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THE URBAN PALIMPSEST IN THE NARRATIVES OF THE CITY OF KABUL

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ABSTRACT :

The poetics of representation in a narrative of a city engages in the metaphorical and literal depiction of the urban spaces. Shaped by the diversity of elements like observation, memory, authenticity and imagination, the literary representations of a city portray the heterogeneous palimpsest images of a city. On the other hand, the historical narratives of a city chronicle the stories of urban cultural spaces that are embedded in contestation for power. Thus, the narratives of a city are embedded in the cultural spaces of a city. The city of Kabul has been experiencing conflicts and contestations between the ruling dynasties and factions led by individuals for occupation of the city and the region. The emergence of new regimes in place of the existing rulers resulted in political instabilities in the region. Thus, the narratives illustrate the images of the city and the incidents of conflict and trauma. Considering the images of the city of Kabul in Taran N Khan's Shadow City: A Woman Walks Kabul (2019) and Nayanima Basu's The Fall of Kabul: Despatches from Chaos (2024), the paper aims to analyze the poetics of representation of the transformation of the urban spaces in the city of Kabul during the change of guard in Afghanistan in the month of August 2021. Taran N. Khan a journalist explores the veiled city of Kabul from the days of her arrival in the city in the year 2006 to the days of her departure in 2013. On the other hand, Nayanima Basu's work chronicles the scenario of the fall of the city of Kabul from 8th August to 17th August 2021 with the collapse of the government of the Republic of Afghanistan. The narratives reflect on the city during the occupation of Afghanistan by the US-led NATO forces and their withdrawal after the return of the Taliban to power in the year 2021. The constant and frequent political instabilities present the city of Kabul in a state of flux. Consisting of the stories of the people, who are uprooted from the city, the people who are addicted to drugs, and the people who died in the city turning the city into a vast graveyard, the city is portrayed as a hotbed of conflicts and violence. An attempt to understand and interpret the urban spaces in these narratives presents the nostalgic and dystopian images of the city. Resultantly, the narratives serve as the elegies of the city. Employing the method of qualitative textual analysis and the review of the relevant works of literature, the study is essential to understand the decline of the city of Kabul in the contemporary context. The examination illuminates the impact of the political instabilities on the city leading to the transformation of the city. These and other related issues are the focus of the paper.

Keywords: *Taran N Khan, Nayanima Basu, the Cityscapes of Kabul, the Palimpsest, Urban Polity*