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Unraveling Organizational Conflicts and Conflict-Management Strategies in RMG Industrial Sector of Bangladesh: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Shila Nasrin

Department of Business Administration, Atish Dipankar University of Science and Technology (ADUST), Bangladesh

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Abstract The Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector is a cornerstone of Bangladesh's economy, significantly contributing to GDP growth and providing employment opportunities, particularly for women. Despite its economic importance, the sector has faced substantial challenges over the past decade. Key issues include low labor costs and intense global market competition, which have led to concerns such as retrenchment, dismissal, wage disputes, extended working hours, inadequate overtime compensation, demotion, and insufficient adherence to safety and health standards. These challenges have been exacerbated by factors like the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions, impacting the sector's stability and growth. In response to these challenges, a study employing a qualitative approach with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was conducted. This study analyzed narratives from various sources to understand the nature of conflicts between garment workers and management and to identify effective conflict management strategies. The study found that prevalent conflicts stemmed from long working hours, inadequate compensation, and unsafe working conditions. To address these issues, initiatives focusing on financial literacy and leadership training have empowered workers to establish trade unions within factories. These unions have fostered supportive work environments where workers' rights are respected, and conflicts are addressed collaboratively. Furthermore, strategies such as collective bargaining, union solidarity, and advocacy for policy reforms have been instrumental in managing conflicts and promoting a more equitable and just environment within the garment industry. These efforts highlight the importance of systemic reforms and worker empowerment in ensuring sustainable development in Bangladesh's RMG sector.

Keywords Ready-Made Garment, Conflict, Conflict-Management, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Readymade Garments (RMG) Industry has been identified as the fastest-growing industrial sector all over the world and even it has been making crucial contributions to upgrading the country and its economy. After independence, the readymade garment (RMG) industry has become the biggest export earner for Bangladesh and achieved global competitiveness in this sector. The readymade garment (RMG) sector plays a pivotal role in the development of Bangladesh, accounting for more than 83 percent of the country's exports and contributing approximately 16 percent to the GDP, with around 4,000 factories employing around four million workers [1]. Despite its robust achievement in economic and social fields of Bangladesh, RMG sector has produced both harmonious and conflictual situations in industrial and social fields.

The export-oriented readymade garments (RMG) sector in Bangladesh started its journey in the late 1970s as a small non-traditional export sector [2]. By taking advantage of cheap labor and the quota-based market in the USA and EU under the provision of the Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA) of GATT, it attained a high profile in terms of the country's economic growth [3]. By FY2002, within a span of about two decades, its exports had reached US$4.5 billion, demonstrating a remarkably high growth rate for an emerging industry anywhere in the world. This also indicates robust expansion, from less than 50 factories in 1983 to more than 3,400 in 2002, with the number of RMG workers rising to approximately 1.5 million [2]. It became the largest exporting industry in Bangladesh, experiencing phenomenal growth over the last three decades. Furthermore, Bangladesh foresaw a bright future for the RMG sector, as research data predicted that apparel sales would account for around 40% in Western Europe and the USA, and 31% in China, while other countries would have lower shares [4].

This current prediction makes Bangladesh a global competitor albeit one with huge challenges. Even, the current global situation makes Bangladesh, after China, one of the leading exporters worldwide to sell to the richest buyers in terms of brands and countries [5]. Despite the epic growth of our RMG industry, and its bright prospects, challenges are still there. The working condition, employment deprivation, lower wage rate and worker-owner-employee management structure caused severe difficulties in industrial sector.

To take one example, for the last decade, the productivity scale was falling gradually, but low productivity was offset by extremely low Worker costs –at $0.22 per hour in 2008, they were the lowest in the world [6]. The growing labor unrest and mismanagement in RMG sector generate a huge concern due to inadequate infrastructure, bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption as problematic factors in industrialization of Bangladesh [7]. As a developing country, the pendulum between intention to having huge foreign revenue and loss of harmonious organizational achievement threw the RMG sector into huge social and organizational grievances. Therefore, the research has been oriented to investigate the actual causes and consequences of arising conflict in RMG industrial sector of Bangladesh.

The RMG industrial sector has been recognized as one of the leading economic sectors in Bangladesh. Although, this sector clearly flourished GDP and women's participation in formal job sector, the RMG sector faced huge challenges for a decade. The major challenges originated from growing competition among the owners of diverse industries within and outside the country that produces severe dispute within the industrial framework. It clearly shows that production, quality, profits and corporate social responsibility are critical areas where companies can improve competitive edge [8]. Above all, the domain of work and organization constitutes an arena in which diverging aims and interests provide an inexhaustible source of dispute at all levels [9].

