CHAPTER VI
SUMMING UP

The act of murder dates back to ancient religions, mythologies, histories and literatures of the world and it is found in all its hues: religious murders, ritualistic murders, political murders, domestic murders and the like—all proclaim the fact that ‘murder’ is as old as humanity. What we see here is the disturbing tendency to justify it—even a cruel murder is made to entail a sort of justification. It is to say that murder is committed with a motive/purpose, altruistic or atavistic. The gradual ideologization of murder has been found in all cultures, West and East. The rise of civilization has never abetted but only intensified this unholy alliance between murder and ideology for in recent thinkings and writings, we see its blatant strategic employment as a weapon of ideology. Murder is openly treated not as an end in itself but as a means of achieving an end. Literature, in its aesthetic portrayal of murder, also parallels other disciplines in discoursing on the moral implications and complications of the growing nexus between ideology and murder. And this nexus deserves a detailed analysis and on the strength of this proposition, this thesis involved a study of novels of the twentieth century American Literature to investigate the complexity of ideologically driven murders.

The introductory chapter traces the genealogy of the treatment of murder in literature from ancient to modern times, for ‘homicide’ has been
one of the common themes in world literature ever since the beginnings of
the classical literatures across cultures. Homer who dealt with different
kinds of murders like patricide, matricide, fratricide, suicide, etc., in his
epics, The Iliad and The Odyssey could be said to have influenced not
only the Greek tragedians, like Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides but
also the entire gamut of European writers of the past and the present. In
English literature the handling of murder can be traced back to Morality
plays of the ninth century A.D. and later to Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales of
the fourteenth century. The Revenge tragedies and Shakespeare’s
tragedies followed suit, paving the way for crime thrillers and detective
fiction. And in American literature, which is comparatively of recent
origin, we find writers repeatedly preoccupied with the theme of murder
in all its ramifications. The three major novelists of the twentieth century
America, Dreiser, Mailer and Wright have written novels of ideological
murder, and these novels ignited the present researcher’s critical curiosity
to study the twentieth century American fiction from this viewpoint. The
novels taken for study are: Theodore Dreiser’s An American Tragedy
(1925), Richard Wright’s Native Son (1940), Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita
(1955), Norman Mailer’s An American Dream (1965), John Cheever’s
Falconer (1977), Valerie Miner’s Murder in the English Department
(1982) and Jack Higgins’s The President’s Daughter (1997). All the
novelists have captured in words the predicament of their protagonists
who, trapped in their ideology ranging from materialistic to racial, commit murder out of a psychological conflict between the fear of the loss of their existence/identity and the motif to gain/regain power or reassert their identity.

The physical and psychological conditions of the murderer-protagonists, the ideals that impelled them to commit murder, the rationale of the murder, their preparedness and un-preparedness for the murder, the kind of ideology of each of the murderers and their pre-murder psychic conditions are analyzed in the second Chapter. Some of these murderer-protagonists are afraid of, and mentally tormented by, their victims, and they are forced to resort to murder as an act of self defence. For instance, Bigger Thomas of Native Son, nurtures both fear and hatred for his victim Mary; Richards Rojack of An American Dream fears and detests his victim, his arrogant wife, Deborah; Farragut of Falconer both fears and hates his murderous brother Eben, his victim; Marjorie Adams of Murder in the English Department dreads her victim, her professor, Angus Murchie for his sexual assault; Clyde Griffiths of An American Tragedy fears his victim, his poor beloved, Roberta Alden, that she will spoil his chances of marrying the wealthy Sondra Finchley; Humbert Humbert of Lolita, fears his victim, Quilty, that he will be a constant peril to the peaceful life of his beloved, Lolita, and Judas of The President's Daughter fears the Muslim terrorist Sharif-Al-Hakim and the other Muslim
terrorists and so he kills them. Analyzing the ideologies of the murderer-protagonists of these select novels, the chapter discussed the various ideologies behind the murders: Bigger Thomas's racial ideology, Richards Rojack's American Dream ideology based on power, Farragut's familial ideology, Marjorie Adam's gender ideology, Clyde Griffith's American Dream ideology, Humbert Humbert's love ideology and Judas's Jewish nationalistic ideology. It studied the link between the protagonists and their ideologies and examined the protagonists' obsessions if any, or otherwise with their ideologies and their pre-criminal psychology in planning the execution of the murder in such an intelligent manner as to deceive law and the police.

