

CHAPTER V

WOMEN IN SCANDINAVIAN CRIME FICTION

When it comes down to it, this story is not primarily about spies and secret government agencies; it's about violence against women and men who enable it.

—Stieg Larsson

When Stieg Larsson wrote 'The Millennium Trilogy' he wanted to give voice to the abused woman who has been a victim of the power structure. He initially named his first novel *Men who hate Women*. He later renamed his novel but the theme remained the same. This theme of the position of women in the welfare state gained prominence with *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* but this theme has always found a resonance in the Scandinavian crime novel and in the novels discussed in this chapter. Readers of crime fiction will instantly realise the masculinity of crime fiction which focus on rationality, logic and the physical prowess of the investigator. Gender studies reveal that the areas of logic and rationality are often considered a purely male domain while the emotional and the intuitive are looked upon as the domain of the female. This idea is reinforced in crime fiction as revealed in the study of female characters in the history of crime fiction. While the British version focused on the mental brilliance of the detective, the American version focused on the physical strength and courage of the central protagonist further reflecting this stereotype.

Even the later reworking of the genre produced thrillers which captured the disturbed psyche of an essentially male criminal. Hence in this male-dominated genre, the question arises as to where is the space for women and what role do they play? This question becomes doubly potent

when the background of crime fiction is a location which is considered to be the most egalitarian of all nations in the world. Has a country considered as a safe haven for all genders able to shed its patriarchal prejudices? It is obvious that the five crime series discussed here all have a male central protagonist. The readers follow the story of crime and the ensuing detection of criminals and their motives. But this investigative process is not just a story of the detective who follows the clues and reveals the criminal is the end. Scandinavian crime fiction delves into the minds of both the detective and criminal to reveal their prejudices as they dissect the society to its bare bones. By keeping the socio-political critique in the background, this chapter investigates the changes in our conception of gender roles and the place of women in society taking a look at representations of women in crime fiction from the most egalitarian nations.

A look into the history of crime fiction reveals that women have been prolific writers of novels centred on crime yet earlier crime fiction by women focused on intuitive detection. This idea is reflected in the works of Agatha Christie who transformed detective fiction by creating memorable characters like Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. Agatha Christie started writing mystery novels in response to a challenge by her sister and she created Hercule Poirot—her fussy Belgian detective in 1916 in her novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. He would go on to be the second most famous detective in the world outranked only by the iconic Sherlock Holmes. Like his predecessor, Hercule Poirot is a man of extraordinary intelligence. Christie also—

“endowed him with an overweening vanity and a neurotic precision, as well as magnificent moustaches and his famous little grey cells[...] and, thanks to the brilliant

television portrayal by David Suchet, is now firmly fixed in the public consciousness and affection for all time”(Curran 2011: 13).

Though Poirot is presented as relying on his little grey cells, his detecting skills are based on far simpler methods of acute observation which are stereotypically a feminine domain. Many a time Poirot is able to solve a crime based on his observations of the domestic space, a chair being moved in the drawing room or the location of a particular object on the mantelpiece. Therefore, in Christie's hands, the detective figure is significantly feminised.

Perhaps this feminisation of the detective figure paved the way for the creation of Christie's own woman detective- Miss Jane Marple, introduced to her readers in the short story "The Tuesday Night Club," published in December 1927. She later had a book-length debut in *The Murder at the Vicarage* in 1930. She is described by the author as being an old spinster, kind and always knitting. She is an example of an armchair detective and her—"style of detection is based on village parallels, small and seemingly insignificant events familiar to her from a lifetime of village living, which she adopts as a basis for comparison when faced with more sinister events" (Curran 2011: 16).

Detection in its truest sense is thus considered to be a typically male domain as reinforced in the title of P.D.James novel—*An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1972) which features her female detective Harriet. Raymond Chandler drew a portrait of an ideal detective in his essay "The Simple Art of Murder":

"Down these mean streets, a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honour, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him." (18)

This quote reiterates the idea of the figure of the detective as being primarily a male figure. As discussed in the second chapter this image projects the role of the detective as a chivalric knight who rescues a damsel in distress or that of God like saviour who brings about restoration of order at the face of chaos. Both this image of a saviour and a protector is a predominantly masculine conception of gender roles.

