Nobody knows the new rules

Unlike the rule of law, the rules of social conduct are often strictly obeyed. These “rules”, obviously unwritten and silent, dictate the gamut of social conduct are often unwritten and silent, dictating the conduct of the majority of people. The lack of social consensus about these new rules allows such things as attacks on women for wearing western attire. If the majority were in consensus - that women have every right to wear whatever they want and to go to pubs if they choose to - it’s doubtful that the attacks would have even occurred.

It is the lack of social consensus about what’s right that allows people to do what’s wrong. In one way or the other, every group and subculture is in the process of negotiating and understanding its own rules: organisations and employees, politicians and constituents, employees and employers, parents and children, between laws, friends, and husbands and wives, and sometimes, shopkeepers and customers.

Recently, I was at an upmarket shoe shop in the centre of Bangalore. By way of piped music, they were playing unexpurgated Eminem. “Yo motherf***er,” he said. I just thought it was inappropriate in a shop I might happen to think he’s a genius. I just thought it was inappropriate in a shop I might bring my child to. Then again, the two other customers in the shop, women in their fifties, seemed unconcerned as they leisurely browsed through the shoes. Why was I suddenly indulging in moral policing?

“Do you want me to put some other music, Sir?” he asked. “No,” I said. “Thank you for asking.”

We will eventually figure out the new rules. But until then, it doesn’t matter whether you’re a tourist or a long time Bangalorian, son of the soil, or fresh off the plane, boat, or bus. You don’t know the new rules. Nobody does.