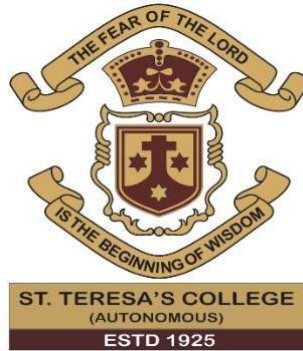


**A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF *THE HANDMAID'S TALE*:  
*THE GRAPHIC NOVEL***



*Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in  
partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of  
BACHELOR OF ARTS in English Language and Literature*

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project entitled “A Semiotic analysis of *The Handmaid’s Tale: The Graphic Novel*” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Tania Mary Vivera, Assistant Professor, Department of English

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I hereby declare that this project entitled “*A Semiotic analysis of The Handmaid’s Tale: The Graphic Novel*” by Athira Prasad is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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## Introduction

*The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopian novel by Margaret Atwood published in 1985. This novel gained international fame and consideration and got nominated for the Booker prize in 1986. The novel showcases a fictional world where the government tramples on the rights and freedom of the female population. In that society, religion was the core part of their life. The law derived from the religious ideologies, resulted in subjugation of women and forcefully converted them into vessels for producing children. Psychological counselling created a specific mind-set in people and a society that intends to dismantle all forms of freedom. The process is called persuasion, this is a process by which the person's attitude or behaviour is influenced or affected by communications from other people like verbal threats, tormenting and physical abuse. Hence, to remain in existence, they silently followed the rules. There are various adaptations of the novel such as opera, movie, series and graphic novels. The graphic adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel* (2019) is chosen to analyze its significance from other versions. Renee Nault, the author of the graphic adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*, put forth various elements which the other adaptations could not bring forth. Using colors and strokes, she conveys the feelings of oppression, regression and terror which are portrayed in the novel. This project aims to provide a critical review of various theories which help in understanding the framework of the graphic novel.

Graphic novels can refer to any text which shows a resemblance to comics and represent the visualized format of the novel. The origin of the graphic novel started

with comics but they were degraded by literary critics as they were claimed to be childish and held no literary value. The graphic novel is considered the new medium of comics which elevate the childishness and adds maturity. The graphic novel with the combination of visual and narrative reading style conveys various cultural aspects which led to it being worthy to be critiqued. In the graphic novel *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel* (2019), unique narration captures the interest of the readers and the side-by-side panels show the direction as the story progresses further. The dystopian novel tends to showcase the possibility of such tyranny taking place in the future. Even though it is not specified, various historical incidents are utilised in the novel's thematic construction. Government controlling the reproductive rights of women, trading rights for equality, constructing a society enforced by religion etc, are various instances which took place in the past are represented in the novel.

In order to prove oneself superior than the other, countries are indulged in activities affecting the peace, population, war and natural calamities. The government not considering the rights of the citizens, revolts and protests taking place, violence against others, rapes and inequality etc, all these actions are somewhat stating that such a state will not be far. As the graphic adaptation of Margaret Atwood's novel came out after a long duration, the readers can analyse the text more significantly than the time of the original novel. Considering how Renee Nault maintained the timeline of the 21st century, the readers can imagine the cruelty a certain generation had to go through. They can consider it quite shocking as this era is always tend to promote freedom and equality, the citizens always voiced out their opinions and protested against the authorities if their rights or liberty was questioned but due to the trauma and violence, the people in the republic of Gilead, became silent and continued to obey the rules imposed on them; Oppression and subjugation became part of their life.



From all the different adaptations, the purpose of choosing this adaptation of *The Handmaid Tale: The Graphic Novel* (2019) is to showcase how graphic novels tend to be more prominent than other modes of adaptations and convey various instances of the story adding different meanings to it. Picturization of the narrative is done so that the reader can understand the creativity and thought process of the original author.

Generally, in novels, the readers tend to imagine their own fantasy world with characters portrayed in novel but in visual narrative of the graphic novels the imaginary power of the reader is questioned. The characters are already visible in the graphic novel and the entire thought process is controlled by the author as the graphic novels showcases the unique character, imagery and symbolism compared to that of the reader.

Chapter one deals with the theoretical analysis of the graphic novel, it tends to provide a detailed analysis of various aspects of graphic novels and theories which have been used to evaluate the graphic novel, origin of the graphic novel and how it is different from the comics. It also includes an analysis of various colors used in the novel and how hidden meanings are portrayed with the use of symbols and signs. Charles Sanders Peirce's Theory of Signs and Visual Semiotics has been applied in order to analyse them. The theory of Representation of time put forth by the two different eras are also discussed.

Chapter two deals with the critical analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel* (2019) graphic novel, it discusses different instances in the graphic novel and evaluates the use of signs, symbols and colours in the novel. Margaret Atwood's graphic novel showcases a dystopian world which is controlled by the Republic of Gilead. The thought process of the original author is pictured as it is by

Renee Nault. The readers can perceive what the people of Gilead had gone through, the oppression and tyranny from the artwork.

Hence, this project aims to analyze various theories that critically analyze the graphic novel and state its significance and discuss meanings and the importance of signs, symbols and colors used in *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel* (2019).

## Chapter 1

### Theoretical representation of graphic novels

A graphic novel is a combination of both the visual and verbal narrative methods, they bring a unique reading style which captures the interest of many readers. The origin of the graphic novel started with comics. They were discarded back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as they were considered childish and hold no literary value. They were labelled as immature and not able to impart any value or knowledge to the readers. However, graphic novels provide a new medium, of narrative complexity. Rather than comics, the graphic novel intends to target the adult audience, whereas comics are popular among children. The visual narrative of the novel captures the interest of the readers and. It uses the medium of colours and symbols to create varied meanings of different aspects of the story. In graphic novels, the story is conveyed through the medium of images.

