retailers never concern about the safety of the workers.

The factories of Bangladesh are the part of twenty-first century globalization, poorly built shelters for a production process geared toward long working days, third rate machines, and workers whose own lives are submitted to the imperatives of just-in-time production.

### **9.3 Local Context: Peripheral State**

#### ***9.3.1 Failure of Governance: Institutional Framework***

After analyzing the event of Rana Plaza collapse we can conclude that it was an outcome of the governance failure in the society. Bad governance prevailed from the very beginning, as the building was constructed on illegal lands and clearance to the construction was gained in a illegal way. It is not only the failure of governance, it is also the failure of responsibility.

In the case of Rana Plaza accident, the government has totally failed to ensure that the building owners adhere to the approved plans. The local municipality has little power to ensure that the influential elite of the area stick to them. This is true to almost all planning or permission agencies from the capital to the suburbs. The lack of competent town planners, code enforcers, inspectors all add to the nexus of undue politicization and corruption. The rescue efforts also show the complete inadequacy of the disaster management agencies.

### **Role of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishment**

The Department of Inspection for factories and establishment under the labour and employment ministry is supposed to oversee more than two lakh factories including over 5,000 readymade garment factories and establishments countrywide. But this department cannot perform its functions properly due to acute crisis of manpower and logistics. The department has only 51 inspectors to do the massive task. Another 52 approved posts for inspectors remain vacant for long (Factory watch farcical, 2013).

The high authority of the department also acknowledged that they have huge power and important tasks to discharge but they do not have the necessary manpower to do this. On condition of anonymity, a senior official of the department stated to media that “It is just an eyewash what we do in the name of inspection”.

Historically, the department had been facing neglect of the government since its inception in 1970. The number of factories and establishments has increased over the years, but the department has not been equipped with adequate logistics and manpower to discharge its functions properly. To meet a legal condition of the International Labour Organization (ILO), a UNO specialized agency dealing with labour issues, the then government set up the department for factories and establishments.

### **Role of the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk)**

The Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) is legally responsible to control development within its 1,528-square kilometers area of Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (master plan) as per Town Improvement Act. But the common excuse is that many time they could not control construction of buildings beyond the city’s core area due to lack of manpower. Even there are scores of example of illegal high-rise buildings even in the capital’s core area,

where Rajuk has remained mysteriously silent. So, the excuse is unacceptable. On the other hand, whereas Rajuk is already overloaded, at the same time it is a planner, developer, regulator and contractor. But now it is more interested in working as developer and contractor.

After the Rana Plaza accident, it was revealed that the building had no approval from Rajuk. It was built with a municipality approval for five stories and is located within Rajuk master plan. It is apprehended that the building law, safety precautions and mandatory Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) have not been followed in constructing thousands of buildings in Savar and other fringe areas of the capital.

According to media report, since 2007 the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) has had five designated officials in a committee responsible for approving building construction in Savar. The committee, comprised of a board member, an assistant director and an executive engineer of Rajuk, assistant chief architect of department of architecture and a government-appointed authorised officer, has a revised jurisdiction over Turag, part of Ashulia and Tongi and Gazipur Sadar in April this year. But they never appeared to enforce building law there.

On the other hand, various municipal authorities, including that of Savar, have approved hundreds of buildings within Rajuk jurisdiction even though they lack technical manpower as required by laws. As per Building Construction Act and BNBC, only an authorized officer along with a building construction committee of Rajuk can approve a building design within an area of an approved master plan. Such approval also requires supervision by enlisted architect, structural engineer, geotechnical engineer, a town planner as per laws and above all a set of rules. But a Pourashava lacks all of those. They also could not go for enforcing building law in areas like Savar because of “vehement opposition” by local municipal authorities. But Rajuk did lodge a case against Rana Plaza owner for the collapse for violating Building Construction Act and the BNBC. It proves Rajuk is the authority responsible for enforcing laws there.

### **Role of the Disaster Management System**

The disaster management procedures at Rana Plaza also proved the fragility of the disaster management system. The rescue efforts show the complete inadequacy of the disaster management agencies. 8 years ago, rescue at the Spectrum site became almost impossible

because of lack of proper equipment and effective coordination. A Task Force set up after the Spectrum collapse had recommended the import of equipment for precisely such rescue operations, but it is amazing that a shortage of mechanical equipment at the Rana site led volunteers to manually dig walls and open gridlocks. Numerous volunteers using their bare hands, small scissors etc to cut wires, have set a courageous standard in rescuing lives. But many more could have been saved if disaster management procedures had been more orderly, and proper equipment made available in time. We have provisions for an industrial police to control workers but no industrial disaster management system. It is the characteristics of a bourgeoisie state who arrange all preparation to control the poor weak mostly female labour but not concern about their safety.

