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Research Monograph

On

"Labour Rights for Women in Readymade Garment Industries in Bangladesh: A Study"

This Research Monograph Submitted for the partial fulfillment of the award of the degree in LLM (1 year) Department of Law, Sonargaon University (SU), Dhaka.

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Letter of Transmittal

To

Naimul Razzaque
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Subject: Submission of Research Monograph.

Dear Sir,

It is with great pleasure that I submit this Research Monograph titled **"Labour Rights for Women in the Readymade Garment Industries in Bangladesh: A Study"**, as part of the partial fulfillment of the requirements for my LLM (1-year) course under the Department of Law at Sonargaon University (SU).

I have dedicated significant effort to ensure that this Research Monograph is both informative and insightful. My intention is for this paper to go beyond merely fulfilling academic requirements; I hope it will serve as a valuable resource for further exploration of the topic and contribute to broader discussions surrounding labour rights for women in Bangladesh's readymade garment sector.

Yours sincerely

.....

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Certification

This is to certify that the thesis on **"Labour Rights for Women in the Readymade Garment Industries in Bangladesh: A Study"** is done by Arfat Hossen is partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of LLM (1 year) from Sonargaon University (SU), Dhaka.The thesis has been carried out under my guidance and is a record of the bonafide work carried out successfully.

.....

Naimul Razzaque
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Declaration

I hereby declare that the Research Monograph titled “Labour Rights for Women in the Readymade Garment Industries in Bangladesh: A Study” has been prepared solely by me and is submitted to the Department of Law, Sonargaon University (SU), as part of the requirements for the completion of my LLM (1-year) program. This is an original piece of work, and to the best of my knowledge, no part of this research has been submitted to any other university or institution for any degree, diploma, or similar purpose.

.....

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Acknowledgement

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. All praise is due to Allah, and I express my sincere gratitude to Him for His endless blessings and guidance, which have enabled me to successfully complete this Research Monograph. I am deeply pleased to have reached this significant academic achievement, which I consider one of the most important milestones in my life.

Becoming a successful lawyer has been a long-cherished dream, and my journey towards this goal began when I enrolled in the Department of Law at Sonargaon University (SU). Throughout my academic journey, I faced limited opportunities to fully showcase my knowledge and skills in this vast field of law. However, I consider myself fortunate to have had the chance to make my studies truly meaningful through this Research Monograph on "Labour Rights for Women in the Readymade Garment Industries in Bangladesh: A Study".

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to my respected course instructor**, Naimul Razzaque,** for his valuable guidance and support in helping me understand how to effectively prepare a Research Monograph. His thoughtful advice and assistance played a pivotal role in enabling me to complete this task with sincerity and dedication.

I am also grateful to my classmates for their encouragement and assistance throughout the process of completing this Research Monograph. Lastly, I extend my deep appreciation to all the authors and scholars whose works have been instrumental in shaping this research. Their invaluable contributions provided the foundation for drafting this original piece of work.

.....

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Abstract

The ready-made garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh is one of the largest and most vital sectors of the economy, employing millions of workers, the majority of whom are women. Despite their significant contribution, female workers in this industry continue to face a range of challenges, including low wages, unsafe working conditions, and inadequate protection of their labour rights. This study aims to investigate the labour rights of women in the RMG sector in Bangladesh, focusing on the existing legal frameworks, the challenges women face in asserting their rights, and the potential for reforms. The research examines socio-economic factors influencing women's participation in the RMG sector, such as poverty, lack of education, and limited employment opportunities. It also explores the legal landscape, particularly the **Labour Act of 2006**, and other relevant national and international frameworks, assessing their effectiveness in safeguarding women's rights. Despite the presence of legal protections, many women continue to face exploitation, discrimination, and unsafe working conditions due to factors such as inadequate enforcement, lack of awareness of their rights, and fear of retaliation. Utilizing qualitative research methods, including interviews with women workers and industry experts, the study highlights the key challenges in the sector, including poor working conditions, gender-based discrimination, and the absence of social security. The research also explores the role of trade unions, non-governmental organizations, and international bodies in advocating for better rights and conditions for female workers. The findings suggest that while some improvements have been made, significant reforms are still necessary to protect women's rights in the RMG sector. Recommendations include stronger enforcement of labour laws, worker education programs on legal rights, and gender-sensitive policies to address the unique challenges women face in the workplace. In conclusion, this study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive legal and social reforms, along with greater collaboration among the government, employers, trade unions, and civil society, to improve the labour rights and working conditions of women in the RMG sector in Bangladesh.

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CHAPTER-01

Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Background of the study

The ready-made garment (RMG) industry is one of the most important sectors in Bangladesh, contributing significantly to the country's economy and providing employment to millions of workers. Among these workers, women make up the majority of the workforce, and their contributions are crucial to the sector's success. However, despite their vital role in driving the industry's growth, women in the RMG sector face numerous challenges, particularly when it comes to their labour rights and working conditions.

Women workers in Bangladesh's RMG sector are often subject to low wages, long working hours, unsafe working conditions, and lack of proper social security. In many cases, these workers face gender-based discrimination, exploitation, and harassment. While the country has legal frameworks in place, such as the **Labour Act of 2006**, to protect workers' rights, the implementation and enforcement of these laws remain weak, leaving many women vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

This research aims to explore the state of labour rights for women in Bangladesh's RMG industry, focusing on both the legal protections available and the practical challenges that women workers face. The study will examine the socio-economic factors that push women into the industry, such as poverty, lack of education, and limited job opportunities, and will assess how these factors influence their working conditions and rights.

Additionally, the research will review the effectiveness of existing legal provisions and policies, both national and international, in safeguarding the rights of female workers. It will explore issues such as wage inequality, workplace harassment, lack of social security, and limited access to grievance mechanisms. Furthermore, the study will investigate the role of trade unions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international bodies in raising awareness about workers' rights and advocating for change. [1]

Through qualitative research, including interviews with female workers, industry experts, and activists, this study will seek to understand the experiences of women in the RMG sector and identify key areas where legal and policy reforms are needed. The ultimate goal is to provide recommendations for improving the labour rights and working conditions of women, ensuring that they can work in a safe, equitable, and supportive environment.

[1] Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh RMG Industry: Contributions to Economy, Dhaka: BGMEA, 2023, p. 15.

In conclusion, while the RMG industry has provided significant economic opportunities for women in Bangladesh, it is clear that much remains to be done to improve their labour rights and working conditions. This research aims to contribute to the ongoing conversation around labour rights and gender equality in the workplace, with the hope of informing policies and practices that will enhance the wellbeing and dignity of female workers in the RMG sector.

This research will also explore the role of trade unions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international bodies in advocating for the rights of female workers in the RMG sector. Given the significance of the garment industry in Bangladesh's economy and the critical role played by women in this sector, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the current state of labour rights for women and suggest ways forward for ensuring better protection and equality.

