



## THE BLUE WHALE CHALLENGE



Illustration by Nilanjan Das in 04 Sept 17 issue of India Today

### A WHALE SIZED NIGHTMARE !

#### References :

- CHANDIGARH ADMINISTRATION ADVISORY on Blue Whale Challenge.
- Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Govt of India ADVISORY ON "BLUE WHALE CHALLENGE GAME".
- NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR PROTECTION OF CHILD RIGHTS (FAQs) Blue Whale Challenge - What Parents Need to Know.
- Rediffmail.Com report on GOOGLE TRENDS FOR SEARCHES ON BLUE WHALE CHALLENGE.
- WIKIPEDIA : Blue Whale (Game)
- Features & Newsreports : HINDUSTAN TIMES / INDIA TODAY / INDIAN EXPRESS / THE HINDU BUSINESS LINE / TIMES OF INDIA / TNN / TRIBUNE CHANDIGARH.

#### INTRODUCTION

The Blue Whale Challenge (**BWC**) is gaining epidemic proportions. No part of the country is insulated from it and as per media reports, the maximum casualties are taking place in India. This is quite understandable since India has the highest population in the vulnerable age and in internet penetration also India has reached number 3 position worldwide.

Another compelling reason to worry is that the rates of undetected depression, especially among teenagers was already high in our country. This stems from a general neglect of mental health for years and therefore, India ranks among the top 10 nations with a high, basal suicide rate.

We cannot afford to be complacent any more. Tragedy happens when we are lax and not vigilant. Whereas on the one hand we need to exercise a very high level of vigilance, it should not be seen as a curbing or rights by our adolescent children, because undue enforcement and coercion will also have a very damaging effect on them and their families.

#### AIM

The aim of this paper is to compile and summarize all types of information on **BWC** that will enable parents and children to understand the nature of the threat posed by it and also list out effective measures to help our children stay clear of its clutches.

### **WHY THE PLAYER WILL ALWAYS DIE**

The challenge has been named after the whale to signify self destruction because some types of whales deliberately beach themselves on a seashore and die from suffocation or dehydration. The 'Blue' contrary to reports in the media, does not refer to a whale of that variety because Blue Whales don't beach themselves. It is therefore more plausible that the word 'Blue' symbolizes depression as in 'Feeling Blue' - hence the combination taken together signifies suicide caused by depression!

It is not that teen suicides were not taking place prior to **BWC** becoming popular. The complication created by **BWC** is that borderline cases who would not have taken the extreme step are now getting sucked into the vortex of self destruction. For eg. in the 90's, there were predatory 'nurses' on a notorious website who would approach depressed and suicidal people and lure them into a video chat and convince them to commit suicide for their own amusement!

However, **BWC** poses a bigger threat because in this challenge, it is the administrators of the game, also called curators, who prowl the net in search of vulnerable people. They do this by searching for signs of depression in the comments children make or by tracking their browsing history to find who has been visiting sites dealing with issues related to depression or death and thereafter latch on to her / his profile. The tasks given in **BWC** initially give them a sense of achievement as they are easy to do. Soon, they progress to self-mutilation. Ultimately, the game glorifies suicide. The curator plays on the candidates insecurities and makes them believe they are worthless. These challenges also give their suicide a purpose. Also, completing the Blue Whale Challenge gives them a status higher than their peers to set them apart.

The interaction between a curator and a child takes place in a secret group quite probably through emails and chat forums hosted on the 'Dark Web' (meaning that these sites cannot be searched through any of the search engines like Google or Bing or Yahoo etc.) The child is made to promise not to let anyone know about the group or else s/he will have to pay a heavy price for it. Once a child begins to interact with a curator, a small piece of software is installed on the device used by the child to access the internet, and then with the help of this software, they break into the pictures and messages saved by the child on the device. Now starts the sinister process of destroying the innocent child's self confidence and gradually alienating her/him from his elders and peers till a point is reached where s/he becomes mentally enslaved to the curator. That's because with no one to talk to, these tasks and the ambience can erase a person's sense of right or wrong.

If by chance, before the enslavement is complete, the child tries to escape their clutches, the curators with the help of information they have collected from the child's device begin to blackmail her / him or threaten to kill her / his parents. Little does the innocent child realize that the curators are making an empty threat.

The difficulty in neutralizing this 'gateway to suicide' is that there are many curators, managing it and hence no amount of arrests can catch them all just the same as the inability of all the worlds governments and anti-virus software companies being unable to apprehend the virus makers.