This prejudice is also reflected in the creation of the antagonists as well. An example of this is the character of Irene Adler in the Sherlock Holmes series. The series presents Adler as an extremely intelligent woman who is able to hold her own against the brilliance of Sherlock Holmes yet she is eventually presented as a victim who needs the help of Sherlock. The BBC television series on Sherlock Holmes further dismisses her by presenting her as a love interest of Sherlock thus effectively reducing her to the role of a femme fatale. The fact that even a brilliant mind of Irene is unable to comprehend clues and stand equal to the central detective

reflects a marginalisation of a female character. Hence, she is eventually cast as a villain and victim rather than a hero in the narrative.

So in this masculine world where do women figure in the narrative?—“women represented in [a] detective story either played the part of the submissive housewife, the sweet secretary or a dead body, or she was cast as the femme fatale seductress. Though female detectives have appeared throughout the history of the genre, crime fiction has been resistant to a female protagonist as gender transgressions of hegemonic masculinity and ‘normative sexuality’ have conventionally been seen as incriminating traits in the genre”(Stougaard- Nielsen 2017: 172). Hence it can be observed that the role of the women in crime fiction is usually limited to-

- femme fatale
- victim
- the intuitive detective

The presentation of the woman as a femme fatale raises a host of problematic questions since this presents women as the ‘other’ who is an embodiment of a looming threat in the narrative. The emotional and weak portrayal of the femme fatale is a facade for the underlying manipulative character. This acts as a contrast to the tough exterior of the protagonist which hides his sensitive side. Like the spy thrillers, for example, Fleming's James Bond Series, which present the woman characters in an unfavourable light, crime fiction presents the woman as a negative character who employs her seductive prowess to deter the male detective from moving forward in his quest. Her apparent vulnerability allows her to form an emotional bond

with the protagonist which turns into a threat for him—"the personal threat posed by women is linked to a more general division between surface and depth [...] it expands to become a more general social threat, resulting in the masculism and misogyny that are typical of much of [crime] fiction" (Scaggs 2005: 77). The female character becomes a clever ploy in the hands of the storyteller to lead to deviations and misrepresentation of clues. Thus, the femme fatale is an example of how women are put in a negative cast.

The role of the woman as a detective as mentioned earlier reinforces the stereotypical views of women dominating the emotions while rationality remains a male domain. The female detective is presented as using her intuitive power rather than relying on her deductive reasoning. The female detective is also shown as often relying on her male counterparts to get her out of sticky situations where physical strength is required. A popular teenage sleuth Nancy Drew is presented as requiring her boyfriend Ned to protect her from the evil onslaught of literary villains. This shows that women are not presented as being apt to take up the role of the detective in its truest sense.

The presentation of women as victims is equally problematic. It raises a host of questions as we often see women being victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. On the other hand since the female character is a victim she usually dies at the start of the narrative which dismisses her role as simply being a catalyst to set the events in motion. But more importantly, the presentation of women as victims paint a grim picture of a society where women fail to find a safe haven and when the background of the crime novel is Scandinavia which is one of the most egalitarian regions in the world, the question of safety of women gains added relevance.

The Scandinavian countries are known internationally as nations that support and promote gender equality. Women were allowed into universities at a time when women were still denied the right to education. Finland was the first nation in the world to give women the right to vote (1906). Health care services and education under the welfare programmes allowed women the freedom to pursue their own career path as well. The paternal leaves in these nations are also longer giving women a much-needed relief. This gender equality is also reflected in the fact that there is more than forty percent representation of women in the parliament and fifty percent of the ministers are women. Women are hence an active participant in all spheres of life within and outside the boundaries of her home in the Scandinavian nations.

However recent years are showing a wave of negative changes—"the last decades have also witnessed intensifying privatization of the public sector (education, health care, child care, care of the elderly, infrastructure), a development that brings with it not only growing class differences but increased gender inequalities" (Bergman 2014: 70). While the statistics seem to show equality among all genders an in-depth study brings certain uneasy truths to light. Though more than seventy percent of women are working they are working in low paying professions as compared to men. The sectors which employ a higher percentage of women is usually care and service sector which goes further to emphasize a feminine stereotype. Unfortunately, these sectors are also comparatively lower paying which has an adverse effect on the overall position of women since economic equality goes a long way in ensuring overall gender equality.