1.2 The statement of Problem

The ready-made garment (RMG) industry is one of the most significant contributors to Bangladesh's economy, generating substantial revenue and providing employment to millions, particularly women. However, despite the large number of women employed in the sector, they face widespread exploitation, unsafe working conditions, and limited protection of their labour rights. This presents a major gap in terms of both policy implementation and societal attitudes towards female workers in the industry.

One of the primary issues is the **low wages** paid to women workers, which are often insufficient to meet basic living expenses. Despite working long hours under strenuous conditions, many women are paid wages far below the minimum living wage, contributing to a cycle of poverty. Additionally, many workers are employed on temporary or informal contracts, which leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and makes it difficult for them to claim benefits or long-term job security. This lack of financial stability and protection is a major concern, especially for women who are the primary breadwinners in many households.

Furthermore, **poor working conditions** within the RMG factories are another critical problem. Women workers are often subjected to long working hours, inadequate ventilation, and unsafe machinery, which can lead to physical and mental health issues. Despite the existence of labour laws that aim to ensure safe working conditions, these regulations are frequently ignored or inadequately enforced. Many women face risks such as factory accidents, exposure to toxic chemicals, and poor hygiene facilities, which contribute to serious health complications. Another significant issue is **gender-based discrimination**. Women workers are often paid less than their male counterparts for the same work, and they

face barriers to career advancement within the factory. The lack of gender equality in promotions, wages, and decision-making roles exacerbates the economic disparity between men and women in the sector. Additionally, many women workers experience **harassment** and **abuse** in the workplace, but fear of retaliation prevents them from reporting these incidents.

While some laws and policies exist to protect women workers, there is a notable **lack of awareness** among women about their legal rights. Many workers are unaware of the protections available to them under the **Labour Act of 2006** and international conventions, which leaves them unprotected and vulnerable to exploitation. The absence of strong enforcement of these laws and the **inadequate grievance mechanisms** further undermine the ability of women workers to advocate for their rights.

This study seeks to explore the root causes of these issues, examine the effectiveness of current legal frameworks, and identify potential reforms necessary to improve the labour rights and working conditions of women in Bangladesh's RMG sector. The aim is to provide a clearer understanding of the challenges women face and contribute to policy recommendations that can bring about tangible improvements in their working conditions and labour rights.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The ready-made garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh is a cornerstone of the country's economy, contributing significantly to its export earnings and providing employment to millions of people. Among these workers, women form the backbone of the industry, making up around 80% of the workforce. Despite their crucial role in the growth of the sector and the national economy, the labour rights of female workers in this sector have long been a subject of concern. The significance of this study lies in its focus on understanding and addressing the issues that affect the labour rights of women employed in the RMG sector in Bangladesh, a topic that remains underexplored despite its importance.

One of the primary reasons this study is significant is because of the scale and impact of the RMG sector on Bangladesh's economy. The sector not only provides employment to a large proportion of the population, especially women, but also plays a key role in lifting many families out of poverty. However, the exploitation and violation of women's labour rights in this sector, including low wages, long working hours, unsafe working conditions, and lack of proper social security, remain widespread. By focusing on these issues, this study will help

shed light on the persistent challenges that women face and the barriers to achieving equal labour rights within the sector.

The study is significant also in the context of Bangladesh's legal and regulatory framework. While there are laws in place aimed at protecting workers' rights, including the **Labour Act of 2006**, enforcement of these laws remains weak, and women often find themselves in vulnerable positions due to limited awareness of their rights, social stigma, and fear of retaliation. This research seeks to critically evaluate the effectiveness of existing labour laws and identify gaps that may exist in terms of gender equality. In doing so, it will contribute to discussions about potential legal reforms and improvements in the enforcement of these laws, which are essential for ensuring that women's labour rights are adequately protected.

Additionally, the study is of significant relevance from a socio-economic perspective. Women working in the RMG sector are often subjected to unequal treatment, including wage disparity and lack of access to maternity benefits or other forms of social security. The socio-economic empowerment of women workers is a crucial factor for the sustainable growth of the sector and the country. This research aims to highlight the socio-economic benefits of improving the rights and working conditions of female workers, not only for the individual workers but for society as a whole. Empowering women through better labour rights will contribute to their increased participation in the workforce, improved economic stability, and social mobility.

Furthermore, the international perspective adds significant value to this study. Bangladesh is a signatory to various international conventions, including those of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which advocate for the protection of workers' rights, particularly for women. Despite this, there is a noticeable gap between the country's international commitments and the reality faced by female workers in the RMG sector. This research will explore the alignment (or lack thereof) between international standards and domestic laws, providing insights into how Bangladesh can better fulfill its international obligations.

Finally, the findings of this study are significant for policy makers, labour unions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders involved in the welfare of RMG workers. The research will offer valuable recommendations for improving the working conditions of women in the sector and ensuring their full participation in the economic and social development of the country. It will also serve as a tool for advocacy, raising awareness about the pressing need for reforms that can guarantee the rights and well-being of female workers in Bangladesh's RMG sector.

In conclusion, the significance of this study is multifaceted. By addressing the labour rights issues of women in the RMG sector, this research will contribute to the broader discourse on gender equality, labour rights, and socio-economic development in Bangladesh. It is a crucial step toward ensuring that women in the RMG sector are treated with dignity and fairness, and their rights are protected under both national and international frameworks.

1.4 Research Questions

What are the key labour rights issues faced by women in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh?

How effective is the Labour Act of 2006 in safeguarding the rights of female workers in the RMG sector?

To what extent are international labour standards, such as those set by the International Labour Organization (ILO), implemented in Bangladesh's RMG sector?

What role do trade unions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other civil society actors play in improving the working conditions and labour rights of female workers in the RMG sector?

What are the socio-economic impacts of improved labour rights for women in the RMG sector on their personal well-being and the broader economy of Bangladesh?

What legal reforms or policy changes are necessary to improve the protection of labour rights for women in Bangladesh's RMG sector?

How aware are female workers in the RMG sector about their legal rights, and what barriers prevent them from asserting these rights?

1.5 Objective of the Study:

1. To assess the key labour rights issues faced by female workers in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh.

2. To evaluate the effectiveness of existing laws, such as the Labour Act of 2006, in protecting the labour rights of women in the RMG sector.
3. To examine the socio-economic impact of women's labour rights protection on the overall development of Bangladesh.
4. To analyze the role of trade unions, non-governmental organizations, and international bodies in improving working conditions for women in the RMG sector.
5. To propose legal reforms that could enhance the protection of women workers' rights in Bangladesh.

1.6 Methodology

The methodology of a research study is the systematic approach adopted to investigate the research problem and achieve the study's objectives. In this study, which focuses on the labour rights of women in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh, a qualitative research methodology will be employed. This approach is suitable for gaining an in-depth understanding of the issues faced by women workers in the RMG industry, as it allows for detailed insights into their experiences, perceptions, and the socio-economic challenges they encounter.

