

CHAPTER IV

GROWTH OF TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN INDEPENDENT BANGLADESH

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4.1. Introduction

On December 16, 1971 Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation on the world map. The people fought for the country with high hopes and aspirations. But the country had a war-ravaged economy. Industrial workers and agricultural labourers were displaced; some participated in the war of liberation. So, it took some time to settle everything. By this time Peoples Republic of Bangladesh as a state policy nationalised 80 per cent of the major industries and services including banks and insurance. The decision of change over from one economic system to another was rather a bit early while the country just got liberation. However, there was a massive change in the economic system, it might be regarded as a forward step towards socialistic pattern.

Nationalisation was almost a new concept to the workers and management people too. Corrupt politicians made the workers and labour leaders understand that after industries being nationalised, their services being nationalised, the factory was their own property. This is in fact, the basic theme of socialism where all are equal and everybody has equal access to all the existing resources available. But they interpreted the very logic of socialism and misused the assets of nationalised mills and factories to satisfy their self-interest. During this long period of 28 years Bangladesh experienced two Martial Laws, one in 1975 and the other in 1981, and during the Martial Laws the organised movement of workers in industries including jute was disrupted time and again.

In this changing circumstances how the workers, trade union leaders and management behaved, will be analysed in the present chapter.

4.2. Trade Union Movement from 1972 to 1981

As stated earlier after liberation Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh as a state policy nationalized about 80% of the major industries and services including banks and insurance. So there was a massive change in the economic system which was supposed to lead the country towards socialistic pattern. Immediately after liberation, the Prime Minister (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who led the liberation movement was the first Prime Minister of Bangladesh) had a press statement on February 9, 1972 which read as under –

"I assure our workers that the basic goal of the socialist economy, which we are committed to achieve, will be securing the rights of workers and ensuring their welfare. A plan is being prepared where by measures of nationalisation would be combined with new arrangements to ensure workers participation in the management of industries" (Quoted in Khan, 1980: 56).

But the workers illogically demanded higher wage and fringe benefits just after liberation. The Government reacted positively. The Government constituted the Industrial Workers Wage Commission immediately on the demand of the workers. This Commission submitted the report to the Government with certain recommendations. The Government accepted the report. In order to implement these recommendations Government promulgated a law known as State Owned Manufacturing Industries Workers (Terms and Condition of Services) Ordinance 1973. But workers did not take the Ordinance easily as they had lost their basic right of collective bargaining. The report of the Pay Commission for Government, autonomous and semi-autonomous employees was also published in 1973.

So wages and other benefits are fixed by the National Pay Commission (for Government and public sector employees) and National Wages and Productivity Commission (for industrial workers in the public sector) and Collective Bargaining Agent (CBA) has nothing to do in this regard (Akkas and Hussain, 1998; 151). The main issue of bargaining is wage and other benefits. But the wage issue had been ceased by wage commission as a result of nationalisation. Leadership in plant levels and even federation levels had almost very little to do in financial matter. So they did not take the new economic system from the core of their hearts as it crippled their power.

Employers of different organisations also did not accept the scale with satisfaction. So large-scale agitation and conflict came up. Several strikes recorded in Jute and cotton industries that caused considerable loss of production (Hafiz, 1980). Actually the enhancement of wage and salary due to new wage and pay commission could not cope with the rate of inflation. Moreover, management workers cooperation was absolutely minimum at that time. Workers were going to be unruly due to economic recession after liberation and they could not follow the meaning of nationalisation and socialism properly. In their perception, socialism meant that every employee is equal and there would be no difference between a general manager and a

labour in respect of remuneration and status. They thought that there would be no hierarchy. And nationalisation means industry has become its own and their service has also been secured. So they used to defy hierarchical position and instruction issued by the superior authority. Moreover, executives had the paternalistic attitude and they were feeling uneasy to adjust with this new order. Thus, labour management cooperation came to a lowest extent. But to increase productivity and quality of work life labour management cooperation is essential. Besides that it is of much importance to establish a cooperative relationship between management and labour in order to succeed in the competitive business world (Akkas, 1998: 118).

After the liberation of Bangladesh, the new Government adopted the Industrial Relations Ordinance (IRO), 1969 (partially amended in 1970) with a view to regulating labour management relations along with some other laws as Pakistan Government adopted all the British India Laws after 1947 (Alam, 1983: 44). First Industrial Policy was declared in 1972, which recommended for reducing the activities of the trade unions to the status of a welfare organisation. Right to strike in the nationalised industries was prohibited for six months. In the year 1973 the right to strike and lockout, as guaranteed in the year 1969 Ordinance was obliterated (Sayefullah, 1986: 163). During the first Martial Law, Government of Bangladesh promulgated the industrial Relations (Regulation) Ordinance, 1975 (IR(R)O, S 1975) as an addition to the IRO, 1969. The Government amended the IRO, 1969 in July 1977 and the new ordinance was named as the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Ordinance, 1977 (IR(A)O, 1977). Further amendments came in 1980. IRO, 1969 was amended in July, 1980 and the new one was named as the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act, 1980 (IR(A)A, 1980). This Act repealed the IR(R)O, 1975 and incorporated some important features of the first Labour Policy declared in March 1980. After the IR(A)A, 1980 a new law, *i.e.*, the Industrial Relations (Regulation) Ordinance, 1982 was promulgated by the Second Martial Law Government (Alam, 1983: 44).

Another amendment took place in 1985. This will be treated as Industrial Relations (Amendment) Ordinance 1985. Article 7(a) of 23 Ordinance of 1969 had been amended where eligibility of being elected members or officer bearers of any trade union have been amended. In addition to that, article 10, 11, 47 and 47(A) and 47(B) of the said Ordinance of 1969 have been amended. All these amendments were related to

cancellation of trade union registration, appeal organise cancellation, regarding the transfer of officer bearers of trade unions, etc. (Industrial Relations (amendment) Ordinance, 1985), (Ordinance No. 15 of 1985), Govt. of Bangladesh.