The one area which has remained a concern especially for Scandinavian crime writers is the rising violence against women in these egalitarian nations. While Scandinavian crime fiction presents an unvarnished portrait of modern life that holds the key for its success it is also presenting the grim picture of increasing gender inequality. The role and position of women is put under scrutiny in the Scandinavian crime novel. The underlying socio-political criticism which lies at the heart of Scandinavian Crime Fiction finds a voice in its representations of women too.

The global phenomenon of 'The Millennium Trilogy' sheds light into the rising crime against women in the Scandinavian nations. Stieg Larsson who was an investigative journalist provided statistics to show how his work was grounded in reality. His first book titled *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is divided into different sections which begin with a precise and real-life statistics of crime against women which indeed paints a grim picture of the reality in a place like Sweden. Many of the Scandinavian crime series deal with crimes that are typically related to gender and men's dominance of women. The plot may involve women revenging themselves on discriminating men or men's brutal violence against women. They become pictures of the life of a modern woman and takes place in a modern and contemporary world which is more or less explicitly masculine-dominated. This serves to shed light into the social system as well because part of the image projected by the welfare state is that this land is egalitarian.

Scandinavian crime fiction is increasingly presenting images of violence towards women. Crime fiction does have a complicated history with women and violence mostly centered on sexual violation and murder. While the murder of women may be used to evoke sensationalism

in crime novels it can be also used to—"voice social and political criticism and to explore questions of victimization and agency" (Berit Astrom et al 2013: 2). Often overlooked as a mere plot device the violent episodes in crime fiction highlight the complex questions of socio-political formations which encompass both the victim and the agency. The novels of Scandinavian crime fiction become a fertile ground for the debates over gender and violence and its effects. The novels highlight the level of victimization in contrast to empowerment. The texts which have been chosen for discussion are an attempt to "challenge the stipulation of gender roles and myths in relation to sexual violence and that seek to rewrite the roles of victims and perpetrators" (Berit Astrom et al 2013: 3).

The extreme masculinity of the genre of crime fiction has already been highlighted with the focus on male authoritative figures who are the keeper of law and order. The affinity of the genre towards violence on women is captured in British crime writer and reviewer Jessica Mann' declaration—"each psychopath is more sadistic than the last and his victims sufferings are described in detail that becomes ever more explicit, as young women are imprisoned, bound, gagged, strung up or tied down, rape, sliced, burned, blinded, beaten, eaten, starved, suffocated, stabbed, boiled or buried alive" (cited in Berit Astrom et al 2013: 3). However, in Scandinavian crime fiction, this general trend of the depiction of violence cannot be dismissed as being a reflection of misogyny and sadism alone. The violence depicted brings the readers face to face with uncomfortable questions of gender and society. Given the strong trend of social criticism in Scandinavian crime fiction violence on women is presented as a serious social problem. This genre questions the decaying welfare state—"the trouble lurking just

beneath the surface of democracy, and links between the individual body and the social body" (Berit Astrom et al 2013: 9).

While Scandinavian crime writers highlight the truth behind the projected image of egalitarian nations there is one important emerging trend of Scandinavian crime fiction which distinguishes it from other crime series. Scandinavian crime series present female characters both as law enforcers and lawbreakers. This trend has been celebrated by readers and critics alike for the creation of strong female characters who go beyond their gender-defined roles that women stereotypically play in crime fiction. There are also some crime series where there is a subversion of gender roles where the binary of feminine and masculine ceases to exist. The novels discussed here express this through the nuances of characterisation by presenting women in both personal and professional space. Women populating the Scandinavian landscape are both fascinating and formidable. Scandinavian crime fiction reflects how gender roles are destabilizing and how the idea of being a woman is being challenged. Likewise, the crime writers discussed here engage in presenting a more rounded picture of society reflecting upon the changing position of women in these nations.

