CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION: A RE-VIEW OF MURDER AND IDEOLOGY IN LITERATURE

The treatment of violence and murder in literature is as old as literature itself, not a phenomenon of the twentieth century literature alone. The theme of murder had been treated in ancient Greek and Latin writings even in the pre-Christian era. The epic poet Homer and the playwrights like Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, dealt with the theme of murder and such themes have come down the ages since. Since war had become the socio-cultural heritage of ancient Greek and Roman writers in addition to love, they glorified the act of killing for honour or revenge in their works and the warrior who killed more number of enemy-soldiers was worshipped as a hero. As literature is an expression of life through the medium of language, the writers of all ages treat in their works the themes of love, sex, violence, murder and death that characterize society. Since murder is the most terrifying and most awesome experience that can evoke the emotions of “pity” and “fear,” and effect the Aristotelian catharsis in the minds of the audience, the classical writers generously used the theme of murder as a spectacle in their plays for reasons religious, political, social, and personal.

Joel Black, commenting on the genesis of the treatment of murder in literature, says that literature, from its beginning has been concerned
with crime (29). He adds that the founding texts of both Judo-Christian and Greco-Roman culture deal with violations of the law. “The Old Testament begins with the stories of Adam and Eve, eating the forbidden fruit in Eden, and of their sons who became the first murderer and murder victim” (Black 29). Homer’s epics The Iliad and The Odyssey weave together such legends associated with the Trojan War as the abduction of Helen, occupation of Odysseus’ home by the suitors, and the murder of Agamemnon by his wife. The legend of Oedipus may have been the greatest crime story in the classical world.

The Indian epics The Ramayana and The Mahabharatha revolve on the theme of death and murder, especially in war, for the cause of land or woman. Besides justifying the logic behind the murders of the anti-heroes or the heroes, these two epics emulate the high philosophy of life and death. The Bhagavad Gita, one of the holy scriptures of the Hindus, stresses the transience of the body and the immortality of the soul. It is exhorted to Arjuna by Lord Krishna to murder the former’s brother, Karna. In The Ramayana, Rama, the hero, kills the demons like Maareecha, Thadaka, Kumbhakarna and Ravana to establish dharma. The Indian epics justify the murder of even a good man on the basis of dharma, that is, the killing of a virtuous man who faithfully fights against virtue, for the sake of an evil master, is justifiable. These epics illustrate the Hindu dharma that a man for the welfare of a family, a family for the
welfare of a village, a village for the welfare of a country may be sacrificed. The tenets of the Hindu dharma are not against murder when committed for a good cause. They, in fact, endorse murder or destruction of the evil in order to protect the good and the innocent. When they say that the killing of the evil is correct, they also say that killing of the good and the innocent is a sin. The Hindu way of life, which professes love and non-violence, also preaches the destruction of the evil for the sake of the good.

Since life has become very complex and mechanical after the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, the literature that has been produced after these two significant historical events deals with the themes of sex, rape, murder and suicide reflecting the socio-cultural aspects of the period. The Romantic writers gave more space for crime literature and the writers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries pursued it. The crime literature includes works of art in which murder or assassination is the pivotal event around which all events of the plot revolve. These works of art, irrespective of their genre and period, treat different kinds of homicides like patricide, matricide, fratricide, infanticide, euthanasia, regicide and suicide, covering them under the broad umbrella “murder”. For instance, Sophocles’s Oedipus treats patricide while Aeschylus’s Oresteia and Homer’s Odyssey treat matricide; and Shakespeare’s Richard II, Julius Caesar, Hamlet and
Macbeth treat regicide and fratricide. The twentieth century literature bears evidence to the treatment of euthanasia, suicide and infanticide that are prevalent in the medically advanced and psychologically complicated modern society. For example, Ken Kesey's One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest treats euthanasia, Arthur Miller's Death of A Salesman handles suicide and Tony Morrison's Beloved deals with infanticide. Similarly there are several fictions of the twentieth century that treat one or the other of the different types of homicides.