The RMG sector of Bangladesh fell into a problematic situation after the cancelling of MFA-quota system in 2004. More importantly, it faced the worst situation after having two major accidents: the recent experience of Tazreen fire and the Rana Plaza collapse that caused thousands of workers' death and serious life-long injury. The RMG sector is facing two forms of difficulties: one is the challenge of maintaining lower labor costs, and the other is the risk of marketing loss in the world competitive market. For many years, industrial organizations have operated with low-cost labor resources, but the global landscape is changing, as emerging labor markets in Africa can now compete with Bangladesh in terms of cost [1].

In addition, incidents in the sector have manifested huge workplace unsafety, inadequate infrastructure, bureaucratic inefficiency, and corruption as major problematic factors in the industrialization of the RMG sector [7]. For example, a recent investigation of Accord-inspected factories shows that 85.4 percent of electrical, 76.4 percent of fire-related, and 65.4 percent of structural problems have been addressed, with particular focus on structural issues in the industrial sector [10]. As a consequence, grievances regarding retrenchment, dismissal, payment of wages, working time, overtime, demotion, promotion, transfer, seniority, job classification, work rules, and the fulfillment of obligations relating to safety and health have been identified as serious concerns [8].

Regarding those worse situations, conflict or dispute has become inevitable in garments industries of Bangladesh. But, the deep causes in connection with social and organizational relations and also the severity of social and organizational processes have not been investigated yet now. Mostly, the ongoing class conflict and managerial conflict remained out of the research in Bangladesh. Due to witnessing those multi-dimensional difficulties and grievances revolving RMG sector and considering such research gap, investigating the causes and processes of emerging conflicts in organizational sector and finding out conflict management strategies have been selected as the arena of our ongoing research.

2. Research Objectives

The Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industrial sector has increasingly become an arena for both class and managerial conflicts within its organizational structure. In Bangladesh, class conflict has become more prominent and visible than managerial conflict. Moreover, the management system within the RMG sector has largely failed to resolve these ongoing conflicts due to multiple inherent and structural challenges. In light of these issues, this research seeks to address the underlying problems through the following key objectives and corresponding research questions: The first objective is to investigate the major causes of ongoing conflict in the RMG sector. This involves identifying the

key factors that contribute to escalating tensions and understanding the root causes behind persistent class and managerial conflicts. The second objective is to examine the role of organizational processes in fostering conflict within the RMG industry. This includes analyzing how the structural framework of the industry contributes to an environment of class and managerial tension, and assessing the extent to which relational patterns among stakeholders exacerbate these conflicts. The third objective is to explore effective conflict management strategies within the RMG sector. The goal is to identify practical and impactful approaches that not only address existing conflicts but also support the long-term development and sustainability of the industry.

3. Rationale and Significance of the Study

The significance of this research lies in addressing the pressing issue of organizational conflict in Bangladesh's RMG sector by connecting theoretical insights with practical implications. The study directly responds to the stated objectives—investigating the causes of conflict, examining organizational processes, and exploring effective conflict-management strategies—thereby contributing to both academic knowledge and policy practice.

Firstly, the research is expected to provide a scientific diagnosis of the root causes of ongoing conflicts between workers, managers, and owners in the RMG sector. By identifying the nature and severity of these conflicts, the study will help stakeholders recognize the structural, managerial, and relational problems that perpetuate class and organizational tensions. This understanding will be crucial for ensuring workers' rights and minimizing exploitation, thus directly benefiting the RMG industry and its workforce. Secondly, the study will contribute to improving organizational performance by offering evidence-based insights into how conflicts emerge from structural frameworks and stakeholder relations. The real identification of grievances and underlying causes will guide policymakers, factory management, and labor organizations in adopting realistic and sustainable initiatives for conflict resolution, enhancing productivity and industry stability.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research will extend the academic understanding of organizational conflict by linking discourse, class conflict, and managerial processes within the context of Bangladesh's RMG sector. It is designed to formulate new theoretical perspectives on how organizational conflict impacts both workplace relations and broader social dynamics, which will be valuable for future researchers and intellectuals.

Finally, from a reflective perspective, this study will direct future inquiries toward a deeper understanding of the lived realities of workers and managers, as expressed through their discourses [11]. The findings will be beneficial not only for local stakeholders but also for international scholars and organizations seeking to understand and improve labor relations in global supply chains. Ultimately, the study will equip intellectuals, policymakers, and social agents with both cognitive insights and practical strategies to mitigate organizational problems and strengthen the sector's development.

4. Literature Review

The literature review basically deals with the previous research on the entitled issue providing the recent scenario with current data of the problematic area. For this review, well-recognized international articles on this issue are analyzed shortly in which global and national picture could be understood, which would be an effective guide for the ongoing research. Based on a survey conducted by BIDS, Majumder and Begum [12] explored socio-economic impacts of gender differentiation in the export-oriented garment industry of Bangladesh. The survey shows that the gender gap has been narrowed down in many spheres like employment, income, social prestige, control over income, decision-making, etc. This research clearly avoids gender conflict as well as class conflict with its consequences.

