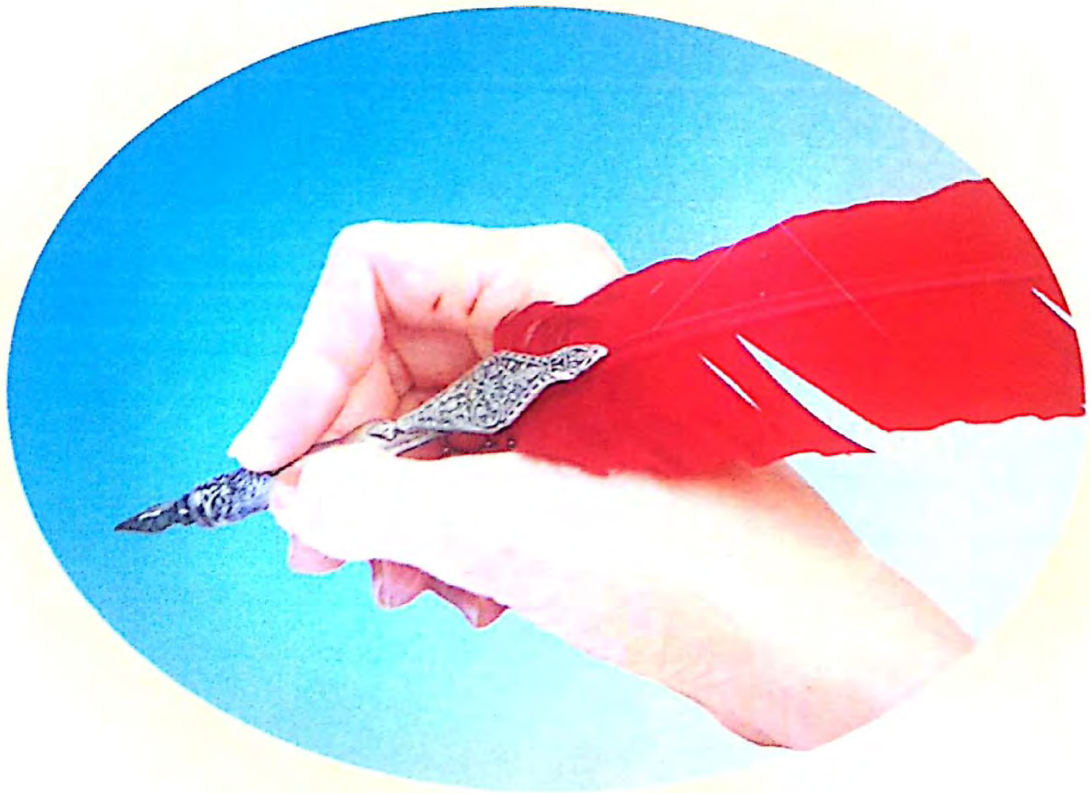


# BLAZING TORCHES

*T.M. Umarani  
Gomez Sophia  
U. Anamica*



**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
Jayaraj Annapackiam College For Women (Autonomous)  
Periyakulam, Tamil Nadu, India.**

Title of the Book	:	Blazing Torches
Editors	:	T.M.Uma Rani Gomez Sophia U. Anamica
First impression	:	February, 2016
Page	:	224
Price	:	Rs.600/-
ISBN	:	978-93-84193-59-1
Printed at	:	Laser Point, Madurai-625 003.

### **Publisher**

Department of English  
Jayaraj Annapackiam College for Women (Autonomous)  
(Accredited With "A" Grade in Cycle – 3 By Naac)  
Periyakulam-625601theni Dt, Tamil Nadu.  
Web:jaceng@annejac.com  
(Affiliated to Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal-  
624102, Tamilnadu.)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced. Stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Application for such permission should be addressed to the publisher.

### ***Disclaimer***

The authors are solely responsible for the contents of the papers edited in this book. The publisher or editors do not take any responsibility for the same in any manner. Errors, if any, are purely unintentional.

