

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF LABOR UNREST: A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF THE THE DERANGEMENT OF LABOR AT BANSHKHALI COAL-BASED POWER PLANT IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

Recently, labor unrest in the Banshkhali coal-based power plants a protest is taken place by the labor, where at least five labor has been killed by the police. This incidents raise the question that, whether the labor do not have the right to raise their voice fro their mandate or not. Productive and skillful labor force is one of the key tools for assuring the economic growth of a country. On the other hand, labor unrest can be considered as one of the major barriers to the path of efficient productivity which extinguishes the sustainable economic growth of any country. Consequently, it is indispensable to understand the social dynamics of labor unrest which would help to alleviate the causes of labor unrest. Thereat, this study employs qualitative research method through collecting data and information from secondary sources with the aim to explore the social dynamics behind the labor unrest in the Banshkhali coal-based power plant. Furthermore, this study would trace out the causes and connsequences of labor unrest through the lens of Karl Marx's Theory of Class Struggle.

Keywords - Banshkhali Coal-based Power Plants, Labor Unrest, Protest, Productivity, Social Dynamics, Theory of Class Struggle

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Labor unrest is a very frequent occurrence nowadays in Bangladesh, especially in garment's industry (Choudhury & Rahman, 2017). But labor unrest in coal-based power plants is also not familiar. Violent protest by labor can lead to decrease the productivity of any industries. Most of the workers of readymade garments industries's are not happy with their facilities and they raise their voice for improving their current working conditions and increasing wages (Choudhury & Rahman, 2017). Though in garment's industries the labor unrest is frequent but also in coal based power plants, the labor also have complained for the poor working conditions, poor amount of wages and an unequal hierarchical relationship between the owners and the labor where, the laborers have been exploited and they are the ultimate sufferer. Islam & Ahmed (2014) found several socio-economic factors which causes labor unrest in readymade garment industries in Bangladesh, which can be related the as the causes of the labor unrest in Banshkhali coal-based power plant. The causes socio-economic causes behind the labor unrest are: wages are very poor, workers have no assurance of payment, irregular payment, lack of additional benefits, workload, lack of recognized labor union and so forth (Islam & Ahmed, 2014).

However, in April 17, police fired on the power plant workers who were protesting in the Gandamara union of Banshkhali upazila and S Alam Group (a Bangladeshi Company) and a Chinese firm is involved with construction of that coal-based power plant. The workers were protesting to earn their rightful demand. This is not the first incident where police killed the protester, five years ago, some native people were protesting against the attempt of the plant owner to acquire land for the construction and police killed six protestant then (The Daily Star, 2021). After the incidents of 17 April, 2021 police filed a case against some 2000-2500 unidentified people accusing of attack police during the clash, on the other hand the power plant authorities filed another case against 1040-1050 people by mentioning 22 names for vandalism and attack (Prothom Alo, 2021).

Therefore, this study attempts to figure out the social dynamics of labor unrest of Banshkhali coal-based power plant. This article has been categorized into five chapters. The first chapter provides the introduction and background of the Banshkhali labor unrest. Then the second chapter describes the methods of the study, the third chapter will provide a brief description about the understanding of the social dynamics of labor unrest at Banshkhali coal-based power plant and also develops a theoretical framework where the study attempts to explore the causes and consequences of labor unrest through the lens of Karl Marx's Theory of Class Struggle. Then chapter four discusses the findings and finally, chapter five provides a strategy to alleviate labor unrest for promoting decent work place.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs qualitative research methods to figure out the social dynamics of the labor unrest of Banshkhali coal-based power plant. Relevant information and data has been collected from secondary sources, such as: existing research paper, articles from the prominent newspaper of Bangladesh, books and so forth. In addition, this study uses the Karl Marx's theory of Class Struggle to trace out the causes and consequences of labor unrest.

Firstly, the study collects data and information from secondary sources, then from that secondary data and information that study makes a portrayal on the social dynamics of labor unrest of Banshkhali coal-based power plant. Secondly, from analysis the study develops a theoretical framework based on the notion of Class Struggle Theory of Karl Marx. Thirdly, after all the analysis the study represent a policy for the government to alleviate labor unrest from every industries of Bangladesh.

