

ISOC India Mumbai Women in Leadership Position Webinar Series: **Changing Dimensions of Women Leadership in the Pre and Post Internet Era**

Date: 12th January 2020

Time: 11.30 am-1.00 pm IST

Presenter: Ms Nalini Gopinath, Adjunct Faculty, Suffolk University and Former Senior Client Service Director, Guavus Inc.

In a continued effort to promote inclusivity and diversity in the Internet Governance domain, the Internet Society India Mumbai brought out the second webinar in its 'Women in Technology Leadership Series'. In this special webinar, ISOC India Mumbai chapter invited Ms. Nalini Gopinath, Adjunct Faculty, Suffolk University and Former Senior Client Service Director, Guavus Inc to share her views on the changing dimensions of women leadership in the pre and post Internet Era. Interacting with the volunteers of ISOC India Mumbai, Nalini relayed her inspiring journey and her serendipitous foray into the world of technology. Despite coming from a humanities background, her quest to learn programming languages like Fortran and Cobol led her to the corridors of National Institute of Information Technology (Premier Indian Institute for engineering and IT) in the mid-1980s. The formal training she acquired in NIIT taught her to approach the complex problems logically by breaking them up step by step and helped her to land a job with a French company (that was into building computers) to train students in programme languages including Pascal 2. She highlighted that even then around 50 per cent of the class comprised of women who came from various STEM disciplines. She attributed this heightened interest in women to the fact that the desktop computing had emerged as a new area and had allowed women the freedom to enter this field at the very initial stages.

Nalini further emphasized that the opportunity she got to work on the cutting edge database design, SQL programming for databases in US and her MBA, with specialization in technology, allowed her to consolidate her knowledge in the field. Her diverse background in humanities, technology, and human resource made her aptly poised to provide consulting on database design, SQL and to later work as a product manager in technology firms where she could act as a perfect bridge between the customers and the company.

The floor was then thrown open for discussion. Engaging with ISOC India Mumbai's volunteer Prateek Pathak, Nalini responded to his question on 'her experience from non-Internet to the Internet world', by stating that the major changes brought in the Internet era were the outsourcing boom, aspect of remote computing and communication, and the ability to use and build database for products marketing. On a further question by Prateek on whether there were any 'fixed steps' to keep a client happy in a technology-dominated firm? Nalini,

based on her own professional experience, demonstrated that one has to stealthily understand the problem that clients want the firm to help with and provide solutions to it. In the instance where the firm cannot provide the desired solution, the manager has to be upfront about it. The trust between the client and the firm is sacrosanct and should not be broken in any event.

Shveta Kokash, an ISOC India Mumbai Volunteer, then requested Nalini to share her vision for the future of women in the management of the Internet. Nalini mused that in her journey she had never faced any discrimination as a woman in this field. On the contrary, being a woman can sometimes help as it gives an impression of being a more approachable, accessible manager and an enabler. She also predicted that as more and more women are joining this area, they are soon going to overtake men in technology. She asserted that glass ceiling, if not breaking, is definitely cracking and a major reason for this is the flexibility provided by tech companies that allow women to balance their families and their careers.

On the question by another ISOC India Mumbai Volunteer, Sneha Tambe, on 'what were the challenges that Nalini faced and how did she overcome them?', Nalini recounted that one of the major challenges of being an engineering manager was one had to constantly keep abreast with the latest technology as this field is always evolving. So there is a continuous learning curve one has to move along.

Building on the same point, another volunteer Nandita Koshal asked Nalini on how difficult it is to keep oneself in tandem with the latest changes in technology and what all steps can one take to ensure that one stays relevant to the field? Nalini responded by sharing that one can attend a lot of seminars, workshops, conferences and do a lot of reading to keep herself abreast as well as head of others. She also continued that to mentor the young engineers and employees one should encourage them to go for further skill advancements so that they were better prepared for future projects and applications.

On another relevant question by ISOC India Volunteer Umesh Alle as to how one can keep herself/himself motivated to learn even in the advanced stage of their career, she responded that for her, it was the combination of her zest to excel and her fear of failure that pushed her to drive harder and harder as she was not from the traditional technological background. Additionally, to mentor and manage engineers, she constantly had to be in touch with the latest developments in the fields. On a query by ISOC India Volunteer Mohammad Pervaiz on whether she enjoyed conventional programming or RDBMS (Relational Database Management System), Nalini shared her preference for RDBMS. She also talked about the popularity of INGRES, a SQL RDBMS during her time.

Lastly, when asked by Sneha as to what advice would she like to give to the future tech-leaders, Nalini advised that given the fast-changing nature of technology, obsolescence becomes a constant peril, hence it is essential to always be open to knowledge, have the humility to learn and shirk away from arrogance of technology. Therefore, always stay curious and keep learning!