Verma and Kumar [13] explored a historical analysis of industrial conflicts in India that highlighted the major factors of conflicts all over the two decades. This research suggests that, between the period of 1970 and 1990, wages and allowances seemed to be a significant cause of industrial disputes, however the rate of those causes has been come down gradually. But the share of indiscipline and violence as a cause of industrial disputes has increased more within this period, while bonus did not contribute more to industrial dispute. Despite having analytical data discovering the contribution of causes to dispute, this research rests on secondary sources and also it does not cover recent situations of industrial sphere.

With a cross-sectional survey of 36 respondents, Nzuve and Kiilu [8] investigated the causes of industrial disputes in the garment factories in the Export Processing Zone (EPZ) Athi-River, Kenya. The study reveals that weak form of leadership with relationship pattern, lower wage, weak trade union movement, inefficient and inadequate social security, lack of employment benefits, opportunities for training, promotion, trained personnel at the health service and short contract are the main problems creating situations of conflict at the EPZ. Although, this research shows multiple causes focusing on weak form of leadership, lower wage and poor working condition as the leading causes of the conflict, the effects of the remaining conflict are out of the study.

Another study using a co-relational survey of 234 respondents with multistage sampling technique, Mayowa [14] examined industrial conflict and its management strategies in selected manufacturing companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that the causes of

conflict in manufacturing companies in Lagos State, Nigeria include poor means of communicating grievances to top managers, unfavorable economic and industrial policies, poor employee compensation and welfare among others. While this study scientifically identified the causes of conflict, the dysfunctions of conflict management were not evaluated and also the socio-organizational circumstances were ignored.

Other than foreign countries, very few studies on this issue have been conducted in Bangladesh. One such survey study was conducted by Islam et al. [3] on 50 workers from five garment industries in Bangladesh, designed to unearth the causes of labor conflict in the RMG sector. The research identified multiple causes of conflict between workers and managerial employees, including poor participation in decision-making, lack of management willingness, absence of labor union activities, lack of workforce diversity, irregularities in payment, and low wages. Additional factors such as mistreatment by managers or officers, rumors, conspiracies, non-execution of labor laws, unruly worker behavior, and political intervention also contributed significantly to these conflicts. However, the study was limited to a very small sample size and did not examine the consequences of such conflicts.

Mahfuz [15] explored the major causes and consequences of labor unrest in RMG industrial sector of Bangladesh. It stresses that irregularities in labor payment, delayed and lower wages, mistreatment of the workers by the managers, absence of trade-unionism and rumor, have been identified as prevalent causes of labor unrest; it affects four parties- the workers, the owners, government and foreign buyers- creating economic downturn. While this research covers both causes and impacts, it deals with only labor unrest avoiding internal conflict and also it does not find out the socio-relational grievances due to arising conflicts.

Apu [16] tried to find out the effects of labor unrest in national economy of Bangladesh. This research states that, ownership of about 40 large-scale garment factories has been handed over to the foreigners, and ownership of about 100 factories is under the process of being handed over which in turn causes a serious concern about the economic situation of Bangladesh; while other socio-organizational effects have not been studied yet (Table 1). Following the above-mentioned literature review, the structural causes of industrial conflict were not effectively investigated, although many studies have been operated in order to find out the exterior causes of conflict in RMG industrial sector in many countries as well as in Bangladesh. Until now, there have been limited studies that clearly focused on how deeply the socio-cultural causes and organizational mechanisms work in soaring conflicts in RMG sector. Besides, the socio-economic grievances and effects on organizational relations were not examined in a broader spectrum.

Moreover, the methodological gap produced the necessity of the research on this problematic issue. Since, most of the research has been oriented to quantitative survey method, the illustration of in-depth reasons and nature of grievances with the effects of conflicts remained unclear mostly in this area. Therefore, the mixed method with survey and KII will hopefully be effective in finding actual reasons and strategies of conflict management in RMG industrial sector of Bangladesh.

