Youth Engulfing Blue Whale: Monomania or Social Construct?

Saikat Chakraborty

*P.G Student in Department of English, Kazi Nazrul University,
Asansol, West Bengal
E-mail: saikatchakraborty1995@gmail.com*

Abstract—*In contemporary times a game called 'Blue whale challenge' has reached an alarming stage due to its accentuating effect on self destruction or self annihilation. It first attracted news coverage in May 2016, in a Russian newspaper 'Novaya Gazeta' that linked many unrelated child suicides to a membership of group 'F57' on the Russian based VK social network. Later on the game's connection to youth suicides has been heard in many countries across the globe including India. Thus the paper would be an attempt to explore the social and psychological constructions that contribute to such self annihilation. The paper delves deep into the ideas of Emile Durkheim where he considers suicide above all to be a signal of crisis in a society riven by constant and excessively rapid change, a phenomenon which threatened the existence of not only society but also of an individual. Durkheim in his book Suicide: A Study in Sociology talks about a mental delirium that leads to suicide, that he calls 'Sui generis'. So the paper takes us through an inquest whether all of our youth is afflicted to 'Sui generis' or it is the rapid change of the world from real to virtual that contributes to this desire for annihilation of the self. Furthermore, the paper also takes a closer look at the 'Werther Effect'(Taken from Goethe's novel The Sorrows of Young Werther) and discusses whether the publicizing of self destruction leads to the repetition of this lethal act called 'Copycat Suicide'. So in a nutshell the paper would be an attempt to provide us with a remedy that can eradicate such social evil.*

Keyword*: Suigeneris, Werther Effect, social construction Psychological construction.*

Introduction

"Blue Whale Challenge" in contemporary times has emerged as an social evil that needs serious attention and eradication as well. First talking about the game, we know that it's a Russian based game that first attracted news coverage in May 2016, in a Russian newspaper *Novaya*

*Gazeta*that linked many unrelated child suicides to a membership of group 'F57' on the Russian based VK social network. Galina Mursaliyeva wrote this article and wascriticized due to its lack of credibility. However, Sergey Pestov, father of a child who had committed suicide studied the social networks and cane up with a number that 200 cases

of the suicide were related to the activities of the social networking group 'F57'. However, there was a still an element of doubt as the cases could have linked to the activities of the Foreign Intelligences but a report from *Meduza* consisting the investigation report of Evgeny Berg almost confirmed the uncanny nature of the various social sites that can lead to mass youth suicide.

What is "Blue Whale Challenge"?

The "Blue Whale Challenge" is a Russian based online game where the instructor or the gaming authority gives task to the player for 50 days and most of these tasks are daring or self harming, such as, cutting a figure of a whale on the hands with a sharp object or watching a horror film at midnight. The last day the instructor or the administrator orders the gamer to commit suicide.

The origin of the name 'Blue Whale' is uncertain as some say it comes from a song of the Russian rock band Lumen were there is an image of a whale caught in a net with no escape routes and others say that it is a reference to the act of 'Beaching' where whales come to beaches accidentally and die.

Monomania and "Blue Whale Challenge"

Emile Durkheim in his seminal book *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*takes an inquest into the reasons that may result into committing suicide. Durkheim denotes suicide to be a disease called Sui generis'[1]. According to Durkheim Suicide can be seen as a result of mental delirium and here he quotesEsquirol, "Suicide shows all the characteristics of mental alienation."[1]. Now the question arises what is 'Monomania' then? In pathological terms Durkheim explains that 'Monomania' is a particular mental deliria or one extreme emotion in the order of impulses or one false idea in the order of representations that is of such intensity that it obsesses the mind and completely enslaves it there by paralyzing all other rationale faculties. In other words, a monomaniac is just same

as one normal person but the former has a psychic state that is prominently detached from the common basis[1]. Going by these ideas of Durkheim and Esquirol we cansay theyouth committing suicide due to the 'Blue Whale Challenge' is afflicted to 'Monomania'. However, later on inhis argument Durkheim demolishes the idea of 'monomania' and concludes that there can not be a diseased mental faculty in pure isolation and if there is a lesion of one faculty, the others are attacked as well[1].Then the question arises that if there are no monomaniacs then what can be the reason of youth committing mass suicide in a gaming or social networking platforms.