After liberation the Government was urged by Jatiyo Sramik League (JSL) to ban those labour unions which had co-operated with Pakistan occupation army directly or indirectly and take punitive measures against the leaders of those labour unions. And those leaders should not have any chance in any ensuing tripartite committees. The then labour Minister Mr. Zahur Ahmad Chowdhury held the same view. Faiz Ahmad group was amalgamated with JSL for existence but Aftab Ali group kept its identity separate by electing Dinen Sen as President and expelling their president Mr. Saifur Rahman and their leading member Vilayet Hussain (Ahmad, 1978: 101). Country needed national unity badly to rebuild the war-ravaged economy at that time. So JSL could not have brought those issues at this juncture.

By this time industrial unrest was cropping up. There was a *gherao* in the Pak Jute Bailing Company, the Kohinoor and Adamjee groups of industrial areas where workers compelled the management to surrender to their demands (Ahmad, 1978: 101-102).

Jute industry was the backbone of Bangladesh economy. Jute used to contribute highest source of our foreign exchange. It is the biggest employer in the industrial sector of the country. Unlike any other manufacturing industry in the country, the Jute industry has to sell more than 90 per cent of its produce in the international market in the face of severe competition from synthetics and other jute goods exporting countries like India, China, Thailand, Nepal etc. In spite of so many odds, Bangladesh occupies a key position in the world Jute goods export market (Bangladesh Economic Survey, 1984-85: 44). But this sort of chaotic condition as noted above was a threat to the industry and a newly liberated country.

From the following table 4.1 we can assess the position of jute manufacturing industry up to 1978-79. Number of permanent workers began to decrease after liberation due to unstable economic and political situation. Again it began to increase gradually from 1976-77. But Jute Mills were running in full swing.

Table 4.1: Profile of Jute Manufacturing Industry in Bangladesh (1965-66 to 1978-79)

Year	No. of Mills	No. of looms installed (a)	No. of looms (operating) (a)	No. of spindles worked (.000') (a)	No. of workers (permanent) (.000') (a)
1965-66	23	13330	11868	178	80
1966-67	29	14603	13073	201	100
1967-68	34	18255	16927	258	110
1968-69	47	20573	18358	293	150
1969-70	55	21453	20631	302	175
1970-71	68	23781	18137	290	170
1971-72	68	23836	15188	250	153
1972-73	73	24184	19933	300	162
1973-74	73	23709	19334	N.A.	150
1974-75	77	24651	17565	N.A.	142
1975-76	77	25679	20271	N.A.	131
1976-77	77	25679	20261	N.A.	132
1977-78	77	25679	22168	346	135
1978-79	77	26034	20493	N.A.	142

Source: Government of Bangladesh, 1980.

The following table 4.2 represents countries production of jute goods in the country in comparison to export, internal consumption and stock. Total production and internal consumption began to decrease after liberation due to instability prevailing all around. From 1976-77 it began to regain its position gradually.

Table 4.2: Production of Jute Goods Compared with the Trends in Export, Consumption and Stock

Year	Total Production	Export Overseas	Internal Consumption	Stock at	
				Beginning of the season	End of the season
1955-56	130	85	40	13	11
1956-57	145	81	57	14	21
1957-58	158	104	57	18	15
1958-59	203	131	55	14	25
1959-60	256	197	51	24	32
1960-61	249	203	48	31	29
1961-62	271	216	57	28	26
1962-63	298	219	65	24	38
1963-64	331	250	69	35	47
1964-65	289	222	69	47	49
1965-66	410	316	71	49	71
1966-67	404	347	68	71	61
1967-68	509	422	74	61	73
1968-69	507	452	66	73	62
1969-70	561	496	63	62	63
1970-71	440	377	56	63	70
1971-72	315	238	45	70	102
1972-73	446	418	30	102	101
1973-74	500	436	28	101	114
1974-75	444	368	45	114	127
1975-76	478	455	40	127	117
1976-77	490	462	34	117	96
1977-78	546	522	45	96	61
1978-79	501	455	38	61	49

Source: Government of Bangladesh, 1980.

There was a serious trouble in the Karnaphuli Complex on 5.2.1972, when 1200 to 1300 previous retrenched workers went to the mill and they went to a confrontation with the job seekers and those who have already appointed in their post (Ahmad, 1978: 102).

A joint statement was issued by Qazi Zafar Ahmad and Haider Akbar Khan (Rono) President and Secretary respectively of Bangladesh Sramik Federation using the Government to take necessary steps immediately to reopen all mills and factories in Tongi area and also to provide relief materials to the workers for their rehabilitation in the second week of February, 1972. On the reopening of Bawa Jute Mills Labour on the 24th February, 1972, Labour Minister of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh Mr. Zahur Ahmad Chowdhury said in his inaugural speech at the reopening of Bawa Jute Mills in February 24, 1972 that the Government would declare the policy of industrial workers very soon. This was followed by a public meeting held at Paltan maidan in the last week of February, 1972 addressed by Qazi Zafar Ahmad. Mr. Ahmad urged the Government to give 80% of the profit of industries to workers, 10% to the management and keep the remaining 10% for itself (Ahmed, 1978:102).

Being a leftist leader (Pro-Peaking) the above-mentioned demands of Ahmad are quite appropriate when the Government was leading towards socialistic pattern of the economy. But the demand was too much optimistic and early too. Socialism cannot be achieved over night. Not only the opposition but also the Government was stepping hastily without experience and not considering internal as well as global political situation of that time.

In this situation the most elderly mass leader Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani issued a statement that many workers who joined their duties after war of liberation were not getting their arrears because banks were not advancing loans to keep the mills running and to purchase raw material and spares. So he urged the Government to take positive steps to resolve the crises. Similarly Mr. Oli Ahad, General Secretary Bangla Jatiya League appealed to the Government to arrange for arrear salaries to all workers both in public and private sectors as well for the entire period of nine months. Moreover clashes spread out among rival trade unions in the Tongi industrial areas repeatedly. Rowdism, specially in Monnu Textile Mills, Meghna Textile Mills, Nishat Jute Mills became a regular phenomena as a result of inter-union rivalry between Jatio Sramik League (JSL) and Bangladesh Sramik Federation (BSF) (Ahmad, 1978: 102-103).