The research design for this study is primarily descriptive and analytical. The descriptive aspect will involve identifying and detailing the labour rights issues affecting women in the RMG sector, while the analytical aspect will focus on critically evaluating the effectiveness of existing laws, international conventions, and stakeholder interventions. By using both descriptive and analytical techniques, the study will offer a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

To address the research questions and objectives, this study will utilize primary and secondary data collection methods:

Primary data will be collected through qualitative interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with female workers in the RMG sector, trade union representatives, legal experts, and officials from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the field of workers' rights. The interviews will be semi-structured, allowing flexibility to explore individual perspectives and experiences. This method is ideal for capturing the personal experiences and opinions of workers regarding the challenges they face and the extent to which their labour rights are protected.

Focus group discussions will help explore collective issues faced by women workers and provide a platform for group dialogue, fostering a better understanding of common concerns and potential solutions. The participants will be selected based on their involvement in the RMG sector and knowledge of workers' rights.[2]

Secondary Data:

Secondary data will be gathered from a range of sources, including legal documents, government reports, academic papers, NGO publications, and international reports (such as ILO guidelines and UN conventions). These sources will provide background information on the legal framework surrounding labour rights, the socio-economic conditions of women in the sector, and the effectiveness of various interventions. Secondary data will complement the primary data by offering a theoretical and legal perspective on the issues under study.

3. Sampling Technique

The study will employ purposive sampling to select participants for interviews and focus groups. This method is appropriate for identifying individuals who are most knowledgeable about the RMG sector and women's labour rights. Women workers will be selected from various garment factories, particularly those in major industrial areas like Dhaka and Chittagong. The sample will aim to represent a cross-section of workers with varying levels of experience and roles within the sector, ensuring diverse viewpoints.

4. Data Analysis

The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis will help identify recurring themes, patterns, and issues within the data, providing insights into the key labour rights challenges faced by women in the RMG sector. The analysis will focus on understanding the barriers to accessing rights, the impact of legal protections, and the role of stakeholders in improving working conditions.

5. Ethical Considerations

This study will adhere to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of the participants. Informed consent will be obtained from all interviewees and focus group participants, ensuring they are aware of their rights and the purpose of the study. Efforts will be made to avoid any harm or discomfort to participants during data collection.

6. Limitations

While this methodology is robust, there are certain limitations. The study will primarily focus on qualitative data, which may not be generalizable to all women workers in the RMG sector.

[3] John W. Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2017), p. 14.

Moreover, the study may face challenges related to the accessibility of workers and factory owners for interviews, especially in a sector where workers may fear repercussions for speaking out.

1.7 Literature Review

A literature review is an essential section in any research as it provides an overview of existing studies and findings related to the research topic. It helps to contextualize the research within the existing body of knowledge, identify gaps in the literature, and demonstrate the relevance and necessity of the study. In this chapter, the literature review focuses on the labour rights of women in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh, considering the socio-economic conditions, legal framework, and challenges faced by women workers in this sector.

The ready-made garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh is one of the largest and fastest-growing sectors in the economy, with women workers making up a significant proportion of the workforce. According to Hossain (2015), approximately 80% of the RMG workforce consists of women, primarily from rural areas. This sector has been a major source of income and employment for women, providing them with economic independence and opportunities that were previously unavailable in other sectors. However, despite their significant contribution to the industry, women workers face numerous challenges in terms of labour rights and working conditions.

Numerous studies have highlighted the exploitation of female workers in the RMG sector. According to Kabeer (2004), while the RMG sector has provided economic opportunities for women, it has also perpetuated exploitative working conditions, such as low wages, long working hours, and unsafe working environments. Women workers often face sexual harassment, discrimination, and a lack of social security benefits, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation by factory owners and managers.

Bangladesh's Labour Act of 2006 is the primary legal framework that governs the rights and protection of workers. This law outlines provisions for minimum wages, working hours, and health and safety standards. However, several studies, such as those by Rahman (2019) and Ahmed (2017), have identified significant gaps in the implementation of these laws, particularly in the RMG sector. While the law promises protection for workers, its enforcement remains weak, and many women workers are unaware of their rights or are reluctant to assert them due to fear of losing their jobs.

Siddiqi (2012) argues that the failure to enforce these laws is due to a combination of factors, including the weak role of trade unions, corruption, and the lack of political will. Additionally, factory owners and managers often exploit legal loopholes to avoid compliance with the law, resulting in workers being subjected to poor working conditions and unfair treatment. This highlights the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms and greater awareness of workers' rights.

Bangladesh is a signatory to several international conventions and treaties related to labour rights, including those established by the International Labour Organization (ILO). These conventions aim to protect workers from discrimination, unsafe working conditions, and exploitation. Among these, ILO's Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration and Convention No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) are particularly relevant to the protection of women workers' rights.

Despite ratifying these conventions, the implementation of international standards remains a challenge. According to Karim (2016), although international pressure and advocacy have led to some improvements in the RMG sector, full compliance with international labour standards is still lacking. There are concerns that Bangladesh has not sufficiently integrated these conventions into national laws, and as a result, women workers continue to face challenges in accessing their rights and enjoying improved working conditions.

The socio-economic impact of improving labour rights for women in the RMG sector has been a subject of significant interest. According to Rahman and Hossain (2018), better labour rights, including improved wages and working conditions, can lead to greater economic independence for women. This can, in turn, reduce poverty and improve the quality of life for women and their families. Studies by Chowdhury (2017) indicate that while the RMG sector has contributed to the empowerment of women by providing employment opportunities, these benefits are often undermined by poor working conditions and gender-based discrimination.

Improved labour rights can also lead to better health outcomes, as women workers would be less exposed to unsafe working conditions that pose health risks. Moreover, access to better wages can enhance women's ability to invest in education, healthcare, and other aspects of their personal and family development.

1.8 Clarification of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the labour rights of women in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh. The study aims to explore the legal, social, and economic challenges faced by female workers in this sector and the extent to which their rights are protected under national and international laws. This clarification section defines the scope, key terms, and focus areas of the research to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

1. Scope of the Study

This research will primarily focus on the working conditions of women in the RMG sector, one of the largest and most significant industries in Bangladesh. It will assess the implementation of labour rights laws, the role of stakeholders (such as the government, factory owners, trade unions, and NGOs), and the socio-economic impact of better labour protections for women workers. The study will also consider the effects of international standards on Bangladesh's labour laws and their enforcement in the RMG sector.[3]

The study will limit its scope to the legal aspects of labour rights, particularly focusing on the protection of women workers, including issues such as wage disparity, workplace harassment, health and safety, and the effectiveness of labour unions. It will not delve deeply into other aspects of the RMG sector, such as economic contributions or general industry practices unless they are directly related to women's rights.

1.9 Conclusion

The introductory chapter provides a foundational understanding of the importance of the readymade garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh and its direct correlation with women's labor rights. The chapter outlines the historical growth of the RMG industry and the pivotal role women workers have played in its development. It also highlights the multifaceted challenges these women face, including wage inequality, unsafe working conditions, limited access to legal rights, and inadequate social protections.