Not only that, it is also not known as to how a new person becomes a curator because ordinarily, a person who completes the challenge successfully, also ends up dead!

### **OTHER FORMS OF GAMIFIED INSANITY**

The **BWC** has opened a Pandora's box from which many more types of dangerous challenges have emerged that aim to at least drive a person crazy, if not to maim or kill. Some of the most insane ones are listed below:

#### The Ghost Pepper Challenge

The Assamese Bhut Jholokia pepper is the hottest in the world. Children challenge each other to stick the pepper in their mouths and record their reactions. This leads to excruciating pain in the mouth, but some people also get worse reactions.

### The Cinnamon Challenge

This challenge requires a child to swallow a spoonful or more of cinnamon powder without drinking any water. The challenge causes respiratory inflammation, collapsed lungs and choking. Deaths have been reported as an outcome of this challenge.

### The Choking Challenge

This challenge gained popularity among teenagers who began choking themselves to get a high. The players believe that cutting off oxygen to the brain can result in temporary "euphoria".

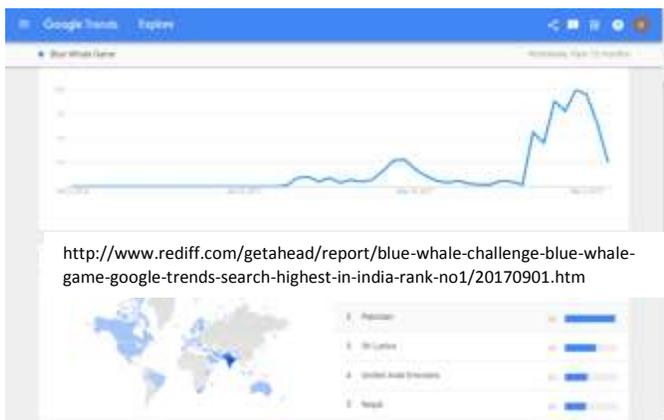
### Ice & Salt Challenge

The game involves pouring salt on the body, followed by immediately placing ice over it. The action causes a burning sensation. The idea is to bear the pain for the longest time. The ice, water and salt mixture is potentially lethal and can cause second- and third-degree burns, similar to frostbite.

### Car Surfing Challenge

In this challenge, a child "surfs" on the roof, bumper or hood of a car. Alternately, s/he must ride a wheeled sofa, skateboard or sled tied to a moving vehicle. Deaths have been recorded due to head injury in most cases.

## **INDIAN CHILDREN AT HIGHEST RISK**



Rediff.com in its report dated 01 Sep 2017 says that **BWC**, has piqued the interest of Indians like never before. According to it, in the last week of August, the top 30 spots on a Google global list of 50 cities that searched the most for the dangerous online game were occupied by Indian cities!

According to Google Trends — the public web facility of Google that shows how often a particular search term is entered across various regions of the world — India consistently ranked first in the world for searches related to the Blue Whale Challenge for the past 12 months.

**For Tricity inhabitants, it should be a super-urgent cause of concern because the highest number of searches for BWC are now being made from here!**

## **THE LURE OF SUICIDE**

In a 2012 article titled '**Suicide: An Indian Perspective**', Dr Rajiv Radhakrishnan, a psychiatrist from Yale, and Dr Chittaranjan Andrade, a psycho-pharmacologist with NIMHANS, Bengaluru, identified 'Cyber Suicide' as an emerging phenomenon. The term Cyber Suicide highlights the role of the internet in aiding or abetting suicide. According to these experts, children become inclined to suicide due to a some weakness or deficiency they perceive in their personality or lifestyle. In the modern world of nuclear, double income families, the danger has increased immensely because without an empathetic listener to talk to or a real world outlet to vent frustration or loneliness, it is easy for someone to find themselves coming under the influence of a 'Wolf in Sheep Clothing' on the world wide web. Additionally, the higher importance of emotion in Indian culture as well as socio-economic realities of our developing economy, render **Indian children as most likely to fall prey** to this macabre challenge!

"Children from classes four to seven are the most vulnerable to the digital world," says Sonali Patankar because of the ease with which they can access highly inappropriate content on the one hand and the near total ignorance of most parents on the other, about the many kinds of dangers lurking on the internet.

**THE TASKS IN BWC**

The sequence of challenges in this game is listed below. It may not be a standard list of challenges and it is also possible that curators of the game keep on making new ones.

