The act of murder dates back to ancient religions, mythologies, histories and literatures of the world. "Murder" 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 this proposition, this thesis involved a study of the novels of the twentieth century American Literature to investigate the complexity of ideologically driven murders.
Chapter I: Introduction: A Re-view of Murder and Ideology in Literature 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 culture. 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 the Shakespearean 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 its entire 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 to study the twentieth century American fiction from this view point. Hence the thesis proposes to explore the different forms of the critical relationship between ideology and murder with reference to the following seven
representative novels: 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’ *The President’s Daughter* (1997). All the authors of these novels, hailing from the twentieth century American background but from its different milieus, are engaged in delineating the predicament of their protagonists, who, trapped in their ideology ranging from materialistic to racial, commit murder in extreme circumstances in their life impelled by fear of the loss of their existence/identity in order to gain/regain power.

**Chapter II: The Rationale of Murder and the Status of Ideology**

*Before Murder* focuses on the pre-murder facet of the protagonists’ lives analyzing the ‘ideological’ cause of the murder in each of the novels. It explores such aspects as the physical and psychological conditions of the murderer-protagonists, the factors that impel them to commit murder, the rationale of their murders, premeditated or unpremeditated, the link between the murderer-protagonists and their ideology, the intensity of their ideology before murder and the kind of ideology of each of them propelling them to commit murder. The chapter elucidates that the murderer-protagonists’ fear and hate of their victims, forces them to resort to murder in their attempt to
liberate themselves. For instance, Bigger Thomas of Native Son both fears and hates his victim, Mary Dalton, whom he murders in order to overcome his fear; Richards Rojack of An American Dream fears and detests his victim, his arrogant wife, Deborah; Farragut of Falconer, like Bigger and Rojack, both fears and hates his victim, his murderous brother, Eben; Marjorie Adams of Murder in the English Department murders her professor, Angus Murchie for she fears that he will rape her; Clyde Griffiths of An American Tragedy murders his impregnated beloved, the poor Roberta Alden, for he fears that she will spoil his chances of marrying the wealthy Sondra Finchley; Judas of The President’s Daughter fears and hates the Muslim terrorist leader Sharif-Al-Hakim and so he kills him; and Humbert Humbert of Lolita, though does not fear his victim, Quilty, hates him for his betrayal.

Analyzing the ideology of each of these murderer-protagonists, this chapter substantiates that Bigger Thomas’s racial ideology, Richards Rojack’s power ideology, Ezekiel Farragut’s familial ideology, Marjorie Adams’s gender ideology, Clyde Griffith’s American dream ideology based on material comforts, Humbert Humbert’s love ideology and Judas’s racialist ideology, are instrumental in their murders of their victims. Besides examining the murderer-protagonists’ obsession/un-obsession with their
ideologies, this chapter probes into their pre-criminal psychology in planning the execution of the murder in such an intelligent manner as to hoodwink law and the police.

Chapter III: The Real Situation of Murder and the Status of Ideology At the Time of Execution closely looks at the actual scene of murder in the novels analysing the methods and manners adopted by the murderer-protagonists in the execution of the murder, the intensity of their ideology during the murder, and their physical and mental conditions at the time of the murder. Besides presenting a vivid picture of the murder situation, the chapter examines the link between the murder situations and the ideologies of the murderer-protagonists. Classifying the murderer-protagonists into two categories—the calculative and the accidental—it substantiates that the accidental murderer-protagonists are drawn into the murder situation accidentally and unexpectedly, and that they happen to murder their victims either with their hands or with any instrument they find nearby, impelled by their dormant ideology; on the other hand, the calculative murderer-protagonists, propelled by their ideologies, pre-plan the murder, create the murder situations and murder their victims with lethal weapons. Analyzing the psychic conditions of the murderer-protagonists at the moment of the murder, the chapter discovers that the accidental
murderers like Bigger Thomas, Rojack, Farragut and Marjorie Adams are mentally disturbed, irritated and provoked by their victims to resort to murder and that the calculative murderers like Clyde Griffiths, Humbert Humbert and Judas are determined, cool and unprovoked by their victims at the time of the murder. Examining the link between the murder situations and the murderer-protagonists’ ideologies, the chapter describes how the murder situation in each of these select novels facilitates the protagonist in executing the murder to realize his/her ideology.

Chapter IV: The Consequence of Murder and the Status of Ideology After Murder discusses the immediate and remote consequences of Murder in the novels and the resultant success or failure of the murderer-protagonists’ ideologies. Analyzing the physical and psychological conditions of the murderer-protagonists after the murder, this chapter shows the effects of murder on them and their preoccupation / un-preoccupation with their acts of murder. It finds that some of these murderer-protagonists like Clyde Griffiths of An American Tragedy and Marjorie Adams of Murder in the English Department, feel mentally disturbed and some others like, Bigger Thomas of Native Son, Richards Rojack of An American Dream and Humbert Humbert of Lolita, feel mentally rejuvenated after committing the murder. It substantiates from a scrutiny of the select novels that all these
murderer-protagonists, excepting Humbert Humbert of *Lolita*, attempt to conceal their murders and scheme to deceive law with a view to escaping arrest and punishment.

The chapter also analyses the predicament of these murderer-protagonists after their murder and shows that some of them, like Richards Rojack, go Scot-free and most of them like Bigger Thomas, Farragut, Clyde Griffiths, and Judas are trapped, arrested and either executed or sentenced to life for their crimes. Apart from analyzing the murderer-protagonists’ post-criminal psychology, this chapter examines their success or failure in achieving their goals through murder.

**Chapter V: Aesthetics: Murder and Ideology** explores the aesthetic rapprochement found in these texts in their unraveling of the nexus between ideology and murder in the twentieth century background. It analyses whether the treatment of murder in literature affects the literary credence of a work of art, whether the incorporation of the philosophical construct ‘ideology’ in literature affects or enhances the literary merits of a work of art, and whether the treatment of ideology in a work of art affects the philosophical value of ideology. Justifying the aesthetics of murder, this chapter establishes the view that, just like the natural violence, human violence like murder can be a potential source of aesthetic experience, and
argues endorsing Joel Black’s view that, “most brutal killings can be appreciated as works of art if only viewed from an aesthetic, or disinterested, amoral perspective” (15). Citing the works of De Quincey, this chapter shows that even a violent act like murder can be viewed exclusively from the aesthetic point of view.

Inquiring into the question whether literature suffers because of its treatment of murder or ideology in it, this chapter substantiates that the treatment of murder or ideology in a work of art only enhances its literary credence. It analyses in detail the aesthetic/un-aesthetic execution of the murders by the murderer-protagonists and the presentation of their murders by the novelists in each of the select novels.

Chapter VI: Summing Up consolidates the arguments to foreground the moral/religious/humanistic consequences of the strategic use of ‘murder’ in the novels and winds up with an incisive analysis of the aesthetic and ideological advantage/disadvantage the select novels gain in dealing with the approbation of murder on the part of their protagonists to ward off their fear of existence and recover the lost power of their self.