As a result of this unrest all around, coupled with political agitation, Government declared a state of emergency in December, 1974 banning strikes and lockouts, meetings and processions. Under the Emergency, Power Rules, 1975 the functioning of trade unions and the offices of corporations, semi-autonomous organisations, banks, insurance and also Government offices were prohibited, though their registration continued (Hafiz, 1980).

After the proclamation of emergency in January 1975 workers of some textile industries went on massive strike on 21st October, 1975. There was some trouble in Tejgaon industrial area because of the layoff, retrenchment and termination of services. Some amount of unrest was susceptible in Adamjee Jute Mills also. In Dhaka and Comilla areas the managers were manhandled by a group of workers in May 1976. In Meghna Textile Mills there was a 'gherao' and some apprehension of trouble in Ashraf Jute Mills, (Ahmad, 1978: 123-124) [more details in Appendix A and B].

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the President of Bangladesh addressed a largely attended labour rally in Tejgaon in March, 1975, where he announced that there will be only one labour front in the country as there could be only one political party named Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BKSAL). The BKSAL was announced as the only political party by President Shaikh Mujibur Rahman on 7th June, 1975. According to the constitution of the party, it will have five fronts, namely, Jatio Krishak League, Jatio Mahila League, Jatio Students League, Jatio Juva League and Jatiyo Sramik League and each one of these fronts would be headed by a secretary General and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would continue to be the Chief of BAKSHAL (Ahmad, 1978: 123).

In the mean time a military coup took place in August 1975. On the 15th Aug. 1975 Khondakar Mushtaq Ahmed took over after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the President of the country. President Moshtaq appointed Dr. Kshitish Chandra Mondal as the State Minister in Charge of Labour. Later on Zia took over and his Martial Law Government promulgated the Industrial Relations (Regulation) Ordinance, 1975 in December 1975 (sec 4 of the IRO, 1975). Persons employed as members of the watch and ward or security staff or confidential assistants of any establishment were denied the right to be members or officers of any trade union (sec 6, *ibid*). Determining the collective bargaining agent (CBA) through

elections was prohibited and a consultative committee was required to be constituted where there was no CBA (sec 7 and 8, *ibid*). All industrial disputes were to be settled through peaceful means (sec 9, *ibid*). The Government appointed the Industrial Workers Wages and Productivity Commission (IWWPC) to suggest a revised wages scale for the workers of public manufacturing sector in April 1977. The Commission submitted a report in June 1978. And accordingly a new Pay Commission was simultaneously appointed for the other public sector workers and employees (Abbas Ali Khan, 1986: 96).

The Industrial Relations (Regulations) Ordinance 1975 and the Emergency Power Rules (1975) also affected the structure of trade unions in the country. The Executive order of the 20th July 1977, Industrial Relations Ordinance 1977 relaxed some of the earlier restrictions on trade union activities. The labour policy (1980) has laid the foundation of a new structure of trade unions in Bangladesh (Mondal, 1992: 15). Government's view was that they believe in the process of collective bargaining for resolving industrial disputes and good labour relations. The Government claimed that the policy had been designed to protect the interest of the workers, the management and consumers and the state as well. This policy recognised the right to strike by the workers and that of lockout by employers as instruments of collective bargaining.

All the previous labour policies and the laws introduced subsequently, provided for collective bargaining practices as a means of settlement of disputes, occasional restrictions were imposed on the free play of collective bargaining practices depending on the political situation in the country. The legal provisions for recognitions of collective bargaining agents were made in 1969. The collective bargaining practices did not however take their roots in the pre-independence Bangladesh Labour relations, as the right to strike was granted to the trade unions (Mondal, 1992: 15).

Between 1948 and 1978, 978 strikes and work stoppages were recorded in the Pakistani Bangladesh. Due to these strikes 83 lacs 80 thousand 5 hundred 15 labour days had been lost. In independent Bangladesh 42 lack 77 thousand 7 hundred 77 labour days have been lost since liberation to 1982 due to industrial unrest in different Government and private productive industrial units (Kaisar, 1992: 35) (see Appendix-I and II).

The National Federation of Trade Unions (NFTU) consisting of eleven out of sixteen (later joined into Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad [SKOP]),

have submitted a five point charter of demands that mainly include free trade unionism, stoppage of denationalisation process of public industrial enterprise, wage increase and similar other demands to the Chief Martial Law Administration (CMLA) on Nov. 16, 1982. Later on they also demanded withdrawal of the martial law (Taher, 1997: 74). SKOP launched various programmes successfully such as rally, torch procession, demonstration, strike, *hartal*, blockade etc. were observed towards realising their demand at the call of SKOP. The military Government has been compelled to enter into an agreement with SKOP on May 21, 1984 to observe the success of this loose confederation called Sramik Karmochari Oikya Parishad (SKOP). Through this agreement some of the vital trade union rights were revived (Taher, 1977: 74).

The following table 4.3 shows the number of workers in major industries in Bangladesh. From this table it is evident that majority of workers are engaged in jute industry.

Table 4.3: Number of workers in major industries

Industry	Number of workers							
	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
Cotton Mills	80923	84969	190697	199543	226132	231655	7296	72049
Jute Mills	286788	303995	265512	257905	269407	256407	137858	137907
Sugar Mills	24264	25477	25529	27559	27609	27649	21168	21203
Cement, lime and	2125	2221	2647	2692	2746	2746	1483	1483
Glass factories	4543	4770	5293	5391	5731	5821	3001	2041
Match factories	11286	11850	12616	12801	12909	12994	6391	5881
Paper Mills	7605	8027	8883	8973	9071	9168	6037	6087
Engineering	51146	53703	55127	65689	57651	59249	29842	29882
Total	468670	495012	566304	571553	611256	605689	213076	276533

Source: Government of Bangladesh, 1990.