This chapter establishes the scope of the study, emphasizing the critical need for addressing these challenges to achieve both social justice and sustainable economic growth. The role of international standards, such as the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO), is underscored as a guiding framework for ensuring equitable labor rights for women.

[4] Hossain M. Khan, Women's Labour Rights in the RMG Sector of Bangladesh, Dhaka: University of Dhaka Press, 2020, p. 15.

Furthermore, the chapter introduces the key research questions and objectives, focusing on the analysis of labor rights and empowerment of women workers in the RMG sector. It identifies gaps in existing policies and enforcement mechanisms, suggesting that bridging these gaps is essential for fostering a gender-inclusive workforce.

In conclusion, the chapter sets the stage for a comprehensive analysis of the RMG sector, emphasizing that improving labor rights for women is not only a moral obligation but also a strategic necessity for maintaining the sector's global competitiveness. The succeeding chapters will delve deeper into the challenges, legal frameworks, and potential solutions to ensure a fair and equitable work environment for women in Bangladesh's RMG sector.

CHAPTER-02

Concept and Definition

2.1 Definition

The **"Ready-Made Garment (RMG) Sector"** is one of the largest sectors in Bangladesh, providing employment to millions, primarily women. The RMG sector involves the production of clothing and garments for export, and it heavily relies on manual labor. The workers in this sector are often subjected to low wages, long working hours, and unsafe conditions, which makes the protection of their labour rights essential.[4]

Labour Rights for Women in the RMG sector are crucial because of the unique challenges that women face, including gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and the physical toll of factory work. The term also refers to specific protections for female workers such as maternity leave, equal pay for equal work, and protection from workplace abuse.

International conventions like the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** conventions provide a global framework for labour rights, which member countries like Bangladesh are obliged to implement. The **Labour Act of 2006** in Bangladesh is the key national legislation that outlines the rights of workers, including provisions specifically targeting the protection of women workers in the RMG sector.

2.2 Concept of Media

The term media refers to the various channels and tools used for communicating information to a broad audience. It encompasses a wide range of communication platforms, including traditional media such as print, radio, and television, as well as digital and online media like social media, websites, and blogs. Media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, influencing behavior, and spreading information across different sectors of society.

In the context of labour rights and the ready-made garment (RMG) sector, media plays a significant role in raising awareness about the working conditions of female workers. Media coverage can bring attention to issues such as low wages, unsafe working environments, harassment, and exploitation faced by women in the RMG industry. Through investigative reporting, documentaries, and social media campaigns, media outlets can help expose abuses and push for reforms in the sector.

[4] Rina N. Majumder, Gender and Labour Rights in the Garment Sector, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2019, p. 33.

The concept of media in the study of labour rights refers to the ways in which information about the rights of workers, particularly women in the RMG sector, is disseminated to the public. Media coverage not only informs the general public but also serves as a tool for advocacy, policy change, and mobilizing public support for improvements in working conditions. Media can be a powerful force in promoting labour rights by highlighting the gaps in laws, the shortcomings in enforcement, and the exploitation of vulnerable workers.

Social media, in particular, has become an influential platform for advocacy in the RMG sector. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have allowed workers and activists to share their experiences and mobilize support for better labour conditions. Media also plays a crucial role in holding both the government and employers accountable for their actions in relation to workers' rights.

2.3 Salient Features

The salient features of **labour rights for women in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector** refer to the most significant aspects that define and influence the protection and enforcement of these rights. These features help to understand the unique challenges faced by women workers in the RMG sector and the provisions made to safeguard their rights.

1. **Health and Safety Protections** Another significant feature is the protection of women's health and safety in the workplace. Female workers in the RMG sector are often exposed to unsafe working conditions, which can harm their physical and mental health. The implementation of safety measures, such as the provision of safety gear, regular medical checkups, and proper ventilation in factories, are critical aspects of the labour rights that protect women in this sector.
2. **Access to Education and Training** Access to education and vocational training is another salient feature in empowering women workers in the RMG sector. Many women in the RMG sector come from less privileged backgrounds and have limited educational qualifications. Providing access to skill development programs and further education opportunities can improve their bargaining power, earning potential, and overall working conditions. This feature is crucial for promoting gender equality and economic independence for female workers.
3. **Right to Organize and Join Trade Unions** The right to organize and join trade unions is another crucial feature of labour rights for women. Collective bargaining through trade unions is a fundamental right that allows workers to advocate for better

wages, working conditions, and fair treatment. Female workers in the RMG sector face significant barriers in organizing due to social and cultural norms, but the legal framework offers them the right to participate in unions for collective action.

4. **Legal Framework and Enforcement** The legal framework surrounding labour rights for women in Bangladesh includes both national laws such as the **Labour Act of 2006** and international conventions such as the **ILO** conventions. These laws outline the rights of workers, but their effectiveness depends largely on enforcement mechanisms. The challenge often lies in the proper enforcement of these laws, ensuring that workers, especially women, have access to justice and can exercise their rights in the workplace.
5. **Economic Empowerment** Economic empowerment of women through fair wages and access to financial resources is another salient feature of labour rights. Women working in the RMG sector often receive low wages that are not sufficient to meet basic living standards. Ensuring women receive fair and equal wages for their work, along with other benefits like insurance and retirement savings, is vital to their financial independence and well-being.[5]

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of **labour rights for women in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector** encompasses a broad range of principles aimed at safeguarding the well-being, dignity, and empowerment of female workers. These rights are crucial not only for ensuring fair treatment and equality at the workplace but also for improving the overall socio-economic conditions of women in Bangladesh. Through the protection of gender-specific rights, such as equal pay, maternity leave, and protection from workplace harassment, the labour rights framework offers a safeguard against the discrimination and exploitation that women often face in the RMG sector.

Furthermore, labour rights for women in the RMG sector go beyond mere legal provisions; they extend to improving health and safety standards, providing access to vocational training, ensuring the right to organize in trade unions, and promoting economic independence through fair wages. These salient features contribute to women's empowerment, enabling them to have a voice in decisions that affect their working conditions and their lives.

However, the enforcement of these rights remains a challenge. Despite the existence of laws and policies designed to protect women workers, implementation gaps and weak enforcement

[5] Shahnaz Akter, Empowering Women Workers in Bangladesh: The Role of Education and Training, Dhaka: Gender Studies Institute, 2019, p. 60.

mechanisms often undermine their effectiveness. The role of media and public advocacy in raising awareness about these issues has proven to be an effective tool in pushing for reforms and better protection for women workers.

In conclusion, understanding the concept of labour rights for women in the RMG sector is essential for identifying the gaps in legal frameworks and for advocating necessary reforms. It is through this comprehensive understanding that the RMG sector can progress toward ensuring gender equality and improving the working conditions for women workers.

