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At first, home is easy to define.

It is the place you left.

The house has a gate you can picture without thinking. Your mother still keeps things in the same cupboard. The road outside has changed, but you remember what stood there before. When somebody abroad asks where you are from, the answer arrives immediately: Nepal.

Then twenty years pass.

You know the quickest route through another city's morning traffic. Your children were born there. Your closest friends are people you met after leaving Nepal. The supermarket cashier

recognises you. Your doctor has your records. You have spent more adult birthdays abroad than at home.

And yet the word *home* may still point toward Kathmandu, Dharan, Butwal, Pokhara, Biratnagar or a village you visit for three weeks every few years.

For long-term Nepalis abroad, belonging eventually becomes less a question of geography than of memory, habit and choice. The practical counterpart is why some migrants return to Nepal only to leave again.

The Nepal you miss is partly a time

Diaspora nostalgia is often described as longing for a place. It may be equally a longing for a period of life.

The Nepal remembered by somebody who left in 2005 no longer exists exactly as it was. Kathmandu has expanded. Roads have changed. Smartphones have altered family communication. Friends have migrated. Parents have aged. Restaurants, neighbourhoods and institutions have disappeared or transformed.

But the migrant changed too.

This creates one of the quiet shocks of long absence: returning to Nepal does not return you to the age at which you left it.

The tea shop can still be there. The people sitting around the table are different.

Annual visits can preserve familiarity without restoring ordinary life

Many diaspora families visit Nepal regularly. Those visits are intense.

There are relatives to see, weddings to attend, temples to visit, food to eat, paperwork to complete and gifts to distribute. A month disappears into obligations and reunions.

That experience can create the impression that life in Nepal remains immediately accessible.

But visiting is not the same as living.

A visitor does not necessarily navigate school admissions, office politics, traffic every morning, municipal bureaucracy, long-term healthcare or the ordinary frustration of getting something repaired. Relatives may rearrange their schedules because someone has come from abroad. Friends make special time.

The Nepal experienced during a homecoming holiday is real, but it is not complete.

This is one reason some people who dream of returning are surprised by the difficulty when they actually do. As explored in why some returnees eventually migrate again, emotional familiarity does not automatically produce practical reintegration.

Language remembers things the passport does not

A person can acquire another citizenship, another accent and another professional identity while still discovering that certain emotions arrive most naturally in Nepali.

Humour is one example.

A joke that needs translation has usually lost something before it reaches the second language. So have many forms of affection, irritation and family shorthand.

For first-generation migrants, Nepali can become a private territory carried abroad.

But language also changes through distance. English words enter sentences. Formal Nepali becomes harder. Regional expressions disappear. A migrant may return and discover that younger relatives speak differently from the Nepal they remember.

The language remains home, but even home has developed a new vocabulary.

Friendship changes when people stop sharing ordinary time

Migration tests friendship in a way occasional visits can hide.

Old friends may still greet each other with extraordinary warmth after years apart. Within hours, they can sound like teenagers again.

But intimacy is built partly from mundane repetition: knowing who changed jobs, whose child is struggling at school, which parent is ill, what happened last Tuesday.

After decades abroad, a migrant can remain deeply loved while no longer being part of the daily story.

The same happens in reverse. Friends in Nepal may know the broad outline of life abroad but not the colleagues, routines and small pressures that now occupy most of it.

Two people can preserve a friendship while gradually losing the context around each other's lives.

Parents keep Nepal emotionally close

For many first-generation migrants, parents are the strongest living connection to Nepal.

The regular call home is not merely communication. It maintains a rhythm.

Parents report who visited, who married, which neighbour died, what happened to the land, whether the roof needs repair and what relatives are saying. Through them, the migrant remains embedded in a place they no longer inhabit.

Age changes that relationship.

As parents become less independent, the migrant begins to experience distance not as freedom but as a constraint. The practical questions examined in families caring for ageing parents from abroad become inseparable from the emotional question of home.

Then, eventually, parents may no longer be there.

For some diaspora Nepalis, that is when Nepal changes most profoundly. The country remains theirs, but the house no longer contains the people who made arrival feel like return.

Children expose the difference between ancestry and memory

Parents can tell children that Nepal is home. Children may hear something else.

They may love Nepal. They may know cousins, celebrate Dashain, understand Nepali and look forward to every visit. But their own memories of childhood belong to another country.

The distinction becomes especially visible when parents talk about “going back.”

Back where?

For the parent, Kathmandu may be a return. For a child raised in Manchester or Melbourne, it may be a move to a place deeply connected to family but never previously inhabited as ordinary life.

That generational divergence is explored more fully in what happens to Nepali families after a generation abroad. It changes the meaning of home from an inherited certainty into something each generation negotiates for itself.