In the book *Imagination and Representation in Graphic Novels* (2010), according to the theory of representation by Lynne Reid, explains "how the invention of the graphic novels was done to remove the themes of comedy and childish narrative and prove the point, as they could to transform even the critical themes and idea through the medium of graphic novels" (4). According to Scott McCloud, comics are defined as "juxtapositioned pictorial and other images in a deliberate sequence intended to convey information and or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (Understanding Comics: The Inevitable Art,9).

In the graphic novels, all the characters and plot are portrayed as per imagination of the author but when we read a novel everyone follow their own thought process about characters. Hence, initially, they were criticized for destroying the imagination of the reader through visual imagery. Imagination of characters differ

from people to people, hence deviating from the original concept of the author. They preserve the original imagination of the author and convey them to the readers. In graphic novels, each character and scene will have their presence within the novel which the other adaptations cannot portray.

Even though graphic novels are considered quite similar to comics, they have different features compared to comics. Comics lack maturity and the readers only see them as a source of entertainment whereas graphic novels are used by various authors to convey something which is meant to be important and is necessary for the readers to understand the seriousness behind the plot. They can act as a medium to convey various aspects which cannot be revealed through the narrative method. Marjane Satrapi, a French Iranian graphic novelist uses the medium of a graphic novel to showcase her story to the world. She explains that graphic novels should not be considered as traditional literature but that does not define them as second-rate, images are also a way of writing. She states it is not advisable to choose between writing and drawing when you have the talent to do both. In her work *Persepolis: Story of Childhood* (2000), she used the medium of graphic novels to represent her story of growing up during the Islamic revolution in Iran. Through her work, the world witnessed the impact of war and religious extremism on Iranians. Various works are showcased through the medium of graphic novels as the images and symbols can reveal the horror and the gravity of the situation. Like *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel* (2019) depicts the republic of Gilead, a society constructed on religious ideologies and Art Spiegelman's depicts the Holocaust through the use of cartoon images of mice and rats.

Eisner's *A Contract with God* (1978), along with the rest of the collection is considered to be one of the first graphic novels which were published. They are mainly done on the themes of the emerging political or cultural issues which the main character has to face and recover from. The important cultural values and references within the graphic novel, arouse the interest of various critics to analyze the novel further.

In other medium of expressions such as film, series, opera etc., there is a change in plot where the narrator has to fulfil the visual requirements of the audience. This results in the original storyline getting corrupted and the plot going in a different direction. In the graphic novel, the original plot is showcased without adding any additional changes and the whole narrative remains the same, only certain areas of less importance are being removed.

Representation of time is an important aspect in the storyline, considering *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel* (2019) graphic novel, we can see how the republic of Gilead showcases the period of historical times when religion was considered superior to individual self. But outside Gilead, the world remains that of the 21st century. Hence, both periods are maintained throughout the novel. Mythical and supernatural elements are added to the story to provide a unique perspective. Compared to verbal narrative style, visual narrative invoke the emotions of the readers. Through visual narrative, we can see the emotions along with the thoughts of the characters. Different types of methods can be used in graphic novels such as changing from one panel to another to maintain the focus of the reader.

Images, symbols, signs and colours are added to the original narrative which offers much more than the actual work. There are different types of layouts of graphic novels that indicate the direction of the plot. They depend on how the readers take in

the images of the following scenes and dialogues, providing a unique narrative experience to the readers. Some of the narrative, with the themes of mystery, fantasy, fiction, nonfiction, etc. are shown. Major themes showcases by graphic are sense of loss of identity, relationships, overcoming a situation, etc. but certain ones also show the major concerns which is faced by the society such as war and genocide.

According to Lynne Reid, British author of books for children and adults rightly remarks that "since the visualization has been done by the artist then it requires utmost concentration and imagining power to enter the world of dystopia which has been created" (*Imagination and Representation in Graphic Novels*, 3). Images not only signify but also become the medium through which we enter the imagination created by the artist. If the readers take it in the correct method to construct the text, then they will be able to analyze and interpret the text faster and also visualize the text. Visual Semiotics is used to interpret various signs and symbols used within the graphic novel and semiotics is the analysis of anything which can be taken as a sign or a symbol. Anything can be taken as a sign as long as it can be seen as some cultural preference or are part of the same group or society and they are conveying some idea or message.

They are mostly studied as anything which can be used to lie or if the lie itself is portrayed then, on the contrary, it reveals the truth. In *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel* (2019), the women mainly the handmaids wanted to believe that the whole existence of the republic of Gilead was a lie, we can take the example of Offred, as each day she believes reality is a dream and things will go back to the way it was next morning when she wakes up and she will be reunited with her family but that image remains as a lie in the novel. The realistic depiction in the story shows the

true reality which is faced by the people in everyday life through the medium of signs to show the readers the sense of the world portrayed in the novel.

‘Semiotics analysis’ studies both language and images used do not reflect reality but at the same time contributing to their construction. The purpose of semiotic analysis is quite specific as it aims to reveal and make the readers understand the hidden structures and the underlying cultural codes, and also show the prevailing meanings of the texts. They are also used in visualized texts and analyze not only the images but also the panels, the structure of the text, and the colours used. They analyze the relationship between the sign, the object, and the referent. We can take the example of the portrait painted by a person and who it should symbolize or represent. An icon can be considered a sign which shows resemblance and similarity with the object. An index indicates the direct relationship it has with the object. The symbol can be defined as something which is not directly connected with the object and yet normally associated with the object.