The circumstantial compulsions that drive the murderer-protagonists to commit murder, the methods and manners adopted by them in their execution of the murder, their physical and psychological conditions at the time of murder and the link between their ideologies and the murder situation were elaborately analysed in Chapter three. It has been found that the category of accidental murderer-protagonists like Bigger Thomas of Native Son, Richards Rojack of An American Dream, Farragut of Falconer and Marjorie Adams of Murder in the English Department happens to encounter murder situations accidentally. They murder their victims either with their hands or with any weapon available at the spot. On the contrary, those of the category of calculated murderer-
protagonists like Clyde Griffths of *An American Tragedy*, Humbert Humbert of *Lolita* and Judas of *The President’s Daughter* conspire their murders in advance, create the murder-situation at their convenience and kill their victims with lethal weapons like pistols. It is also discovered that the first category murderers like Bigger Thomas, Rojack, Farragut and Marjorie are psychologically disturbed, irritated or provoked by their victims to a fit of anger and so they resort to murder impulsively, whereas the second category murderers, except Clyde to some extent, are determined, cool and unprovoked by their victims at the time of murder. There is a strong link between the murder situation and the protagonist’s ideology in the case of each of the murderer-protagonists and these links have been brought under scrutiny and discussed in detail in this chapter. The chapter also pointed out how the murder situation in each of these novels facilitates the protagonists in executing the murder in order to realize their ideology.

The consequences of the murders, the physical and psychic conditions of the murderer-protagonists after the murder and their attempts to cover up the murder and hoodwink the law in order to go unscathed are analyzed in the fourth Chapter. It also examined certain issues like whether these protagonists achieved what they wanted to achieve through murder and whether they felt remorse for their crime or justified their act. Some of these protagonists like Bigger Thomas and
Richards Rojack feel mentally rejuvenated, whereas others like Clyde Griffiths and Marjorie Adams are mentally troubled after executing their murders. All these murderer-protagonists, except Humbert Humbert, attempt either to hide their murders or to hoodwink law for safe survival—Bigger Thomas, at first conceals the murder but when he is suspected, he runs for his life; Rojack pushes Deborah’s body down from the tenth floor and passes off the murder as suicide; Farragut denies having murdered his brother Eben; Marjorie afraid of arrest absconds the scene, Clyde Griffiths lies that he did not drown his beloved, Roberta; and Judas changes his identity and evades the detectives to escape arrest. It is found that some of these murderer-protagonists like Rojack, Humbert and Marjorie are successful, and some of them like Clyde, Farragut and Judas are not successful in realizing their ideologies through murder. Bigger Thomas, despite his death by electrocution, is partially successful in realizing his ideology. An analysis of these novels also revealed that none of these protagonists, except Clyde to some extent, feels remorse for his act of murder and that each of them justifies his murder as a necessity to realize his ideology.

The fifth Chapter discussed the issues like, whether the treatment of murder affects the literary credence of a work of art, whether the ideology incorporated in a work of art affects its literary merits or the literary work that treats ideology affects the philosophical value of the ideology. The
chapter also analyzes such interesting aspects as the point of view of the narration, the justification or disapproval of the murder according to the point of view, and its support of or opposition to the activities of the murderer-protagonist through the use of imagery, similes or metaphors. It is found that in all novels, except in *An American Tragedy* and *The President’s Daughter*, the narrative point of view justifies or supports the murder of their protagonists. It traces the biographical elements in the novels like *Native Son*, *An American Tragedy*, and the autobiographical elements in *An American Dream*, *Murder in the English Department* and *Falconer*. Analysing the presentation of murder and the murder scene of the selected novels, the chapter revealed that these novels treat murder in a more aesthetic and less awesome manner in contrast to the stomach-curdling, popular, murder-mysteries of the twentieth century.