### ***9.3.2 Failure of Legal Framework***

The repeated occurrence of industrial accident has proved that the existing legal framework has failed to stop death of workers. There are several weakness in the existing legal framework. The existing law has been made on punitive strategy and there is failure to effective implementation of the existing law. The framers of the law existing on safety and security of worker ignored the human rights approach in determining the preventive action as well as compensation under the legal provision.

Article-20 of Bangladesh constitution provides that Work as a right and duty. (1) Work is a right, a duty and a matter of honor for every citizen. This constitutional provision vests four obligations on government.

(a). work is a right of a Bangladeshi citizen. He can claim this right to work in Bangladesh. This right does not mean to forced work in risky building.

(b).Work is a matter of honor for every citizen. This right has distinguished between slavery and labour. That means government should keep in mind that who are working in factory are not slave rather human being.

(c) A worker shall be paid for his work. None can deprived him for his due payment.

(d) The state shall endeavor to create a condition in which a person shall become a fuller expression of creative endeavor and of the human personality.



Moreover, Article provides for right to form trade union for collective bargaining to ensure workers' rights. But now a days trade union is an important mean to implement political agenda rather interest of the workers. They are motivated to ensure the interest of their leaders who have elected him by money or support. They never have any headache as to the death of workers (Alam 2013).

### **Inefficient Law on the Occupational Safety and Health of Workers**

In the Rana Plaza accident, the worst thing is that accident was avoidable. Although on the previous day industrial police asked them not to open the factory, factory owners and building owner enforced workers to join in the work. The respective authorities were not concerned about labour safety and security. The Labour Act 2006 of Bangladesh provides the safety and security of the workers at workplace. There is a large number of international standards for the occupational safety and health (OSH), such as safety requirements to certain special type of industry, personal protective equipment, protective clothing, safety signs, radiation exposed environment and the use of electrical appliances. These requirements are not covered by the Labour Act, except only eye protection.

### **Non Compliance of Building Safety**

It is the hard reality that the National Building code is rarely followed in the building construction. In the case of Rana Plaza, this is about the failure of the construction of the building, which is due to its design that had been set for five stories but four more had been built. It was also designed as a commercial building; this is a gross failure of the administration to ensure public safety.

Another problem is that most buildings which are used as factories are not designed as RMG factories. They are designed as commercial buildings and rented out. Accordingly, Rana Plaza housed all the factories, bank and markets. Factory buildings are designed with a higher factor of safety than commercial buildings. Generally, commercial buildings are designed with a factor of safety of 2. Garment factory buildings are designed with factor of safety between 3 to 5. The live loads of storage areas/warehouses are designed with due consideration. The live load of such areas may be up to 5 times more than that of ordinary office buildings.

### **Inadequate Penal Provision**

Bangladesh Labour Act does not contain any penal provision as far as noncompliance with the provisions of safety is concerned. But it imposes imprisonment up to three months or fine up to one thousand taka or with both for any noncompliance (like safety of building, fire) which is not specifically dealt with. Hence, this punishment seems to be inadequate considering severity of such noncompliance by the owners. Moreover, considering the safety of building there are legislations to address it. However, the penal provision containing therein is also inadequate. For instance: the Building Construction Act 1952 imposes penalty of imprisonment up to seven years or with a minimum fine of fifty thousand taka or with both (Khan 2013). Even these inadequate penalties were not implemented. In most of the previous cases, the responsible person escaped through monetary or political power.

### **Slow Legal Process**

In all the cases of industrial disaster, responsible persons go unpunished. In 2005, at least 64 workers were killed in a building collapse at Spectrum Garments at Savar. The owners of the factory were sent to jail. But eventually they got out on bail in a month. A writ petition filed against them is still pending for more than seven years. They are now doing business under different names.

