

International Women's Day



International Women's Day is more than just a celebration; it's a reminder of the long fight for women's rights and equality. First celebrated on March 19, 1911, in Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland, International Women's Day was created to raise awareness of the struggles women faced—and still face—worldwide. Over time, it has become a global day to recognize women's achievements, amplify their voices, and stand together for change.

The event, themed “Nepali Women's Summit: Empowering, Inspiring, and Leading the Future,” was emceed by Kalpana Bhandari, General Secretary of NCNC, and Manika Chaulagain. This event was the first of its kind, co-organized by the Nepal Center of North Carolina (NCNC), Nepali Women's Global Network (NWGN), Arambha Nepali Library, North Carolina Nepali Literary Society (NCNLS), and NRNA North Carolina. It was not only well-organized but also incredibly inspiring. The day began on a warm note with chai, pastries, and fresh fruit welcoming everyone in.

The first speaker was Dr. Sushrusha Arjyal. She is dual board-certified in Psychiatry and Sleep Medicine—one of fewer than ten professionals in North Carolina with this distinction. She served as faculty at Duke University (2017–2024), focusing on outpatient psychiatry and sleep medicine. Now, she owns a company called Bliss Sleep and Psychiatry. She spoke about gender inequality in the workplace, highlighting how women often perform unpaid labor, especially in caregiving roles. In underdeveloped countries, 70% of women are involved in unpaid work, which significantly limits their ability to pursue paid employment.

The next speaker, Dr. Rosha Pokharel, is truly a SHERO! She completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Kathmandu and received her Master of Science and Ph.D. in Electrical and Computer Engineering from the University of Florida in 2013 and 2014. In her introduction, she talked about her job as a data scientist working on cutting-edge AI projects at IBM Watson Weather Company. She said, “From the outside, it looked like I had it all figured out, but the truth is I was battling imposter syndrome... I was also navigating a corporate world where I was one of only three women on a floor of 50 men.” Hearing her speak so openly was powerful. It reminded me how important it is to see people like her breaking barriers and being honest about their challenges.

Afterward, there was a discussion forum led by Ayushma Sharma. The panel featured several powerful and inspiring speakers, including Gunjana Neupane, Reshma Tamrakar, Dr. Pallavi Sharma, and Rosy Alexander, each offering unique insights and perspectives.

After the panel, we enjoyed a delicious cultural treat—warm, flavorful mo:mos provided by Himalayan Grill. The rich aroma and comforting taste added a special touch to the event.

The next speaker was Jessica Holmes, and I really enjoyed her talk. She began by sharing her background, making her story feel so ordinary that someone like me—a regular girl—felt like anything was possible. One story that stood out was how, at one event, she was mistaken for a server: someone asked her to take their coat, and another requested a glass of wine. But she didn't let that injustice stop her. She kept going, achieved great things, and refused to give up.

Afterwards, Seema Kak talked about her organization, Kiran. Founded in the late 1990s as a volunteer-run group supporting the South Asian community in the Triangle, Kiran became a federally funded nonprofit in 2008. It now offers services across North Carolina. One survivor shared her story about escaping an abusive relationship with Kiran's help, which included emotional and practical support and relocation assistance.

Sarika Bansal, a Cary Town Council member, is an information security professional, small business owner, and passionate advocate for community service, women’s rights, and mental health. She shared an inspiring story about a girl named Asha (which means “hope”). Asha dreamed of coming to the U.S. and building a career. Despite constant rejection and being told to settle for less, she never gave up. Her story reflected the journeys of many women in the room—facing rejection, overcoming challenges, and ultimately finding success. As a teen in that room, I felt deeply connected to the women around me.

Tejaswi Giri is a successful entrepreneur and social worker with experience in Nepal, Thailand, Canada, and the USA. As the current Vice President of NWGN, she shared the group’s efforts to build a database of Nepali women professionals. She also highlighted NWGN’s entrepreneurship events and recognized Ms. Niveeta Sharma for her community contributions. The next NWGN biennial conference is scheduled for 2026.

Megha, Founder and President of Arambha Nepali Library, spoke about caste-based and gender-based discrimination in Nepal, and the struggles of the LGBTQIA+ community. She emphasized the need for allies who support equal rights, especially in cases where same-sex couples lack the same legal rights as others.

To wrap up the day, members of the Nepali Literary Society (NLS)—including Ms. Kamla Devkota, Ms. Geeta Basnet, Ms. Pramila Adhikari, Ms. Prabha Pokharel, Mr. Shiva Palans, Ms. Kalpana Ghimire, and Mr. Shikar Dulal—shared their work in Nepali literature. Their words and passion were a meaningful and beautiful end to the event. Dr. Bikash Shakya, President of NCNC, delivered closing remarks, recognizing the contributions of women on the NCNC board. Indira Rijal also provided remarks, and Niveeta Sharma gave the Vote of Thanks.

As I sat among women who had overcome so much and were now lifting others up, something changed in me. Even though I’m only in 9th grade, I realized that change starts now. International Women’s Day isn’t just a date on the calendar—it’s a day earned through the strength of stories, the power of voices, and the unity of women everywhere. I left the event feeling empowered, hopeful, and ready to be part of that movement—even if it starts with just one voice.

Written by:

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