Murder in literature can be categorized into five groups: war massacres, killing for gains or profit, killing for love, assassination and suicide. War massacre, the first category of murders, has been presented in literature ever since the appearance of classical writings. Homer presents a photographic description of large-scale murder while narrating the Trojan War in his epics—The Iliad and The Odyssey. The Elizabethan playwrights like Shakespeare and Marlowe have also handled war massacre in their historical plays like Henry IV, Richard II, King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra, Tamburlaine the Great and Edward II. Swift in his fictional work Gulliver's Travels, and Sir Walter Scott in his historical novels like Ivanhoe, The Talisman and Kenilworth have treated war massacre. In the twentieth century, the two World Wars had been the source of war massacres in novels such as Ernest Hemingway's Farewell to Arms and For whom the Bell Tolls, William Faulkner's Soldier's Pay,
 NormanMailer's *The Naked and the Dead* and several other novels of the post-war period. War massacre is objective in its motive; since war is fought between two inimical societies or countries, the cause of the massacre often being public rather than private. When a captain or a soldier kills his enemy-soldiers in the battlefield, he does it as his duty; he may massacre them mechanically and in cold blood without having any personal cause to kill. All the war massacres are performed for public cause impelled by either racial or national chauvinism.

The second category of murder is killing for personal gain or profit. It is often subjective, that is, the murder committed for gain or profit is often impelled by the murderer's personal desire to get material or political gain or upward mobility. Therefore the desire to realize gain through the murder of a powerful person originates in the mind of an individual who may himself carry out the blood-curdling act of murder or carry it out with the help of his accomplices. Covetousness is thus the root-cause of all murders of this kind. There are evidences to the murders committed for profit in the classical as well as modern literature. In Homer's *Iliad*, Aegisthus's murder of Agamemnon, husband of Clytemnestra and father of Orestes, is motivated by his desire to own Clytemnestra; Aeschylus's dramatic trilogy *Oresteia* also recounts the murder and Orestes's avenging of his father's death by killing Aegisthus and Clytemnestra.
The Bible, which preaches morals through its parables, also treats the subject of murders committed for material gain. For instance, in the Book of Job there is a story, which narrates the covetousness of three thieves who, driven by their desire to possess all the wealth they looted, murder one another. Shakespeare’s Macbeth is an epitome of the category of murder committed for gain or profit. Macbeth, instigated by his desire to possess land and power, plots and murders King Duncan. His murder of the King is motivated by his selfish desire to amass power and wealth; his act has no altruistic motive at all. The nineteenth and the twentieth century literature abound in such kinds of murder committed for gain.

Killing for love is the third category of murders—murders committed for passionate love. The passionate lover, in his attempt to win the hand of his beloved, or in his attempt to join her in life, kills either the opposing people or his rival in love. Sometimes the ardent and platonic lover in his frustration in life kills his beloved and then kills himself with the hope of joining her in the other world. The classical literature, which glorifies war heroes and their love, treats in its works the protagonists’ murders of their rivals for winning the hands of their beloveds. Homer’s Iliad, which treats Paris’s love for another man’s wife, Helen and the war consequent on his abduction of her from Troy, witnesses a number of murders, like the murder of Achilles, committed for the sake of love.
Similarly, Aegisthus’s murder of Agamemnon is also a murder committed as a result of his illicit love for the latter’s wife, Clytemnestra.

Shakespearean tragedies like Othello, Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet bear evidence to the playwright’s treatment of murder for the sake of passionate love. Othello kills his loving wife, Desdemona, not only out of sheer suspicion created by Iago, but also out of his deep love for her; his love for Desdemona is so profound that he does not like her to live and lose her honour after his death; therefore he kills her with a view to saving her honour and joining her in the other world. Similarly, in Hamlet, Claudius’s murder of his brother is motivated not only by his desire to usurp the kingdom but also by his illicit love for his sister-in-law, Gertrude. Romeo and Juliet is a classic example of this category of murder as Romeo kills Tybalt, Juliet’s cousin and villain, for the sake of his platonic love for Juliet.