In the case deadly fire at Tazreen Fashions factory, a day after the accident Ashulia police filed a case saying the fire was set by outsiders. This is only to save owner of the factory, despite his numerous faults, including blocking the exit passage and having no emergency exit. Hossain was never charged. Soon after the accident, the BGMEA stands blindly by the factory owner without judging their faults. The trade body also smells “sabotage” in the accident without any evidence. Successive governments have also backed the BGMEA’s sabotage theory. He had even made the observation before the BGMEA came up with such claim.

The latest one, collapse of the nine-storey Rana Plaza in Savar that had housed five garment factories, claimed life of 1133 workers. In this case factory owner escaped with the help of local parliament and later arrested at the time of crossing at Jessore border four days after the building collapsed. The court and the prime minister had to intervene to arrest the criminals of the Savar tragedy because normal mechanism to punish the culprits is not working.

Irrelevant and irresponsible comments made by politician which act as a barrier to justice. At present the lax attitude of the government and the BGMEA in dealing with workers' death has been encouraging factory owners not to take proper remedial actions to ensure that such untoward incidents do not occur. As a result, dozens of accidents have occurred in a number of factories that killed more than 600 workers in between 2006 and 2012. But no-one was punished for their crimes, there is no update about the case. Thus, in the all case of industrial disaster, criminal goes unpunished, feel safe to commit it again and that's what has come true for Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

### **Inadequate Compensation Provisions**

Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 provides for compensating workers for death, permanent disablement and partial disablement. However, the amount to be compensated seems to be inadequate as far as earning capacity of the aggrieved workers is concerned. Had the amount been more, the owners would have been practically bound to ensure compliance and recurrence of such tragedies could have been prohibited.

In cases of compensation for death, the amount is equivalent to the three years wages or remuneration. Section 309 of the labour Act 2006 states that 'whoever contravenes any provision of this Act or any rules or regulations shall be punishable with imprisonment for any term' up to four years or with fine of up to one lakh taka or both if the such contravention results in death. If it results in bodily injury for any term, the punishment is the maximum imprisonment of two years or fine of up to ten thousand taka (Khan, 2013). These penal sanctions are grossly inadequate and do not correspond to the gravity of the offence.

### **Inactive Trade Union in RMG**

Labour Act also provides limited scope for trade unions. In practice, such trade unions are not effective due to lack of harmony between the workers and the owners. This is mainly due to the lack of intention on part of the owners which warrants change of attitude. The governments are less worker-friendly and more owner-biased, as owners are seen as the creator of employment amid massive unemployment and earners of much needed foreign currencies.

Strict trade union registration requirements (such as under the EPZ Act 2004) were an impediment to trade union functioning. These restrictions have been relaxed in a recent Cabinet meeting. Bangladesh has also ratified the ILO Convention on the right to organization, but the concerned department is yet to embrace and implement the long overdue expansion of trade union practice in RMG.

The owners associations, notably BGMEA and BKMEA, do not promote union practice to maintain employer-workers relation and dialogue in their industrial units; instead they form pliable participation committees to manage industrial relations to their advantage. Their role is thus a part of the problem as they are stakeholder in the vested interest of the industry. They are not meant and expected to be representing the interests of the workers.

Most of the trade union leaders are not from the workers, particularly in RMG. They are like mercenaries and grab leaderships politically as conduits of different political parties' influence on the workers. There is no effective workers representative body. As such, existing workers organizations are more political than the representative of the workers. As a result, there is hardly any serious pressure to be brought to bear on government and owners to improve working conditions of laborers who are mostly powerless and voiceless. In the case of Rana Plaza accident, there was no active trade union who protests the enforcement to join in the work.

### ***9.3.3 Nexus between Corruption and Abuse of Political Power***

The Rana Plaza accident is one of the worst possible examples of ill effects of the nexus between corruption and use of political power — abuse of power for private properties. It was the outcome of the negligence of everyone concerned ranging from the building owner, approver, engineer, contractor, politicians, to manufacturers of construction materials. As corruption has polluted every sector of the country, everyone was busy for making their own profits. In the case of Rana plaza tragedy corruption starts from very beginning of making factory building by passing building plan and ends with the hiding of death body of the crashed workers. Even political blessing starts from more early than that of corruption. Accused owners and managing persons always are escaped by the grace of their political god father. They are never brought under the system of legal punishment.