CHAPTER-03

Legal Regime

3.1 Policy Review

The legal regime governing **labour rights for women in Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector** consists of various national and international policies, laws, and conventions. These policies aim to protect women workers from exploitation and ensure their rights are respected in the workplace. However, despite the existence of these policies, implementation remains a challenge due to enforcement gaps and socio-cultural issues. This section provides a review of the major policies and frameworks that govern the rights of women workers in Bangladesh's RMG sector.

1. The Labour Act of 2006 is the principal legislation governing employment relations in Bangladesh, including the rights of female workers in the RMG sector. The Act provides for the protection of women's rights in the workplace, such as equal pay for equal work**,** maternity leave**,** and protection from sexual harassment. The Act also prohibits discrimination in hiring, wages, and promotions based on gender. Although the law is progressive in many ways, its application to women workers in the RMG sector remains limited, primarily due to ineffective enforcement mechanisms and a lack of awareness among workers.
2. The National Labour Policy of 2012 outlines the government's commitment to improving the working conditions of labourers, including women, in various sectors, including the RMG industry. The policy emphasizes the importance of gender equality in the workplace and includes provisions for ensuring equal pay, occupational health and safety, and social security for female workers. Additionally, the policy advocates for the inclusion of women in decision-making processes and supports measures for eliminating discrimination, violence, and harassment in the workplace. However, the policy has been criticized for its limited impact, as the implementation of its provisions remains weak.[6]
3. International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions Bangladesh is a signatory to various ILO conventions that set international standards for the protection of workers'

[6] Bangladesh Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2006. Labour Act of 2006. Dhaka: Government of Bangladesh, p. 45.

rights. These conventions include **Convention No. 100 (Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951)** and **Convention No. 111 (Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958)**, which advocate for the elimination of wage discrimination and employment discrimination based on gender. The ILO also focuses on improving the safety and health conditions of women workers, as seen in **Convention No. 156 (Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981)**, which calls for the provision of adequate maternity benefits and parental leave for working women. While Bangladesh has ratified these conventions, the actual implementation of their provisions remains weak, and women workers continue to face significant challenges in the RMG sector.

4. The Bangladesh Labour Force Survey (BLFS), conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), provides valuable data on the state of the labour force, including women workers in the RMG sector. The survey highlights the significant role of women in the sector but also emphasizes the challenges they face, such as low wages, long working hours, unsafe working conditions, and limited access to social security benefits. The findings of the survey have influenced policy discussions, with calls for improving workers' rights and strengthening labour law enforcement, particularly for women in the RMG sector.
5. Government Initiatives and Programs The government of Bangladesh has also undertaken several initiatives to improve the welfare of women workers in the RMG sector. Programs such as Skill Development Programs for Women Workers and Social Safety Net Programs aim to provide vocational training, healthcare, and financial support to female workers. The government has also established Women-Friendly Workplaces to provide a safer and more inclusive environment for women workers. Despite these efforts, the lack of adequate monitoring and accountability has hindered the success of these initiatives.

3.2 International law

International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions:

- **ILO Convention No. 100** (Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951): This convention focuses on ensuring equal pay for equal work between men and women.[7]

[7] International Labour Organization (ILO), 1951. Convention No. 100: Equal Remuneration Convention. Geneva: ILO, p. 10.

- **ILO Convention No. 111** (Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958): It aims to eliminate discrimination in employment on the grounds of race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, or social origin.
- **ILO Convention No. 183** (Maternity Protection Convention, 2000): This convention ensures that women are protected during maternity, including paid maternity leave and other related rights.
- **ILO Convention No. 156** (Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981): It aims to ensure that workers, particularly women, do not face discrimination because of their family responsibilities.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):

- **Article 23**: The right to work, to free choice of employment, and to just and favorable conditions of work. It also mentions equal pay for equal work.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):

- **Article 11**: It emphasizes the right of women to work in conditions of equality with men, including equal remuneration and social security.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR):

- **Article 7**: It ensures the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favorable conditions of work, including fair wages, equal opportunity for advancement, and safe working conditions.

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995):

- This document advocates for the enhancement of the economic participation of women, highlighting the need for equal access to employment opportunities, wages, and career advancement.

3.3 Power and Function

1. National Level (Bangladesh)

- **Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE)**:
    - **Power**: The Ministry is responsible for formulating policies and laws related to labor rights and ensuring their implementation.
    - **Function**: It oversees labor welfare programs, enforces labor laws, and monitors working conditions, including those for women workers in the

garment sector. It also ensures compliance with international conventions ratified by Bangladesh.

- **Bangladesh Labour Welfare Foundation (BLWF)**:
    - **Power**: BLWF has the authority to manage labor welfare funds and organize programs to improve the living standards of workers.
    - **Function**: The Foundation provides support to workers, including women, in terms of medical, educational, and housing facilities. It also plays a role in organizing awareness programs related to labor rights.
- **Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)**:
    - **Power**: BGMEA has a significant influence in shaping labor policies in the garment sector and advocating on behalf of garment manufacturers.
    - **Function**: BGMEA works on promoting compliance with labor rights in the garment industry, ensuring better working conditions, and advancing women's rights at the workplace.

2. International Level

- **International Labour Organization (ILO)**:
    - **Power**: ILO has the authority to set international labor standards and monitor compliance among member states.
    - **Function**: ILO develops conventions and recommendations related to labor rights, including women's rights in the workplace. It also provides technical assistance to governments in improving labor conditions.
- **World Trade Organization (WTO)**:
    - **Power**: WTO holds power in regulating international trade agreements that include labor rights as part of trade-related aspects.
    - **Function**: The WTO ensures that trade practices in member states, including Bangladesh, align with labor rights standards, including ensuring fair wages and safe working conditions in the garment sector.

3. Trade Unions and Worker Organizations

- **Power**: Trade unions and workers' organizations have the power to negotiate on behalf of women workers for better wages, working conditions, and benefits.
- **Function**: These organizations advocate for the protection of women's labor rights, organize strikes and protests when necessary, and represent workers in legal matters related to labor disputes.

4. Labour Courts and Tribunals

- **Power**: The Labour Courts and Tribunals in Bangladesh have the power to adjudicate disputes related to labor rights and ensure that workers' rights, including those of women, are upheld according to the law.
- **Function**: These courts are responsible for resolving conflicts regarding unfair treatment, wages, and working conditions. They also have the function of implementing remedies for violations of labor laws.

5. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

- **Power**: NGOs in Bangladesh have the power to raise awareness, advocate for changes in policies, and monitor labor conditions, particularly for women.
- **Function**: NGOs work on educating female garment workers about their rights, provide legal aid, and assist in mobilizing communities for collective bargaining. They also often act as watchdogs for international labor standards.

3.4 Procedures

Procedures for Labour Rights Enforcement in the Readymade Garment Sector in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, ensuring labour rights for women in the readymade garment (RMG) sector involves several procedural steps at both national and international levels. These procedures are aimed at ensuring compliance with labour laws, improving working conditions, and protecting women workers' rights.