Euthanasia or mercy killing can also be treated as a kind of murder for love. When a person is terminally ill and there is no chance of his recovery, the doctors don’t mind recommending euthanasia for such patients in order to relieve them of everlasting suffering. English literature witnesses a good number of works of art that treat euthanasia. In Ken Kesey’s One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest, Bromden an inmate of the psychiatric ward and friend of McMurphy smothers McMurphy out of rage and pity when he comes to know that the doctors have a lobotomy
performed on him. Somerset Maugham’s short story, “The Man with the Scar”, too recounts how intimate love sometimes makes one kill one’s wife. In this story, a criminal, the man with the scar, loves his wife so deeply that when the police arrest him and sentence him to death, he goes on parole to meet his wife, kisses her and stabs her to death for he does not want her to survive and suffer after his death. Not only the person who is an impediment to love but also the person who is the object of love is murdered at times.

Assassination or killing for political reasons is the fourth category of murder. Black, analyzing assassination, classifies it under two categories; one is politically motivated assassination in which either the act of murder is initiated and executed by the private citizens as in the deaths of John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr., or state-sponsored assassinations as in the slayings of Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, the Diem brothers in South Vietnam, President Salvador Allende of Chile, and Egypt’s President Anwar Sadat; the other category of assassinations are evident psycho-or sociopathic acts as in the Manson cult slaying, the Moors murders of 1965 or the serial killings by Richard Speck, Ted Bundy, and Albert DeSalvo (135-36). But after analyzing several noteworthy assassination episodes of the late 1970s, Black finds out that sometimes neither political motivation nor social or mental
malaise but the media mediated violence “hyperaestheticized by mass-
culture” (136) is responsible for assassination.

Assassinations are sometimes committed by the frustrated youth who want an identity for themselves. Black cites Mark David Chapman’s assassination of former Beatles leader and pop superstar, John Lennon on December 8, 1980 and John W. Hinckley, Jr.’s attempted murder of President Reagan four months later as instances to show that murders are committed by young men who had been hero-worshipping their victims. Thus, sometimes the assassins, with a view to becoming popular overnight, assassinate the celebrities. Hence, Bernard Shaw, in his play Man and Superman ironically points out the popularity that the assassination endows the victim and the assailant with: “The assassin Czolgosz made President Mackinley a hero by assassinating him. The United States of America made Czolgosz a hero by the same process” (276).

Like the other three categories of murder, assassination has also been a theme in literature since the classical period. Since history witnesses a number of assassinations of great rulers, philosophers and leaders, literature, whose function is to reflect the cultural and political milieu of its time, immortalizes the death of these celebrities in its pages: the assassination of Socrates, who is sentenced to death by consuming hemlock; Galileo, the Italian philosopher and astronomer, who is stoned to
death by the public for having told the truth from his scientific observations that the earth revolves round the sun; Julius Caesar, the Roman emperor's assassination by the conspirators headed by Cassius, Cicero and Brutus; and the beheading of Charles I by the revolutionary and unruly Puritans in the seventeenth century.

The nineteenth and the twentieth centuries witnessed a number of assassinations everywhere in the world; prominent among them are the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Lincoln and John Kennedy of America and Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi of India. The writers at different points of time have immortalized the assassinations of such celebrities in their literary works. For example, Shakespeare re-presented the assassinations of Julius Caesar and Mark Antony in his Roman plays Julius Caesar and Antony and Cloepatra; Bertolt Brecht dramatized the killing of Galileo by the public in his play Galileo; the Democratic poet of America, Walt Whitman immortalized the merciless assassination of the humane American President, Abraham Lincoln, in his elegy "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed"; and James Hepburn in Farewell America deals with the assassination of President John Kennedy. Besides these literary works of art that are listed, there are a number of works dealing with the assassination of celebrities in literature.
Since the assassinations are politically motivated, they have an ideology behind them. The assassin commits the murder of a celebrity or a political leader in order to realize his own ideology. As a result, very often the assassinations happen to be ideological murders. Nathuram Godse's assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 is an illustrative one of ideological murder. Godse's R.S.S. ideology, which asserts Hindus' supremacy over Muslims, did not allow him to appreciate Gandhi, a Hindu advocating the equality of Hindus and Muslims, and so he shot him to death.