- 21 Rights of Women in Bama's *Sangati* 118  
**J.Gracy**
- 22 Violence Against Women in BPO'S With Special Reference to the  
 Novels *One Night at the Call Centre* and *Stiletos in the Boardroom* 124  
**B.Helen Sheeba**
- 23 Post-Nuptial Depressions of Women in Ancient Promises By Jaishree  
 Mishra 130  
**J. Jeya Sheela**
- 24 Women's Quest For Identity and Social Conventions in Nayantara  
 Shagal's *The Day In The Shadow* 133  
**S.Nasreen Banu**
- 25 Sudha Murhy's Emancipated Women - A Study of Select Novels 141  
**M.Karthiga**
- 26 Violence in Ngugi Wa Thinog'o's *Weep Not, Child* 146  
**V.Jothimani**
- 27 Portrayal of Violence Through Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* 149  
**R.Selvarani**
- 28 The Voice of the Female in Meira Chand's *A Different Sky* 153  
**H.Rakhiba**
- 29 A Critical Analysis of the Poem *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*  
 By Maya Angelou 161  
**R.Mano Sowmiya**
- 30 Feminist Consciousness in the Selected Works of Shashi Deshpande 165  
**N. Subathra**

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN BPO'S WITH  
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE NOVELS *ONE NIGHT  
AT THE CALL CENTRE AND STILETTOS IN THE  
BOARDROOM***

**B.HELEN SHEEBA**

**INTRODUCTION**

Over the decades, a night shift labor force has gained momentum in the global economy. The hyper-growth of the transnational call center industry in India exemplifies the reality. The night shift requirement of the transnational call industry also intersects with the spatial and temporal construction of gender. Research conducted in 2006 in Mumbai, Bangalore, and Ahmedabad indicated that the nightscape is primarily a male domain (with the exception of prostitutes, bar dancers, and call girls) and women's entry into this domain generates a range of diverse responses from call centers, their employees, the employees' families, the media, and the Indian public. This illustrates that there is no linear outcome to how working at night shift in a call center affects women's lives. Even though the global nature of the work combined with the relatively high salary, is viewed as a liberating force in the lives of workers, in actuality, women simultaneously experience opening and constriction for working in the industry. When women leave their homes or migrate from their villages, the act of "stepping out" can place them in positions of experiencing disdain, and possible violence, even when the act of stepping out is done for the good of their families and society. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, for instance, migrant women working at night in export-oriented garment factories experience hostility and abused both inside the factory and when they travel to and from work. The violence these workers face includes verbal harassment from male supervisors such as "Daughter of a whore, why don't you work? You can die for all I care, but you have to finish your work," rape both inside and outside the factory, and the very real threat of assault and kidnapping when they are out at night. The independence of

earning their own money and living away from the family unit is viewed as a threat to the urban, male order. As Siddiqi aptly points out, "Symbols of inverted moral order, women workers substitute male inadequacies and national failure". Popular fiction, documentaries, and newspaper accounts on the call center industry were also collected, in order to evaluate how the call center industry was portrayed popularly and to understand reaction to this relatively new industry. Although some critics present the BPO industry as one subjecting workers to toiling the night away in IT sweatshops, a similar outcry did not emerge about women not participating in the industry because they are unable to go at night as freely as their male counterparts.

### STILETTOS IN THE BOARDROOM

Shruti Saxena's 2010 novel, *Stilettoes in the Boardroom*, is set in BankPro, a business process outsourcing (BPO) company in Gurgaon, a new suburb of Delhi. It revolves around three female characters: Sarahna, a young woman who takes a job at BankPro to avoid marriage; Shivaa, a thirty-something married career woman; and Arya, a manager with successive office romances. Sarahna battles with her mother over taking the job, as the latter wants her daughter to marry and stay home. Shivaa suspects her husband of being unfaithful as she works such long hours that she hardly sees him. Arya is trying to overcome an unpleasant experience from her past, when she was offered a promotion in exchange for sex. Saxena identifies the main problems confronting these characters, and thus contemporary professional women in India more generally, as sexual harassment, work-life (im)balance, and family disapproval. *Stilettoes* presents the IT-enabled sector as a place of potential but ultimately frustrated liberation for women. This industry employs around two million workers, largely young university graduates. BPO jobs are among the best-paid in India for young people, though a certain level of education and English-language skill is required. This means that BPO workers are firmly part of India's

socio-economic elite. Women are also highly visible in this workforce. In India, where “respectable” jobs for women have traditionally been teaching, nursing, and secretarial work, the visibility of women in the IT-enabled sector can be bracing to conservatives. Though the foreign investment and employment opportunities have been widely celebrated, the attendant cultural change has been less openly embraced. As Shehzad Nadeem suggests, the clash between the celebration and the anxiety engendered by the growth of BPOs supposes two different moral worlds:

The first is one in which marriage is arranged by family, gratification is delayed, and the individual is engulfed and defined by a dense web of family and social obligations. The second posits an autonomous, pleasure-seeking self that no doubt derives succour from family, but is defined more by the voluntary choices it makes. Liberalization and globalisation are shaping the aspirations and identities of the Indian middle-class. It is within this fraught new setting that Saxena sets her novel. Clothing is a social signifier that can reveal a lot about perceptions and practices of subjectivity. In *Silletos*, traditional Indian cultural markers are un-cool, contrasted with things that are perceived as being western. Sarahna, for instance, faces hostility from her mother over her decision to work at BankPro because she immediately cuts her long hair and dons a pair of jeans. When she goes to BankPro for her interview, Sarahna takes careful notice of the appearance of the other employees: “Girls in her college were never allowed to dress like this. This place opened up a whole new world of opportunities, not just for one’s career but also personal development”.

Personal appearance is equated with personal development because it is understood that shunning the outward symbols of Indian womanhood—the long, plaited hair and Punjabi salwar kameez that Sarahna wears to her job interview—represents a desire to become more western, and therefore modern. Young

women are presented as a metonym for broader social change, and freedom in *Stiletto*s is a function of consumerism as well as the fulfillment of personal desires (the latter, interestingly, a typical characteristic associated with the “chick lit” genre). In the world of BPOs presented in *Stiletto*s, women cannot have successful or fulfilling independent careers, or lives, unless they break with tradition. The struggles of contemporary Indian women are met with a feminist liberation ideology underpinned by western consumerism. Related to the co-mingling of young men and women, another uniquely modern concept is explored: sexual harassment. Though the harassment of women in public spaces is no new phenomenon—not by any stretch—the prohibition and legal structures around it are relatively young. As might be expected, *Stiletto*s condemns sexual harassment when it appears in obvious and indisputable ways, such as pressure to have sex in exchange for career advancement. However, the novel may still be perpetuating attitudes that reinforce the sexual objectification of women, and, ironically enough, could authorize behaviors such as sexual harassment.

### ONE NIGHT AT THE CALL CENTRE

In Chetan Bhagat’s novel *One Night at @ The Call Centre*, Bhagat describes the closet of a Call Centre and tries to reconstruct the life conditions of the workers surviving in the oppressive work culture of the Call centres. The group consists of six characters Shyam, Priyanka, Esha, Vroom, Radhika and Military Uncle. All the six enter this profession with different mindsets. Esha is projected as a young ambitious girl who nurtures the dream of becoming a successful model. Swayed by the passion for the career, she makes wrong choice and remains unmindful of the consequences. She develops sexual relations with a man who promised her career of a successful model but only to ruin her life. Through the life of Esha, Chetan Bhagat intends to communicate the realities of the frailties related with the life of young girls who weave the pattern of their life in

opulence and glamour and sacrifice their grace at the cost of the honour of the family and personal talent. The narrator Shyam notes: "I saw Vroom stare at Esha. It's never easy for guys to work in an office with a hot girl. I mean, what are you supposed to do? Ignore their sexiness and stare at your computer?" Perhaps meant in a flippant tone, this comment reveals the objectification that women face on a regular basis. In this instance, Shyam is describing a workplace crush—but by describing it the way he does, Shyam projects upon Esha, the object of the gaze, the aura of sexual seduction. He is suggesting that Esha is herself at fault for luring Vroom's attention. It is easy to see how such presumptions become, within a few short logical steps, a defense of sexual assault and harassment. In the process of the exploration of Esha's life Bhagat reflects on the conditions of sexual harassment and such other compromises in the private jobs.

## CONCLUSION

Bhagat's novel *One Night at @ The Call Centre* is a fine deconstruction of isolation, insecurity, nothingness and stress devouring the psyche of good sense of the workers. *Stiletto* attempts to locate women's experiences within the "new" India, and while it does expose some of the tensions women must grapple with, it unfortunately undercuts its own effect by reinscribing women within patriarchal norms.

## WORKS CITED

Beena, Agarwal, *A voice of Seismic shift in Indian English Fiction*, Yking Books, Jaipur, 2013.

Berger, Peter, *The Heretical Imperative*, New York: Double Day, 1980.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One\\_Night\\_@\\_the\\_Call\\_Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Night_@_the_Call_Center)



<http://www.booksforus.in/2014/10/one-night-at-call-center-pdf-free.html>

<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1966&context=clweb>