



**Ms. Shaheen Mistri**  
**Recipient**  
**Development and Welfare of Women and Children Award 2019**

I seek one thing

The opportunity to do more for more children.

I seek this because I feel anger and frustration and sadness and urgency knowing that as I sit in this air-conditioned, carpeted auditorium so grateful for the privilege of being on this stage

Somewhere, at this exact moment,

A child with disability is chained at home,

His mother scared to set him free

While she goes to buy vegetables

And a little girl in a school nearby

Has raised her hand hopefully six times

Wanting to try and answer

But her teacher hasn't noticed

Somewhere in this moment,

Kids are copying from a fading blackboard

Both questions and answers

And I see them thinking a little less with every day that they grow

Somewhere a class lies empty; the teacher hasn't come to school this month

Somewhere, a child contemplates how useless he is

For the student next to him scored a 97% versus his 85%

And somewhere, a child just got whacked across the head

His head spins

And in that moment, he hates school, and life, a little bit more

I seek to do more for more children because these are not stories that I've heard or invented  
I've seen that kid copying mindlessly  
I've heard the whack of a slap, and a cane  
I have seen learning slip, slip, slip  
And with it, children fall  
Their colours fading from bright, neon, fun, hopeful  
To the dull grey of helplessness, mediocrity and failure  
For 30 years now, along with countless others who I am immensely grateful for, I have worked to bring  
back those colours.  
To shower children with  
The tinsel gold of dreams  
The bold mango of belief  
The gleaming metal of the rollercoaster of opportunity  
The rice-paddy green of learning  
The powerful white of love  
There is a lot that I do not know  
But I do know this  
If our children dream  
Not tomorrow, but today  
If they believe, not in the ways things are but in the way they can be  
If they are given opportunities to learn, not just in school but from life  
If they love, both themselves and everyone around them  
Then the world will be a better world  
Gentler, Kinder, fairer  
The world will lose a little of its grey  
And be more full of sunshine

And so, thank you

For this opportunity to pause

For the road to equity for all children is long

And tiring

And really, really overwhelming

And it means a great deal to know that we walk together towards that day where we promise a better nation for our children.