Table 1. Literature review with method, findings and limitations

Researchers	Method	Findings	Limitations
Majumder & Begum (1997)	Survey-based socio-economic analysis	Narrowed gender gap in employment, income, social prestige, decision-making, and control over income	Avoids gender and class conflict analysis along with their consequences
Verma & Kumar (1992)	Historical analysis (1970–1990) using secondary data	Wage and allowances were key causes; indiscipline and violence increased; bonus was less significant	Based on secondary data; does not cover recent industrial developments
Nzuve & Kiilu (2013)	Cross-sectional survey (36 respondents in Kenya EPZ garment factories)	Weak leadership, low wages, weak unions, poor social security, lack of training/promotion/benefits, and short contracts as major conflict causes	Effects of conflict not explored
Mayowa (2015)	Co-relational survey (234 respondents, multistage sampling in Nigeria)	Causes: poor communication of grievances, unfavorable policies, poor compensation, and welfare	Conflict management dysfunctions not evaluated; socio-organizational aspects ignored
Islam et al. (2014)	Survey of 50 workers from five Bangladeshi garment industries	Causes: low decision-making participation, weak union activity, low wage, mistreatment, conspiracy, irregular payments, lack of diversity, political interference	Small sample size; consequences of conflict not addressed
Mahfuz (2013)	Qualitative analysis of labor unrest causes and consequences	Causes: delayed/lower wages, absence of unions, mistreatment, rumors; impacts on workers, owners, govt, and buyers, leading to economic downturn	Focused only on labor unrest; internal conflicts and socio-relational grievances were not considered
Apu (2010)	Analytical study on economic effects of labor unrest	Labor unrest caused transfer of ownership to foreign hands, raising economic concerns	Socio-organizational consequences were not studied

Source: Literature reviewed by author

5. Theoretical Framework

Karl Marx's theory of class and class conflict has been modified into a modern form of conflict by modern sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf [17]. The nature of class and character of conflict in early capitalist era have changed due to changing structure of capitalism and organizational development. Since, the structure of ownership and capital circulation has been transformed into a complex and diversified formation, the structure of conflict has become more comprehensive and wider-ranging and therefore the effects of conflict have turned into multifaceted dimensions. In this context, the theory of Ralf Dahrendorf might be more appropriate and adjustable to explain the causes and consequences of conflict in RMG industrial sector of Bangladesh.

Karl Marx simplified class as mainly bourgeoise and proletariat in the name of owning and non-owning class in which capitalists as owners have power of control while workers have nothing but their own labor, which can produce class conflict due to class alienation and exploitation. By contrast, Ralf Dahrendorf [17] reformulated class structure on the basis of authority, in which new middle class as managerial body has become more powerful than any other class and groups. Therefore, the structure of authority makes the relation with horizontal and vertical level worth of educational quality and skilled performance, which predominantly forms the relation of superordination and subordination among the employees and workers.

In this context, Dahrendorf discovered three groups of society: quasi groups, interest groups and conflict groups [18]. Since, according to Dahrendorf, quasi groups hold managerial positions and power of authority, and interest groups as secondary groups are derived from the quasi groups having connection with organizational goals and programs [18]. Examining the roles of those groups in industrial sector, Dahrendorf [17] explores that conflict groups are composed of vertical and horizontal employees based not only on class interest but also on both manifest and latent interest which causes a distinctive form of group conflict.

Dahrendorf clearly postulates that the latent interest is the root cause of group conflict which exists mainly among the horizontal and vertical managerial bodies in industrial sector. This idea intends that labor unrest shows manifest interest as a cause of direct conflict. Then, Dahrendorf [17] introduced the idea of 'institutionalization of class conflict' that shows class conflict is being permitted by organizational procedure following three steps: 1. Conciliation by director of industry or chairman of corporate body 2. Mediation by government authority 3. Arbitration by armed police or army. Dahrendorf [17] saw industry with its structure of society as the dominating order of society and patterns of conflict therefore extend to the whole society. Despite having system of conflict management, the quasi-groups of industry have access to political sphere, making them dominant group and placing the workers in subjected position, for which the conflict is being intensified to an extraordinary degree [17]. Thereby, the study illustrates how organizational processes such as rules, managerial roles, and workplace relations generate different types of conflicts between workers, managers, and owners; and it also presents strategies of conflict management, including mitigating class conflict, rationalizing management, promoting cooperation, and reforming institutional policies (Figure 1).

