I never touched a computer until I was 17 years old.

I grew up in Karachi of salt wind and monsoon rains, of qawwali drifting from weddings two streets over, of women who embroider entire histories into cloth and grandmothers whose stories contain more wisdom than any algorithm yet written. There was no laptop in our home. No coding class at my government school. No one in my family had entered technology. I was curious, I was hungry and none of that was enough to put a device in my hands.

When I arrived in the United States for university, I held a laptop for the first time as my own. I was terrified. I was electric. I am now a double major in Computer Science and Economics, the first woman in my family to pursue a career in technology and the longer I sit in this room, the more I understand that my presence here is not an ending. It is the beginning of a responsibility.

My international education gave me something I could not have found in Karachi alone: the ability to see my home from the outside. Studying economics alongside computer science gave me a lens I had not expected. Every technology is also an economic system. Who builds it, who owns it, who is excluded from it are not accidents. They are design choices. And the women currently excluded from AI are not absent because they lack ability. They are absent because of access, language, and the quiet persistent message that this world was not made for them. All of which can be changed.

Artificial intelligence is already reshaping agriculture, medicine, and governance in Pakistan. If women from government schools, from interior Sindh and Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, are not part of understanding and shaping it, the future will be built without them. Their needs will go unmodeled. Their languages will go unlearned. Their wisdom will be absent from the systems that will one day govern their own lives.

That is not acceptable to me.

The **Noor Scholarship Fund** named for the Urdu word for light, the originating kind is my answer. It is designed specifically for young women aged 16 to 35 who attended government schools in Pakistan's remote and underserved communities: women who never had a device, who studied in Urdu or a regional language, who were told, implicitly or explicitly, that technology was not for them. Every scholar receives a laptop, permanently hers. A six-month data SIM. And a $3,000 living grant, entirely unrestricted because she knows whether she needs to feed her family, cover transport, or simply have, for the first time, money that belongs to her.

The curriculum is honest about where it begins. In the first months, scholars learn entirely in Urdu and their regional languages: what a computer is, how the internet works, how to navigate a device, how to search for information and evaluate whether it is true. Digital literacy before anything else because these are the foundational skills that open every other door. Alongside this, we run a short, focused module on basic English literacy not conversational fluency, not grammar examinations, but the functional vocabulary of technology: the words that appear on every screen, in every programming language, in every line of code. Words like "file," "save," "function," "input," "error." Enough English to navigate a keyboard and read what a computer is telling you. Because here is the honest truth that I learned sitting in my own first computer science class, jet-lagged and terrified: you do not need to dream in English to code in it. Programming languages borrow only a small

vocabulary from English, and that vocabulary can be learned the same way scholars learn anything systematically, in context, with patience and good teaching.

Which is exactly what the Noor curriculum provides. All technical instruction is delivered bilingually every concept explained first in Urdu or the scholar's regional language, then demonstrated in English as it appears in code, then explained again until it lands. No scholar is left behind because of language. No scholar is made to feel that her mother tongue is an obstacle rather than a foundation. The goal is not to replace Urdu with English but to add a narrow technical bridge between them just wide enough to walk across into a coding environment and feel at home there.

Later modules introduce the concepts behind artificial intelligence without requiring advanced language skills at all: what machine learning is, how data shapes the systems already making decisions about Pakistani farmers, patients, and loan applicants, and why it matters that women with local knowledge are in the room when those systems are designed. Coding is introduced only once scholars have the digital confidence and basic English vocabulary to meet it and always with Urdu explanation running alongside every English command, every error message, every line of logic.

The capstone project asks each scholar to identify one problem in her own community and propose a technology-assisted solution. A woman in interior Sindh mapping flood-prone areas. A young woman in Balochistan documenting traditional embroidery patterns before they disappear. A student in KPK is designing a simple system to help her school track attendance. These are not small ambitions. These are exactly the problems that billion-dollar AI companies are failing to solve, because they do not have anyone in the room who has actually lived them.

The scholarship prioritizes students from government schools, the daughters of teachers, farmers, labourers, women who raised families without ever being asked what they themselves wanted to build. First-generation learners. Women with no prior access to devices. Women re-entering education after years away. Applications may be submitted in any form: handwritten and mailed, written in Urdu or any regional language, or delivered as a WhatsApp voice note. We ask only two things: your story, and your willingness to learn. No prior English fluency. No diploma. No proof of what you have already accomplished in a system not built for you. Only: who are you, and what do you want to build?

Each scholar is paired with a Pakistani woman working in technology, a mentor who grew up speaking the same languages, eating the same food, navigating the same expectations, and who found her way into rooms not designed with her in mind. These mentors meet with scholars monthly, answer questions about learning and life, and offer what no curriculum can: living proof that it is possible. As each cohort graduates, its scholars are invited to become mentors themselves. The chain extends from woman to woman, year to year until the Noor network becomes something larger than any single scholarship: a community of Pakistani women who understand technology, who carry their culture with them into digital spaces, and who reach back, always, for the next one.

Joh roshni mili hai, woh aage deni hai. The light you have been given: you must pass it forward.

I did not invent that ethic. It lives in every teacher who stayed late in a government school with no resources, every grandmother who taught a child to read by lamplight, every woman who held the door open behind her. I am trying to give it structure and scale.

To every young woman in Pakistan sitting in a government school classroom, watching a world that seems to be happening somewhere else: this scholarship is yours. You do not need to speak English today. You do not need a device today. You need only to be willing to show up, to try, to tell us who you are and what you want. We will meet you where you stand and walk forward with you from there.

This is the scholarship I did not know to dream about, because no one around me had dreamed it yet.