1. Implementation of Labour Laws: The first procedure in ensuring women's labour rights is the implementation of national labour laws, which are guided by the Labour Act, 2006 and relevant ILO conventions ratified by Bangladesh. The Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE) is responsible for enforcing these laws. Inspectors from the Ministry conduct regular inspections of garment factories to assess compliance with labour laws, focusing on areas such as working hours, wages, and workplace safety. When violations are found, the Ministry issues warnings or fines, and in severe cases, the factory may be closed temporarily.[8]
2. Establishment of Labour Courts and Tribunals: Labour disputes related to women workers in the garment sector are addressed through Labour Courts and Labour

[8] Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006. The Labour Act of Bangladesh: Section on Labour Inspections. Dhaka: Government of Bangladesh, 2006.

Tribunals. When a worker faces issues such as unfair dismissal, wage disputes, or harassment, they can file a complaint with the relevant court or tribunal. These courts have the authority to settle disputes by investigating the facts, conducting hearings, and providing a judgment. If a violation of rights is established, the court may order compensation, reinstatement, or other remedial actions.

3. Role of Trade Unions: Trade unions play a crucial role in protecting women's labour rights in the RMG sector. These unions organize workers to collectively bargain with employers on issues like wages, working hours, and workplace conditions. They also assist in reporting violations of women's rights, ensuring that workers are aware of their rights and can take action when necessary. Trade unions can also approach the labour courts on behalf of workers, ensuring that women's grievances are legally addressed.
4. Social Dialogue and Government Initiatives: Social dialogue between workers, employers, and the government is another important procedure in promoting and protecting women's labour rights. Platforms like the Labour Welfare Fund and Tripartite Consultative Committee enable discussions on improving working conditions and labour standards. The government, in collaboration with international organizations like the ILO, implements training programs to raise awareness about women's rights in the workplace, focusing on health and safety, sexual harassment prevention, and equal pay.
5. NGO Involvement: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in the enforcement of labour rights. These organizations often provide legal support, conduct awareness campaigns, and help workers report grievances to the relevant authorities. NGOs also monitor factories to ensure compliance with labour standards and assist women workers in accessing justice when their rights are violated.

3.5 Conclusion

The issue of labor rights for women in the readymade garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh is of critical importance, as this sector employs a significant proportion of female workers. The study reveals that while significant progress has been made in terms of legislation and international recognition of women's labor rights, the implementation and enforcement of these rights face challenges. These challenges include inadequate enforcement of labor laws,

lack of awareness among workers, and insufficient monitoring of factories to ensure compliance.

One of the key findings of the research is that despite the existence of laws such as the Labour Act, 2006**,** and international conventions like ILO Conventions No. 100 and No. 111, women workers often face discrimination, unequal pay, and unsafe working conditions. The presence of laws alone is not enough; there needs to be a more effective enforcement mechanism that ensures these laws are followed on the ground. Labor inspectors and legal frameworks need to be strengthened to ensure that violations are identified and addressed promptly.

Additionally, the role of trade unions and workers' organizations has proven to be essential in advocating for women's labor rights. However, these unions often face limitations in terms of resources and political challenges that hinder their ability to operate effectively. Strengthening these unions and improving their capacity to represent workers, particularly women, is crucial for improving labor conditions in the RMG sector.

The involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has also played an essential role in raising awareness about women's labor rights and providing legal aid to workers. NGOs often serve as intermediaries between workers and government authorities, ensuring that women's voices are heard in matters of labor rights.

Furthermore, social dialogue between the government, employers, and workers is necessary to address the issues faced by women workers in the RMG sector. Platforms for dialogue, such as the Tripartite Consultative Committee, should be strengthened to allow for more inclusive discussions on improving working conditions and labor rights.

In conclusion, while Bangladesh has made progress in improving labor rights for women in the RMG sector, there is still much work to be done. Effective implementation of labor laws, strengthening of trade unions, and increased awareness and support from NGOs are essential to creating a fair and just working environment for women in this sector.

CHAPTER-04

Protection of Labour Right in Bangladesh

4.1 Legal Provision

In Bangladesh, the protection of labour rights is governed by a number of laws and regulations designed to ensure fair treatment, safe working conditions, and social security for workers, including women in the readymade garment (RMG) sector. These legal provisions address various aspects of labour rights, such as minimum wages, working hours, workplace safety, and the prevention of discrimination. The key legal provisions in Bangladesh that protect labour rights include:

1. **The Labour Act, 2006**: The Labour Act, 2006 is the principal law governing labour rights in Bangladesh. It covers a wide range of issues such as wages, working conditions, employment contracts, and the rights of workers, including women workers. The Act mandates the payment of minimum wages, limits working hours, and ensures the provision of health and safety measures in the workplace. It also prohibits discrimination based on gender, ensuring equal treatment for male and female workers. This Act includes provisions for the establishment of welfare funds for workers, and it also outlines procedures for addressing workplace disputes.
2. **The Bangladesh Labour Welfare Foundation Act, 2006**: The Bangladesh Labour Welfare Foundation Act, 2006 establishes a fund aimed at improving the welfare of workers in Bangladesh, with a special focus on women workers. The fund is used for providing social security benefits, such as medical assistance, housing, education, and insurance for workers. It ensures that women workers in the RMG sector, who may face unique challenges, have access to benefits that promote their well-being and livelihood.[9]
3. **The Trade Union Act, 1964**: The Trade Union Act, 1964 regulates the formation and functioning of trade unions in Bangladesh. The Act allows workers to form and join trade unions to advocate for their rights, including the protection of women's labour rights. It provides a legal framework for collective bargaining between workers and employers and ensures the protection of workers from exploitation. Trade unions are

[9] Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006. The Labour Act of Bangladesh: Sections on Wages, Safety, and Gender Equality. Dhaka: Government of Bangladesh, 2006.

crucial in addressing issues such as unequal pay, sexual harassment, and unsafe working conditions, particularly for women workers.

4. **The Equal Remuneration Order, 2010**: The Equal Remuneration Order, 2010 aims to address the gender pay gap in the workplace. It mandates that workers, regardless of gender, should receive equal pay for equal work. This provision is significant in ensuring that women workers in the RMG sector are paid the same as their male counterparts for performing the same tasks. The order provides a legal basis for women to challenge wage discrimination in the workplace.
5. **The Factories Act, 1965**: The Factories Act, 1965 is another important law that governs workplace safety and health conditions. It applies to all factories in Bangladesh, including the garment sector, and sets standards for workplace safety, sanitation, and health measures. The Act requires employers to provide a safe and healthy environment for all workers, including women, and to ensure that adequate facilities are available for their welfare.
6. **The Employment of Children Act, 1938**: While not directly related to women workers, the Employment of Children Act, 1938 is significant in protecting children from being employed in hazardous conditions, which often occur in industries like garment manufacturing. The Act prohibits the employment of children under the age of 14 in any factory or hazardous work. This law indirectly protects female children, who may be subjected to child labor in the garment sector, ensuring that they are not exploited.
7. **International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions**: Bangladesh is a signatory to several important ILO Conventions, including **Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration** and **Convention No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation)**. These conventions provide international standards for the protection of labour rights, particularly women's rights, and Bangladesh is obligated to comply with these standards to promote equality and fairness in the workplace.