According to Barthes "visual meaning can be articulated into the two separate levels of denotation and connotation "(370) (*Rhetoric of the image*). ‘Denotation’ communicates the exact meaning of an image. The intermediate meaning corresponds with the symbolic and ideological meaning of the image and also other possible meanings. There is always a relationship between the image and the language, which is also possible in the case of movies and cartoons, and comics. Along with the image and language, words and pictures contribute their part to the overall story. Both of them convey their meanings and also combined meanings. The dialogue explains the meanings which are not to be found in the image and vice versa.

In “Mimesis as Make-Believe”, Kendall Walton says "playing games of make-believe when we appreciate fictional representations, in that we (the audience) are

imagining the fictional truths generated by the representation in question to be actually true"(3). He analyzes the text with the connection of appreciation and criticism of a book in mind, as the readers often tend to be attracted emotionally to the illustrations, and we often fail to notice the truth. He explains mimesis as just an exploration through various works of representation of arts, he states that for addressing the issues related to the fictional establishment and claims to the existence, he focuses on the idea that the notion of make-believe can provide a framework for the novels and reflect on what it means for a work to be mentioned as representational. Semiotic functions of indexicality and secondary iconicity help to understand the medium through which the panels are reconstructed by the formation of the images.

"Indexicality" refers to the signs where the signifier is caused by the signified and the iconic signs refer to the signifier resembling the signified. Here, they show the similarity between the object and their verbal shows.

Charles Sanders Peirce's Theory of Signs can also be applied here, his research on the importance of semiotics is a seminal here. He defines "sign as anything which is so determined by something else, called its Object, and so determines an effect upon a person, which effect I call its interpretant, that the latter is thereby mediately determined by the former"(478). The interpretant helps us understand the relation between sign and signifier. Object refers to something which is signified, for example, we can say it as an object with a word attached to it. Hence, the meaning of the sign is recognized by the readers from the interpretation generated by the artists.

Peirce claims that thoughts are in the form of signs, which can be seen in the novel as all the memories of Offred and dreams are portrayed in terms of signs and symbols. The nature of the object pressurizes the nature of the sign to fulfil the



requirements of a successful signification. This leads to the signs utilizing the habit or social rule or law that connects it with its objects, if so then the sign can be considered a symbol. For example, in the novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), the handmaidens were symbolized by the colour red which signified fertility. They had no right over their own choice of clothing and the colour of dressing was given to women to depict each role they have to play in society. Red for handmaidens, Green for mantras, Blue for wives, dull green for aunts, etc.

The sign determines an interpreter, if they do by taking an idea of the sign then the qualitative features employ it as signifying the object. Therefore, the sign can be considered a theme. If we start understanding a sign in terms of its qualities, then it suggests the object it may have and if we look into the sign, it determines an interpretant by shifting our focus on the understanding of the sign upon the existential features which are employed in signifying an object, then the sign can be called as a decent. In *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel* (2019), the name of the shops and other commodities turns into symbols to not let the people feel tempted by those. The shops for men remained like that but the shops for women have changed. Peirce explains how our ability to understand a sign relies upon terms of its place in some pattern of reasoning and system of signs which enables us to derive information from it.

Other than symbols and images, colors also convey various messages and provide an aesthetic feel to the graphic novel. The semiotics of color represents the meanings that can be conveyed through the color as a sign. They determine the meanings taken by the readers when they look at the colors of the signs. We need to look into that considering the economic, intellectual, and emotional aspects while understanding the color semiotics. Taking into the emotional aspect, it has on the

reader and when those emotions are evoked in the mind, it affects our psychological state. For example, Red is often used in the image, as the strong visibility tends to attract the viewers.

In some countries, like South Africa, they are used for mourning and the sacrifices they made to gain independence. In India, the color red is the most important color which is often used in cultural meanings and traditions, which symbolizes relationships, wealth, power, authority, fear, etc. Yellow is a color that symbolizes happiness and energy but when they are used against the background portrays a sense of danger etc. Blue is mainly associated with muscularity, both trust, and depression. In some countries, they portray safety and protection, they are also symbolic of various religions. The color green is often connected to nature, the environment, etc., in some countries they also symbolize freshness, luck, and spring, etc. In some south American countries, green symbolizes death and it is also forbidden in Indonesia. In the Middle East, they symbolize wealth, luck, prosperity, youth, fertility, new life form, etc. Black is a color that shows death, tragedy, darkness, depression, evil, etc. but it also symbolizes formality and rebirth. In the case of socio-economic meaning, for example, purple symbolizes the wealthy and the royals.

There are differences between the young audiences and the adult in the matter of colour preferences as the young audience is attracted by bright and vibrant colours while the adult is more attracted to classic colours when there is something to connect with value and warmth. In case of buildings, industries and factories tend to have cool colors and are used for clothing, buildings, and interior works. Whereas in primary sector, warm and vibrant colours are used. As far as cultural values are considered, red mostly symbolizes anger in some countries while in china, it's a colour of luck.

Blue is often associated with marine activities and is mostly used in river or Oceanside areas.

But they are considered evil in east Asian countries. Even though it is associated with a calm and cool state, they are often used to symbolize unhappiness. White is a symbol of peace, purity, hygiene, and intelligence but also refers to death or sterility. Other than that part, when we look into the other aspect of colour semiotics, such as texture, gloss, etc, then we can get an idea of perception and reaction. In *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel (2019)* where the colour red is associated with the handmaidens which symbolize fertility and they are considered to be important figures within the society but the red colour is associated with shame, when it comes to other divisions of the women as they are considered using the body to earn their title and the jealousy of not being able to conceive a child. The emotions and memories of Offred are portrayed in the colors red, white, and black. The red centre and the streets of Gilead are shown in a dark dull shade to symbolize the tyranny of the government and the oppression and subjugation of the women. Red is the colour mostly used in the novel which shows fertility, violence, oppression, tyranny, shame, etc. the handmaid tale revolves around the colour red which indicates the economic and cultural messages which are being put forth. Mostly dull and dark colours have been used to showcase the oppression and tyranny of the government and bright and warm colours.