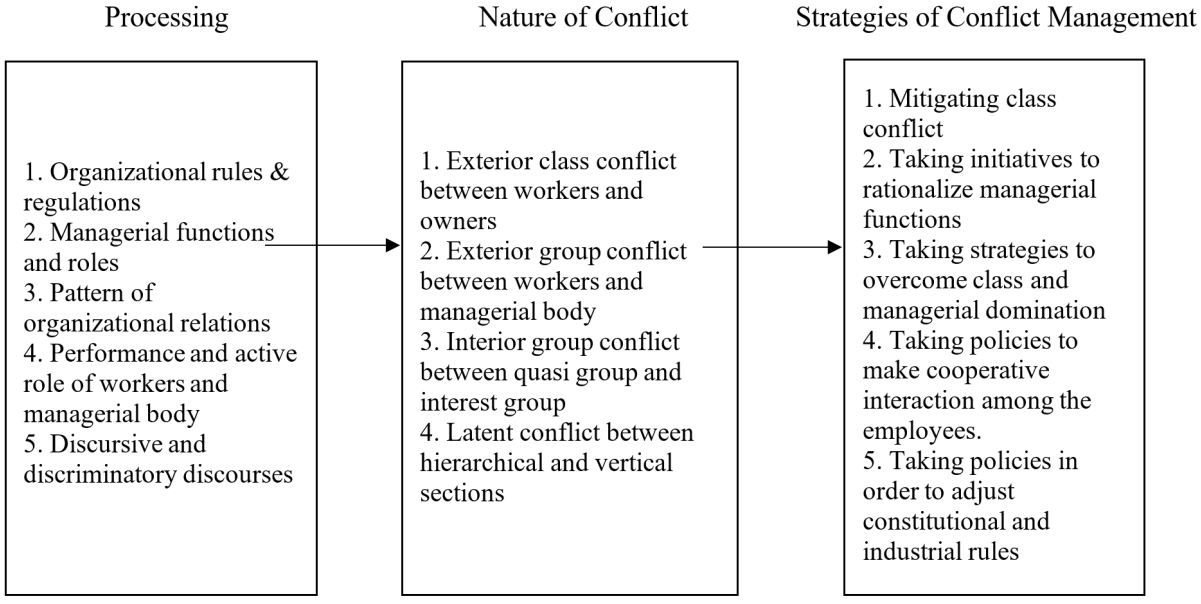

Figure 1. Theoretical frame developed by Author

The study of organizational conflicts in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector of Bangladesh can be situated within both class conflict theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Dahrendorf's theory of industrial class conflict emphasizes that industrial spaces are inherently characterized by structured inequalities, where authority and subordination generate persistent tensions between management and workers. These tensions often materialize as organizational conflicts, which are shaped not only by structural factors but also by discursive practices that reproduce or challenge power relations. To complement this structural perspective, CDA offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing how language and discourse contribute to the production, maintenance, and contestation of power in industrial relations. CDA underscores the interconnectedness of discourse, cognition, and society [18], enabling the exploration of how discriminatory or manipulative discursive strategies reinforce inequality, resistance, and conflict in organizational contexts [19].

Within this framework, Van Dijk [18] distinguishes between discourse-immanent critique, which identifies contradictions, paradoxes, and inconsistencies in textual or conversational practices, and socio-diagnostic critique, which uncovers the manipulative or power-abusive dimensions of discourse [20]. Fairclough's [21] three-dimensional model further strengthens CDA by linking text analysis (descriptive), discursive practice analysis (interpretative), and social practice analysis (explanatory), thereby connecting workplace discourses to broader socio-political and cultural structures. A crucial aspect of CDA in this context is ideology critique, which exposes distorted social meanings, epistemic injustices, and mechanisms of domination embedded in discourse [19]. By uncovering how discourses sustain inequality and marginalization, ideology critique becomes particularly relevant in analyzing organizational conflicts and conflict-management strategies in the RMG sector, where workers often experience systemic disempowerment. Thus, integrating Dahrendorf's theory of industrial conflict with CDA allows for a nuanced understanding of how organizational conflicts in Bangladesh's RMG sector are both structurally rooted and discursively constructed. This theoretical framework situates conflict not merely as a clash of interests but as a dynamic process mediated through language, power, and ideology.

6. Methods

6.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach as part of a critical paradigm that deals with studying multiple layers in social reality which are governed by hidden-underlying structures [21]. It aims to explore complex dimensions of conflict in the RMG sector. A major tenet of pragmatism is that qualitative method is more exploratory than quantitative research, and so the qualitative component in this study is particularly crucial for understanding the deeper, more nuanced aspects of conflict that are not readily captured through numerical data [22]. This approach allows for the exploration of participants' lived experiences and perspectives, offering richer insight into the informal and structural causes of conflict and their broader implications on socio-organizational relations and human well-being.

6.2. Data Collection Method

CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) method was used for explaining interview data. In-depth interviews began with common-sense understandings of lived experiences and aimed to uncover the underlying structures, meanings, and contextual boundaries of those experiences [23]. Those in-depth interviews were published in newspapers and websites, which made it possible to do Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Discourse analysis is a relatively recent approach applied in a variety of disciplines to examine the systematic bodies of knowledge [19]. CDA, as a research method, also stems from critical social theory for understanding ideologies within a social context of power relations [23]. And so, the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method was used as the most significant research method. The stories as part of in-depth interviews are available in different newspapers, articles and websites, showing that discourse analysis would be possible to do research having insight into the garment workers in Bangladesh. Considering the method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the underlying problems such as discrimination, exclusion, prejudice, and psycho-social vulnerabilities are perceived among the ready-made garments' workers [24]. For this, the texts, contents and opinions are explained.