It is generally known that corruption hinders development and deprives people of fundamental human rights. The Savar tragedy tells the world that not only does corruption prevent access of the poor and disadvantaged to the whole range of basic services and entitlements, corruption kills innocent, honest and hardworking workers.

The Rana Plaza was allegedly constructed in an illegally occupied piece of land in collusion with the powerful from both sides of the political spectrum, supported by commission or omission by officials in the municipality, Rajuk and other authorities whose responsibility it was to ensure compliance to laws, regulations and codes relevant to the design, content and quality of construction and use of the building. There were gross violations a to z by power or transaction. Question remains if and to what extent source of income behind such a huge property was a matter of interest to the tax authority. The UNO abused power to undermine security threats caused by the cracks, so did owners of garments factories who forced the workers to come to work.

Within the Readymade garment sector there are certainly some compliant business houses. But obsessed with quick profits, a large number of the so-called employers have not only ignored the basic requirement of transparency in setting up terms of employment like basic minimum salaries and benefits and work place safety, they have also used their money-power to enjoy impunity blatantly violating laws, regulations and codes thanks to a vicious and apparently unbreakable collusion of elements in politics, business, administration and law enforcement.

All of these facts are evident in the building that houses the headquarters of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), which was built on wetland without an environmental clearance and defying civil society outcry and even court orders. One prime minister, Sheikh Hasina laid the foundation stone of the BGMEA building on 28 November 1998; another prime minister, Khaleda Zia inaugurated this complex on 8 October 2006, symbolizing an unabashed and endless mutual contest of gaining inches in the power base of political space.

### **Factory licences given and Renewed despite Faults**

The chief factory inspector's office had granted licenses to four garment factories at Rana Plaza and renewed those every year since 2008 though the factory floors of the nine-story building were built illegally and the units lacked safety standards.

As per the law, building owner Sohel Rana was supposed to get its design approved by the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha. Though he had approval from Savar Municipality for raising a five-storey structure, he built four stories more and rented out the top floors to garment factories. The office of the Chief Inspector of Factory and Establishment (CIFE) is responsible for verifying the authenticity of the approval and ensuring safety of workers. But the CIFE seemed to have overlooked this mandatory verification prior to issuing licenses to these garment units.

Four factories — New Wave Bottoms Ltd, Phantom Apparels Ltd, Phantom Tex Ltd and New Wave Style Ltd — had obtained licences from CIFE between 2006 and 2008, according to records. The fifth, Ether Tex Ltd on the sixth floor, had been running without any licence. Garment factory owners usually don't approach CIFE for licence at all. Being involved in underhand deals, some unscrupulous officials issue licences to non-compliant factories (Ali 2013).

The CIFE, under the labour law, can file cases against the owners of non-compliant factories. It has filed 11 cases against the owner of Rana Plaza for anomalies in the approval of the high rise and against all five factory owners for not maintaining safety standards.

In November 2012, a dreadful fire at another garment factory Tazreen Fashions Ltd at Ashulia claimed 111 lives. Housed in a nine-story building, the factory also had acquired fire licence from Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD). Fire Service and Civil Defense authorities had also issued fire licences to the factories and renewed those every year.

This is the common phenomena that when an incident happened, respective authorities show the excuse of lack of sufficient manpower. The CIFE said that nearly 40 percent of 314 positions at chief inspector's office are vacant. Of the total manpower, only 103 are factory inspectors. Of them, only 52 are posted to oversee more than 26,000 registered factories

across the country. There are only 13 working inspectors out of approved 29 posts to look after 14,000 registered factories in Dhaka division alone.

### **Violation of National Building Code**

The probe body, formed by the home ministry to investigate the reasons behind the collapse, revealed its findings. Extremely poor construction materials and violation of construction rules contributed to the collapse of the nine-storey Rana Plaza. The substandard of materials was very poor. The ratio of cement and sand in the mixture was not proper and extremely low quality iron rods and cement were used.

Sohel Rana, owner of Rana Plaza, erected the building for commercial purposes and later built more floors to house garment factories, violating the building construction code, and factory and fire safety rules. The municipality did not even follow the Bangladesh National Building Code while issuing the permissions to Rana Plaza. The local municipality authorities first gave permission for a six-storey building, and later gave permission for another four floors on top of that.

Rana housed five garment factories on the upper floors of the building where factory owners installed generators and machines weighing several thousand tonnes, which was a gross violation of the rules. Regarding the land on which the building was built, the report said a portion of the large building stood on a piece of land which had been a water body before and had been filled with dirt.