In the case of cultural values, red mostly symbolises anger in some countries while in China, it is a colour of luck. Blue is often associated with marine activities and is mostly used in river or Oceanside areas. They are associated with a calm and cool state and is often used to symbolize unhappiness. White is a symbol of peace, purity, hygiene and intelligence but also refers to death or sterility. The most widely

used norms for gender colours are pink and blue. Pink for girls and blue for boys. Warm colours tend to be energizing and positive, they reflect passion, happiness, enthusiasm and energy. Orange represents change and movement, it's associated with creativity and it tends to be friendly and inviting.

To sum up, all the theories help in understanding the framework of the novel and graphic novel are worthy to be appreciated among all other adaptations, as they can put forth the ideas which the writer wants to convey while maintaining the original storyline of the work through images, signs and colours. In this version of *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel* (2019), Renee Nault has used various symbols and artworks concerning the emotions and thoughts of the characters as well as the hidden meanings behind the panels.

## Chapter 2

### Semiotic analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*

In *The Handmaid's Tale - The Graphic Novel* (2019), the hand cover of the book is glossy using watercolours and paints to form beautiful images and small neat handwriting. If we look into the graphic novel *The Handmaid's Tale - The Graphic Novel*, from the beginning we can see ourselves entering a world that is being controlled by the regime where women are subjugated and controlled by the regime. A system created to follow religious ideologies and opposed to the current lifestyle of the people.

Margret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale - The Graphic Novel*, which has been adapted in various forms such as graphic novel, series, opera, film etc. a work with different adaptations tends to showcase various instances of the novel in the mind of the readers. This dystopian novel proposes an issue which has a chance of taking place in the near future. While the novel provides the reader with their own imagination on the story taking place, the graphic novel gives a particular understanding of each event taking place and the respective characters by visual interpretation. Since the publication of the graphic novel tends to be after a long duration from the original work, there will be many differences in viewpoints of the readers since the opinion of the readers will be changed due to cultural and political differences. But in this situation, we can see our imagination and the representation of the artist having a clash, which is exciting and infatues the readers to continue the story.

There are various signs and symbols in the novel, which portrays the hidden meanings and feelings of the characters. Such as the red leaves as a symbol of separation from her husband and abortive escape from the republic of Gilead. Gilead symbolizes the eye with wings, the flowers in the garden of the wife 'Serena Joy' take on the sinister form of hanged handmaidens, and the object that brings these two together. The ceiling itself is in the shape of a wreath that watches over Offred. Her actions and behaviour are continuously being monitored, hence she can always be seen wearing an expressionless face. She only feels comfortable to be herself at night, when she is alone.

The story proceeds with events, where the memories of the main protagonist 'Offred' is being fragmented through the novel, the representation of time and the coexistence of dream and reality provides a critical framework for the readers with the ongoing events and the past of Offred. It helps in showcasing the state before and after the regime took control of the people. Such as the juxtaposition of troubling memories, the memories of the protagonist and her longing to wake up in the past are captured. She is trying to admit to herself that the current regime is a dream and the next morning, she will wake up and be with her family.

Along with visual representation, symbols are also used, such as instance of the arrival of the tourists from Japan, and they tend to be wearing modern clothes which are of the 21st Century but the handmaids feel disgusted by them, even though they too once wore the clothes according to their comfort. It can be seen to what extent the women were brainwashed to fit into the system as their original viewpoints and ideals were changed. As Offred says in the novel "Then I think: I used to dress

like that. That was freedom. It has taken so little time to change our minds about things like this” (Attwood, Ch. 2).



Fig.1.The tourists from Japan visiting the Republic of Gilead. *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*.

They are made to be the symbol of the Republic of Gilead where they have to express pride and happiness as they are meant to follow the natural order of hierarchy and have a life being protected from all kinds of violence, women are subjected to. Through the graphic novel, the readers can understand the true state of horror and tormenting life the people are going through, mostly women. The difference in their past life and after the control of the regime, showcases how their rights and freedom were taken and enforced the rule of tyranny, subjecting the women and empowering the men. Using the notion of religion as a mode of representation to brainwash the women, making them believe their role is within the domestic sphere and their role as a handmaid is a chance to correct their crimes. The art style captures the emotions felt by the characters and the restricted lifestyle they have to go through. Even though film and series show both the visual representation, they have their limitations, they cannot be compared to invoke the same feeling in the readers as in graphic novel,

none of the other mediums can portray the character's feelings and thoughts. The way the brush strokes are done, the usage of colours, dull colours to portray a dark environment and bright colours to present the past of Offred. The use of symbols and colours are symbolic of their own identity.

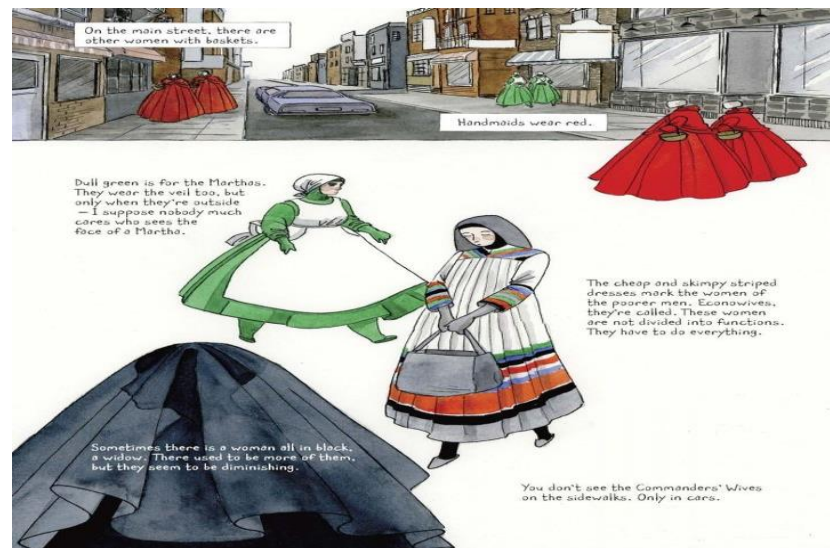


Fig.2.The colours assigned to the women. *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*.

