



MS. SHAHEEN MISTRI

Recipient of the Award for Development and Welfare of Women and Children - 2019

Born: March 16, 1971

Born in Mumbai, Shaheen Mistri grew up in five countries. At the age of eighteen, moved by the inequity she saw on a trip to visit her grandparents she dropped out of Tufts University and returned to Mumbai with the intention of understanding the unequal opportunities that children have.

The Beginning: Shaheen Mistri founded the first Akanksha centre in 1989, enrolling 15 children and engaging college friends as volunteers. This became the Akanksha Foundation, a non-profit organisation founded to maximize the potential of children living in low-income communities through education. Akanksha, which means “aspiration” in Sanskrit, today runs 21 Akanksha Schools that hold high expectations of all students and use innovative methodologies to impart a holistic education. Over the past 30 years, the Akanksha Foundation has expanded from serving 15 children in one centre to almost 9000 children across Mumbai and Pune. Amongst Shaheen Mistri’s contributions while building Akanksha she launched Art For Akanksha, the Social Leadership Program for students and working directly with children to produce several Akanksha musicals – Operation Khazana, Once Upon a Time in Shantipur and Kabir and the Rangeen Kurta.

In 2008, searching for a way to impact more children and inspired by the Teach For America model, Shaheen Mistri founded Teach For India (TFI), with the audacious vision of providing an excellent education to all children across India by building a movement of leaders committed to ending educational inequity in India.

The Change-makers: Teach For India runs a highly selective, two-year, full-time teaching Fellowship where Fellows work to transform the lives of students in under-resourced schools. Today, TFI reaches 38,000 children through the direct work of over 1000 Fellows and 250 staff members across seven cities (Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune, and Mumbai). Additionally, TFI has over 3000 Alumni who have completed the two-year Fellowship, with 70% of them still working full-time in the education and social sector.

“Through Teach For India we work towards every child in India attaining an excellent education,” says Shaheen Mistri. “Our belief is that every child needs an excellent education to develop his or her potential fully. With this vision in mind, we are building a movement of leaders committed to eliminating educational inequity.”

Teach For India’s core Fellowship experience exposes Fellows to the needs of the specific communities that they are working with and enables them to step into the world of their students to understand a little of the many challenges they face. In year two of the Fellowship, Fellows start their own Be The Change Projects (BTCs) to address challenges in their respective communities which directly impact the children, the school staff members, parents, communities and/or the whole ecosystem around.

Teach For India’s Alumni Impact Team runs multiple projects to support their Alumni to accelerate their reach and impact. In 2015, TFI initiated the InnovatED Program, for building the skills and capacity of entrepreneurs looking to build impactful educational organizations and to support Teach For India’s early-stage education entrepreneurs who are looking to take their innovations from a project to a sustainable level. In 2017, InnovatED was established as a national platform. InnovatED has impacted

23 full-time entrepreneurs and 50,000 kids in the past 2 years. Other alumni programs include the Alumni Leadership Accelerator, where alumni are placed in schools as school leaders or in government and policy level roles. TFI has also set up a digital platform called TFI Connect to enable collective action amongst alumni.

Teach For India has introduced various innovative programmes, which pushes its sense of possibility, spreads its learning and provide kids, educators, and the entrepreneurs with a platform for dialogue.

Shaheen Mistri has created projects like the Maya Musical and the Kid's Education Revolution which explore student leadership, creating platforms for student voice and partnership. It is her belief that children are their partners in this work and that they have a critical role as change-makers in reimagining education. She conceptualized InspirED, an innovative education conference that Teach For India hosted in several locations to bring educators together to challenge them to work together to improve the education system.

TFI's Teacher Training Portal, Firki, aims to be a one stop platform for teachers to learn and grow together. Firki currently has over 9000 registered users and 60 courses (in multiple languages) on teacher professional development. And in 2017, Shaheen Mistri conceptualized TFIx, a year-long incubator program for passionate entrepreneurs who are willing to adapt Teach For India's model to their context and region in rural areas. In the past 3 years, TFIx has enabled 26 entrepreneurs to launch their own Fellowship in regions ranging from Bihar to Jammu and Kashmir.

Impact: Teach For India's impact is both in the academic results of its students and in their growth on values and mindsets and their changed aspiration levels. In 2012-13, Teach for India initiated a longitudinal study in collaboration with Columbia University and Educational Initiatives committing to track and measure how its students are growing over an extended period of time (July 2012 to March 2016). The study compares gain in test scores of students in Teach for India classrooms with that of students in comparable non-Teach for India classrooms. Each year, over 90% of the students graduate and go on to college.

Shaheen Mistri has authored the children's books, "Miss Muglee Goes to Mumbai" and "Miss Muglee Met Mr. Get", and has written the book "Redrawing India: The Teach For India Story"

She serves on the boards of Akanksha Foundation, Design for Change and the Simple Education Foundation. Shaheen Mistri has served on the Boards of Teach For All and The Thermax Foundation.

Her work for children over three decades has mobilized thousands of people to work together for a systemic change in education. Shaheen Mistri has built the largest network of education change-makers in the country.

Awards & Recognitions:

2001: Ashoka Fellow Award

2002: Global Leader for Tomorrow, World Economic Forum

2006: Asia Society 21 Leader

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