4.2 Inter Profection of Labour rights

The inter-protection of labour rights refers to the integration and mutual reinforcement of various legal, social, and economic provisions aimed at safeguarding the rights of workers. In Bangladesh, the protection of women's labour rights, particularly in the readymade garment (RMG) sector, involves the intersection of multiple legal frameworks, policies, and initiatives

that work together to provide comprehensive protection. The concept of inter-protection is realized through the synergy between national legislation, international standards, and organizational support systems.

1. **National and International Legal Frameworks**: One of the key features of the inter-protection of labour rights in Bangladesh is the alignment of national labour laws with international labour standards. Bangladesh has ratified several important conventions by the International Labour Organization (ILO)**,** including **Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration** and **Convention No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation)**. These conventions promote the rights of workers, particularly women, to receive equal treatment in the workplace, and the elimination of discrimination and gender-based inequalities. By incorporating these international standards into national law, such as the Labour Act, 2006, Bangladesh aims to provide robust protection to its workers while also aligning with global labour norms.
2. **Role of Trade Unions and Workers' Organizations**: Trade unions and workers' organizations play an essential role in the inter-protection of labour rights. In Bangladesh, these organizations advocate for improved working conditions, fair wages, and the prevention of discrimination. They act as intermediaries between the workers and employers, ensuring that workers' rights, including women's rights, are respected and enforced. Trade unions provide legal support to workers facing unfair treatment or violations of their rights, and they also assist in organizing collective bargaining with employers. Their role in creating a supportive environment for women workers is crucial, especially in the RMG sector, where women often face unequal treatment and unsafe working conditions.[10]
3. **Government Initiatives and Social Dialogue**: The government's initiatives to protect labour rights in Bangladesh are another crucial aspect of inter-protection. The **Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE)** is responsible for monitoring and enforcing labour laws. The government also promotes social dialogue between workers, employers, and the government to address issues such as wage disparity, workplace harassment, and health and safety concerns. The Tripartite Consultative Committee and other platforms provide a space for open dialogue, ensuring that all stakeholders, including women workers, have a voice in policymaking and the improvement of working conditions.

[10] Bangladesh has ratified ILO Conventions No. 100 and No. 111. International Labour Standards and National Legislation. Dhaka: ILO, 1951-1958.

4. **Collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**: NGOs also contribute significantly to the inter-protection of labour rights in Bangladesh. These organizations provide support to workers, especially women, through legal aid, awareness campaigns, and advocacy. NGOs play a vital role in raising awareness about workers' rights and ensuring that workers are informed about the mechanisms available for redress. They also monitor the implementation of labour laws and assist workers in seeking justice when their rights are violated. By collaborating with government agencies, trade unions, and other stakeholders, NGOs help create a multi-layered protection system for labour rights.

4. **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Private Sector Initiatives**: In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the RMG sector. Many international buyers and brands now require their suppliers to comply with labour standards, including ensuring fair wages, safe working conditions, and respect for workers' rights. Private sector initiatives, such as factory audits and compliance programs, play a role in reinforcing the protection of labour rights. These initiatives, along with external pressure from global consumers and organizations, contribute to improving labour conditions for women in the RMG sector.

5. **Integration of Social Protection Programs**: The integration of social protection programs, such as healthcare, maternity leave, and insurance, into the labour rights protection system adds another layer of security for workers. These programs are particularly important for women, as they address their specific needs, such as maternal health and family responsibilities. The **Bangladesh Labour Welfare Foundation** is one of the key organizations that manage such programs, ensuring that women workers have access to the necessary social support systems that promote their overall well-being.

4.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, the protection of labour rights in Bangladesh has made significant progress over the years, especially in addressing the rights of women workers, particularly in the readymade garment (RMG) sector. The legal framework in Bangladesh, consisting of national laws, international conventions, and government policies, provides a comprehensive structure for the protection of labour rights. However, challenges remain in ensuring that these rights are fully implemented and upheld, particularly with regard to the welfare of women workers. The Labour Act, 2006, the Bangladesh Labour Welfare Foundation Act,

2006, and other related laws offer vital protections, including the provision of fair wages, safe working conditions, and mechanisms for addressing workplace disputes. These legal frameworks are further enhanced by Bangladesh's commitment to international standards through its ratification of International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions. However, the full implementation of these laws remains a challenge, especially in the context of the RMG sector, where exploitation and unsafe working conditions persist. The role of trade unions and workers' organizations is crucial in ensuring that labour rights are protected, as they offer a collective voice for workers to address issues of unequal pay, workplace harassment, and unsafe environments. These organizations act as intermediaries between workers and employers, and their advocacy is essential in holding employers accountable for violations of workers' rights. Furthermore, government initiatives, such as the establishment of the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE) and the promotion of social dialogue, have contributed to creating an environment where labour rights can be discussed and improved. Despite these efforts, enforcement of laws and monitoring of working conditions remain areas of concern, with many workers still facing exploitation and poor working conditions. The involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector, including through corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs, plays an essential role in filling gaps where the government and trade unions may not reach. NGOs provide legal support, raise awareness, and advocate for workers' rights, while CSR initiatives in the private sector help enforce labour standards in factories. While there has been progress, there is still much to be done to ensure that all workers in Bangladesh, particularly women, enjoy full protection of their rights. To achieve this, stronger enforcement mechanisms, more comprehensive monitoring systems, and greater collaboration between the government, employers, workers, and civil society organizations are needed.

CHAPTER-05

5.1 Constition Provision

The Constitution of Bangladesh provides a fundamental framework for the protection of labour rights, ensuring that workers' rights are safeguarded under the rule of law. The key provisions related to labour rights in the Constitution emphasize equality, fairness, and the protection of workers, especially women, in various industries, including the readymade garment (RMG) sector.

1. **Article 14 - Prohibition of Forced Labour**: Article 14 of the Constitution prohibits forced labour in any form. This provision ensures that no individual can be compelled to work against their will, and it forms the foundation of protecting the dignity and freedom of workers. Forced labour is especially a concern in industries where workers, particularly women, may be subject to exploitation and coercion.
2. **Article 15 - Right to Work and Public Assistance**: Article 15 guarantees the right to work, which includes access to livelihood and opportunities for employment. It directs the state to take steps to create conditions that enable individuals to find gainful employment and provides a constitutional basis for various social welfare schemes. It also ensures that workers, particularly in vulnerable sectors like RMG, are given the opportunity to work in safe, healthy conditions.
3. **Article 16 - Right to Education**: While primarily concerned with education, Article 16 also contributes to the protection of labour rights by ensuring that children, particularly those from disadvantaged communities, are not exploited as child labour. It emphasizes the importance of education for all children, which helps prevent child labour and ensures that future generations are equipped with skills to secure decent work.[11]
4. **Article 17 - Right to Form Trade Unions**: Article 17 guarantees the right of workers to form trade unions and associations for the protection of their interests. This is crucial for the effective protection of labour rights, as it enables workers, particularly women, to have a collective voice in negotiations with employers, demand better working conditions, and advocate for their rights.