Table 4.4: Number of workers employed in Jute industries 1982-1989

Year	No. of workers engaged in Jute industry	% to total	Total number of workers in major industries
1982	286788	61.19	468670
1983	303995	61.41	495012
1984	265512	46.88	566304
1985	257905	45.12	571553
1986	269407	40.07	611256
1987	256407	42.33	605689
1988	137858	46.69	213076
1989	137907	49.86	276533

Source: Compiled from Statistical Year Book, Bangladesh 1990.

4.3. Trade Union Movement from 1981 to 1991

From June, 1982, major changes took place in the economic policy of the country, though it originated few years back. President Ziaur Rahman adopted a policy in the late 1970s for a return of substantial parts of the nationalised sector to private ownership, while General Ershad, in June, 1982, announced a major programme of decentralisation, notably of the jute and textile industries (Harper, 1987: 33). The total labour force in 1984-85 was 29.5 million, representing 30.19% of the total population estimated at 97.7 million (Khan, 1990: 122).

Due to industrial unrest 42 lacs 77 thousand 7 hundred 41 labour days had been lost in 1982. During this period (1981-1991) 5 hundred 21 times production stopped due to direct confrontation between labour and management (Kaiser, 1992: 35). Industrial disputes took place due to different reasons. The main reason of dispute is wage and other financial issues. The inflation rate in Bangladesh is one of the highest in the world, which demands frequent revision of scale of pay and wages. As a result, 64 per cent of the total strike was due to wages. Non-financial matters like leaves, holidays and personal matters like discharge, dismissal, promotion, transfer etc. were said to cause 12 per cent of the total number of strikes (Sengupta & Muniruzzaman, 1979: 15). Although in 1990-91 the nominal wages of both the skilled and unskilled workers in general have increased ten to eleven times of 1969-70 level but real wages have declined by one-fifth to one-fourth (Mondal: 19).

The reasons of disputes in a study (Chowdhury, 1983: 308) have following findings – pressure for the enhanced wages beyond the prescribed norm (31.97%) has been found as number one reason for disputes between the workers and the management. The unfair dismissal and retrenchment of workers (40%) by the management, promotion, job security transfer (21.90%) questionable quality and irregular supply of raw materials (16.18%), misbehaviour of the authority etc. are other important causes.

Industrial disputes take place in Bangladesh for sixteen times in 1983 which causes 3 lacs 92 thousand 6 hundred and 16 man-days lost in 1983 (Kaiser, 1992: 35). Industrial disputes or conflicts are almost the part of industrial life. But frequent disputes hamper production and distribution process. The number of industrial disputes, workers involved in it and man-days lost since 1947 to 1989 can be seen in notes-1. Industrial disputes

some times occur due to political causes (inter and intra-union rivalries, political issues of national interest and sympathetic strikes for causes of specific political party etc). During 1977-1991 out of 796 cases of industrial disputes 350 (about 44%) cases were caused by so called political factors (Mondal, 1992). Due to industrial disputes, on an average, Tk. 105.58 million loss of production occurred during 1980-1991 (Sengupta & Muniruzzaman, 1997: 17). One hundred and forty two industrial conflicts took place in 1984. Due to this conflict 11 lac 75 thousand one hundred 78 man-days were lost. President H.M. Ershad's regime was full of (Kaiser, 1992: 35) unrest, which prevailed not only in labour front but also to the political, and student front. It is revealed from different statistics of labour department that indices of trade unions are increasing more rapidly than the number of trade union members. The growth of trade unions is higher than trade unions' membership strength, what are the reasons behind this unnatural growth, *i.e.*, multiplicity of trade unions. Firstly political parties play the most dominant role towards the multiplicity of trade unions in Bangladesh. Different political parties are in competition among themselves to get hold of maximum influence in labour front.

Secondly, the union leaders very often change their party affiliation and they try to identify themselves with the party (in the labour front) sponsored by the successive regimes. It seems that there may be two reasons behind this change of identification: (a) Fear of oppressive and repressive measures against the labour leaders may be adopted by the regime in power; and (b) to receive personal gains or favour from the incumbent regime (Bhuyan, 1991: 153). Not only the labour leaders and even the managers switch over their support and blessing to the unions of ruling party. Managers of public and private enterprises deliberately support ruling party in order to seek benefits from the Government (Hussain *et al.*, 1998: 146).

The extent of multiplicity may be well understood by the fact that at the national level there are as many as 23 national federations of trade unions, of whom the most are affiliated with different political parties (Taher *et al.*, 1997: 103). The trade union movement of Bangladesh is highly politicised and the majority of the union is affiliated to political parties. As part of their campaign for the end of Martial Law and for elections, opposition parties and their affiliated unions called a series of general strikes

from 1983, often with considerable effect in Dhaka and other large cities and with loss of lives (Harper, 1987: 34).

From table 4.5, we can have a glance at the political affiliation of trade unions in Bangladesh. Like the following example most of the trade unions of mills and factories have political affiliation or attachment.

There were twenty-three National Federations of Labour in Bangladesh in 1995 with their political affiliation.