Officials of Savar municipality said the building owner had placed a layout plan in 2008, which they approved. The municipality has a small wing comprising of two engineers for approving building layout plans. Local homeowners said most of the buildings in Savar were authorized by this wing. The process is simple and quick with speed money.

According to Sub-Assistant Engineer Alam Mia of Savar municipality their responsibility had laid only in approving the layout plan for the 10-storey commercial building, not in supervising the construction. It was up to the site engineer or architects to ensure quality on the construction.

On the other hand, Chairman of Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) stated that an area of 1,528 square-kilometers around Dhaka falls under direct jurisdiction of Rajuk. No

municipality within this area has the authority to permit any building construction. The owner of Rana Plaza did not obtain Rajuk approval, although it was mandatory. The owner of the building had not followed the Bangladesh National Building Code. Besides, there was no supervision by any architect or engineer during the construction work which, according to him, was the main reason for the collapse.

There is a strong linkage between corruption and politics. Corruption starts from very beginning of making factory building by passing building plan and ends with the hiding of death body of the crashed workers. Political blessing starts from more early through land grabbing by political power. Accused owners and managing persons always are escaped by the grace of their political god father.

Politicians involved in the party in power and government officials (bureaucrats) establish their own rule and play with people's lives to amass money and assets. The Rana plaza accident is one of the bad examples of it in recent time. A ruling party man, Rana, had built the nine-storied building without following building construction laws. Even, he grabbed the land on which he had built the Rana Plaza.

As Rana is a ruling party man, he did not need to face any hurdle in retaining the possession of the grabbed land and he did not need to follow the laws properly to build the Rana Plaza. Even the law enforcers, the Industrial Police after being informed about the cracks in the building, could not enforce the law as the building owner is a ruling party man who is blessed by the ruling party's local MP.

Sohel Rana as face of democratic politics at the grassroots level: Rana patronized by Member of parliament as his godfather, use of local power and patronage to ensure Rana's rapid rise to affluence, no oversight by party organization over political players such as Rana and Rana could use his political influence to bring in inspector/engineer from UZ office to give clearance that building was safe in response to worker's concerns over safety.

Rana demonstrated his political loyalty by keeping factories in his building open during hartal. He enforced factory owners for keeping factories open. Even victims accused to researcher during the interview that Rana used to protect opposition parties hartal and for this he collect workers from these factories by using his political power.



Now politician become businessman and businessman becomes politician. This growing linkage of politics and business with plus 60% of members of the parliament having business as primary occupation against below 20 in the first post-independence parliament four decades ago, lies at the core of the policy capture by forces that have prevented strategic and concrete measures. More than 30 garment industry bosses are members of parliament, accounting for about 10 per cent of its lawmakers (How textile Kings, 2013). Other owners, like Sohel Rana, the owner of the building that collapsed, have strong political ties.

These politician business men has made mountain of properties through corruption and political power. For example, the case of Mohammad Fazlul Azim who is also a member of parliament. Bangladesh's garment boom has made Mohammad Fazlul Azim a wealthy man. Over three decades his empire has grown from a single factory to a string of plants that employ 26,000 workers and clock up an annual turnover of about \$200 million (How textile Kings, 2013).

Azim, a member of parliament, has benefited from government policies to grow the industry into a global powerhouse. His elegant home in Dhaka is a haven of luxury with an outdoor swimming pool, walled off from the chaos of the capital's streets. His costs have almost doubled over the past several years. It's now time for the big Western brands he supplies to pay more for their clothes, and stop squeezing his margins, he declares (How textile Kings, 2013).

Even today's trade union is an important mean to implement political agenda rather interest of the workers. They are motivated to ensure the interest of their leaders who have elected him by money or support. Most of the trade union leaders are not from the workers, particularly in RMG. They are like mercenaries and grab leaderships politically as conduits of different political parties' influence on the workers. There is no effective workers representative body. As such, existing workers organizations are more political than the representative of the workers. They never have any headache as to the death of workers. As a result, there is hardly any serious pressure to be brought to bear on government and owners to improve working conditions of labourers who are mostly powerless and voiceless.