Since Murder is a ‘general cultural phenomenon’, which is specially social, legal or psychological, it has become a daily news item in the media and a recurring, obsessive theme in a wide variety of artistic fictions (Black 6). In this form, murder can be studied in a relatively disinterested mode as a morally neutral phenomenon, in contrast to the approach taken by the sociologist, the criminologist, and the pathologist, all of whom treat murder as a moral problem and a social problem, as opposed to a metaphysical evil (Black 6). Hence the study of murder in literature has become a significant subject “in revealing the murderer’s
undetermined, metaphysical dimension” (Black 6). Though the treatment of the theme of murder dates back to the days of the classical Greek writers Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, the appreciation of the literary treatment of murder as an aesthetic experience started only with the publication of De Quincey’s “Murder” essays in 1827.

More than the aesthetic analysis of the handling of murder in literary works, the inquiry into the rationale of the murder which impels the murderer to commit such a crime, and into the motivating factors on the psyche of the murderer have become an area of concern for the literary critics of the post-modern period. Therefore, the thesis has analyzed the various factors involved in the making of the ideologies of the murderer-protagonists, their victimization by the society, their frustrations, their psychic conditions before the murder, the impediments they face in realizing their dreams, their execution of the murder with the hope of accomplishing their ideologies, and their success or failure in realizing what they wanted to achieve through the murder. It has been established that the murderer-protagonists of all these novels use murder as a powerful weapon in clearing off the impediments they come across in realizing their dreams, their ideologies.

All these murderer-protagonists were victims of different kinds of oppression and as a result, each of them has been forced to frame an ideology of his own to emancipate either himself or his society. For
instance, Bigger Thomas of Native Son, victim of the white racial oppression, is forced to frame his racial ideology in his attempt to liberate his race; Captain Daniel Levy alias Judas of The President’s Daughter, victim of the Muslim terrorists, is compelled to formulate his Jewish nationalistic ideology with the intention of emancipating his vulnerable Jewish race; Marjorie Adams of Murder in the English Department, victim of Professor Angus Murchie’s sexual advances, is forced to assume her gender ideology; Richards Rojack of An American Dream, victim of his disloyal wife’s murderous assaults and venomous words, is forced to adapt the American dream ideology of freedom, power and material comforts; similarly, Clyde Griffiths of An American Tragedy, victim of childhood poverty, hunger and humiliation, is made to conceive his American dream ideology of wealth and material comforts; Farragut of Falconer, victim of the murderous behavior of the members of his family, designs his familial ideology; and Humbert Humbert of Lolita, a victim of betrayal in love and in married life, devises his love ideology.

Besides analyzing the different kinds of ideologies that were the motivating factors in triggering the murderer-protagonists to commit murder, the thesis examined the question as to how far the murderer-protagonists succeeded in realizing their ideology through murder. It is found that some of them like Richards Rojack of An American Dream, Marjorie Adams of Murder in the English Department and Humbert
Humbert of *Lolita* are successful and some of them like Clyde Griffiths of *An American Tragedy*, Ezekiel Farragut of *Falconer* and Judas of *The President's Daughter* are not successful in realizing their ideologies through murder. But Bigger Thomas of *Native Son* is partially successful in achieving his goal.

Though some of these protagonists, like Bigger and Judas, whose ideologies are based on the public interest like the emancipation of their race, cannot succeed in their attempt to realize their ideology through murder, they also succeed to the extent of paving the way for the freedom of their races in the years to come; their failure is only a success in awakening the spirit of struggle for freedom among the people of their races. Though these protagonists fail in their attempt to attain their target, their endeavour to accomplish it, itself is a kind of success, as the Tamil Sage poet Thiruvalluva rightly says in *The Sacred Kurral*: Who aims at elephant, though dart should fail, has greater raise / Than he who woodland hare with winged arrow slays (107).