Table 4.5: Distribution of Numbers and Members of National federation of Labour in Bangladesh, 1995

Name of the Federation	Number of affiliated Unions	Membership of Affiliated Unions
1. Bangladesh Jatiya Sramik League	90	50,693
2. Jatiya Sramik Federation	19	18,300
3. Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra (CPB)	60	36,881
4. Bangladesh Sangjukta Sramik Federation L	45	21,272
5. Bangladesh Trade Union Sangha L	12	19,303
6. Jatiya Sramik Jote [JSD (Rob)]	12	2,260
7. Bangladesh Jatiyabadi Sramik Dal (BNP)	218	2,09,748
8. Bangladesh Sramik Kalyan Federation (JI)	20	9,570
9. Bangladesh Ganatantrik Sramik Federation (WP)	3	5,937
10. Bangla Sramik Federation (L)	3	294
11. Jatiya Sramik League (AL)	144	1,46,972
12. Bangladesh Trade Union Federation	4	1,648
13. Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress (NGO)	19	60,196
14. Bangladesh Sramik Federation	5	3,639
15. Jatiya Sramik Party (JP)	142	1,17,844
16. Jatiya Sramik Forum	11	4,205
17. Bangladesh Jatiya Sramik Federation (L)	5	2,235
18. Samajtantrik Sramik Front (BSD)	21	2,671
19. Jatiya Sramik Jote, Bangladesh [JSD (Inu)]	6	1,671
20. Jatiya Sramik Karmachari Jote	26	5,019
21. National Trade Union Federation	5	1,799
22. National Workers' Federation	10	10,467
23. Bangladesh Workers' Federation	7	1,19,324
Total	887	8,52,532

Source: Talukder, 1997: 152-153.

Notes: CPB = Communist Party of Bangladesh; L+ = Splinter Leftist Parties, JSD = Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, BNP = Bangladesh Nationalist Part (Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Dal), JI = Jamat-i-Islami, WP = Workers' Party, AL = Awami League, JP = Jatiya Party, BSD = Bangladesh Samajtrantrik Dal, These political parties are the mentors of the so-called national federation. JSD (Rob) represent a faction of JSD and JSD (Inu) represents another faction of JSD. NGO = Non-government voluntary development organisation.

So we can come to a conclusion that multiplicity of trade union is a by-product of politicisation of unions. There are other factors like attitude of workers and they are having less integrity and national feeling. Our workers are ill paid and not educate when their demands and aspirations are not fulfilled by trade unions and their leaders they become frustrated. Then they might have a tendency to switch over from one union to another and from one leader to the other.

The new Martial Law Government headed by H.M. Ershad took some steps to improve the lives of industrial workers. The most remarkable of these was almost doubling the wages and salary levels for public sector industrial workers according to the recommendation of the new wage and productivity commission and the new national pay commission appointed in the first half of 1985 (Abbas 1986: 97). However, the President had been alleged or criticised on the point that this enhancement of salary was motivated. It was one sort of political infiltration among the workers who are generally believed to have a significant influence in the national politics. What ever might be the intention workers were benefited.

With the withdrawal of Martial law at the end 1986, all restrictive provisions on trade unionism and labour relations were also withdrawn correspondingly (Abbas, 1986: 98). By 1986 there were 2,614 registered trade unions, organised mainly on industrial and occupational lines, and 17 national trade unions. But only 3 per cent of the workforce was organised. The 74 per cent of unorganised agricultural labourers were little touched by unionism (Harper, 1987: 34).

One lac seventy five thousand one hundred seventy eight man hour lost in 18 industrial conflicts which took place in 1987. Sixteen industrial conflicts was recorded in 1989, while 85 thousand 3 hundred and 95 man hour was lost (Kaisar, 1992: 35).

Table 4.6: Distribution of Number of Trade Unions and Number of Trade Union Members over the period 1971-1991

Years	Number of Unions	Number of Members
1971	1160	45060
1972	2523	682923
1973	3069	859735
1974	3320	946977
1975	3161	921152
1976	3037	895904
1977	3005	873128
1978	3178	1006516
1979	3357	1041080
1980	3613	1097757
1981	3533	1127506
1982	2156	946048
1983	2126	947281
1984	2488	1075496
1985	2593	1090338
1986	2132	1164289
1987	3387	1195704
1988	3625	1421834
1989	3908	1517567
1990	3789	1619008
1991	3956	1642915

Source: Ahmed, M.U. (1997).

There were 3625 trade unions in which the total number of members was 14,21,834 in Bangladesh on 31 Dec. 1988. In Dec. 31 1989 number of unions rose to 3908 and the total number of members went up to 15,17,567 (*Government of Bangladesh, 1988 & 1989*).

The following table 4.7 shows the growth and development of trade unions and trade union members from 1984 to 1995.

Table 4.7: Distribution of Number of Trade Unions and Number of Trade Union Members - 1984-1991

Years	Number of Registered Trade Unions	Indices of Trade Unions (Base = 1984)	Number of Members of Trade Unions	Indices of members of Trade Unions (Base = 1984)
1984 (31 st Dec.)	2488	100	1075496	100
1985 (31 st Dec.)	2596	104.22	1090338	101.38
1986 (31 st Dec.)	3132	125.88	1164279	108.26
1987 (31 st Dec.)	3387	136.13	1195704	111.18
1988 (31 st Dec.)	3625	145.70	1421834	132.20
1989 (31 st Dec.)	3708	149.04	1517567	141.10
1990 (31 st Dec.)	3789	152.29	1619008	150.54
1991 (31 st Dec.)	3956	159.00	1642915	152.76

Source: M.A. Taher *et al.*, 1998: 108.

Above table 4.7 shows that although the number of trade unions has been increased to a great extent, the number of trade union members has not increased to the extent of number of trade unions. It is due to multiplicity of trade unions on the one hand, and multiplicity of trade union

on the other is due to political affiliation. There are some other causes too, inter-regional groupings and personality clashes among the labour leaders. For example, in Bangladesh Bank, the Central Bank of the country, four trade unions are in operation (the Daily Star, January, 8, 1998). There were five trade unions in operation in Adamjee Jute Mills Ltd. The Government of Bangladesh has been compelled to close down the mill due to recurring huge losses. This jute mill was the biggest in Asia and it had a worldwide reputation in Jute sector of the world. But there cannot be more than three unions in an enterprise as per labour law of the country. It is a matter of regret that most of the organisations are violating the provisions of labour laws of the country.