Women are assigned with a certain colour to identify their role in the society such as red for the handmaiden who acts as a vessel for producing children and continuing the next generation of the regime, green for mantras, they are assigned with the duties of household chores and cooking, blue for the wives of the commanders etc. Each colour symbolizes the hierarchical order in their domestic sphere. Dull green for aunts, they are the only hierarchical women as they are provided with power to dominate other women and force them to follow their role in the society through religion. The dull green worn by the aunts and the Marthas are different, as the dull green clothing of the aunt indicates a militant authority as its the colour mostly worn by the soldiers. They had power over the handmaidens, to educate



them to ensure their use in reproducing. All these roles of the women are prone to limit themselves to the domestic sphere as they are made to believe it's because of the freedom and rights that the women were being violated and abused. The poor women wear cheap and skimpy stripped dresses, they are called as econowives, having each strip of colour in their clothing mentions their work in each field, they are not divided into any category.

They tend to make their fabric from the leftover clothing from other class of woman as they cannot afford to buy fabric. The children are made to wear white clothing which indicate the purity. After the death of the commander, the colour black is worn but the wives, where black shows the loss, mourning etc. among all these women, only the handmaidens are the ones which is restricted to too many rules and regulations because they are considered to have the most important function among others, to ensure to produce the next generation of the Gilead. They are protected from other men and always provided with security. But they are looked down on from other women as if they have voluntarily agreed to be a handmaid. As the colour red is associated with shame and vulgarity, others consider the work of the handmaids as vulgar and shameful. Even though they have to be respected according to the rules, other women look down on them and others are forced to take care of them. To the Mantras, they are just another household chore they have to complete.

With the government negotiating with the women by taking away their rights and freedom in exchange for security and protection. In the novel *The Handmaid's Tale- The Graphic Novel* (2019), the message of the subjugation of the women was conveyed, though that scenario was changed in other adaptations, in some adaptations, the idea of the novel was conveyed as such but in the series, the main

protagonist 'Offred' was shown as the heroic figure towards the end rather than the original storyline where she accepted her fate and continued to live under the regime. No action or revolt has been done from her side to protest against the Republic of Gilead whereas in the series, she started to revolt against the regime with the support of other handmaids to bring down the regime, even causing the death of the commander

When converted to series, film etc., the original story line gets hindered as to give out the drama and screenplay to invoke the sense of excitement in the mind of the viewers. In the graphic novel, only certain parts from the novel are modified accordingly to provide a continuous storyline, the less important parts of the novel were omitted by Renee Nault. Through the mix of both verbal and visual interpretation, the art style and use of colours can be used to reveal the emotions which the character wants to express.

Graphic adaptation captures the target audience with its innovative techniques to showcase various themes and genres. In the graphic novels, there are hardly any blank spaces and they are mostly used by the artist to propose symbols and signs. The image portrayed on both the pages captures the juxtaposition of the troubled memories and situations. The image showed on two pages invoke the main message the character or the scene is conveying,

In the graphic novel, there is a division of the whole body by identifying one as outer body and inner body, there is this fragmentation to illustrate the idea of the outer body being obliged to follow the social norms and ruled without having any individual thought, the inner body being the carrier of the self-thought and emotions which cannot be displayed outside just as the subconscious mind. As Offred always

mentions as they are nothing but two legged wombs, they are just used for the process of reproduction. In the novel, during their stay in the red center, they were often brainwashed and tormented, as even if the women are beaten it should not matter, only the fact of them being fertile is considered. They are made to obey the system and cope into the role of the handmaiden. This dystopian novel contains the theory of Marxism and the theme of construction and reconstruction, the religious ideology etc. the story starts with the main protagonist being sent to the commander's house to produce the child. As the story continues, the harsh reality of the regime was brought into light evoking the feeling of horror and trauma in the readers.

Since there is a wide gap between the original novel and graphic novel, the readers will be able to analyze the problems faced clearly and perceive it from a different view point. The past before the Republic of Gilead was enforced, was shown in bright colours depicting the freedom and rights the people enjoyed. After the rights which the women fought so hard for were once again taken away, as the women were confined into the duties of the domestic sphere and the man dominated the society. Not even basic rights were granted to women, their choice of clothing, education was denied to women, throughout the novels red and dark colours have been used.

The dark background to signify the terror of the regime, such as following the religious ideology, all the crimes such as abortion, gender treachery, divorce etc are considered to be a sin. The women who have committed the sins but are fertile are taken as handmaids while others are left in the colonies. Men who performed abortion or were homosexual were killed and their bodies were hanged on the walls, the citizens should feel anger and disgust by seeing them. The religious teachings were a medium through which the women were made to behave in the society. The colour

red which signifies blood, violence, fertility, reproduction in the novel, places a great importance in the story. Such as the instance where in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* (1850), the women had to wear the letter A, the handmaidens had to wear the colour red to signify the purpose which is reproduction. The particular colour system assigned to the women describes their position in the society



Fig.3. The bodies are displayed on the wall. *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*.