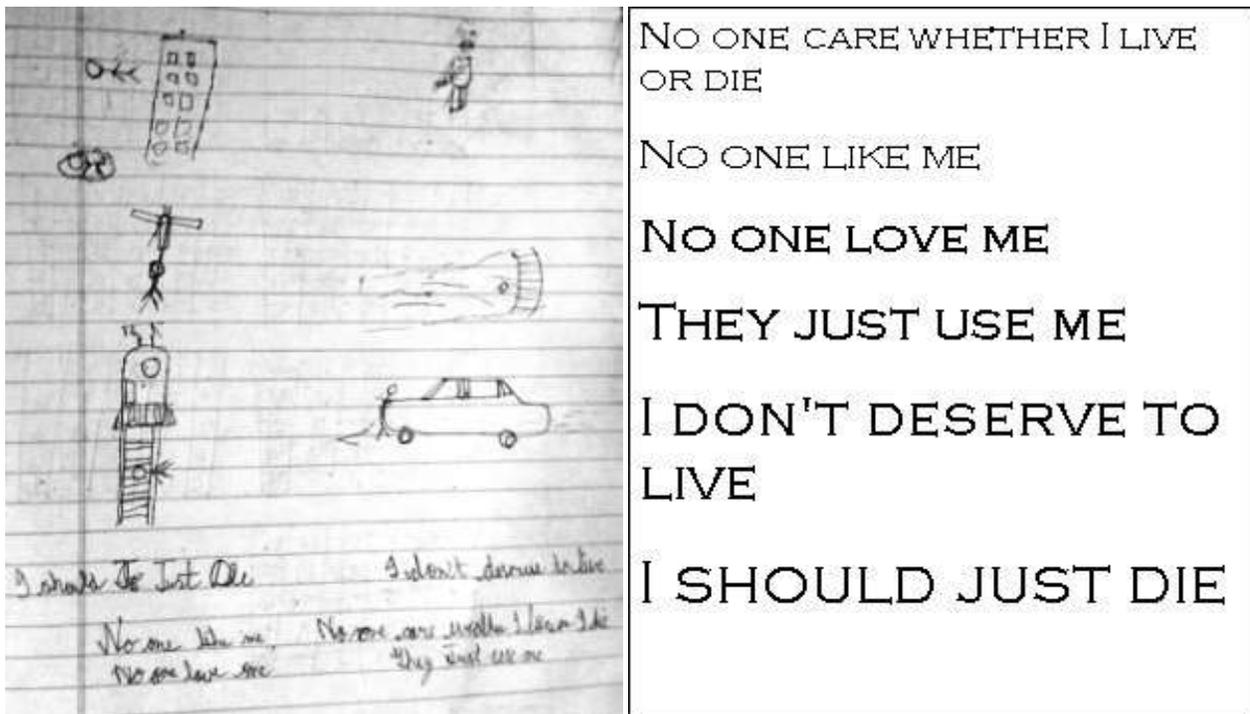
1. Carve with a razor "f57" on your hand, send a photo to the curator.
2. Wake up at 4.20 a.m. and watch psychedelic and scary videos that curator sends you.
3. Cut your arm with a razor along your veins, but not too deep, only 3 cuts, send a photo to the curator.
4. Draw a whale on a sheet of paper, send a photo to curator.
5. If you are ready to "become a whale", carve "YES" on your leg. If not, cut yourself many times (punish yourself).
6. Task with a cipher. (Written in coded language.)
7. Carve "f40" on your hand, send a photo to curator.
8. Type "#i\_am\_whale" in your VKontakte status.
9. You have to overcome a fear you have.
10. Wake up at 4:20 a.m. and go to a roof (the higher the better)
11. Carve a whale on your hand with a razor, send a photo to curator.
12. Watch psychedelic and horror videos all day.
13. Listen to music that "they" (curators) send you.
14. Cut your lip.
15. Poke your hand with a needle many times
16. Do something painful to yourself, make yourself sick.
17. Go to the highest roof you can find, stand on the edge for some time.
18. Go to a bridge, stand on the edge.
19. Climb up a crane or at least try to do it
20. The curator checks if you are trustworthy.
21. Have a talk "with a whale" (with another player like you or with a curator) in Skype.
22. Go to a roof and sit on the edge with your legs dangling.
23. Another task with a cipher.
24. Secret task. (Secret Mission)
25. Have a meeting with a "whale."
26. The curator tells you the date of your death and you have to accept it.
27. Wake up at 4:20 a.m. and go to rails (visit any railroad that you can find).
28. Don't talk to anyone all day.
29. Make a vow that "you're a whale."
- 30-49. Everyday you wake up at 4:20am, watch horror videos, listen to music that "they" send you, make 1 cut on your body per day, talk "to a whale."
50. Jump off a high building. Take your life.