The last category of murder is suicide or self-murder out of frustration in life. Frustration in life or failure in love sometimes leads an individual to terminate his life. Like the other three categories of murders, suicide has also been dealt with in literature ever since the time of Aeschylus and Euripides. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Othello* also treat the theme of suicide. Similarly, the nineteenth and twentieth century British as well as American literature treat the subject of suicide. For example, O' Neill's *Emperor Jones* and Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman* successfully treat the suicide of the psychologically upset protagonists.

The novels treating murder can be classified into two types—the novels treating ideological murder and the detective novels. Both types of novels share some of the basic qualities of crime fiction in common; both
of them fall under the broad category of crime literature as both of them deal with murder as their central theme. But the novel treating ideological murder differs from that of the detective genre in its treatment of the crime, in its presentation of the character of its murderer and in its narrative technique. Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Brothers Karamozov* and *Crime and Punishment* are classic examples of the novels treating ideological murders. The detective genre leads to the mystery as to “who” committed the murder and it is more an intellectual pursuit. It presents a retrospective analysis of the occurrences that take place, after the murder. It concentrates on detecting the person who committed the murder, and so its emphasis is more on the post-murder rather than on the pre-murder phase. Since the chief concern of the detective genre is unravelling the mystery of the murder, it treats the sleuth or detective like James Bond 007 as its protagonist. It glorifies the intelligence and smartness of the sleuth, who goes from place to place and meets person after person to gather information to unravel the mystery behind the murder. Its narrative is presented from the point of view of the sleuth and therefore, the readers are more inclined to identify themselves with the sleuth supporting and appreciating his acts.

The criminal was applauded for his intelligence when criminality came into its own as a literary subject in the late eighteenth century. In the early years of the nineteenth century, when romanticism was at its height,
the criminal had merged, to use Ziolkowski’s phrase “from the market place to salon” (290) or in the words of Mandel, “from the streets to the drawing room” (5). But when Eugene-Francois Vidocq founded the Bureau des Renseignements, the first modern detective agency, there was a transformation in the treatment of the traditional romantic roles of rebel hero and despotic villain, and there was a corresponding shift in the average readers’ sympathies “from the criminal to the ‘detective’” (Ziolkowski 293). In the words of Black, the sensational criminal literature evolved into the more sedate, bourgeois, rationalist genre of detective fiction in which the sleuth’s artful ingenuity comes to match and even surpass that of the criminal whom he pursues (42).

Edgar Allen Poe’s “Tales of ratiocination” inaugurated this genre in the 1840’s and his “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” of 1841 is regarded as the first detective story in English literature. This detective genre is later experimented by William Russell in his fictional Recollection of a Detective Police-officer (serialized from 1849 to 1853 under the name Thomas Waters), and Dickens in his Bleak House published in 1852 (Black 42). In these detective novels the sleuth, from the amateur detectives like Dupin and Sherlock Holmes to the spate of professional private investigators of the twentieth century, seem to have supplanted the criminal as the “hero” of criminal literature. It has become the convention of the detective genre to portray the sleuth at odds with the
established police force. Thus the detective genre, though it deals with the theme of murder, is apparently different from that of the novels treating ideological murder in its treatment and approach to the crime.

On the other hand the novels treating ideological murders are not bothered about the “who” but about the “why” of the murder. Unlike the detective genre, whose interest is the detection of the identity of the murderer, the murder novels of this category are concerned more with the reasons for the murder than with the identity of the murderer. They do not present merely an intellectual process but a psychological and logical process of the murder. So, here the interest is on the “why” and the “how” of, or the logical reasons for the murder. In this type of murder novels too the murderer has a motive, which may not seem logical to us, but it is logical or rational for the killer because of his firm conviction in his ideology. These novels are more concerned with the pre-murder phase presenting in detail the logical critical situations in the murderer’s life that force him to resort to homicide. These novels go about narrating the events leading to murder in a chronological order. Unlike the detective novels, these types of novels present the murderer as a “rebel-hero”. “He was celebrated in literature as a hero of the people, as a socially acceptable monster, a kind of elephant man” (Black 41).