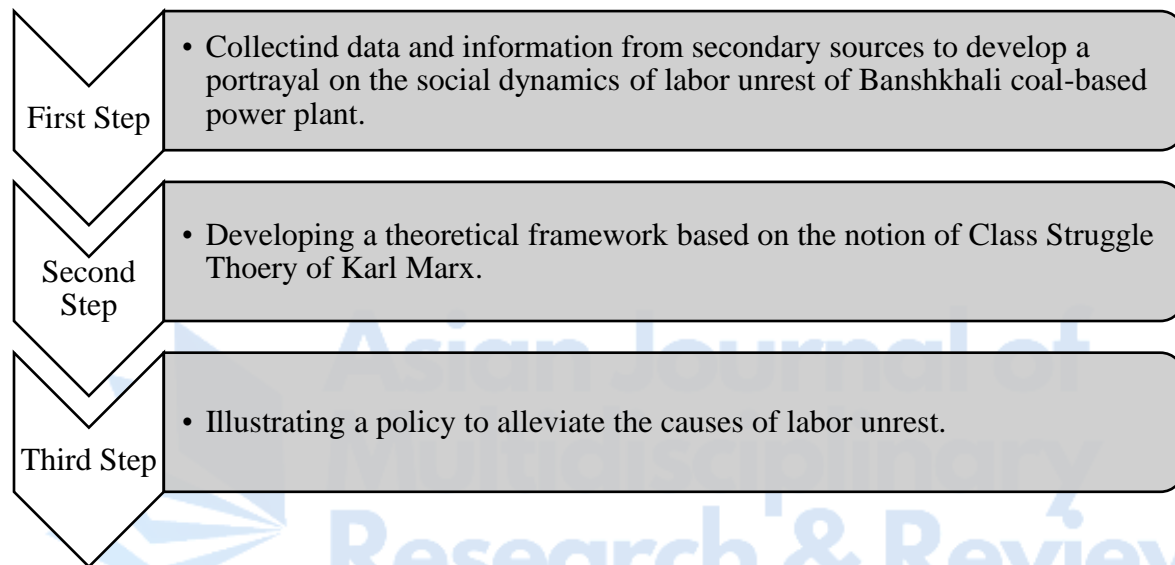


Figure 1: Method of the Study; Source: Author's Creation

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF LABOR UNREST AT BANSHKHALI COAL-BASED POWER PLANTS

To understand the social dynamics of Banshkhali labor unrest, two groups can be divided: 1. The owners and 2. The labor who protested and the assumption is that the behavior of any group can shape the action of another group. The protest is not the result of a single day or a month rather than the protest is the consequence of the exploitation which the labor have to face for many years and finally they raise their voice for their legal demands. The labor have several demands, such

as: increasing wages and reducing the working hours in the morning (The Business Standard, 2021). There was riot among the labor for long period of time for the reduction of working hours, raising wages and against the torture and in 17 April, 2021 police fired and killed labor. Though the authority of S Alam group claimed that, they are not responsible for the clash as the labor have to work under Chinese company and Chinese contractors (The Business Standard, 2021). But with that statement S Alam group cannot deny their responsibilities.

Furthermore, the ignorance of the owner of the power plant leads to labor unrest. This kind of irresponsible behavior of the owner destroys the hope of the labor and they do not have another option without protesting. The social change occurs by altering the behavior of the labor for this kind of reckless action of the employers.

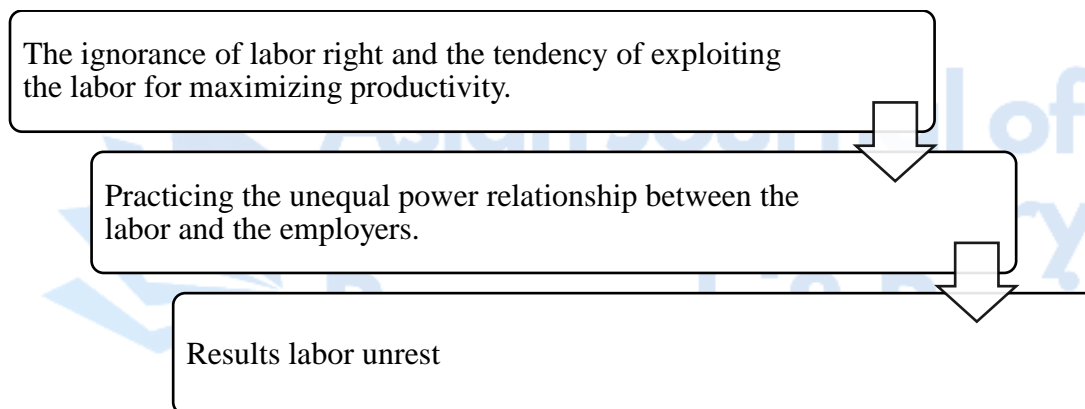


Figure 2: Social Dynamics of Labor Unrest; Source: Author's Creation

Therefore, the reckless behavior of the owners can able to take place in a society where a powerful group of people can have the opportunity to practice their power for their own benefit and supported by other elite group of people. Therefore, this convenience would provide a field for the owners to play a unequal game with the labor who are not as powerful as the owners are. Though the labor want to work efficiently but due to the lack of opportunities and the blindfold behavior of the owners leads to alter the behavior of the labor. As the consequences of exploitation of long time exploitation the labor needs to raise their voice and by the reckless behavior they understand that labor unrest is the only way to raise their voice.