The house back home carries more than property value

Diaspora families often retain a house or land in Nepal long after the economic logic becomes ambiguous.

The property may sit empty for much of the year. Maintenance becomes another task. Siblings disagree over what to do with it. Children abroad have little interest in inheriting it.

Yet selling can feel disproportionately difficult.

That is because the asset may represent more than real estate.

It preserves optionality: *we can always go back.*

A locked house in Nepal can function as psychological insurance against the idea that migration became permanent without anyone formally deciding it would.

Success abroad can make returning harder

The longer somebody lives abroad, the more infrastructure accumulates around them.

A career develops. Pension contributions grow. Children enter particular school systems. A spouse builds a professional network. Mortgages are paid. Healthcare relationships form. Citizenship or permanent residency removes uncertainty.

None of these things necessarily weaken love for Nepal.

They increase the cost of acting on it.

This is why the question of return becomes more difficult with time even when the emotional desire remains strong. The decision is no longer one person's plane ticket. It involves an entire household system.

Some migrants discover that they belong more strongly abroad than they expected

This can be uncomfortable to admit.

Diaspora culture often treats attachment to Nepal as a measure of authenticity. Someone who says they prefer life abroad may sound ungrateful or detached.

But belonging is partly built by participation.

If a person has spent twenty years paying taxes, raising children, volunteering, working and building friendships in another country, that society is not merely where they happen to reside.

It has become part of their biography.

Recognising that does not require rejecting Nepal.

And some discover that they never fully arrive elsewhere

The opposite experience is equally real.

A migrant can become professionally successful, legally settled and socially integrated while continuing to feel that some part of life is temporary.

The accent marks them as foreign. Their name requires explanation. Political debates remind them that citizenship and

belonging are not always identical. A racist encounter can abruptly reveal a boundary that seemed to have disappeared.

In those moments, Nepal can return not as nostalgia but as certainty: somewhere in the world, no explanation of origin is required.

That feeling can survive decades.

Identity becomes less binary with time

The question “Are you Nepali or Australian?” makes sense administratively. It is often inadequate culturally.

A long-term migrant may think about family like a Nepali, work like someone trained abroad, speak in several linguistic registers and raise children who combine identities differently again.

This hybridity is sometimes described as being caught between two worlds.

That metaphor assumes a person must eventually choose one.

Many do not.

They build a life in the space between them.

The diaspora itself becomes a kind of place

Over time, Nepali life abroad develops institutions of its own.

There are temples, restaurants, football clubs, cultural organisations, language classes, concerts, professional networks and community groups. Dashain is celebrated in rented halls. Nepali musicians tour cities their parents' generation barely imagined as destinations.

The International Organization for Migration's 2024 mapping of established Nepali diaspora communities found respondents overwhelmingly first-generation, but also highly educated and interested in maintaining engagement with Nepal.

That first-generation dominance will gradually change.

The diaspora will increasingly contain people whose Nepali identity was formed abroad rather than exported from Nepal.

Home can survive without return

One of the most persistent assumptions in migration is that genuine attachment should eventually produce physical return.

It does not always.

A person can care about Nepal, invest there, support relatives, follow its politics, teach their children Nepali and visit every year

while knowing they will probably never again live there permanently.

That is not necessarily failed migration or failed patriotism.

It may simply be an honest description of where life accumulated.

Return can also happen late

For others, the equation changes after retirement, after children leave home or after a parent dies.

A person who could not realistically return at forty-five may find Nepal compelling at sixty-five.

The reasons may be social rather than economic: familiar language, relatives, climate, community, a slower routine or the desire to spend the final decades closer to where life began.

The homecoming imagined by a twenty-five-year-old migrant may eventually happen, just not on the original schedule.

What does twenty years do to home?

It complicates it.

Home stops being one address. It becomes a collection of attachments with different histories.

One place contains childhood. Another contains adulthood. One holds parents. Another holds children. One language carries memory; another carries work. One country explains where you came from; another explains much of who you became.

The mistake is assuming that only one of them can be real.

Can you still call Nepal home?

Yes.

But after twenty years, the word may no longer mean what it did on the day you left.

It may not mean the place where you live, vote, work or expect your children to remain. It may not even mean the place to which you will eventually return.

Home can also be the place that formed the first version of you—the language in which family still makes sense, the landscape against which childhood is remembered, the country whose changes feel personal even from thousands of kilometres away.

And the country where you built the next twenty years can be home too.

Migration does not always replace one home with another.

Sometimes it leaves a person with two places they can return to, and neither one exactly as they remember it.

Research note: This is a narrative analysis of long-term diaspora identity rather than a claim that all Nepalis abroad experience belonging in the same way. Diaspora context is informed by IOM's 2024 mapping of established Nepali communities across 16 countries; individual experiences vary substantially by migration route, generation, citizenship, family structure and destination.

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