**[Me-too to Gentoo](https://www.dawn.com/news/1715812/me-too-to-gentoo)**

[Shahzad Sharjeel](https://www.dawn.com/authors/7601/shahzad-sharjeel) Published October 19, 2022 Updated 2 days ago

The writer is a poet. His latest publication is a collection of satire essays titled Rindana.

Listen to article

WOMEN are making a mark for themselves in every field. They are trailblazers — from participating in and covering sports previously thought to be the exclusive preserve of men to uncovering their heads when forced to do the opposite. Under the most restrictive regimes, young girls and women are challenging the authoritarian tendencies of erstwhile popular movements that turn to “devour their own children”.

Nietzsche is supposed to have said, “nobody understands, only a poet begins to”. Our own Majaz Lakhnavi encouraged 20th-century Indian women, perhaps women everywhere, when he wrote:

(it would have been better had you made a standard out of your veil).

Imagine an Arctic outpost with nothing but a colony of penguins in sub-zero temperatures, and no running water. A post office will be the second most unimaginable thing in this setting; four women running it being the first. This is what is happening on Port Lockroy on Goudier Island in Antarctica, nearly 9,000 miles (14,484 kilometres) from the UK. Four women have been selected from some 6,000 applicants aspiring to run the post office for the next six months. It sends out some 80,000 postcards annually to more than 100 countries by ship crews who call on the island. For the first 10 weeks of their assignment, these four brave souls will be accompanied by a fifth person to show them the ropes of surviving in extreme climes. ‘Aha! here comes the alpha male to lead the pack,’ you are thinking. Wrong. The fifth is also a woman, with previous experience in running the place.

Pakistan does not lag behind in female heroes.

These brave, adventurous and talented women deserve to be named. Clare Ballantyne, 23, has been appointed postmaster. She has just completed a Master’s degree in earth sciences from Oxford University. Mairi Hilton, 30, a conservation biologist with a PhD degree, will monitor the penguin colony on the island. Newly-wed Natalie Corbett, 31, is temporarily leaving her husband behind for what she considers a lifetime opportunity to observe Arctic life. She will run a gift shop at the outpost. She runs a pet accessories business in Hampshire. Lucy Bruzzone, 40, a scientist with previous Arctic experience will act as base manager, coordinating all the comings and goings of ship crews and visitors to the island. Vicky Inglis, 42, will be the group’s temporary mentor. The penguin variety on the island is, by the way, called Gentoo.

Afghanistan, Iran, India, Bangladesh and all other countries in our neighbourhood have their female heroes to boast of. Pakistan does not lag behind. We too have our Benazirs, Asma Jehangirs and Malalas. Most heartening is the fact that our legions of brave women are not restricted to the past or those who have already made their mark; the supply chain of intelligent, persistent, and daring women seems inexhaustible in Pakistan.

From politics to sports, and from law enforcement to the sciences, young women are doing Pakistan proud. From polio vaccination campaigns to dengue inspection teams, women are leading from the front, undaunted by the harsh terrain or climate change-driven disasters. They face resistance at times beginning at home and from the community to the militants who think nothing of murdering vaccinators trying to save our future generations from preventable diseases and lifelong disabilities.

While women are raring to go, so are the reactionary forces. Something as simple as a sports festival becomes controversial. Threats and warnings were hurled at the org­anisers of the rece­ntly concluded Gilgit-Baltis­tan Women’s Spo­rts Gala. As is its wont, the adm­inistration caved in and renamed the event GB Women’s Fair. Have no doubts, the killjoys had nothing against the ‘gala’ part of the nomenclature as they are pretty enamoured of everything ‘gala’, and the infatuation is mutual, dare one add. The words ‘women’ and ‘sports’ uttered in the same breath make them breathe fire.

One big problem with appeasing regressive elements is that it is never enough. Fast on the heels of the gala fiasco, wanted militants brazenly blocked the road between KP and GB close to Babusar Pass, holding tourists and commuters hostage including a local minister. According to media reports, the miscreants’ demands included visiting rights to their imprisoned accomplices and their release. This is reportedly the same outfit whose members are suspects in the infamous killing of a foreign mountaineering expedition to Nanga Parbat in 2013. What is more outrageous? Blocking roads with impunity by associates of suspects in the terrorist attack or the fact that almost 10 years later only a handful of convictions could be handed down? Only a few convicts are behind bars, two escaped from jail; the rest of the suspects remain at large. Islamabad too braces for another siege.

*The writer is a poet. His latest publication is a collection of satire essays titled Rindana.*

[**shahzadsharjeel1@gmail.com**](http://mailto:shahzadsharjeel1@gmail.com)

*Published in Dawn, October 19th, 2022*