A study conducted after the Rana Plaza accident by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) covering over 80 factories in Dhaka, Ashulia, Gazipur and Jatrabari, has found that all the stakeholders in the garment sector, including owners, buyers, labour leaders and

government agencies, are more or less involved in corruption and irregularities. Owners are involved in irregularities related to technical and social compliance issues while buyers help make fake audit reports. In many cases, owners set up factories without complying with building codes and fire safety rules and even build factories in residential areas.

In most cases, owners do not give appointment letters and pay slips to the workers. They instead prepare fake salary sheets to show buyers that they pay higher wages to workers. Many international buyers, for their part, are giving orders to non-compliant factories in exchange of underhand dealings or commissions. In many cases, buyers withhold payments on various grounds mainly to get discount or commission.

As TIB report stated, garment owners pay between Tk 7 lakh and Tk 20 lakh in bribe to collect certificates and get other services from 17 government institutions for setting up an industrial unit (Separate ministry for garment, 2013). In exchange of money, many trade union leaders also work in favor of the owners. These corruptions in the apparel industry took institutional shape mainly due to lack of transparency, accountability and good governance.

Some 10 percent parliament members are directly involved in the RMG sector, increasing the risk of making decisions in favor of certain individuals and groups. In many cases, the BGMEA does not perform its duties properly and rather gets involved in matters that are beyond its scope of work. This creates scope for political interference in the sector.

#### **9.4 Feminist Perspective: Super-exploitation of Female Labour**

While ready-made garment industry employed more than 4 million workers, most of them are female workers. Almost 80 percent of this labor market occupied by female workers. In any accident in ready-made garment women consisted the majority of the victim. Even in the Rana Plaza accident, women are mostly victimized. These women are the victim of the double exploitation: as a garment worker and as a woman. Besides the worker identity, women experienced discrimination and harassment because of their gender. Thus, to understand political economy of this accident, it is important to discuss the gender dimension of the accident in RMG sector.

There is a close relationship between globalization, export-oriented readymade garment sector and feminization of labour market. Thus, feminists have argued that gendered discourses of work are more important for feminization and exploitation of labor than the economic forces of cheap labor. They argued that no critique of capitalism without a critique

of patriarchy. They formulate a critique of patriarchal relations and of the use of technology within a patriarchal structure as a historical and political-economic foundation of exploitation deeper still than the class relations. Female labour in RMG sector constituted flexible labour market who are victim of super-exploitation.

In this study, I have found that majority of the victim of the Rana Plaza accident are woman. Most of them were severely injured including hand injury, leg injury, traumatized, severe backbone injury, head injury, pelvic fracture, crush injury and compartmental syndrome and others. A number of women lost their hands or legs or eyes. That means there are now unable to work. While once up on a time there was the single earning member in family, now they become an unbearable burden for their family.

It has been observed during the field work that after losing everything (e.g., their job and physical working ability), most of the women survivors are now close to destitution. A Little financial relief is provided. Because of poverty, treatment cost is not affordable for them. Some have been abandoned by their husbands and their in-laws. With their own families too poor to support them, they are helpless. Despite the national and international outcry about the accident, these vulnerable survivors are without social and economic support.

Many other issues related to gender dimension which are sociologically very important to analyze political economy of the accident revealed from in-depth interview of women survivors. The majority of woman worker in the Rana Plaza factories were relatively unskilled, semi-literate or illiterate, youthful. They have migrated from the countryside, mostly from north Bengal. The causes of this migration, as they mentioned during the field work, related to poverty and financial crisis of workers' families in rural areas. Different factors (e.g., income and ownership of land and other properties) make up the poverty nexus in their rural area.

Besides this, a large number of the women workers interviewed in this study are widow, divorcee or abandoned by husband. Interestingly, a number of survivors came to Dhaka and joined garment factory to be self established after got married to their loved one against their family opinion. In some case, interviewee migrated to the capital after depriving from their landownership right because of relative's constipation. Each young woman who arrives fresh from the countryside needs time to adapt to the very different environment of work in these factory.

Woman workers in the Rana Plaza experienced discrimination and harassment because of their gender. The majority of woman workers interviewed in this study worked as helper, sewing operator, and machine operator or in finishing or cutting section where wages were low. These women worked for longer time but paid in little. There was a very few female line-chief, quality controller or supervisor. Many female interviewees reported that as they were working at lower category and they were poor, divorcee, widow or young, it was easy to control them.