Though these murderer-protagonists die in their attempt, they sow the seeds of the freedom of their race, in their death. On the other hand, the success of some other murderer-protagonists like Richards Rojack, who realizes his materialistic American Dream ideology of power through murder, cannot be treated as a real success from the ethical, social and religious point of view. Rojack’s success is not better than the failure of
Bigger Thomas who dies for the sake of his racial ideology. When Rojack experiences a dead-life through his materialistic ideology, Bigger Thomas, experiences life in death.

Farragut’s familial ideology that compelled him to murder his brother, Eben, when the latter provoked him, Humbert Humbert’s love ideology which forced him to avenge his betrayer in love, Clare Quilty, and Clyde Griffiths’s American dream ideology of possessing wealth and social status which impelled him to murder his impregnated beloved, Roberta Alden, in order to marry the wealthy Sondra Finchley are some of the bad examples which should be discarded by the modern society in order to live a happy and peaceful life. Thus the study of the treatment of ideological murder in fiction is not simply a research accomplished for the sake of research alone. It is a study of human psyche under specific critical situations which drives man to resort to murder; it is a study of man’s avarice and ambition that lead him towards the gallows; it is a study of human follies which one should fear in one’s life; and it is a study that enlightens one of the dangers of social evils which are capable of transforming a man into a pervert or a murderer, and leading him towards his catastrophe. The treatment of ideological murders in literature and the study of such murders are therefore not without epistemological value.
The study of crime and murder in literature throws more light on some of the unknown recesses of the human psychology in a given circumstance. As Aristotle speaks about purgation in connection with the tragedy, the study of murder also has a cathartic effect on the minds of the readers. Further, such studies make them realize the human predicaments that force man towards committing murder.

The problematics regarding the rightness of murder can be viewed from the standpoint of aesthetics or sociology rather than from the ethical or legal point of view. Aesthetics may treat murder as any other artefact and appreciate the act of murder and the skill of the murderer. The sociologist views murder from the point of view of the society and justifies or condemns a murder on the basis of its merits to the society—he will justify the killing of a monstrous villain and condemn the killing of an innocent man. On the other hand, religion condemns murder as a sin, and penology condemns it as a crime deserving capital punishment. The role of the literary study of the novels treating ideological murders, therefore, is not simply to justify or condemn the protagonists’ acts of murder; but to trace such important facts as the root-cause of the murder, the politics involved in the murder and the influences on the murderer, and to find out a solution to eradicate such maladies from the society. Such a study of murder should examine how an individual becomes a murderer as a result of such factors as his poverty, heredity, cupidity,
addiction, bad habits, circumstances or provocation, and should substantiate how the politics—racial, gender, materialistic or power politics—involved in the murder is detrimental or beneficial to the society. Therefore this thesis took up the task of analysing the seven select novels from the twentieth century and assayed to discover such aspects as the various factors involved in the murderer-protagonists’ formation of their ideologies, which impelled them to commit murder, the link between their ideologies and their personal life, their psychic condition before, during and after the commitment murder, and the consequences of the murder.

The novels treating ideological murders, like any other novel, can contain a variety of artistic assumptions other than treating murder and ideology. Therefore, the irony in the title of Mailer’s *An American Dream*, which is a criticism of American life, the white racial oppression on the black and the black’s protest in Wright’s *Native Son*, the sexual perversion and paedophilia in Nabokov’s *Lolita*, homosexuality and drug-addiction resulting in hysteria and murder as in Mailer’s *An American Dream* and Cheever’s *Falconer*, cruelty and kindness in the American prison life as portrayed in *Falconer, An American Dream, An American Tragedy* and *Native Son*, history and fiction in Jack Higgins’s *The President’s Daughter*, sexual harassment and gender oppression on the University campus in Valerie Miner’s *Murder in the English Department*
are aspects that need to be explored further so as to enable one to view these texts more of literary pieces than of mere propagandistic treatises of different kinds of ideologies.