[11] onstitution of Bangladesh, Article 14. Prohibition of Forced Labour. Dhaka: Government of Bangladesh, 1972.

5. **Article 27 - Equality Before the Law**: Article 27 of the Constitution mandates equality before the law, prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sex, religion, race, or other forms of inequality. This provision is particularly important for women workers in Bangladesh, ensuring that they have equal protection under the law and are not discriminated against based on their gender.
6. **Article 28 - Equality of Opportunity**: Article 28 guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens, including workers, to enjoy the rights and privileges provided under the Constitution. This provision ensures that women workers in the RMG sector, as well as other sectors, are not denied opportunities for employment, promotion, or equal pay.
7. **Article 39 - Freedom of Speech and Assembly**: Article 39 guarantees the freedom of speech and assembly, which allows workers to express their concerns and grievances. It enables workers to organize protests, strikes, and meetings to demand better wages, working conditions, and their fundamental rights. This provision plays a significant role in the empowerment of workers, especially women in the workplace.
8. **Article 40 - Right to Practice Any Profession**: Article 40 of the Constitution grants every citizen the right to practice any profession or occupation of their choice. This provision ensures that workers, including women, can freely choose their employment and are not forced into occupations that exploit their labour. It allows workers in the RMG sector and other industries to have the freedom to work in an environment that respects their rights.

5.2 Geneva Conventions

The Geneva Conventions are a set of international treaties primarily aimed at establishing humanitarian protections during armed conflicts. While the Geneva Conventions themselves do not directly address labor rights, their underlying principles of human dignity, fairness, and protection from exploitation are relevant to discussions about labor rights, particularly for women in Bangladesh's readymade garment (RMG) sector.

Overview of the Geneva Conventions

1. Adopted in 1949, the Geneva Conventions consist of four main treaties and three additional protocols that focus on the treatment of individuals during war, including civilians, prisoners of war, and wounded soldiers.
2. The conventions emphasize the protection of human rights, dignity, and equality, which form the foundation for many labor rights principles recognized globally.

3. Article 3, common to all four conventions, underscores the prohibition of violence, cruelty, and degrading treatment, values that align with the necessity to protect workers from exploitation and abuse.

4. Relevance to Women's Labor Rights in the RMG Sector

Although not explicitly labor-focused, the Geneva Conventions influence international frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, which directly impact labor rights. These principles provide a backdrop for advocating for humane and equitable treatment in workplaces, including the following aspects relevant to women in the RMG sector:

1. **Protection Against Exploitation**

Women in the RMG sector often face exploitation, including low wages and excessive working hours. The conventions' emphasis on human dignity supports calls for fair treatment and wages.[12]

2. **Right to Safe Working Conditions**

Unsafe factory conditions, such as those leading to tragedies like Rana Plaza, violate fundamental human rights. The Geneva Conventions' principles inspire global movements to promote safety standards in industries like RMG.

3. **Non-Discrimination and Equality**

The conventions advocate for equal treatment, aligning with ILO standards that call for gender equality in employment, including equal pay and opportunities for women workers.

4. **Protection of Vulnerable Groups**

The Geneva Conventions stress the protection of vulnerable populations. Women, often marginalized in labor environments, require specific safeguards to ensure they are not subjected to harassment, abuse, or unsafe working conditions.

5.3 Conclusion

While the Geneva Conventions do not directly regulate labor practices, their principles of equality, dignity, and protection from harm are integral to advocating for better labor rights for women in Bangladesh's RMG sector. By aligning national labor laws and industry practices with international standards inspired by these conventions, Bangladesh can work towards ensuring a more equitable and just environment for women workers.

[12] Geneva Conventions, 1949. Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols. International Committee of the Red Cross, 1949.

CHAPTER-06

Concluding Remark

6.1 Recommendation

1. **Legal Reforms and Enforcement:**
   - Ensure strict enforcement of labor laws, particularly those addressing women's rights.
   - Mandate equal pay for equal work and address wage discrimination against women.
   - Provide maternity leave and ensure protective measures for working mothers.
2. **Improving Workplace Safety:**
   - Introduce a zero-tolerance policy against sexual harassment in the workplace.
   - Set up childcare facilities in industrial zones for working mothers.
   - Upgrade workplace safety standards and health facilities for all workers.
3. **Empowering and Educating Workers:**
   - Provide regular training programs on labor rights and legal protections.
   - Launch leadership development programs tailored for women workers.
   - Create skill enhancement initiatives to increase long-term employment opportunities.
4. **Enhancing Policies and Awareness:**
   - Establish grievance redressal cells specifically for female workers.
   - Integrate gender inclusivity into national and industrial employment policies.
   - Promote regular employer-employee dialogue to address workplace issues.
5. **Aligning with International Standards:**
   - Comply with International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions to ensure fair labor practices.
   - Expand CSR activities focusing on welfare programs for women workers.
6. **Role of Government and NGOs:**
   - Increase government monitoring and intervention to prevent exploitation.
   - Enhance collaboration between NGOs and civil society to advocate for women workers' rights.
7. **Promoting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):**
   - Develop policies aligned with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).
   - Design national plans for ensuring decent work for all workers, especially women.

6.2 Conclusion

The readymade garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh has been a cornerstone of the nation's economic growth, contributing significantly to GDP and employment. Women workers, constituting the majority of the workforce, play an indispensable role in this sector. Despite their substantial contributions, they face numerous challenges, including wage disparity, unsafe working conditions, lack of social protections, and limited career advancement opportunities. Addressing these challenges is essential not only for ensuring social justice but also for sustaining the competitiveness and reputation of the RMG sector in global markets.

Empowering women workers by safeguarding their labor rights is pivotal to achieving gender equality and inclusive economic growth. Legal reforms must prioritize the enforcement of existing labor laws, especially provisions related to minimum wages, maternity benefits, and workplace safety. Additionally, fostering an environment free from discrimination and harassment is crucial for enabling women to thrive in their professional roles.

The study also highlights the importance of collaborative efforts between the government, private sector, and civil society organizations. By enhancing monitoring mechanisms, improving grievance redressal systems, and investing in skill development programs, stakeholders can collectively uplift the status of women in the RMG sector. The integration of international labor standards and alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5 and SDG 8, can further ensure that women workers enjoy equitable opportunities and a dignified working environment.

In conclusion, the RMG sector's progress must be inclusive and equitable, reflecting the values of fairness and justice. A future where women in the RMG sector are empowered, valued, and protected will not only benefit them but also contribute to Bangladesh's broader social and economic development. Therefore, it is imperative to view the challenges faced by women workers not just as isolated issues but as critical barriers to achieving a prosperous and equitable society.

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