Many other factors including recruitment process, working hours, leave facilities and promotion prospects etc. affect woman's working experience. Although the ready-made garment industry belongs to the formal sector, the recruitment procedure is largely informal because seasonal demand requires a labor market with high flexibility so that labor can be easily required when needed and easily disposed off when not required. Many survivors said that they were recruited through neighbors, friends, or relatives working in these factories.

During the field research, workers said that they had to work in long in order to meet buyers tight time schedule. In addition to this, workers willingly had to work for long time only because of their poverty level. A number of women shared their miserable experience that they used to work 12 to 15 hours, from 8.00 am to 10.00 or 12.00 am. The normal duty was from 8.00 am to 8.00 pm, but to earn some extra money they had to work up to 10.00 pm with 2 hours overtime. However, some worker in finishing section stated that they were forced to work 01.00 to 03.00 am. In most of the cases, female workers forced to work for long overtime.

Another common complain of the female workers interviewed in the study is that there was a very little leave opportunity for them. They had to work on holiday. Although they were paid for overtime work on weekly holidays, no alternate holidays are given. The maternity leave was given but without pay. It was also observed that prospects for promotion were slim for woman. Among female workers generally, helper category workers get promoted to the post of operator, but a very few female operators are promoted to the higher category jobs of quality inspector, supervisor or production manager.

Now, it is very clear from many study findings that the working condition in ready-made garment is not up to the ILO standard. Most of the garment factory buildings are overcrowded, congested and poorly ventilated. As a result garment workers are exposed to

toxic substance and dust. Raw materials contain dust and fiber particles that hang in the air. Dye, a toxic substance emitted from colored cloth, spreads in the workroom. The workers, particularly the operators and sewing helpers, who are mostly women, continuously inhale these substances. As an interviewee reported that just one month ago before the accident took place, her sister was injured from light explosion and this type of accident occurred frequently. Interviewee also stated that many fresher workers injured during operating machine. Most factories do not have adequate ventilation and exhaust fans and few workers use masks. Garment workers suffer from the absence of a lunchroom, lack of pure drinking water, and lack of canteen facilities. Even after the Rana Plaza accident, hundreds of workers in a number of factories in Savar and Ashulia areas became sick and got admitted in hospital after drinking water from factory.

One of the major problems faced by female workers in readymade garment is violence against women. They constitute a high risk group because they tend to be young, unmarried, rural migrants, and work late hours. Female workers experienced sexual harassment ranging from insults directed at a person's gender, suggestive comments, and demeaning remarks, to unwelcome touching and grabbing and other physical assaults, including raping. But these types of sexual harassment are highly under reported because female workers are reluctant to disclose information on this subject. A number of interviewee reported that their colleagues faced these kinds of harassment in the workplace. Although their illiteracy, gender and origins may play an initial role in explaining women's reluctance to protest their conditions, it is the larger structural constraints on their capacity to act on their own behalf, and the costs they may incur if they were to try to do so, that prevent the majority of women workers from reporting harassment incidence. These factors are rooted into existing socio-cultural norms and values regarding gender identity.

However, ready-made garment industry also has a great contribution to women empowerment in the form of emancipation from traditional shackles of society. Women's employment in the RMG sector has affected self-esteem and self-confidence, conjugal life, matrimonial relationship, fertility, age at marriage, sharing the domestic chores, and decision making. Since majority of the victim of the Rana Plaza accident are women a concentration should be made from gender perspective. The treatment, rehabilitation, and compensation of these destitute women must be ensured. Besides this, other issues related to gender discrimination and violation against woman should be addressed to ensure gender friendly environment for women in RMG sector.

## Chapter Ten: Conclusion

The Rana Plaza accident is the deadliest industrial accident in the history of readymade garments industry. A total of 1,133 workers died in the accident, 2,438 workers came out alive and 332 workers are still missing. Many workers lost their hands or legs or eyes, and many other became paralyzed. However, the collapse of Rana Plaza is not a single accident, now it has become regular incident in the RMG sector. During the last two decades, around 2,000 workers died in the accident in RMG sector.