4.4. The Movement During 1991-2000

Though in a mass movement, President Hussain Muhammad Ershad was ousted and the elected Government came in power in 1991. So democratic environment was created within the country. The right to form or join any association or organisation had been ensured as democratic rights restored. So union activity started in full swing.

There were 2488 registered trade unions with 10,75,469 members in Bangladesh in 1984, whereas it stands 4514 trade unions with 17,02,112 members in 1995 (Taher *et al.*, 1998: 102).

Table 4.8: Distribution of Number of Trade Unions and Number of Trade Union Members over the period 1992-1995

Years	Number of Unions	Number of Members
1992	4056	1648783
1993	4238	1674945
1994	4484	1681694
1995	4796	1720679

Source: Ahmed, M.U. (1997).

Table 4.8 represents that the number of trade unions is increasing rapidly, but the number of members is not increasingly accordingly. This tendency leads to the multiplicity of trade unions.

Upto 31st December 1998 there were 5694 trade unions in operation with 18,23,561 members. Additional 337 unions have been registered with 50,144 members in 1999. But 116 unions had been cancelled, which had 17,011 members. So upto 31st December 1999 total number of trade unions was 5915 with 18,56,694 members.

Table 4.9: Classification of Trade Unions according to Number of Members on 1998

According to Number	Number of Unions	Number of Members
01-50	145	4063
51-100	107	6054
101-200	63	11059
201-300	30	6087
301-400	06	1864
401-500	05	2285
501-600	02	1050
601-1000	07	5263
1001-2000	02	2342
2001-5000	01	2002
5000-Above	01	12172
Total	369	54241

Source: *Government of Bangladesh, 1998: 36.*

We see the same scenario in the above table that 145 unions having members 01-50. Only two unions having membership above one thousand and only one union has more than twelve thousand members. So there is a trend of forming small unions, which indicates sign of disunity and multiplicity of unions.

Adamjee Jute Mill was renowned in the trade union history of this country. There were about 28 thousand workers and four thousand employees employed in the mill in 1992. In the pre-liberation period workers of this mill played a pivotal role in the different anti-Government movements. But after that a group of corrupt leaders used the workers in terrorist and other activities derogatory to the workers interest. Corrupt leaders used to take percentage in jute purchase, sale, submission of tender and appointment of new workers. In this way they made money and destroyed the workers' interest and finally jeopardised the total objective of the trade union movement. Management was also corrupt and inefficient. About 110 workers were assassinated almost all in inter-union or intra-union rivalry from 1972 to 1992 (Kaiser, 1992: 92). Not only in Adamjee Jute mills, but also in all the mills including banks, transport, etc. were the same. One of the biggest sectors is road transport unions, where about four hundred big and small unions were in operation. Three federations were united and formed Bangladesh Road Transport Workers' Federation in 1990. But all over the transport sectors, unions were also corrupt. They used to extort money illegally from all the bus and truck terminus and which were distributed upto top level. In this way all the leaders used the unions as their media of corruption (Kaiser, 1992).

The following table shows the distribution of trade unions and number of trade union members. Again we can see the number of trade unions is increasing but the number of members is not increasing proportionately.

Table 4.10: Distribution of Number of Trade Unions and Number of Trade Union Members – 1992-1995

Years	Number of Registered Trade Unions	Indices of Trade Unions (Base = 1992)	Number of Members of Trade Unions	Indices of members of Trade Unions (Base = 1992)
1992 (31 st Dec.)	4065	163.38	1648783	153.30
1993 (31 st Dec.)	4238	170.34	1674949	155.74
1994 (31 st Dec.)	4484	180.23	1681690	156.36
1995 (31 st Dec.)	4514	181.43	1702112	158.26

Source: Taher *et al.*, 1998: 108.

Number of workers of major industries in public and private sector in Bangladesh is shown in table 4.11.

Table 4.11: Number of Workers in Major Industries

Industries	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000
Jute				
Production Worker	112554	112673	112508	111075
Other employees	14855	14690	14856	14385
Total	127409	127363	127364	125460
Cotton				
Production Worker	41508	41582	40969	414287
Other employees	7318	7395	7540	7585
Total	48826	48977	48509	49013
Paper				
Production Worker	3601	3484	3392	3310
Other employees	2860	2767	2709	2648
Total	6461	6251	6101	4994
Steel				
Production Worker	1668	1600	1509	1550
Other employees	554	538	506	492
Total	2222	2138	2015	2042
Cement				
Production Worker	816	884	1070	983
Other employees	571	672	780	602
Total	1387	1556	1850	1585
Fertiliser				
Production Worker	3080	3134	3128	3109
Other employees	4128	4066	4050	4091
Total	7208	7200	7178	7200
Petroleum				
Production Worker	436	429	406	379
Other employees	296	300	321	356
Total	732	729	727	735
Print and Varnish				
Production Worker	234	250	260	273
Other employees	279	286	293	319
Total	513	536	553	592
Ready Made Garment				
(For export mainly)				
Employees* (in million)	1.40	1.50	1.51	1.50 (e)
Male	0.14	0.15	0.15	0.15 (e)
Female	1.26	1.35	1.36	1.35 (e)
Number of Garment factories	2503	2726	2963	2963

* The total number of technical and production workers and other employees
e: estimated

Source: Government of Bangladesh, 2000: 164.

Garment industry has been developed in Bangladesh in tremendous way within a very short span of time. This is a labour-intensive industry and the advantage is that labour is very cheap in Bangladesh in comparison to western and even to many Asian countries. Before liberation there were only one Garment factory in Bangladesh. There were only 8 factories in 1997 whereas the number rose to 587 in 1984. The number of Garment factories stood at 2650 in 1998 and at present the number is 3,300 (BNGWF, 1999-2003: 2003).

Garments is the highest source of foreign earnings of Bangladesh as jute was the leading source of foreign exchange of the then Pakistani period. A clear picture of export earning of principal commodities of Bangladesh is shown in table 4.11.