Durkheim in his study further talks about four kinds of suicide-

Maniacal Suicide- In this case the victim hallucinates due to a deliria and kills himself to escape from an imaginary danger.

Melancholy Suicide- Here the victim suffers from extreme sense of sadness and exaggerated depression that results in the loss connection to worldly bonds and pleasures.

Obsessive Suicide-In this instance the victim commits suicide without any motive or imaginary hallucination and is completely obsessed with the idea of killing himself.

Impulsiveor Automatic Suicide- Here the desire to harm one's self results from an abrupt and immediate impulse that covers the victims mind and paralyzes his other rationale faculties for a very short period of time.

Now, talking about our proposed argument we understand that apart from the Melancholy Suicide others are largely related to insanity and we cannot bestow other types as a reason for all the death cases due to this lethal online game without any conclusive evidence. There is no such credibility that all the victims are suffering from mental alienation. So, the question we now confront is that if the youth is not mentally alienated then what does cause their melancholia or social alienation so to say.

The social construction or social alienation

Taking Durkheim further into account we can say Durkheim associated even the Melancholy Suicide with a certain sense of insanity or mental deliria. But we can say that in a post modern world the melancholic mental condition does not only arise due to insanity but also social alienation. To understand this we have hark back upon Luigi Tomasi's interpretation of Durkheim where he argues that suicide occurs due to a rapidly changing society[2] and here we have to delve deep into this idea of rapid change that causes this rootlessness among the youth. The idea of rootlessness is generally associated with the people suffering from diasporic anxiety. However, the cases of suicide associated to this lethal game has not given any traces of diasporic anxiety so to say. So the question is what is that change that causes this social alienation and rootlessness. To answer this we have to borrow Baudrillard's idea of

'Simulacra' or the replacement of real with the aid of virtual. This is the change that has happened so rapidly across the globe that the inexperienced youth has not been able to cope with this. The reality or social bonding has transformed into the platform of social networks. The social networking world seems more real than the real. The youth not only uses this as a platform for social activities but also self aggrandizes itself here. A sense of glamour start hegemonizing the youth and young people as a result have deriving pleasure from such grandeur. This resembles Baudrillard's critique of the modern times, by calling it an 'age of spectacle' influenced from Guy Debord's*The Society of the Spectacle*.Now this addiction to social networks has resulted in a complete removal from reality and social alienation. The youth can't even connect themselves with their parents. Thus the only means of social activity, human bonding and mental expression deteriorates down to the social media.

Such deteriorations are nothing but results of commodity fetishism and reification. Thus Debord produced a perfect situational theory by borrowing the ideas of*The fetishism of commodities and the Secretthereof*by Marx and *History and Class Consciousness* by Lukacs*.* While talking about these theorists we understand that they all lamented about the transformation of a human being into a mere commodity. This transformation actually escalates the idea of self aggrandization. As a result the Spectacle or the social media becomes the concrete inversion of life and an autonomous movement of the non-living. This inversion has completely alienated youth from reality. Thus they fall prey easily to these lethal games because they could not hark back to any meaningful human bonding in reality and thus commit self destruction, as Durkheim would put it. The autonomous movement of the non living has started paralyzing the human bonding in order to become a controlling lethal force.

So any change in social networks or a lack of self aggrandizing leads the youth to extreme melancholia due to lack of meaningful bonds in reality. This change makes them suffer like a drug addict suffering from inadequate supply of drugs. This social delirium has been exploited by such social evils eventually leading to disastrous results.

Conclusion

Therefore we can conclude by saying that this rapid change from real to virtual has actually posited our youth in mental and social deliria that leads to such devastating results. So we must not get carried away with the prowess of the virtual world and make use of it in good means for progression rather than regression. In a world of post-truth it's our social responsibility to create meaningful human bonds and not get alienated from the society. Another aspect of this problem is the human instinct of imitating or imitation without any intellectual credibility. The accentuating effect of such a notorious game can be attributed to this imitative instincts where suicide reports or the publicizing of these cases resulted

in further imitations known as the copy cat suicide or the 'werther effect' taken from Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther.* In many cases it has also resulted as a mode of altruistic suicide where the gamer can't quit after getting into the game because he or she is blackmailed that his or her family might be harmed terribly due to this. Therefore, there isn't a denial of the fact that our nation state and its governing body with the aid of ethical hacking should contribute in eradicating such social evils.

Works Cited

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