Violence and murder which became part of the last century world, have found expression in the literary works of that period. One can say
for sure that there is no great work of art that does not touch upon either murder or violence of any form in it. It can be said that the majority of the writings of the twentieth century deal with one or the other form of homicide. The literary works thus treating the theme of murder have two different views as to the act of murder. Some of them justify the murder committed by the protagonist and demonstrate that murder is essential and inevitable to the welfare of the society or the country. The points of view in such novels or plays not only support the protagonists' murders but also justify them as acts of emancipating either society or themselves. In fact, these novels glorify the murderer as a "rebel hero" or a Robin Hood, who commits murders for the good of the public, and rationalize the murders of their protagonists.

On the other hand, some works treating murder present it as a cruel and inhuman act which is against the ethical, philosophical, sociological and biological values of life. They deal with the scenes of murder in them with a view to moralizing the society on the unholy practice of snatching the life of a person. Though they treat the theme of murder in them, these novels despise and condemn the act of murder. For instance, the Morality plays and the Revenge tragedies of the sixteenth century dealt with the scenes of maiming of eyes, cutting of tongues and amputating of limbs in order to teach the people lessons and avoid recurrences of such crimes. So the ancient playwrights presented scenes of murder and assassination in
their plays not only to evoke cathartic effect in the minds of the audience but also to preach them the moral that the ‘wages of sin is death.’ In brief, while some works of art do not approve of the heinous act of homicide, the others justify the causes of murder.

Murder, whether supported and justified or condemned in a work of art, is an inhuman and barbaric act. The act of murder might have been committed for the good of a society and still it is a crime punishable by law. According to the Hindu dharma, killing of the evil is not a crime. Similarly, the Tamil proverb “kondraal paavam, thindraal poachu” says that killing is a sin, but killing for survival is no more a sin. The Ramayana, The Mahabharatha and the Indian legends and puranas speak about God’s destruction of the evil; through their stories, these legends and mythologies bring out the philosophy that killing the good is evil whereas killing the evil is good. The act of murder is thus viewed from different angles based on the rationale, circumstances and manner of the murder.

The proverb “One man’s meat is another man’s poison” illustrates that what appears to be correct to one, may appear to be wrong to another. Similarly, the murder committed by a person in a particular context may appear to be an act of sacrifice to some people who are affected by the person killed; whereas it appears to be a crime or sin to others who are related to the victim. The question is debatable: Whether all murders are
crimes or not and whether all crimes are sins or not. Therefore, to arrive at a precise definition of murder, the views of various branches of knowledge on “murder” are worth analyzing.

The ethical view is always against the act of murder or homicide. Thiroux, based on a few ethical systems like the Pacifists, the Jainists and the Kantian Duty Ethics, expresses his ethical views on murder that “the taking of human life is always wrong in terms of the Value of Life Principle” (154). Thiroux argues, “all human life is to be revered and no one may ever be killed for any reason, even if one’s life is threatened by another. In such a case, one who is being threatened may try everything short of violence or killing to prevent being killed, but he may not kill another, even in self defense of other innocent people” (154). Ethics generally does not approve of the murder of someone even in self-defence or in defence of others. And it pleads for not killing any humans even for an admirable ideal. This ideal is certainly put forth in Christianity in Jesus’ teachings “Love thy enemies” and “Turn the other cheek”.

While ethics condemns murder as a wrong and inhuman act, religion considers it a sin. All religions preach love and compassion and invariably have the same view of murder, that murder is a sin and murderers are sinners punishable by God. This idea is expressed in the Bible, as “The wages of sin is death”. All religions argue that “only God can create or take away life, and that, in His infinite wisdom, He will duly
punish the killer in the same way. Killing in any case, is not the right of other humans under any circumstances” (Thiroux 155). Poets like Dante who are convinced of the high moral calling of their art even specify that murder is a sin or crime. “Thus, according to Dante’s elaborate classification of sins in the *Inferno*, murderers are punished in the seventh of the nine circles of Hell, which is reserved for those guilty of acts of violence, and which consists of three sectors or *gironi* (“rounds”). Murderers occupy the first *girone*” (Black 6). W.H. Auden secularizing Dante’s classification of sins asserts that murder is an offence “against God and society” (Black 6).