Table 4.12: Export of Principal Commodities of Bangladesh (1995-96 to 1998-99)

Commodities	(Million Taka)			
	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99
Total Exports	1144521	171554	229408	245620
1. Prawns and shrimps	11803	10781	11745	12117
2. Tea	1254	1380	2150	1885
3. Spices	2	6	1	0.4
4. Raw hides and skins	2	3	1	1
5. Raw Jute	2968	4344	3776	3527
6. Jute Yarn	2405	2854	2684	2970
7. Jute mfg. total	10360	10531	9528	19719
(a) Hessian	1956	2108	1812	2309
(b) Sacking	35	45	14	18
(c) Carpet backing cloth	1459	1156	1304	1089
(d) Others	6910	7222	6398	7303
8. Leather and leather manufacture	6108	5366	4809	6793
9. Ready made garments	90595	114793	171660	190146
10. Handicraft	135	66	150	200
11. Others	18889	21430	22904	17262

Source: *Government of Bangladesh, 2000: 256.*

Trade union movement in garments industry is very weak. It is weaker than other sectors even. There are 8 country-wide registered trade union Federation. There are 9 federations registered as division based. Another 5 registered federation are combined with jute, textile and leather sector. Apart from these, there are 6 unregistered federations in this sector. There are three alliances in Garment sector. These are: (a) Bangladesh Garment Workers Unity Council; (b) Bangladesh Garments Workers and Employees Unity Council; and (c) Bangladesh National Coordinating Committee (BNCC) affiliated with ITGLWF. The National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF) is the most important trade union federations of garment workers in Bangladesh. The federation was established in 1984. There are 28 registered

trade unions (plant unions) affiliated with NGWF. Beside these, the federation had 1016 factory committees. From 1984 the federation is involved in all the important movements including strikes in the Garment sector (Activity Report, 1999-2003).

Table 4.11: Number of Employees in Ready Made Garments

	(in millions)			
Sex	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000
Male	0.14	0.15	0.15	0.15
Female	1.26	1.35	1.36	1.36
Total	1.40	1.50	1.51	1.51

Source: *Bangladesh Statistical Pocket Book 2000.*

In garments sector ratio of female workers is much higher than the male. Women workers are the backbone of garments industry, but their economic and social status is at stake. Even the management does not ensure the security of the women workers. Women workers faced rapes and sexual harassment outside the factories and sometimes inside the factories. Women workers are not given the equal wage, equal rights and promotional facilities (ibid.).

By and large, this is the total scenario of trade union movement of Bangladesh. At present, there are 26 federations in existence in Bangladesh and it is the result of multiplicity of trade unions. The following table (Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies [BLIS]) will show the names of National Federations, their office-bearers, number of unions attached with the respective federation, number of unions affiliated with and number of members with each union (see appendix-III).

4.5. Summary

In this chapter we have attempted to discuss the growth and development of trade unions and their movement since liberation in 1971 to 2000 with the frequent political changes that took place within the period. Trade union movement got a new fillip in a newly liberated country and under a new economic order. But it is marked that they just follow the predecessors. The very practice of multiplicity of trade unions, inter-union rivalry, leadership conflict, politicisation of unions, low academic background of trade union leaders and corrupt leadership of trade unions have become more acute than before.

For a couple of years the trade unions have lost their glorious past. The union movements are now regarded as a disturbing element in the development process. Donor countries now-a-days have been imposing constant pressure on us to impose restriction on those union activities that hamper growth and productivity of the manufacturing enterprises.

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Appendix-I: Trends of Intensity of Industrial Disputes (1972-1994)

Year	No. of dispute (D)	No. of Workers involved (W)	No. of Man-days lost (L)	Index No. of disputes (Base 1972 = 100)	Index of Workers Involved (Base 1972 = 100)	Index of Man- days lost (Base 1972 = 100)
1972	39	43615	126000	100.00	100.00	100.00
1973	58	35027	285177	148.72	80.31	226.33
1974	32	57387	231736	82.05	131.58	183.92
1975	02	28327	162000	05.13	64.95	128.57
1976	05	14517	256618	12.82	33.28	20.33
1977	22	76675	81715	56.41	175.80	64.85
1978	89	113209	662332	228.21	258.56	525.66
1979	96	114248	647629	246.15	261.95	513.99
1980	104	164032	1160436	266.67	376.09	920.48
1981	80	117031	1198460	205.13	268.33	268.33
1982	55	21788	238658	141.03	49.96	189.41
1983	16	175787	392616	41.03	403.02	311.60
1984	142	481004	1144817	364.10	1102.84	908.58
1985	95	198118	284920	243.59	454.24	226.13
1986	46	105977	2079671	117.95	242.98	1650.53
1987	18	88795	175278	46.15	203.59	140.11
1988	09	28874	49398	23.08	66.20	39.20
1989	16	60513	85395	41.03	138.74	67.77
1990	05	14554	28479	12.82	33.37	22.60
1991	03	454	29811	07.69	01.04	23.66
1992	11	6190	29741	28.21	14.19	23.60
1993	11	6101	16029	28.21	13.99	12.72
1994	02	5641	2421	05.13	12.93	01.92
Period Average 1972-1994	41.57	85124.52	397319	106.58	195.17	315.33

Source: Sengupta and Moniruzzaman, 1997: 14.

Appendix II: Trends of Industrial Disputes for Disposal (1972-1994)

Year	Total No. of disputes not involving stoppage of work	Total No. of disputes involving stoppage of work	Total No. of disputes referred to labour courts	Total No. of disputes referred to Labour Tribunal
1972	720	39	3377	42
1973	1645	58	4056	430
1974	883	32	4910	237
1975	469	02	4532	23
1976	311	05	4048	19
1977	276	22	4032	52
1978	408	89	4010	51
1979	361	96	3290	41
1980	570	104	3876	38
1981	673	80	4893	58
1982	408	55	6704	42
1983	420	16	6923	34
1984	837	142	5605	175
1985	872	95	4654	156
1986	522	46	5256	25
1987	343	18	5732	30
1988	573	09	5538	38
1989	2822	16	533	22
1990	564	05	5499	24
1991	1293	03	5264	31
1992	1204	11	4374	52
1993	272	11	4622	38
1994	218	02	4482	63

Source: Sengupta and Moniruzzaman, 1997: 11.