Swedish author Henning Mankell combines both these features in his portrait of female characters. The readers come across some important women in the narrative. Linda, his daughter is one such character who is a constant in all the novels of the series, though his ex-wife Mona remains a distant figure. In keeping in line with the social critique that informs all of Mankell's work the author often refers to the violence faced by women in a so-called egalitarian society. His stories are rife with women who are victimized and undergo a sense of

abandonment as they have no one to rely on. They are presented as shadows in a society that is supposed to give them an equal voice. One work which explicitly deals with the abuse lurking beneath the facade of domestic bliss is *The Fifth Woman*—“[the] novel feature[s] female avengers and serial killers who respond violently to male abuse by taking place of an impotent, still patriarchal welfare state, which is found unable to deliver on its promise of social and gender equality” (Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 210).

The novel narrates the story of a serial killer who baffles Wallander and his team. As the story unfolds we discover there are a number of female characters who have all been abused by men and the killer at loose is murdering these men in the most gruesome manner. The choice of domestic violence as a crime against women is significant since the truth of this crime lies hidden beneath the facade of respectability that the men project—“this was because Sweden's prosperity was a well-camouflaged quagmire. The decay was underneath it all” (*The Fifth Woman* 368). The abused women presented in the narrative draw a sordid picture of the way women are treated in a so-called egalitarian society. The women who are in an abusive relationship are living in absolute terror and there is no one to look out for them. The abusive men are seemingly respectable as we meet the hardworking university researcher, an orchid-loving flower shop owner and a poet who writes only about birds who are all revealed to be perpetrators of violence and murder. This presents a different picture of the society which is put up for scrutiny by the author. The women are presented as victims of the worst kind as they are most unsafe within the confines of the protective space of their homes.

But among these battered women, Mankell presents the character of Yvonne Ander. She is one such woman who takes up the role of a perpetrator subverting the stereotypical role of a victim. She is signal creation in crime fiction as she refuses to be boxed into a stereotypical traditional woman figure. Ander breaks all the norms associated with gender binaries. She is a woman who trains in lifting weights traditionally looked upon as a masculine domain. It is easy to see that Ander is different from pre-existing female characters. While the history of crime fiction gives many examples of female killers, they are limiting since they remain within the feminine domain of emotions and intuitions. Mankell's character, on the other hand, is a brazen female who challenges the authority of the police force uncovering the corruption that the system is facing- she is unsmiling and a far cry from the femme fatale/victim of the crime novels. The image of the Ander is presented as being sans make-up mostly reinforcing the ambiguity of sexuality and more importantly, subverting the image of the seductive femme fatale.

What makes Ander different from her predecessors is her gender ambiguity. She wears a perfume which lingers on in the crime scene and yet manages to starve a man and hang him to death. This duality and ambiguity is the one aspect which confuses the detective and his team. The killer murders men with a level of cruelty which shows a lack of emotion. When faced with the question of the gender of the killer the team decides that the killer is a man. The reason for this is explained in the narrative—"women almost never use violence unless they're defending themselves or their children. And then it's not premeditated violence, but instinctive acts done in self-defence. A woman would not normally dig a pongee pit. Or hold a man captive. Or throw a man in the lake inside a sack" (*The Fifth Woman* 380). This statement by one of Wallander's colleagues reflects a stereotypical view of a woman who is seen as a passive figure

rather than an active one. Mankell subverts this conventional image as reflected most obviously in Ander's methodical way of killing each of her victims.

As the story unfolds the killer is revealed to be a female who takes matters into her own hands and dispenses her form of justice. As Wallander and his team start to make a clearer profile of the killer the motive is revealed—"a revenge motive is taking shape. At any rate, it runs through each crime as a possible link. Men who use force against women are attacked in return by a calculated violence of a masculine kind. As if they were being forced to feel their hands on their own bodies" (*The Fifth Woman* 380). While the novel is centred on episodes of extreme violence and exploitation faced by women, Mankell draws the character of Ander who refuses to play the victim. Once a victim of exploitation, the story is also a story of revenge and justice meted out by Ander to the exploiters. Perhaps this is the reason why even when she is finally caught there is a feeling of grudging respect for her amongst those who had been hunting her because she has succeeded in taking control which goes beyond playing a mere spectator. Ander's belief is captured in her thoughts—"evil must be driven out with evil. Where there is no justice, it must be created" (168). Thus, *The Fifth Woman* is an important work in crime fiction which reflects the status of women in Swedish society.