While Dante presents the religious views about murder as a sin of violence, Auden asserts that it is a crime against God and society and presents the sociological view of murder: “Murder is unique in that it abolishes the party it injures, so that society has to take the place of the victim and on his behalf demand atonement or grant forgiveness; it is the one crime in which society has a direct interest” (149). The principal difference between Dante and Auden consists in the distinction between the religious concept of sin and the secular concept of crime; they are alike in their conception of murder as a moral outrage, either as a sin or as a crime.
The Hindu religion, like the other religions, which professes love and non-violence, is dead against the act of murder. The orthodox Hindus, who strictly adhere to the doctrine of non-violence, promote vegetarianism because they believe that non-vegetarianism leads to the killing of animals, which is again a sin against God. They strongly believe in the words of the Tamil Sage-poet of the Sangam age, Thiruvalluva, who in his sacred Kurral says: “What is the work of virtue? ‘Not to kill’, / For ‘killing’ leads to every work of ill” (44). The Kurral says that not killing any living being is the highest virtue of life and killing will cause all kinds of vice.

Black, speaking about the politics of murder, views murder from a cultural perspective and says that it destroys any idealistic illusions we may cherish about the type of society in which we live (18). As Auden suggested, it shatters the ethnic myth of the “Great Good place” of “an innocent society in a state of grace...where there is need of the law, no contradiction between the aesthetic individual and ethical universal” (150-53). Even post revolutionary societies, which are founded on the democratic ideals of the Enlightenment and which officially condemn murder as uncivilized barbarism, unofficially rely on violence to implement many of their policies (18). So murder is regularly practised by the most democratic states in a variety of “legal” forms—capital
punishment, open warfare, covert and mercenary operations, military advice and assistance to allied nations and friendly rebel forces.

A retrospective analysis of murder in history makes it evident that some forms of killing are regarded as socially acceptable, and even as morally sanctioned, while others are condemned as outrageous crimes. Such retrospective judgment of the rationality or irrationality—and therefore the legitimacy or illegitimacy—of mass killing which is the province of the historian, prompted Michael Foucault to treat murder "as the singular, decisive, but undecidable act that gives rise to cultural distinction and to the historical narratives that organize cultural experience" (Black 19). Foucault says: "Murder is where history and crime intersect. Murder it is that makes for the warrior's immortality ... murder it is that ensures criminals their dark renown...Murder establishes the ambiguity of the lawful and the unlawful" (205-06).

While Auden regards murder as the act that puts ethics and aesthetics in opposition to each other, Foucault claims that murder is the primal event that both compels and enables us to distinguish between "the historical and the everyday", between battles as the "stuff of history" and street brawls as the milieu of crime (206). In other words, 'murder' from the political point of view, is a decisive act that effects cultural distinctions.
Murders usually have motives behind them. But some exceptional cases like Capote’s *In Cold Blood* treat cold-blooded murders committed for no reason. There should be a strong motive/cause for the murderer to commit murder. In this regard it would be pertinent to refer to *Collier’s Encyclopedia* that attributes a murder to one of the three factors: biological or congenital defects of the offender, mental disorder and environmental or social factors (7: 466-68). Naturally, the causes of the murder treated in literature are also based on these three factors.