Appendix-III: List/Statements of National Federations

Sl. No.	Name of the Federation and Address	Name of the President & Secretary	Number of affiliated unions	Number of members of affiliated union
1	2	3	4	5
1.	Jatio Sramik Federation 76/1, Q, Uttar Jatrabari, Bibir Bazar, Dhaka	i) Mr. Shafiqur Rahman Majumdar ii) Mr. Jalal Ahmad	19	18,280
2.	Bangladesh Trade Union Kendro 23/2, Topkhana Road, Dhaka	i) Mr. Nurul Islam ii) Dr. Wajedul Islam Khan	60	50,180
3.	Bangladesh Sanjukta Sramik Federation 23/2, Topkhana Road, Dhaka	i) Mr. Mukhlesur Rahman ii) Mr. Sharitullah	119	21,272
4.	Bangladesh Trade Union Sangha 31/32, P.K. Roy Road, Bangla Bazar, Dhaka	i) Mr. Khalilur Rahman Mr. Chowdhury Ashiqul Alam	12	19,933
5.	Jatio Sramik Jote 20/4, Jai Kali Mandir, Dhaka	i) Mr. Meshbahuddin Ahmad ii) Mr. Abdul Wahed	12	2,260
6.	Bangladesh Jatiotabadi Sramik Dal 28/1, Naya Paltan, Dhaka	i) Mr. Alhoj Abdullah Al Noman ii) Mr. Nazrul Islam Khan	258	2,32,899
7.	Bangladesh Mukta Sramik Federation 68/2, Purana Paltan, Dhaka	i) Mr. Md. Noshu Mian ii) Mr. Mujibar Rahman Bhuyan	128	75,693
8.	Bangladesh Sramik Kalyan Federation 435, Elephant Road (Baro Mogbazar), Dhaka	i) Mr. Mujibur Rahman ii) Prof. Harunur Rashid Khan	33	34,522
9.	Jatio Sramik Federation, Bangladesh 31/F, Topkhana Road, Dhaka	i) Mr. Abul Bashar ii) Mr. Shah Alam	11	15,881
10.	Jatio Sramik League 23, Bangabandhu Avenue, Dhaka	i) Mr. Abdus Salam Khan ii) Mr. Ahsan-ullah Master	144	1,46,972
11.	Bangladesh Trade Union Federation 12/1, Quazi Nazrul Islam Sarani, Mymensingh Road, Bangla Motor, Dhaka	i) Mr. Shah Atiul Islam ii) Mr. Sadekur Rahman	04	1,648
12.	Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress 6/A, 1/19, Mirpur, Dhaka	i) Mr. S.M. Alam Mendu Mian ii) Mr. Mamunur Rashid Chowdhury	33	1,58,693
13.	Bangladesh Sramik Federation 14, Shaheed Captain Mansur Ali Saroni, Dhaka	i) Mr. Gholam Sattar ii) Mr. M.A. Mannan	05	3,639

14.	Jatio Sramik Party 60, Dilkusha Commercial Area, Dhaka	i) Mr. Shah Md. Abu Jafar ii) Advocate Delwar Hussain	142	1,17,844
15.	Bangladesh Jatio Sramik Forum 12/1, Kabi Jasimuddin Road, Uttar Kamalapur, Matijhil, Dhaka	i) Mr. M. Jahangir Alam ii) Mr. Abdul Mannan Siddiky	14	17,885
16.	Bangladesh Jatio Sramik Federation 15/A, Purana Paltan, Dhaka	i) Mr. Tofazzal Hussain ii) Mr. Rafiquzzaman	05	2,235
17.	Samajtantrik Sramik Front 23/2, Topkhana Road, Dhaka	i) Mr. Abdullah Sarkar ii) Mr. Mahbubur Rahman Ismail	16	2,285
18.	Jatio Sramik Jote, Bangladesh 35/36, Bangabandhu Avenue, Dhaka	i) Mr. Abdul Kader Howlader ii) Mr. Badal Khan	20	7,130
19.	Jatio Sramik Karmochari Jote 211, Madhya Basabo Railgate (East of Railgate), Dhaka	i) Mr. Rafiqul Islam ii) Mrs. Fatema Begum	26	5,019
20.	National Trade Union Federation B.T.C. Union Office, Mahakali, Dhaka	i) Mr. Mushaf Hussain ii) Mr. Abu Bakar Mian	05	9,791
21.	National Workers Federation 48, Purana Paltan, Dhaka	i) Mr. Ruhul Amin Majumdar ii) Mr. Anisul Haque	10	10,467
22.	Bangladesh Workers Federation 40, Siddheswari (Ayesha Manzil), Dhaka	i) Not Available ii) Not Available	07	1,19,324
23.	Bangladesh Sramik Sanghoti Federation 20/25, North South Road, Habib Market, Dhaka	i) Mr. Md. Alam Khan ii) Mr. Ruhul Amin	12	3,664
24.	Bangladesh Jatio Sramik Karmochari Parishad 13/1/C, 2 K.M. Das Lane, Golapbagh, Dhaka	i) Mr. Alhaj M.A. Aziz Shisti ii) Mr. Hedayatul Islam	05	8,465
25.	Jatio Samajtantrik Sromik Jote 35/36, Bangabandhu Avenue, Dhaka	i) Mr. Mumtazuddin ii) Mr. Abuk Khan Sajjad	11	3,840
26.	Bangladesh Jatio Sramik Jote 35/36, Bangabandhu Avenue, Dhaka	i) Mrs. Shirina Akhtar ii) Mr. Nur Khan	05	2,421

Source: Compiled from the Statistics provided by *Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies*, 2003.