6.3. Data Sources and Data Analysis

A five-year initiative titled *Mapped in Bangladesh (MiB)* used a factory census approach to compile and digitally map data on export-oriented ready-made garment (RMG) factories across Bangladesh. As of mid-March 2022, MiB had mapped a total of 3,723 factories [25]. According to the MiB data, these factories employ approximately 2,777,677 individuals—significantly fewer than the 4 million workers often claimed by industry entrepreneurs [26]. Although their life is so challenging and vulnerable, only a few of stories of them were found in online sources; of them, three stories were selected for discourse analysis. Website sources visually present the vulnerability and sufferings that were produced by different interviews. Their languages were found in different stories which were contextualized, explained, and presented. The website texts were analyzed that presented critical discourse exposing different forms of ideas, concepts and thoughts. The discriminatory discourse and linguistic discourse were

explained with critical eyes. Researchers explained the accomplished data through the thematic analysis to indicate critical themes such as discursive defamatory discourse about garment workers and discriminatory discourse about those workers.

This study draws on lived experience narratives of garment workers and labor activists in Bangladesh. The first story comes from Morzina Begum, a garment factory worker, whose experiences are documented in a video interview available on YouTube. A second story is from Nazma Akter, Executive Director of the Awaj Foundation, who shared her own experiences of working in the garment industry in a YouTube interview. Additionally, an exploratory case was found in the story of Nahidul Islam, who joined a union in 1991 and later became the General Secretary of the Sommilito Garments Sramik Federation. These narratives such as 1) The Story of Morzina Begum 2) The Story of Nazma Akhter 3) The Story of Nahidul Islam, are published on the Fair Wear website and also featured on the YouTube channel Fair Wear Foundation. The interviews document their struggles for securing labor rights, their resistance against exploitation, and their efforts toward empowerment in the garment industry. For analysis, these spoken interviews were examined using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method. CDA enables exploration of how their language reflects lived experiences of exploitation, unequal treatment within the industry, and the strategies they employed to manage and resist conflicts in the workplace.

6.4. Ethical Issues

To ensure the reliability and validity of qualitative data, data were analyzed taking from reliable sources. Transcriptions were generated from credible and authentic sources, serving as secondary data. Researchers critically analyzed the discursive presentation of language and its relation to the practical experience of social exclusion based on recorded speeches that confirmed research validity [27].

7. Results and Discussion

The garment industry has the potential to support women's empowerment and thereby improve the lives of millions in garment-producing countries like Bangladesh. It provides vital work opportunities that have enabled many women to improve both their own and their families' standard of living [26]. However, this potential is undermined by persistent challenges, as women in the sector face job discrimination, sexual harassment, assault, and limited opportunities for promotion compared to men [26]. A case study illustrates this reality. Morzina Begum began working in a garment factory at the age of 15, where she found the work extremely difficult. She observed that women and girls were consistently treated poorly—they were forced to work late hours without pay, denied time off, and even pregnant women were required to carry heavy loads [28]. Attempts to speak up were met with hostility; when Morzina tried to raise her concerns, she was yelled at and mistreated. Eventually, she turned to the Awaj Foundation, which empowered her to raise her voice and make it heard [28].

> "*At the age of 15, I borrowed 150 Taka from a friend and ran away to Dhaka at night before my wedding. Because my stepmother was forcing me into marriage right after my HSC examination. I got my first job in a factory when I was 15 years old. It was so loud and noisy and there was so much shouting. My mind could not take it. My feet swelled up and I could not stand anymore. I noticed that young girls about my age were made to stay at work till 3 am or 11 pm. They were not given proper mill times or paid properly for overtime before they were clothing bundles of 110-120 pieces. These bundles were tied and hauled from one table to the next by pregnant women. No body said anything. One day I said 'Boss, I don't make her do this job. Give her something else. He said 'who are you to say that?' He treated me badly. That day I felt terrible. Is this how things work in the garments sector? Boys have the courage to speak up about their issues. That is why they rarely face the problems. Girls cannot speak up or fight back. That is why girls face more trouble in the workplace*". [The Story of Morzina, YouTube] [28].