Some works of art treat murders committed by their protagonists/antagonists, motivated by their ideologies aiming at some social or political changes. These murders can be rightly called ideological murders. For example, Brutus’s murder of Julius Caesar in Shakespeare’s play is an ideologically motivated one. Brutus, unlike the selfish conspirator, Cassius, has no personal cause in assassinating Caesar; he is a man guided by his patriotic ideology, which compels him to join the conspirators in assassinating Caesar for the welfare of his motherland. Brutus’s love for his country comes uppermost in his mind when he says, “not that I love Caesar less, but that I love Rome more” (3.2.22-23). Literature dwells on murders committed due to different kinds of ideologies like racial ideology, political ideology, gender ideology, love ideology, materialistic ideology, Communist or Marxist ideology, Capitalist ideology and familial ideology.
History has witnessed many ideological murders ever since the dawn of civilization. Starting from Julius Caesar of the 1st century B.C. to Rajiv Gandhi of the late twentieth century, most of the assassinations happened to be ideological murders. For instance, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination was impelled by racial ideology; Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination was triggered by religious ideology; John Kennedy’s killing was motivated by political ideology; Indira Gandhi’s murder was triggered by the Sikh’s religious ideology and that of Rajiv Gandhi, by the LTTE’s ethnic ideology. Even the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is ideological from the point of view of his Jewish victimizers. Some of these historically important celebrity assassinations find expression in fictions like James Hepburn’s Farewell America, which deals with President Kennedy’s assassination.

The twentieth century American fiction in its attempt to reflect the socio-political and cultural milieu of America deals with one or the other form of these ideological murders. In these novels, the protagonists or antagonists, who happen to be the victims of social or familial oppressions, find in murder a strong and powerful weapon to fight against their oppressors in accomplishing their ideologies—racial, political, familial, gender, love, materialistic or Marxist. For instance, the Afro-American novelist, Richard Wright’s Native Son treats the black youth, Bigger Thomas’s murder of his white employer’s daughter, Mary,
for his racial ideology; Theodore Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy* presents a poor but ambitious youth, Clyde Griffiths’s murder of his poor and pregnant beloved Roberta Alden, in order to marry the wealthy and beautiful Sondra Finchley, fuelled by his materialistic ideology; John Cheever’s *Falconer* handles the murder committed for the protagonist’s familial ideology; Valerie Miner’s *Murder in the English Department* deals with murder prompted by the gender ideology of a University student; Norman Mailer’s *An American Dream*, like *An American Tragedy*, treats the American dream ideology of power and wealth; Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* portrays murder triggered by the protagonist Humbert Humbert’s love ideology; and Jack Higgins’s *The President’s Daughter* presents its antagonist, Judas’s murders and murder attempts impelled by his racialist ideology.

The present study assays to analyse seven such twentieth century novels, which treat murders impelled by their protagonists’ intense desire to accomplish their ideologies. The novels taken up for analysis, selected from different decades of the twentieth century American fiction, representing the social, political and cultural life of each of these decades are: Theodre 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). These novels share some common features. The treatment of murder is the first feature. Second, the protagonists of these novels nurture their own personal ideologies and resort to murder in order to realize them. The third important characteristic common in all these novels is the protagonist’s position as victim. The protagonists, who resort to murder in realizing their ideologies, are all victims of either the society or individuals. As victims of constant oppression, these protagonists form their ideologies and rebel against their victimizers through murder. The sufferings of these protagonists as victims turn them to be the assailants of their victimizers.

The fourth prominent aspect that is present in all these select novels is their protagonist-murderers’ attempt to hoodwink law and escape arrest. For instance, Bigger Thomas of Native Son, after his murder of Mary Dalton, first tries to deceive the police by turning the suspicion on Mary’s Communist lover, Jan Erlone; and when the police find out his foul play, he flees with his black girl, Bessie, and kills her suspecting that she will betray him to the hunting-police. Like Bigger Thomas, Clyde Griffiths of An American Tragedy, after drowning his poor beloved, Roberta Alden in the waters of Big Bitterns, escapes from the scene and joins his wealthy girl, Sondra Finchley in order to trick law and escape arrest. Similarly, Richards Rojack of An American Dream, after strangling his wife Deborah, deceives law by throwing down her dead body from the window
of the tenth floor and passing it off as suicide. Farragut of *Falconer* also attempts to evade arrest and punishment by vainly arguing at the trial that he did not hit his brother, Eben, on his head, and that only Eben hit his head against the wall. Marjorie Adams of *Murder in the English Department* also attempts to throw dust in the eyes of the law both by not revealing the mystery about Angus Murchie’s murder and by disappearing from the scene to avoid investigative enquiry. Similarly, the Jewish terrorist leader, Judas of *The President’s Daughter* hoodwinks law and the detectives by changing his original name Captain Daniel Levy to Judas, and by hiding his face with a net mask so as to conceal his identity. But, Humbert Humbert of *Lolita* is the only one, who deviates from the other murderer-protagonists in not attempting to cheat law and escape arrest; unlike the other murderer protagonists, he wants to expiate for his crime and so, after the murder, he voluntarily courts arrest by wantonly driving the car on the wrong side. Thus, the murderer-protagonists of these novels attempt to delude law in order to escape punishment.