Mankell also presents successful female characters that are part of the police force. His daughter Linda's eventual choice of career and her decision to follow her father's footsteps also suggests the presence of women who are willing to venture into careers which have traditionally been seen as a masculine domain. However, Wallander is sceptical of his daughter's career choice which echoes a traditional outlook. *Before the Frost* features Linda

Wallander as the lead detective and narrates her story after she graduates from the police academy. She is waiting for her first assignment when her friend Anna disappears, convinced that something bad has happened to her she embarks on her first case without the approval of the authority. Linda is presented as an equally brilliant investigator though a reckless one as she refuses to pay heed to any rules that would deter her from her search for her friend. The novel starts with a troubled relationship between the father and the daughter as both of them are part of the Ystad police force. But it ends with Linda earning the respect of her father.

Like, Mankell, Arnaldur Indridason writes stories rife with women who are victims of abuse and domestic violence. These stories highlight the underlying horror of helpless women through a nuanced characterisation. His second novel *Silence of the grave* is a narrative of a woman who undergoes years of physical and mental abuse at the hands of her husband which eventually culminates in murder. The author describes the violence in a matter of fact tone—“My God,’ she said. Blood trickled into her mouth from her split upper lip. The taste mingled with the salty tears running down her face. ‘why did you do that? What have I done?’” (8). As the abuse increase the unnamed victim knows that she must get away so she seeks the help of a vicar—“she has seen the vicar who told her that a good wife does not leave her husband.[...] ‘think about your children,’ the vicar said” (45). Likewise, the police too do not come to her rescue—“when she stood in front of the policeman with a swollen eye and split lip, they told the couple to take things easy. Said they were disturbing the peace” (45). This episode reveals the social prejudice people have when it comes to marriage. The fact that religion nor law comes to her aid even after knowledge of abuse disturbingly legitimizes this crime which

eventually pushes the story to its tragic end. This presentation of woman as victim reveals the failure of the welfare model on an individual level.

While this story presents the narrative of a female as a victim Indridason also presents women as part of the police force. The focus of the series lies on the central Detective Erneldur but the narrative gives a background of his team too. In this team, the two most prominent figures are Detective Oli and Detective Elinborg. The significant feature of this team is that Detective Elinborg is a female who is described by the writer as—"Elinborg was of an indeterminate age, forty-something, well built without being fat, and she loved food.[...] she started working for Reykjavik police as a summer job and ended up joining the force. She was one of the few female detectives" (*Silence of the Grave* 14). Elinborg is an important part of the investigative team and when Detective Erlundur takes a break it is up to her to solve a crime in *Outrage* which features her as the lead detective.

Outrage is a significant novel in the Reykjavik murder mystery series when it comes to gender roles as it centers around Elinborg giving readers a different perspective and an insight into a character who had till now remained in the periphery. *Outrage* centres on the brutal murder of a man who is found with date-rape drugs in his pocket. There is a possibility that the murder victim might have been a serial rapist. This pushes the lead detective to pursue different threads of clues which eventually leads to a revelation that becomes an answer to many deaths which are unearthed along the way.

But it is not the murder that is of central interest in this narrative as the writer presents a thorough insight into the life of the female lead detective. Like many female detectives in the history of crime fiction Detective Elinborg choice of this profession is a surprise of many including her family. The fact that this is a male-dominated profession even in an egalitarian society is highlighted in the surprise people feel when they encounter her. One such conversation occurs in *Silence of the Graves*—“she greeted Elinborg sincerely and asked if there were many woman detectives. ‘next to none,’ Elinborg smiled. ‘sinful’ said Mikkalina, offering her a seat. ‘Women should be in forefront everywhere’” (248). A female detective is most likely to stumble into this profession by chance like P.D James’ Harriet who inherits a detective agency. Hence, Elinborg’s deliberate choice becomes significant in the history of female detection as well. Arnaldur Indridason clearly mentions that she could have continued her studies in the field of geology and become a scientist yet she chooses to join the police force even though there are only a handful of female detectives in the Icelandic CID. It is also significant that she does so at the face of immediate disapproval from her family especially her mother—

“Elinborg had heard it all before. Her mother was disappointed that she had ‘finished up’ in the police, as she put it. She thought the job was beneath her daughter. Not because it was unimportant- far from it-but she simply could not bear to think of her Elinborg dealing with crooks. She imagined other people-nothing like her daughter-pursuing criminals, arresting them, questioning them and locking them up. Her daughter just wasn’t that kind of woman. Elinborg had long ago given up defending her profession” (*Outrage* 167).

