1. INTRODUCTION

According to a school of thought in Hinduism, the entire creation is viewed as *leela*, the word *leela* meaning a play or a drama. This perspective echoed in the words of William Shakespeare when he wrote: *All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.* The question as to for whom the drama is being done, that is to say, who the audience is, was not considered by Shakespeare and it will be wise for us to leave it as well as it has the potential to lead us into a metaphysical quagmire.

Since times immemorial, human existence has been viewed by many as a drama. However, the recent insights offered by Erving Goffman’s into the parallels between social life and the theatre are significant. He had “suggested that any social establishment may be studied profitably from the point of view of impression management” (Goffman, 1959, p. 238). He further noted that “in performing a role, the individual must see to it that the impressions of him that are conveyed in the situation are compatible with the role-appropriate personal qualities effectively imputed to him” (Goffman, 1961, p. 77).

In a drama as well as in life each one of us has a role to play/perform. It may be argued that the quality of the drama as well as the quality of life depends on the extent to which one is immersed into the role that has been assigned to him/her. What matters is, not how grand the role is that one is assigned, but how well it is played out. The great actor and director Constantin Stanislavski had once remarked: *Remember: There are no small parts, only small actors.*

The performance of an individual in a job, which is to say the quality of the role played/performered by the individual depends on the extent to which the individual has immersed himself/herself into the job/role (Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). The extent to which a person immerses himself/herself into a role is called engagement (Kahn, 1990). Engagement is significant because the individual’s performance in any job is a direct function
of his/her engagement with it. Given this importance of engagement, it is not surprising for researchers to have enthusiastically explored the concept delineating its antecedents and consequences.

The phenomenon of ostracism in the workplace has the potential to have a disastrous effect on the employees. Given the fact that ostracism negatively affects the basic human needs and the self-regulating ability of the individuals (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005; Williams, 1997), it is bound to affect the ability of an individual to immerse him/her in any role, affecting his/her engagement. In light of the above argument, it may be fruitful to investigate the impact of workplace ostracism on the work engagement of employees.

1.1 Motivation for the Study

I had been a student of physics before entering the field of organizational behavior. I have always been awe-struck at the hidden splendor of our universe revealed in the laws of nature. Yet it was starting to dawn on me that my thirst for an underlying order in our cosmos will not be quenched until I also get some insight into the laws governing human behavior. I believe that we humans, although we are under the influence of the laws of physics, have a free will with which we can choose how to react to anything that may happen to us. This belief has been expressed by Viktor Frankl eloquently as “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: The last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

With this perspective in mind, I made my decision to transition into studying human behavior. I could not join a doctoral program in psychology since I had a post-graduation degree in physics; so I decided to join a doctoral program in organizational behavior. My interest lay in the domain of interpersonal behavior. I was fascinated by the framework of Transactional Analysis (TA). I delighted in the way that it attempted to explain human
behavior. While engrossed in the technicalities and minutiae of TA, I came across a statement which made a lasting impression on me. The statement was *negative strokes are better than no strokes*. The fact that people prefer to be treated badly rather than left unnoticed was something which went against my intuitions. I read as much about this as I could lay my hands on. I soon realized that the disciplining activity of *hookah-pani band*, often heard in the context of villages, was a manifestation of this very same principle.

After going through the relevant literature, I decided to conduct research on the phenomenon of ostracism in the workplace. Ostracism is often likened to a silent death for the targets of ostracism. Harassment is often not as harmful as ostracism, a fact which echoes the statement that *negative strokes are better than no strokes*.

### 1.2 Organization of thesis

In the chapter that follows, i.e. chapter 2 we review the literature on engagement. We discuss the different types, antecedents, and consequences of engagement. This is followed by a review of constructs related to engagement like job involvement and organizational commitment. The literature on workplace ostracism is reviewed next followed by a review of related constructs of social ostracism, social isolation, workplace isolation, loneliness, and solitude. This is followed by a literature review of role ambiguity, psychological meaningfulness, and perceived organizational support and the hypotheses linking the various constructs.

This is followed by chapter 3 which deals with the research methodology. It includes the measures used for capturing the construct and the details of the pilot study, which is followed by the details about the data and sample for the final study. Chapter 4 deals with the analysis of the data. It includes the results for the measurement and the structural models, analysis for mediation, multi-group analysis.
Chapter 5 deals with the analysis of the data pertaining to the two gender groups, results for their measurement models, structural models, and mediation analysis. In chapter 6 we conclude the study by discussing the results, highlighting the contributions to theory, implications for managers, limitations of the present study and directions for future research.