The fifth aspect that is found in common in all these novels is their murderer-protagonists’ lack of compunction for and justification of their murders. Since these murderer-protagonists employ murder as a weapon in realizing their ideologies, they do not regret their murders; instead they try to justify their act. Therefore, Bigger Thomas, even when arrested and tried, does not feel penitence for his crime; instead, he justifies his act
saying, “What I killed for must have been good!” (392). Clyde Griffiths does not regret his murder of Roberta; instead he justifies it. Similarly, Richards Rojack has no compunction for his murder of his wife, Deborah. Farragut, even in the prison, does not apologize for his crime. Marjorie Adams, like Bigger Thomas, does not regret her murder of Murchie; instead she justifies it as an act of defence (144). Judas too does not feel compunction for his gruesome murders of the Muslim terrorists; instead he justifies his murders as acts of sacrifice for the welfare of his race. Humbert Humbert, like the other protagonists, not only lacks compunction for his murder but also justifies his murder. Thus, all these protagonists have no compunction for their murders of their oppressors; and therefore they justify their act of murder even at the time of their trial or imprisonment.

Another feature that is found in common in the select novels is the narrative voice’s approval of the murders of their protagonists. The narratives of almost all these novels are presented from the points of view of their Murderer-protagonists and the acts of the protagonists are approved of by the novelists’ voices through direct or indirect comments.

All these five factors spanning these seven novels offer ample scope for a research problem and this dissertation takes its beginnings in the identification of the scope. The novels under study are taken up for research regarding the treatment of ‘ideology’ and ‘murder’ in them, and
the nexus between these two aspects. The present thesis attempts a critical study of these select seven novels with a view to analyzing the rationale or the cause of the murder, the ideology that impels the protagonists to commit murder and the consequences of the murder. It further studies the murderer-protagonists' success/failure in their attempt to realize their ideologies through murder.

The study restricts itself to the select seven American fictional writings representing different periods of time in the twentieth century so as to reflect the ethos of each decade. The thesis makes a detailed study of the protagonists' ideologies, which propel them to commit murder. It analyses the pre-murder psychology of the murderer-protagonists and presents the premeditation or un-premeditated nature of their murders. It critically views the real situation of murder and presents how the murderers face the murder situation. It makes a study of the post-murder phase, presenting the consequences of the murder and shows whether the protagonists realize their ideology through murder, or not. It also critically analyses the narrative technique, the point of view, the position of ideology when it is treated in literature, and the aesthetic point of view of murder in each of these select novels.

The thesis is divided into six chapters presenting an objective study of the ideology of murder in the seven twentieth century American novels. Chapter II: "The Rationale of Murder and the Status of Ideology before
Murder," focuses its attention on the pre-murder facet of the protagonists’ lives analysing the ‘ideological’ cause of 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, their pre-criminal psychology, the link between the murderer-protagonists and their ideologies and the intensity of their ideology before their murders.

Chapter III: “The Real Situation of the Murders and the Status of Ideology at the Time of Execution” closely looks at the actual scene of murder in the novels analyzing 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.

Chapter IV: “The Consequences 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. Analysing 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 further
examines whether the murderer-protagonists attempt to escape arrest or simply submit themselves to the police, whether they justify their murder and ideology even after their imprisonment, whether they are punished by law or deceive it and whether they feel compunction for their murder or not.

Chapter V: "Aesthetics: Murder and Ideology," explores the aesthetic rapprochement found in these texts in their unravelling 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.

Chapter VI: "Summing up," consolidates the arguments to foreground the moral/religious/humanistic consequences of the strategic use of 'murder' in the novels. It 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.