The story of Morzina underscores the systemic challenges and conflicts within Bangladesh's garment industry, particularly affecting young female workers. Many workers endure excessive working hours, often extending late into the night, without adequate breaks or fair compensation. Pregnant women are frequently assigned physically demanding tasks, and the overall working environment is characterized by high noise levels and stress. Despite labor laws stipulating an 8-hour workday, a significant proportion of female workers report working 10–12 hours daily without appropriate overtime pay. The social context of power relations [22], thereby infers that gender-based discrimination is prevalent, with female workers facing disproportionate challenges, including lower wages and limited opportunities to voice concerns. Efforts to advocate for better conditions are often met with hostility from management, discouraging collective action. This suppression of workers' voices contributes to a culture where grievances remain unaddressed, perpetuating exploitation. These issues highlight the urgent need for systemic reforms to protect workers' rights and ensure equitable treatment in the garment industry. Morzina added,

> "*Later, I met my husband, and 15-20 days, after we met he told me he wanted to marry me. So, I gave him three conditions. The first condition was that he was to take*

me to his village home before marriage. The second condition was that he cannot tell me how to spend my money. The third one was that he cannot mind if he sees me talking to other colleagues. He agreed willingly on those conditions. Two years later my husband was diagnosed with Tuberculosis. Work could not give me time off. But I was determined to fight against this oppression. Then I went to Awaj Foundation (Awaj Foundation is a Bangladesh partner of plan international and fair wear). I explained everything to Ms. Khadeja. I told her that they would not grant me leave and my husband is in the hospital. What should I do? They gave me the courage and I was absent for ten straight days, going back to work on the 11th day". [The Story of Morzina, YouTube] [28].

Morzina's experience illustrates the systemic deprivation faced by garment workers in Bangladesh, where employers often deny basic rights, such as leave for family emergencies, reflecting a broader disregard for workers' well-being. This neglect fosters conflict, as management's indifference and the lack of effective enforcement of labor laws exacerbate tensions between workers and employers. In response, workers like Morzina seek support from organizations like the Awaj Foundation, which empowers them through education on labor laws, legal assistance, and advocacy for better working conditions. Such grassroots initiatives are crucial in addressing workplace injustices and promoting a more equitable environment within the garment industry.

Morzina then included,

"*Awaj used to call me during the holidays for training sessions. How to earn more money. How to speak out against injustice. How to distribute food and work in a family. How to save and spend our earnings wisely. These are the kinds of things we learned. Women are given more priority there. They are given safety. They are taught how to become resilient and not fall behind. From here I started to revolt. I created the trade union in my factory. Now no one loses their job. This was my first act. No one shouts at anyone more and the environment is such that we are now all friends*." [The Story of Morzina, YouTube] [28].

Morzina's experience illustrates effective conflict management in Bangladesh's garment industry through empowerment and collective action. By participating in Awaj Foundation's training sessions, she gained skills in financial literacy, assertiveness, and leadership, which enabled her to establish a trade union in her factory. This initiative fostered a supportive work environment where workers' rights are respected, and conflicts are addressed collaboratively, leading to improved workplace relations and conditions.

The story of Nazma Akter, Executive Director, Awaj Foundation, is important here. Nazma Akter started working in a garment factory at age 11. She is now the Executive Director of Awaj Foundation. Nazma explains the state of the garment industry in Bangladesh as she sees it [29]. In response to the question 'how would you characterize the garments industry in Bangladesh', Nazma claims that,

"*I am not saying it's excellent or super. Its survival. Because you know the infrastructure has been changed. But if you are talking about the living wages, freedom of association, gender-based violence, the livelihood, life, quality of life, it has not changed. Because the workers are treated as cheap labor. They are getting minimum wages, not the living wages. I don't think that has been changed. As you know that Rana Plaza collapsed, Tazreen Fire, a lot of things happened. Lots of initiatives are supporting the safety of the workers. But in real life it has not been changed. There were no trade union rights like fifteen years back, and no trade union issues were addressed. Now there are quality unions we have. Many women are in leadership position. They are demanding and signing collective bargaining. There is a big gap between management and workers. Things are changing because of awareness, education. We try to reduce gap building. We are working together with workers, suppliers, union, stakeholders. Workers need to be respected; dignity needs to be ensured*". [The Story of Nazma, YouTube] [29].

Nazma Akter's account highlights ongoing deprivation in Bangladesh's garment industry, where workers, particularly women, continue to face poverty wages, gender-based violence, and limited access to trade union rights. The lack of effective enforcement of labor laws allows such exploitative practices to persist, exacerbating the conflict between workers and employers. In terms of conflict management strategies, Nazma emphasizes the importance of seeking external support to address workplace injustices. Organizations like the Awaj Foundation, which she founded, play a crucial role in empowering workers through education on labor laws, providing legal assistance, and advocating for better working conditions. Their efforts contribute to fostering a more equitable and just environment within the garment industry.

Another case of Nahidul Islam is needed to discuss. Nahidul Islam Nayan's journey from a garment factory floor to a prominent trade union leader exemplifies his dedication to improving workers' rights in Bangladesh's garment industry. Beginning his career in 1989 as a cutting helper earning 300 taka, he joined a union in 1991 and has since become the General Secretary of the Sommilito Garments Sramik Federation, representing over 70,000 members [30].