Even though the handmaidens are strictly monitored, the main protagonist Offred tends to assert her feelings and create a sense of freedom for herself. The stealing of flowers at night and hiding butter from the meals can be examples of that. Since the handmaidens are made to feel like machines which gives birth, they are trained to not show any emotion. They cannot love nor show affection to another male even the commander, as they are to feel sorry for the wives, because of which the handmaidens including Offred tend to feel lonely and have a desire for wanting to be loved as a human being. She hence finds the feeling of comfort in other males such as

Nick and the commander, she feels a sense of happiness after knowing that the commander loves spending time with her rather than his own wife.

Representations of time from the state before and after the regime have been portrayed. After the demolition of the democratic government, the republic of Gilead came into existence and the lives of the people were followed according to religious ideology. If we look at the state before the demolition, we can say that one of the reasons the regime was formed was due to the state the people were living in before. Poverty, kidnapping, public protest, oppression, violence against women, the pollution and radiation causing the steady decline in the birth rate etc. Hence, this regime established what they called the natural order of the public spheres. The handmaidens were removed from their original identity and offered a new name, "Of" added to the name of the commander they are assigned to show that the handmaiden belong to that place. It can be said that such a state is possible in the future, as the current state the people are going towards, the destruction of the land and species, the pollution caused by the industries and the crime rate going up. Revolt and protest against the government in various areas, the central not taking the rights of the citizens into consideration etc.

Renee Nault visualised the characters and gave them a unique presence in the novel. Overall, the novel shows an aesthetic feel, various myths and fairy-tale structure has been included in the novel. The main significance in the story is that of the night, as that is the only time where Offred can express her true emotions and be herself. During the day, she feels as if her every movement and actions are being watched, hence she rarely expresses her emotions and is often seen with an expressionless face. She lets her thoughts wander into the past and longing for those

days where she was happy with her husband and her child. She yearns to escape her reality of pain and suffering.

The graphic novel captures the intense emotions and her longing to see the family, the teaching she used to undergo in the red centre and the process of demolition of the government taking place. The trauma she is going through due to her daughter being forcefully taken away from her and she does not know whether her husband is alive or dead. When she passes alongside the wall, she hopes that her husband is not dead, as all the doctors who have committed abortion are hanged to the wall with the symbol of foetus placed on their chest to reveal their crime. These are displayed to educate the people as abortion is a serious crime as per religious ideology. Other than the memories, she thinks about the message the previous handmaids left for her, conveying the fact that one can escape this tormenting life by taking their own life and finding happiness. She feels as if the previous handmaid is whispering and calling her to join her. The commander is depicted as an old man with grey hair and has a powerful appetite. Even though he wears a cold expression.

Serena, the commander's wife is portrayed as a cold and hypocrite who is displayed as a character who wants others to follow the natural hierarchy and women should be subjugated to the domestic sphere and support their husband, but it's ironic that she had to live that kind of lifestyle now. She disregards the role of handmaids in her house and hates the fact of someone taking over her authority.

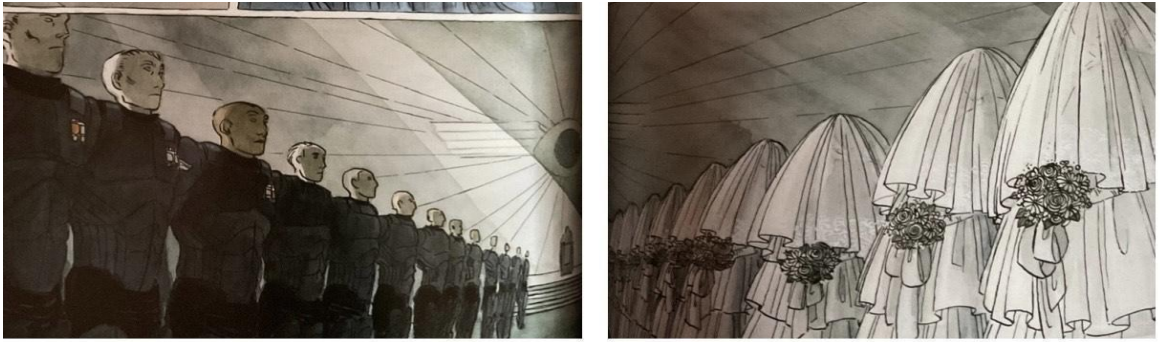


Fig.4.The wedding of the angel. *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*.

All the handmaids had to gather to witness the delivery of the baby, the wedding of the angels and the execution of the people who violated the rules. During the delivery time, the handmaids gather around the woman who is due and yell “hold” “breathe” “inhale” “exhale” etc. During the contradictions the wives massage the tummy of the wife whose handmaids was giving birth as if she is the one giving birth, this is done to not let the wife feel as if she could not conceive. During the time of the delivery the handmaid has to deliver the baby in a birthing tool between the legs of the wives. The handmaids are not allowed to show any emotions or feelings towards their child.



Fig.5. The handmaid giving birth. (*The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*)

During the time of the execution, mostly the convicts are being beaten by the handmaids to death, these convicts are basically the people who revolt against the governments or feminists. All the women who conceive another man's child other than the commanders are hanged to death, both the handmaid and the wife who helped her.

The panels on the two pages signifies something significant, such as on the first page, the handmaids lying on the bed with aunts patrolling the area, the eye on the corner of the page shows how the women are being oppressed and restricted to make their own choices. Since all the movements were monitored and no conversation was allowed with each other, they learned to lip read without turning their heads and touch each other's palm when the aunts were not watching. The handmaid lying on the bed and the aunt patrolling the area, at the corner of the page, showcases a large eye which explains the fact that they are under a strict surveillance of the government, their movements and behaviour are being monitored to ensure discipline among the maidens. Since only a few fertile women were left due to severe pollution and radiation, most of the women have gone sterile resulting in steady decline of population.