**PREVENTIVE MEASURES : SYMPTOMS AND INDICATIONS**

- i. Unusually secretive behaviour, mostly related to their online activity.
- ii. Becoming withdrawn from friends and family.
- iii. Persistent low mood and unhappiness.
- iv. Child unwilling or unable carrying out routine day to day tasks.
- v. Sudden outbursts of anger directed at themselves or others.

- vi. Loss of interest in activities that they previously used to enjoy.
- vii. Mention death defeat in their conversations.
- viii. Visible marks like deep cuts or wounds on any part of the body of the child.
- ix. A sudden increase in the time they spend online, especially social media.
- x. They change the screens on their device when approached.
- xi. They become withdrawn or angry, after using the internet or sending text messages.
- xii. Their device suddenly has many new phone numbers and email contacts.
- xiii. If you see the word 'Tor' or 'Onions' in the browsing history of your device or find the Tor Browser. (TOR - The Onion Router) installed on your child's device, immediately seek professional help.**
- xiv. Remind your child that you are there and will support them as they face life challenges.
- xv. If you're giving your child a smartphone , install parental control apps or safety apps like Net Nanny or the locally build MobiCID which allows online activity to be monitored.
- xvi. Teach your children to take responsibility for their online behaviour. Just as they are taught to be safe in the real world, cyber threats and preventive measures should also be discussed.
- xvii. Discourage your child from spending more than 5 hours at a computer or a smartphone.
- xviii. Closely observe the dressing habits of your child. They may begin to dress in a way that hides self inflicted wounds

**Reproduced below is the sketch made by a Tricity boy in his note book before committing suicide.**



### **PARENT - CHILD INTERACTIONS**

- i. Maintain an effective communication with the kids. Take interest in what they do and spend their time in.
- ii. Talk to your child more often. Explore the online world together and engage in interesting activities demonstrating ethical and safe online behavior.
- iii. Give them space enough to let them unfold their feelings without restraint.

- iv. Keep an eye on the falling grades and behavioural changes
- v. Go through the scribbles on the pages at the end of the notebook at regular intervals.
- vi. Sensitize the children about the pros and cons of the internet regularly.
- vii. Instead of complaining or reprimanding them about their spending time by themselves or for crying, try to understand the reason for such behaviour.
- viii. Make it a rule to talk to your child for 20 minutes every day and let them do the talking. This will help you to read any signs of trouble that they may be going through.
- ix. As the world is getting digitized, it is extremely important for you to bridge that gap by staying updated of their digital activity. Keep an eye on what they do on the internet.
- x. Make sure that your child has access to age appropriate online sites which do not promote unethical behavior or violence.
- xi. Always ensure that the child uses a computer placed in the family space
- xii. If you are tracking your child's activity on the web, you can look out for words such as 'F57' or 'F40' or the other names by which the game is addressed, that is, "Quiet House", "The Silent House", "Wake me up at 4:20am" or "The Sea of Whales". You must also keep a tab on hashtagged forms of these words also.
- xiii. Leading Social Media sites have begun to display links to psychological help locations. Therefore, if you begin to see some such link it would be a sure signal that your child has been posting depression related material or has been searching for the link to the Blue Whale Challenge. Please don't take the protestations of the child lightly. He should be immediately taken to a psychiatrist and his access to the internet should be completely blocked till the danger tides over.
- xiv. Please also review the safety / privacy settings of your social media account to make sure that information you share does not go past your friend or at the very most, friend of friend.
- xv. Talk to other parents about the issues
- xvi. If the child is already playing the Blue Whale Challenge, immediately stop her/him from using internet on any device. Inform the local police authority and seek their advice on safety measures.

#### **NEED EXPERT HELP ?**

Listed below are some of the more renowned organisations dealing with Depression related Suicides:

<b>National Institute of Mental Health &amp; Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS)</b> Switchboard: + 91 80 26995000	<b>De Addiction Centre, PGIMER, Chandigarh</b> Sector 12, Chandigarh, 160012 Phone No.: 0172 257 6576
<b>Neuropsychiatry &amp; Drug Deaddiction-Rehabilitation Centre,</b> Opposite Cricket Stadium, Sector 23-B, Chandigarh, 160023 / Phone : 0172 272 4111	<b>AASRA</b> 104, Sunrise Arcade, Plot No. 100, Sector 16, Koparkhairane, Navi Mumbai - 400709 24x7 Helpline : 91-22-27546669
<b>Prevention of Suicide Help Counselling Center</b> # 3074, Sector 19 - D, Chandigarh 24 x 7 : 091931 61303	<b>Lifeline Foundation</b> Address – 17/1A Alipore Road Sarat Bose Road, Kolkata - 700 027 Phone +91 33 24637401 / +91 33 24637432 <a href="http://www.lifelinekolkata.org/home.html">http://www.lifelinekolkata.org/home.html</a>
<b>Chandigarh Administration</b> <b>Women &amp; Child Helpline</b> No. 1091 or 0172-2741174 / 2705011	<b>DSP (Night Duty) Chandigarh</b> (From 12:00 AM to 05:00 AM Daily) Dial – 09465121000

<b>SNEHA Suicide Prevention Centre,</b> 11, Park View Rd, Raja Annamalai Puram, Chennai-600028 Phone: 044 2464 0050	<b>The Samaritans Mumbai - Suicide Prevention Helpline</b> 402, Jasmine C.H.S Apartments, Dada Saheb Phalke Marg, Dadar East, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400014 <b>Phone:</b> 022 6464 3267
<b>Connecting NGO, Pune</b> (Between 2pm to 8 pm) 18002094353 (Toll Free) 9922001122	<b>Maithri, Kochi</b> H-2104, Jawaharlal Nehru International Stadium Complex, Kaloor, Ernakulam, Kerala 682017 <b>Phone:</b> 0484 234 2703
<b>Sumaitri,</b> Aradhana Hostel Complex, No 1, Bhagwan Das Lane, Bhagwan Das Road, New Delhi Phone : 011-23389090 (Mon-Fri 2PM to 10PM / Sat-Sun : 10AM to 10PM)	<b>Saath Suicide Prevention Centre</b> B-12, Nilamber Complex, H L Commerce College Road, Navrangpura, Navrangpura, Vasant Vihar, Navrangpura, Ahmedabad, Gujarat 380009 +91 79 26305544 / +91 79 26300222
<b>PRATHEEKSHA, KERALA</b> +91 484 2448830 E-mail – rajiravi2000@hotmail.com)	<b>Thanal (Suicide Prevention Centre)</b> No:5 Old Stadium Complex, Puthiyara, Calicut, Kerala - 673004 / Phone 0495 237 1100 E-mail – thanal.calicut@gmail.com)
<b>iCall, Mumbai</b> +91 22 2556 3291, e-mail – icall@tiss.edu	<b>Vandrevala Foundation Helpline – 1 860 266</b> 2345, e-mail – help@vandrevalafoundation.com
<b>PRATHYASA, IRINJALAKUDA</b> +91-480 – 2820091	<b>CHILD Helpline (1098)</b>
<b>Maitreyi, Pondicherry</b> 255, Thyagu Mudali Street, Pondicherry - 605001 Phone: 91-413-2339999	<b>ROSHNI Counselling Centre</b> 1-8-303/48/21, Kalavathy Niwas, Sindhi Colony, Secunderabad, Telangana - 500003 Phone 040 66202003 / 7904646

For more information, please visit the following URLs :

<http://infosecawareness.in/Know-About-Blue-Whale-Suicide-Game>

[http://unicef.in/Uploads/Publications/Resources/pub\\_doc148.pdf](http://unicef.in/Uploads/Publications/Resources/pub_doc148.pdf)

## **CONCLUSION : Battling Blue With Pink**



If **BWC** is Mr. Hyde then Pink Whale Challenge is Dr Jekyll - it's benevolent Avatar! It follows a similar pattern but comes up with interesting tasks each day to make participants smile and be happy. The game also teaches youngsters the importance of loving yourself, and insists that they write about what makes them love themselves on themselves with a marker pen. As stated by a school student Avayukth, "The Pink Whale challenge helps a person realize the motives of life and search for happiness. Most importantly, though, youngsters have to realize that online challenges —Blue or Pink — should not be accepted as a part of life or as influencers. We all have our inherent traits of strength and weakness and it is up to us to work on them."



There is also a Make in India initiative to counteract **BWC**. It is an app created by a Mangaluru based start-up 'Accolade Tech Solutions'. RUG is aimed at creating challenges that benefit individual players and society. The game will be available for download on Google Play from September 30. It will have 30 challenges that will run for 30 days. These challenges will be spread across three levels with 10 questions each in each level. Each level has two lifelines that can be used in case the participant finds the questions tough. These challenges have been put together by academicians and psychologists.