Moreover, the owners always have a tendency to use their power and exploit the labor by not assuring labor right at all. There this kind of behavior also leads to change the liable behavior of labor (figure 2). Harebrained actions of the owners increases labor exploitation by low wages, higher wages discrimination, no festival bonus, no weekly day off, forced overtime, no payment and so forth. Eventually the exploitation creates miserable conditions to the labor to work efficiently. The irresponsible behavior of the owners of the Banshkhali coal-based power plants is responsible for several inconvenience of the labor (figure 3)., for which the labor must have to change their behavior and raise their voice. Furthermore, by practising the power unethically the employers tend to torture the labor who protested and for the fear of torture sometimes the protester knock down their protest and have to work with those inconveniences and thus most of the protests cannot able to gain its aims.

Consequently, any positive social change cannot able to take place through the change of the behavior of the owners and labors. But due to the reckless and dominating behavior of the owners and the authorities often lead to the exploitation of the labor. Though there are several laws and strategies to reduce the exploitation but due to the lack of willingness of implementation of those laws labor always have to be dominated, which can be proved by the incidents of labor unrest at Banshkhali coal-based power plant. In the particular incident, the labor raised their voice over increasing wages, reducing working hour in the month of Ramadan which are the rightful needs of the labor but as the owners and authority of the power plants are more powerful hence, the labor has been killed and also accused for creating unnecessary unrest.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Karl Marx explored the class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie in the capitalist society (Rummel, 1977). The core idea of the theory of class struggle can be understood through the incident of labor unrest at Banshkhali coal-based power plant. Karl Marx represented the structure of society in relation to its major classes and conflict or struggle between those two classes is the tool of change in the societal structure (Rummel, 1977). Marx defined class by the property

ownership and claimed that, there are three classes regarding property ownership in a society, which are: a) the bourgeoisie, who owns the means of production, b) landowners, , whose income is rent and c) proletariat, who sell their labor for wages (Rummel, 1977). Through the distribution and consumption of wealth these three classes are determined, which eventually represents the power relation among the classes and individual makes classes according to their interests and involves in a conflict with the opposite class (Rummel, 1977).

Furthermore, the distribution of political power also defined by power over production and with the political power the bourgeois class uses to legitimize and defend their property, hence class relation is political (Rummel, 1977). Finally, Marx claimed that, the class relation is the condition of the exploitation of the worker and the condition of the exploited worker will depreciate so badly so that, the social structure will breakdown; the class struggle will then transform into a proletarian revolution (Rummel, 1977). Eventually, structural change will be occurred as the result of the conflict between the classes.

Therefore, in the case labor unrest in Banshkhali coal-based power plant, there are mainly two classes, a) the owners as bourgeois and b) the labor as proletariat. Here, there is always a class conflict between the owner and the labor and the owners are more likely to exploit the proletariat for protecting their property. Therefore, to maximize the profit owners can able to do anything and the labors are the ultimate sufferer. But, sometimes the labors raise their voice for their right which happened in Banshkhali coal-based power plants and by the use of power the owners again exploit the labor. According to Karl Marx, if this kind of exploitation will be continued their the class struggle would transform into the labor revolution and ultimately, structural change will be taken place as a result of class struggle.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Most of the protest held for the rightful demand of the labor. Inappropriate wages, overtime without any incentive, relaxed working hour and so forth. The unequal power relationship between

the employees and the owners of the industries often lead to riot which diminishes the productivity of the industries. Furthermore, as the employers are more powerful than the labor hence the employers have the tendency to exploit the labor by workload, overtime, under-payment and so forth. Though there have also labor union, but sometimes the several members of labor union are also work for the industry's owner for their own purpose and the general labor have to suffer a lot and cannot able to gain their rightful demand.

In the capitalist society, there is always a tendency for using labor for the maximum productivity of industry at any cost. The unequal power relationship also tends to create a circumstance where the labor have no say and cannot have to raise their voice over the powerful group of people. If any group of labor raises their voice, then they have to be sufferer or have to die as the powerful owners would use the police against the labor, which we can see from the incidents of Banskhal labor unrest. Furthermore, labor unrest is not the consequences of a single day, it is the consequences of the long-time exploitation and to survive a decent life a labor must have to raise their voice which leads to labor unrest.