In the Red Centre, they are made to believe that all violence that happened to women is their own fault, hence they need to be punished and thus they need to fulfil the responsibility of giving birth to the heir of the commanders. The handmaidens who could not conceive a child were punished in inhumane ways and left in the colonies where they had no mode of survival, as the quote from the novel says "there are no sterile men only women who are infertile". (Atwood, Ch. 4)





Fig.6. The handmaids are monitored in the Red Center. *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel.*

The name of the places and shops are converted into symbols and the women are restricted from any sort of beauty products as in Mayday. Only the inner body matters as for the handmaids only the fact that they are fertile matters, hence we can see in the novel how Offred hides the bar of butter which she gets for breakfast so that she could apply on her face.

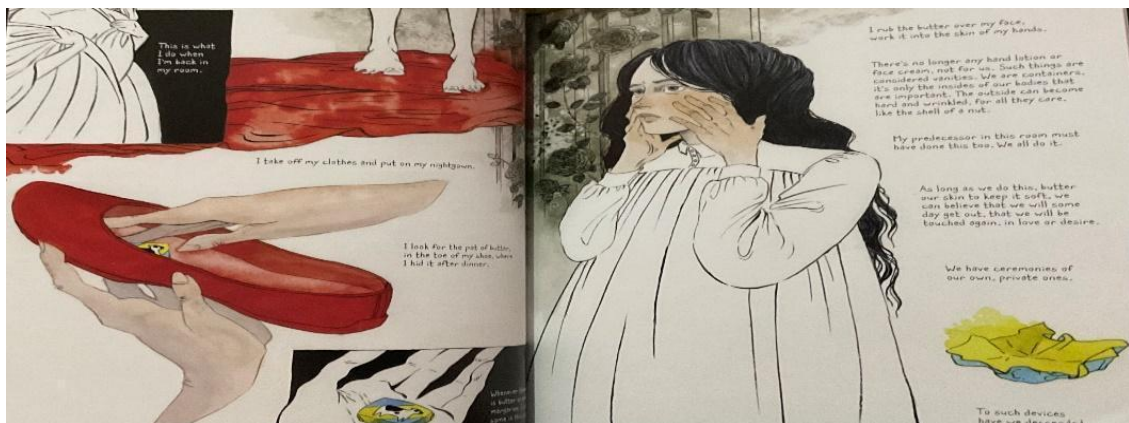


Fig.7. Offred stealing butter. *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel.*

Symbols are used in the story to convey the feeling, as the red leaves scattered in the back background depicts both the autumnal abortive escape from the republic of Gilead and the separation of offered from her husband.

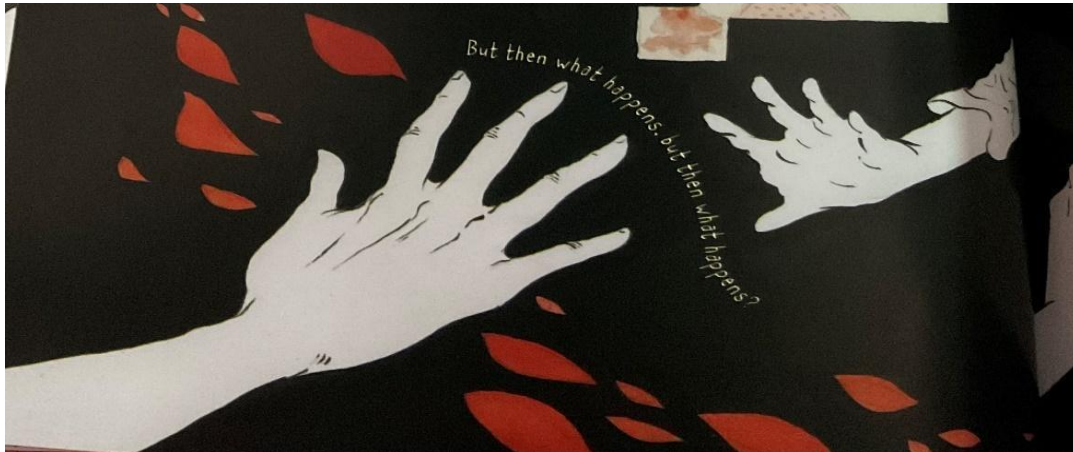


Fig.8.The red leaves which represents Offred's separation from her family. *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*.

Certain instances such as stealing something which will go unnoticed from others and commanders calling her late at night which was not allowed. All these instances led to her being offered a different kind of authority than the wife. These were her tiny steps in revolting against the regime and breaking the rules which were established.



Fig.9.The commander and Offred playing scrabbles.

*The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*.

The commander asking her to play the game of scrabbles and showing her the banned magazines made her feel different as he mentioned he never did these with his wife, as she has changed.

