

Passion has always been described to me as something innate, almost like we have been hardcoded to follow one predetermined path. However, my path consists of several slip roads with my heart entangled to each one of them, which ultimately converged into finding my passion for Informatics.

At an early age I recognized the privilege I had and wanted to put it to good use by giving back the one thing that no one can take away - knowledge. Living in India, my safety was something I thought of every single day and I strongly feel that the place of women in society is just a symptom of a larger issue - not being educated about it. I started teaching Math, English and basic computer skills at rural schools to bring change at the grassroots level. Through my interaction with the students and teachers I tried to educate and advocate for feminism. But soon I realized that raising my voice at such a small scale wasn't enough, I needed a form of expression that would convey my strong emotions to a bigger audience.

I decided to express myself through design, a medium that is not only informative but also induces emotion. I taught myself Adobe Illustrator so that I could display posters about gender equality, women's safety and even hygiene (especially amongst women) in the classrooms in a way that the children could understand. This sparked curiosity and conversation about important issues like problematic system of gender specific roles and professions. Women are expected to be homemakers or to be in professions like nursing and teaching while men are expected to be the breadwinners or engineers and CEOs. This was also an issue close to my heart since the field of Information Technology, which I aim to be in, is male dominated. Looking at the impact a few posters made, I have grown to respect and love all kinds of design in its way of being simple yet so powerful thus cultivating my love for helping others as well as design as a medium of education and social welfare.

A few years later when I moved out of India to the University of Washington, I saw a world where I could develop new skills and find more opportunities to cultivate my passions. When I took INFO 201, I understood how data can be turned into information to make useful applications for a target audience. Even though I enjoyed and had prior experience in programming, I realized through this class that it is just a *systematic* form of design – making efficient use of large amounts of data to reach a goal along with a mental challenge. Using that insight, I created a Shiny app that informs users of the frequency and location of crimes in the Seattle area. I used the Seattle PD calls API to create dynamic visualizations which could make its users aware of areas of crime around them. This app gave its users the freedom to take their safety into their own hands. And just like that, I felt safer - through information. Through the final project fair, I could display my idea to a multitude of people at once which reinforced my goal to reach a larger audience. The amount I learned in the class made me extremely enthusiastic about my project which was the reason I excelled at the class material.

Social welfare, design and technology are thought of as mutually exclusive streams or career paths. I found that the essence of informatics is not just one thing, it is the harmony of all of them together. Which is why when I saw the driving force of all three things I was very passionate about, coming together - I knew, with all my heart that this was *my purpose*.

To expand my horizons in Informatics I took upon the opportunity to work as a research volunteer at Seattle Children's Innovation and Technology lab where I am fulfilling my passion for helping people through smart design and technology. My job was to come up with a design to help children with the challenges that come with autism. I started thinking of the human centered approach of helping children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in their daily lives; I realized that their biggest challenge was interacting with people and gauging social cues. I chose to work with Augmented Reality to design a world that was more comfortable for them. Using Microsoft HoloLens 2, I am working on designing an application that detects and predicts human emotions in real time to help them understand the world a little better.

From helping children in India to designing AR applications for children with ASD in Seattle, each day I feel content knowing that I am fulfilling my passion for helping people. As a woman, Indian, designer, and most importantly an emphatic human being I can bring unique perspective when I design technological solutions that could actually impact someone's life. In the future, I want to explore the power of information by creating user-centered technological innovations for the betterment of society.

Finding my passion wasn't a sudden life changing realization, an "Aha" moment or an epiphany; it was cultivated through experiences, drive and hard work that made me who I am today. I want to take that spirit and carry that forward by studying Informatics and by helping as many people as I can