With the beginning of the process of industrial revolution and its spread out to other parts of the world, we have been experiencing increasing industrial accidents. There is a long evidence of such industrial accident. For example, the Pemberton Mill collapse in Lawrence, Massachusetts on 10 January 1860 killed 145 workers, the Grover Shoe Factory disaster on 20 March 1905 killed 58 people in Brockton, Massachusetts, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York on 25 March 1911 killed 146 workers, the Kader Toy Factory fire on 10 May 1993 in Thailand killed 188 workers, a fire at the Ali Enterprises garment factory in Karachi in Pakistan on 11 September 2012 killed 289 people and so on. But there is a little sociological work on these accidents. This paper sought to study the Rana Plaza accident from sociological perspective.

The Rana Plaza accident is not an isolated phenomenon. It is a part of local and global political economy. Globally, this accident can be explained as an outcome of flexible accumulation by global capitalism. In this global economy, there is an internationalization of production and consumption. Readymade garments manufacturing industries originated in the developed countries of West Europe and United States in the 50's of the last century. But because of high competition as a result of globalization of production, the relatively big capitalists investing in the garment industry began to explore the possibility of taking advantage of the cheaper labour power available in the 'developing' countries like Bangladesh for decreasing the production cost.

World's giant retailer: Wal-Mart, El Corte Ingles, PC Penney, Kik, C&A, Benetton UK, Mango, Trimark and Premark etc. operate in Bangladesh only because of its competitive price and low labour cost. For example, in the case polo, shirts of a brand sold in London for \$46 were offered for sale from Rana Plaza for just \$4.45. This is the reminder of multinational companies' flexible accumulation by dispossession. But The global brands or

retailers no longer wanted to invest in factories. They turned to sub-contractors that allowing them to enjoy the benefits of the cheap products without having their consciences stained with the sweat and blood of the workers. The Rana Plaza accident was a clear symptom of the global apparel industry's outsourcing of responsibility for labor and environmental conditions in factories. The tight delivery times, competitive pricing and penalties embedded in apparel contracts played a critical role in motivating factory managers to cut corners on safety and to push workers back into a dangerous factory. As a business partner there are responsibilities of global brands to work to improve compliance of factory. But multinational companies' fast and restless drive for high profit to overcome the crisis of profitability of capitalism led developing countries like Bangladesh to just avoid mass death of workers in deadly industrial accident like Rana Plaza accident.

From local context, this accident can be seen as a product of bad governance and mass corruption in the peripheral state. Bad governance started from the very beginning as the building was constructed on illegal lands and clearance to the construction was gained in illegal way. A nexus between politics and corruption worked in these illegal processes. Even the existing legal and institution framework failed to stop death of workers because of these bad politics and corruption. All the stakeholders in the garment sector, including owners, buyers, labour leaders and government agencies, are more or less involved in corruption and irregularities. Owners are involved in irregularities related to technical and social compliance issues while buyers help make fake audit reports. In many cases, owners set up factories without complying with building codes and fire safety rules.

There is a close relationship between globalization, export-oriented readymade garment sector and feminization of labour market. The poor female garment workers constitute the more flexible labour market for global apparel business. Most of them are under-aged, widow, and divorcee or abandoned by husband. It is easy to control and force them to enter into such death trap, to work for long time (16 hours working day including long overtime) without any leave facility. They had to work on holiday. They become appendage of the machine. They experience prolonged working hours and insufficient wage only for maintenance and for the propagation of their race (as Marx described the condition of factory workers in England many years ago). It is a super-exploitation of cheap female labour by multinational apparel company. There is a close relationship exists between the exploitation, other oppression of women and the ceaseless accumulation and growth.

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## Appendix

### 1. Check List

- § Demographic Characteristics (including name, age, origin, education and marital status etc).
- § Family background (including parents' occupation, properties, land ownership).
- § Causes of migration and joining in the garment factory.
- § Living condition (including housing, sanitary, fuel and water facilities).
- § Economic condition (including household income, expenditure and saving).
- § Working experience in garment factory (including job status, working hour, salary payment, overtime etc).
- § Other job facilities (including leave, promotion, bonus, insurance and health facilities).
- § Any work related health problem.
- § Any injury or accident in working place before this.
- § Behavior of the owners and managers.
- § Gender related harassment, discrimination and violation.
- § Experience of the accident (including whether informed about the crack in the building, whether enter into the building forcefully and experience of the building collapse).
- § Impacts of the accident (Type of injury and other physical and psychological problems.)
- § Treatment and rehabilitation process.
- § Getting compensation.
- § Present situation (physical and financial)
- § Needs and future plan.