"*I am Noyon. I am general secretary of United Garments Labor Federation representing the labor workers in the ready-made garment sector in Bangladesh. There are 65 unions in this federation and I am one who is leading the*

biggest union in Bangladesh where 8000 workers are working. I was once a garment worker. I joined the garment sector in 1989 as a cutting helper. When I joined the trade union, the owner could not accept it as well and they had a negative attitude towards me. In the past, we did not get salary monthly; it was delayed for a few months. Now, we get salary timely. There was no maternity leave system. Workers used to get paid as they worked. Now all those issues are settled. Now workers are getting maternity leave, weekly holiday and other holidays. The first challenge we face is when a female worker joins the union. The management of the factory does not take it as good; as a result, the job security becomes threatened. The second challenge comes from family. Family members don't prefer a woman to get involved in the union protesting against wrongdoing, and fighting for rights. We face a similar problem when a female worker becomes a mother. After being a mother, most of the time, her husband doesn't want to let her work. Another problem is that we don't have enough day care services for women workers with little children in our factories. We don't have a proper environment for the female workers where we can motivate them enough and train them properly. We are still lagging far behind in female empowerment". [The story of Nahidul, YouTube] [30].

Noyon, General Secretary of the United Garments Labor Federation in Bangladesh, has been instrumental in advocating for the rights and well-being of garment workers, particularly focusing on the challenges faced by women in the industry. He highlights those female workers often encounter significant obstacles when attempting to join unions, including threats of job loss and harassment. Thereby, discrimination, exclusion, prejudice, and psycho-social vulnerabilities are perceived among the ready-made garments' workers [25]. To address these issues, Noyon has supported initiatives like "women's cafes," which provide safe spaces for women to gather, share experiences, and receive support, thereby empowering them to advocate for better working conditions and mental health support. Despite efforts to improve labor conditions, unionization in Bangladesh's garment sector faces persistent challenges. Factory owners often view unions negatively, leading to harassment and difficulties in registering new unions. Noyon continues to work tirelessly to overcome these barriers, striving to create a more equitable and supportive environment for all garment workers in Bangladesh.

These systemic barriers to union participation, coupled with societal pressures and inadequate support for working mothers, contribute to the deprivation faced by female garment workers. Such challenges are compounded by entrenched gender biases and resistance to unionization, leading to ongoing conflicts within the industry. In response, Noyon emphasizes the importance of collective bargaining, union solidarity, and advocacy for policy reforms that address gender-specific needs. By fostering a supportive environment and challenging discriminatory practices, unions aim to create a more equitable and inclusive workplace for all workers.

8. Conclusions

This study sets out to investigate the causes of ongoing conflict in the RMG sector, examine the organizational processes that foster these conflicts, and explore effective strategies of conflict management. The findings highlight that conflict in the RMG industry arises primarily from structural and relational inequalities between workers, managerial bodies, and owners. Systemic deprivation—such as long working hours, unsafe conditions, wage discrimination, and suppression of workers' voices—emerges as a central cause of persistent tensions and grievances.

The conceptual framework further clarifies these dynamics by linking organizational processes with the nature of conflict. On the processing side, rigid organizational rules, managerial functions, discriminatory discourses, and limited participatory opportunities create conditions for discontent. These practices translate into different forms of conflict: exterior class conflict between workers and owners, exterior group conflict between workers and management, interior group conflict among quasi and interest groups, and latent hierarchical tensions. Together, these conflicts reflect a workplace environment where power imbalances and inequitable structures perpetuate organizational dysfunction and worker exploitation. At the same time, the study underscores the importance of conflict management strategies for addressing these challenges. Effective approaches include mitigating class conflict, rationalizing managerial functions, reducing managerial domination, and fostering cooperative interaction among workers and managers. Grassroots initiatives—such as trade union formation, legal awareness campaigns, financial literacy programs, and gender-sensitive advocacy—illustrate how collective empowerment can shift the dynamics of conflict management toward inclusivity and equity. However, barriers such as harassment of union leaders, bureaucratic hurdles in union registration, and resistance from management continue to limit these efforts.

Thereby, organizational conflicts in the RMG sector are deeply embedded in structural inequalities and discursive practices that sustain class and managerial domination. Yet, through systematic conflict management strategies, policy reforms, and worker empowerment initiatives, these conflicts can be transformed into opportunities for organizational development and social justice. The integration of discourse analysis with industrial conflict theory provides a robust framework for understanding and addressing these issues, ensuring that both the rights of workers and the efficiency of the industry are safeguarded.

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