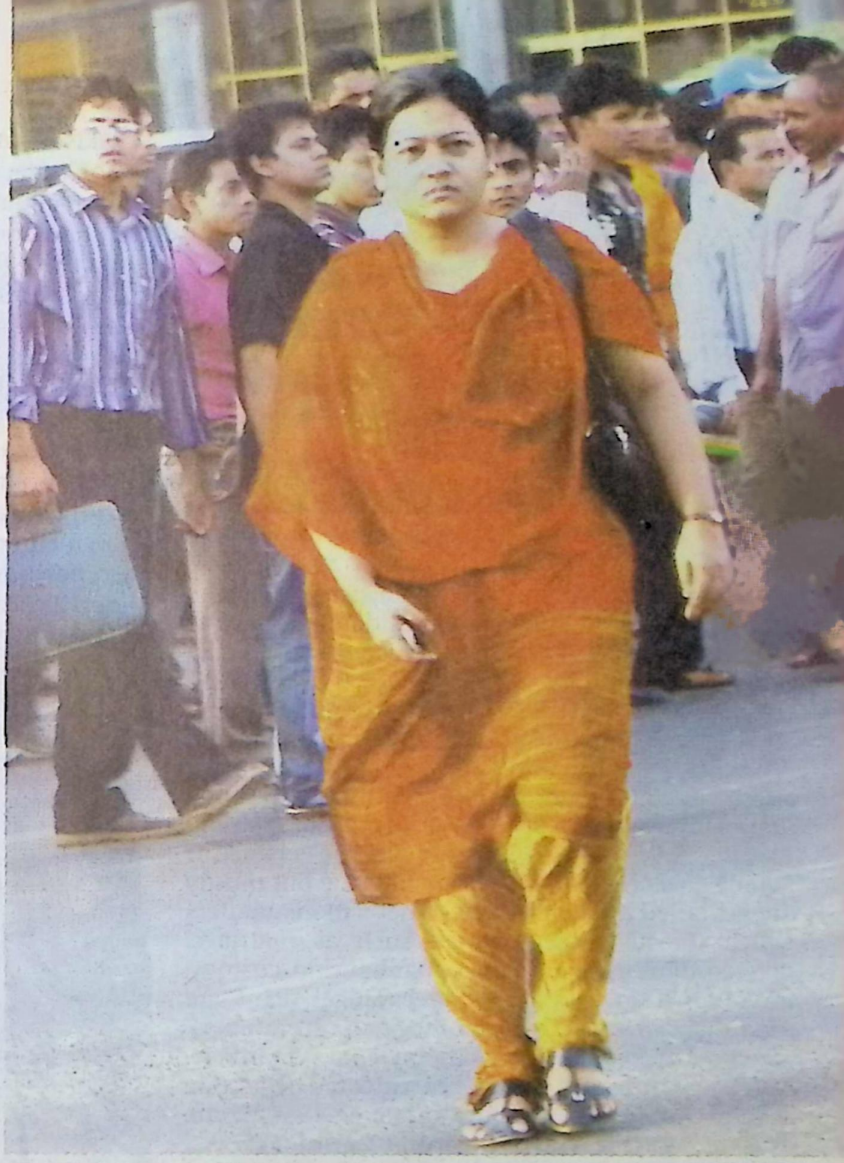
The conspiracy against women can possibly be traced back to the Biblical version of the Original Sin story in which Eve leads Adam astray by making him eat from the forbidden apple. Thus the role of the woman has been set from ancient times; a woman must be kept under a leash, like a wild animal, she must be tamed and moulded so that she can be useful and productive. Unleash her shackles and she will surely take her man into the darkest path and destroy him and herself. This male paranoia has continued over time, accumulating the grime of each kind of male chauvinism rolling on blissfully from one era to another until it comes across an obstacle or two, kicks it around a little and then moves on to the next chunk of time. Translate this rather strange parable into the 21st century and what do you get? The situation is not much different; in many parts of the world they are identical. Women are seen as lesser beings than men, they are unclean, they are less intelligent, not to mention physically weak, they should stick to being dutiful daughter, wife and mother; they must above all, be controlled. Despite a strong and committed women's movement and international conventions such as CEDAW, governments and societies, continue to deprive women of their economic, social and political rights.

The biggest weapon to keep the women in check is by claiming the limits and boundaries that circumscribe women's lives as those dictated by the practised religion. To make the weapon more potent, laws of the land, formed again, by men, unwittingly or completely intentionally, work hand in hand with the populist version of religion to discriminate against women in practically every sphere of life. In the Bangladesh context women for example, are plagued by a set of laws, depending on which religious community they belong to even if such laws are contradictory to the constitution of the country. Even some of the articles of the constitution serve to propagate rather than eliminate gender discrimination.

The need for a Uniform Family Code, harped on by the women's movement for decades, has become crucial and mandatory especially since it has been demanded at the international level through the CEDAW Committee, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.



Political will and a major change in societal perceptions of women is the only way to achieving equality.

The Constitution of Bangladesh declares equal rights for men and women in all spheres of public life. The problem is that it is only in the spheres of state and public life that equality is guaranteed through the Constitution. This means that in the private or personal sphere women are bound by the religious laws of her community. So even if her husband continuously tortures his wife, until she is killed, the state is unlikely to intervene, as it considers this a 'private matter'. Of course once she is killed and it is established as a homicide it becomes a murder case it will be dealt with by the law of the land.

Trying to understand the dichotomy of public and private spheres is exasperating. According to Dr. Faustina Pereira, a Supreme Court Advocate and author of the book 'Fractured Scales' that deals with this very issue, the legal system of Bangladesh is categorised into two distinct branches. One is Constitutional Law and the other is General Law or those that are not directly governed by the Constitution. The Constitution being the supreme law of the