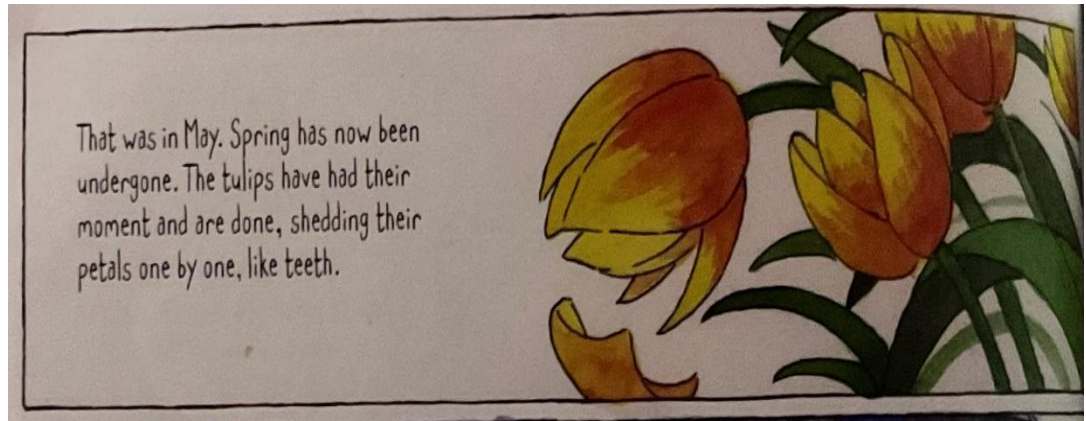


Fig.10.The tulips representing women. *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel*.

The tulips in the novel, bloom in the spring, they are beautiful but after the season, they slowly wither away. They are similar to the situation of women, as they have their freedom and rights before the regime. They were independent women who had the right to choose who they want to be or what they want to do in their lives, they can question anyone if their rights are being attacked but now they are barely surviving in the tyranny without any rights nor freedom.

Their choices, their dress style and even their body is controlled by the government. They have no choice but to obey those rules so that they can survive with the hope that someday it will turn back to normal and they can see their families and get back their freedom. Makeup, symbolizing sexuality and freedom and the nostalgia of her past self, since the handmaids now cannot wear makeup or use any face cream. In chapter twelve of *The Handmaid's Tale-The Graphic Novel* (2019), the commander

orders her to wear short dress and make up, of course she feels awkward and uncomfortable since she is prone to wearing the red dress and no makeup, she gets a feel of the past when she used to do all these things.

In the novel, along with the religious ideology, the feminist propaganda is decreased as some women in the novel such as Serena and Offred's mother believed in the traditional gender roles as men and women had their own separate roles which they have to fulfil in the society. Both when faced with reality both of them gave up on their ideology. The cold and emotionless expression is always shown on Serena as once she used to be a beautiful young opera singer and had her own viewpoints on society and believed in women being doing the household jobs and staying at home. But those statements backfired her as she quickly faced the backlash from public for her absurd remarks but now she has to live in that reality under the regime and faced with unhappy lifestyle. Her authority now is only limited to her household; she hates Offred thinking that her authority will be challenged. In the house of the commander most rooms have blue wallpaper which can indicate the wife's authority. Other themes of religious ideology, protest against tyranny and oppression of women are emphasized in the novel.

In conclusion, we can analyse various aspects of *The Handmaid's Tale-The Graphic Novel* (2019) and look into depth of various signs and symbols which are used in the novel to signify various meanings.

## Conclusion

Graphic novels were formed from the idea of comics, which were considered childish and believed to not impart any knowledge to the readers. They were not taken into consideration by the literary critics who tend to look down on them but soon the graphic novels came into the forefront. The interesting narrative style of the graphic novels started to capture the interest of the readers and slowly started to gain fame. But some critics agree and disagree with the fact that graphic novels put forth literary values. It was often considered that they tend to destroy the imagination of the reader by visualizing the narratives of a plot but rather they put forth the same ideas and visualization which the author wants to showcase through the narratives.

As a reader tends to have their points of view and their visualization of the plot will be different from another reader, gradually the original concept tends to fade. Also, graphic novels help in showcasing various plots and concepts which the narrative style cannot bring forth. Adding mystical and supernatural elements with a unique framework of the graphics tends to capture the interest of the reader. Visualizing the narration can evoke emotions within the reader, as in *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel* (2019), the readers can feel the horror and tyranny felt by the people in the republic of Gilead through the graphic adaptation rather than the other adaptations.

The theory of representation of Time, Visual Semiotics, Theory of Signs, and Colour semiotics help in analysing the graphic novel from a better perspective. Various signs and symbols are used in graphic novels to convey hidden meanings and messages, which cannot be conveyed through the novel narrative

If we take Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: Story of Childhood* (2000), she used the graphic novel as a medium to represent her story. The oppressed lifestyle she had to go through brought terror into the mind of the readers. The graphic novel is the only medium through which the world can understand the tyranny and oppression of women in Afghanistan.

*The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel* (2019) speaks about the oppression of women and how the government took control of their reproductive choices and used them as a vessel to produce children for the commanders. The regime supports male supremacy and subjugation of women; it is a dystopian world following religious ideology. Renee Nault conveyed various messages which are hidden within the novel, the images within the two panels tend to convey various meanings and various artworks. The dark and dull atmosphere tend to showcase the horror and tyranny of the Republic of Gilead. Rather than the symbols, each colour tends to portray various instances. For example, the colour red is mostly used in the novel which showcases violence, fertility, reproduction etc.

Each color is assigned to women in order to identify their role in the system, such as red for the handmaids, blue for the wives and green for the Martha, econowives have each fabric attached to their clothing, as the fabrics are in scarcity, and they cannot afford proper clothing. Colors tend to create each woman's power and domination within the system. The ideas and opinions of women are brainwashed into thinking that following the ideology will lead to a life of satisfaction and happiness. The people no longer revolt or fight for their rights, they accept the mission of the government and willingly follow the rules.

If we consider the other adaptations, the graphic novel seems to showcase more concepts and ideas. In *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel* (2019), if we compare it to the other adaptations, the graphic adaptation has maintained the originality and the unique artwork and it portrays the author's visualization of the plot, whereas the other adaptations have made significant changes in the plot and the characters, which diverted the plot. They tend to create more drama and heroism to capture the interests of the viewers.

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