There are several causes of labor unrest, among them: the ignorance of the owners, government, lack of appropriate initiatives taken by government and the civil society, violation of labor right and so forth are the major reasons. The employers often show ignorance or they are more likely to neglect the needs of the labor, as they (employers) more powerful than the labor, hence they do not care about the right of labor. The employers are more likely to have the opportunity to lobby with the officials of government, consequently, they tends to fix the labor unrest by not fulfilling the rightful demand of the labor. Their behavior and overlooking tendency often leads to labor unrest. On the other hand, according to Marx's theory of class struggle, as the owners tend to use their power against the labor for protecting their property, there will be always a class conflict between labor and the owners and ultimately it lead to labor unrest.

CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

Though there are several laws and policies to reduce the labor unrest, for example, there is an allegation that, to develop a strong labor union can able to reduce the labor unrest as labor union can negotiate with the employers for the needs of the labor, but with having labor union this kind of unrest cannot able to be reduced. Moreover, there is also a tendency of not listening or not giving appropriate respect to the labor union by the employers. Labor unrest is curse for any developing country like Bangladesh and therefore, it is the high time to make an effective and feasible policy for assuaging the fever of labor unrest from every in sphere of industrial sector.

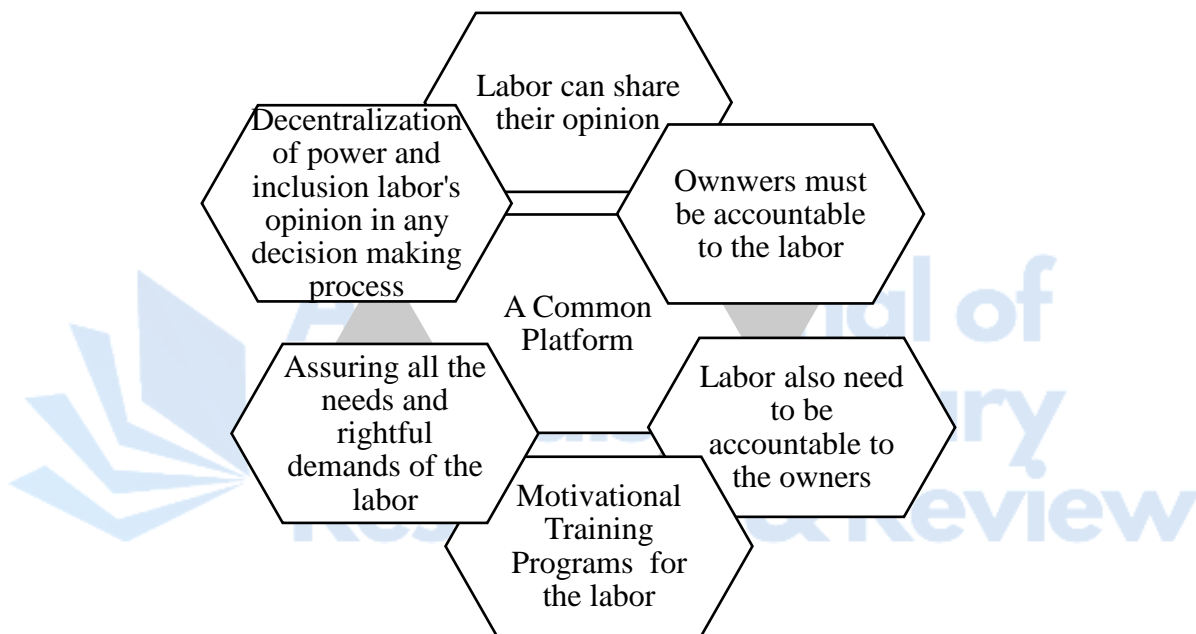


Figure 3: Alternative Strategy; Source: Author's Creation

To alleviate the causes of labor unrest a strategy can be undertaken by the authority. Firstly, a common platform needs to be provided for the labor and the industries' owners. In that platform, labor can able to share their opinion, mutual accountability between the labor and the employers needs to be developed for the effectiveness of the common platform. Moreover, several motivational training programs for the labor can be undertaken, after that assuring to fulfill all the needs for the labor also needs to be undertaken. Finally, decentralization of power should be promoted for reducing the unethical power relationship between labor and the owners and as well

as. Inclusion of labor's opinion in any decision making process of the industry should be promoted which can decrease the tendency of labor unrest.

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