

## Statement Of Service and Commitment To Increase Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Computing

*“Be the change you want to see”*

Growing up amidst the diverse fabric of Mumbai has profoundly shaped my worldview. Celebrating the richness found in our varied cultures and beliefs was not just a concept but a way of life in my formative years. During my Architecture studies, I was fortunate to experience cultural and gender parity among my peers, a privilege I soon realized did not extend into the professional realm. **I was struck hard by the glaring lack of diversity in leadership roles**, particularly as I sought to join architecture firms led by women. Discovering that only 20% of licensed women architects in India become practitioners, **I chose to lead my own architecture firm in Mumbai**, partnering with a female peer. The **gender and cultural disparity became even more pronounced as I transitioned from architecture to the computer science (CS) field** for my Ph.D. Statistics in the CS field speak volumes — women represent less than 25% of faculty, with even fewer in leadership positions, particularly those representing multicultural backgrounds. As I reflected on the stark absence of peers and mentors who mirrored my journey, and the systemic barriers that hindered the minority groups’ representation in leadership roles, I became passionate about **being the change that I wanted to see** in my environment. **My journey at MIT became a platform for championing the cause of improving diversity in leadership roles through service, and my mentoring and teaching practices.**

### SERVICE

Early on in my Ph.D., I attended the Grace Hopper Conference as a student scholar. This conference, attended by over 35,000 women in STEM, was a turning point for me as I witnessed the transformative power of women supporting each other in academic and professional spheres. I brought this energy back to MIT where I quickly became involved in **initiatives to improve leadership skill-building, resources to provide holistic support, and efforts to address systemic hurdles in early STEM careers** for women-identifying students. My involvement has **contributed** to the development of **new training workshops, new policies for financial support** of women graduates, as well as **new guidelines for graduate admission practices** aimed at improving diversity, equity, and inclusivity at MIT and beyond.



My roles: (l-r) Organizing committee for GW6 events and 2019 EECS Women’s Summit; GW@MIT Leadership Conference, 2018; Organizing committee for NEGWise Summer Retreat on Fostering an Inclusive Campus Climate, 2019; Speaker for MIT CodeIt for middle school girls and non-binary students.

**Initiatives to increase diversity in leadership:** I was part of several student groups at MIT where I organized a range of events **within the EECS department, across MIT, and even across seven New England universities**. For example, to improve a sense of community and belonging among female graduate students in the Electrical Engineering and Computer Science department at MIT, I co-organized several movie nights, paint nights, and dance classes as the **social events chair** of Graduate Women in Course-6 (GW6). These monthly events became a regular socializing space, particularly for graduates like me who struggled to find female peers in their labs. I also co-organized **leadership conferences** like the very **first GW6 Conference** and the **Fall Leadership Conference for Graduate Women at MIT (GW@MIT)**. At these conferences, we organized discussions, workshops, and skill-building sessions to equip women and non-binary identifying graduate students with the necessary tools to **thrive in leadership positions in academia and industry**. Having given my own TEDx talk on my research, I led a workshop for underrepresented graduate students to design a TED-style talk on their research, so they can not only develop the skills to articulate their

research but also **confidently showcase their research contributions to the world** through public speaking. I also invited women leaders like the **Turing awardee Prof. Barbara Liskov** to share their journeys and inspire the women graduates **to be the trailblazing role models of their fields**.

**Resources to improve holistic support for women:** Besides working towards building leadership skills, I have also advocated to improve the support for their well-being, particularly of **graduate women with families**. As part of the **EECS student committee**, my efforts resulted in tangible outcomes like **increased financial aid for childcare and mental health resources**, contributing to a more supportive environment for women in the department. Likewise, going beyond MIT, I led the organization of a **retreat for NEGWiSE** (New England Graduate Women in STEM), spanning multiple universities (MIT, Harvard, Boston University, Brandeis, Tufts, Dartmouth, and Brown), focusing on **identifying microaggressions, cultivating inclusive campus climates, and advocating for increased participation** of historically underrepresented and marginalized groups. At this day-long event, attended by close to 80 graduate women in the New England area, several **participants expressed how having early support and exposure to STEM positively changed their career trajectories**.

**Efforts to provide early mentorship support and exposure in STEM:** Inspired to take concrete steps toward improving early mentorship support in EECS, I teamed up with the department at MIT as part of the **EECS admission committee**, where we worked on generating a memorandum of **recommendations focused on improving equality and equity within the graduate cohort**. As a result, we provided additional department funding to the **Graduate Application Assistance Program (GAAP)** which paired **applicants from underrepresented groups** with **existing EECS graduate student-mentors**. As part of GAAP, I advised two undergraduate women students on improving their application package as well as finding the right research groups at MIT. Likewise, to advocate for the early pursuit of STEM careers, I regularly give talks at CodeIT, an MIT initiative for middle school girls to learn coding and gain early exposure to STEM. By sharing my research journey, **I aimed to inspire the future generation of women researchers**.

### **MENTORING and TEACHING PRACTICES**

Besides service and volunteering, I have ensured that my mentoring and teaching practices nurture the same diverse and inclusive environment that I advocate for. Being mindful of my own assumptions and identifying ways to improve my interactions with students from diverse groups through empathy and inclusivity continue to be central to my practices. I am proud to have gender parity among my mentees, a significant number of whom belong to underrepresented groups with diverse backgrounds, religions, nationalities, sexual orientations, and disabilities. **Witnessing their successes in pursuing advanced research endeavors or industry leadership paths** has reinforced my devotion to scaffolding equitable opportunities for underrepresented students.

### **FUTURE COMMITMENT and PLANS**

I recognize that the initiatives during my Ph.D. are only the first step toward my vision of **seeing a diverse group lead in the field of computing**. I stay deeply committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in academia and industry research, drawing upon my personal journey and experiences as an Indian woman in both architecture and computer science. Recognizing the inequities that persist within these fields at several levels, I am dedicated to spearheading initiatives that empower underrepresented groups at various stages of their careers. To that end, I plan to organize specialized panels and workshops at SIGCHI conferences like ACM CHI, UIST, DIS, and C&C, dedicated to supporting women and underrepresented minorities (URM) in engineering fields, particularly in the area of human-computer interaction, to discuss systemic issues, raise awareness about them, and develop actionable solutions and programs to support URM. I also plan to further secure grants to study and support the broadening of education for marginalized communities. Finally, I plan to mentor my students to join forces to champion the cause of inclusivity in academia. My mission is to **continue spearheading the change I want to see** and I aim to achieve it by building a supportive lab culture and academic community, providing a sense of belonging and safety through difficulties, and fostering a learning environment where **all individuals feel welcomed, supported, and empowered to succeed**.