Elinborg's mother's attitude also reveals a stereotypical construct of how a female should behave which is the masculine notion of a woman staying home and raising children. Since Elinborg does not fit into the socially accepted behaviour of a good woman she faces a keen sense of disapproval ironically from her mother.

In spite of all the prejudices surrounding her, she relentlessly pursues the case. She becomes the new face of a female professional who is able to stand against the obstacles placed by a patriarchal society while emphasizing—"the necessity to empathize with the social pressures on women related to the demands of competitive, masculine professional life and the resistant social norms associated with motherhood and femininity [concluding that a] modern woman must fight to become an individual first" (Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 176). This individual space of Elinorg is highlighted by the writer throughout the series as her love of cooking. She loves cooking new cuisines and adding an Icelandic flavor to food from different countries. Her refusal to cook the traditional food that she grew up eating reflects her adventurous spirit while her recipe book becomes a symbol of her inventiveness and unorthodox outlook which comes handy in her professional field. Her choice of cooking a family meal is also bound to her following her passion rather than her sticking to the traditional gender roles which relegate a female to a domestic space of feeding and nurturing. Cooking becomes a way of finding her own space as an individual rather than a daily chore which gives her a break from everything including her family—

"Whenever Elinborg focused on her cooking she attained a rare state of calm. She permitted herself to slow down and retreat from the stressful daily round, to concentrate

on something other than work and take a break from the family. She emptied her mind of everything but the consideration of different ingredients, and how she could apply her insight and artistry to producing perfection from chaos. In her kitchen, she found an outlet for her creativity [...] For Elinborg the three stages of [...] - preparation, cooking, and eating-were a recipe for life itself" (*Outrage* 311-312).

However, it is her detection skills which remain of primary interest in the narration. The methodical way of sifting through various clues applied by Elinborg is also in direct contrast to the intuitive way of detection applied by previous female detectives. Elinborg is presented as relentlessly questioning possible witnesses no matter how slight the connection and all family members in search for clarity. She does not leave things to chance as she keeps an unlikely friend of the victim under close surveillance. She sits alone in her car waiting for any suspicious behaviour and does not rely on her male colleagues to rescue her from any possible dangerous situations. There is no moment of her following a 'hunch' as she sifts through various clues for answers as her response to situations is rational. She is presented as a calm and intelligent protagonist.

These subtle nuances in her character reflect her refusal to fit into the female stereotype which has relegated a female to the domestic space alone in a genre which idealises masculinity explicitly. Though she feels the demands of the traditional role of a wife and a mother she does not comply with this role that is expected of her. On the other hand, she makes a space of her own in a male-dominated profession whilst refusing to face any subordination due to her being a woman. She subverts the stereotype of the female detective by solving the crime through

methodical detection remaining calm and collected the entire time. Hence, the character of Detective Elinborg reflects –"gender roles in the wake of women's struggle for equality in the workplace and at home [which is] representative of microcosms of the gender based inequalities, conflicts and violence in the wider society" (Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 177).

Her character also exposes rampant sexism present in the professional sphere which becomes an eye opener for the readers since the Scandinavian nations have often been hailed as an egalitarian utopia. This topic of sexism is not new to Indridason as he has dealt with it in *Jar City* too which presents a sexist cop who allows a rape case to go cold because of his belief that the victim wanted the sexual encounter with her rapist. This, in turn, exposes the attitude which believes that any degradation of a female was normal and how the keepers of law made it impossible for a woman to complain. The sexist cop hence becomes an example of overt masculinity who use their position of power to silence any complaints. While this was a direct case of sexism *Outrage* presents a more muted version of expected behaviour in a patriarchal society which tries to topple the lead detective as they try to undermine her authority. Hence, it is also appropriate that the associated crime of the murder victim is rape which is directly connected with the ideas of masculine power and oppression highlighting the sadistic misogyny which lies at the heart of all social criticism of Scandinavian crime fiction. The title of the novel *Outrage* captures the outrage rape victims feel at the leniency of the judicial system against the rapist.

Jussi Alder-Olsen's Department Q series features an investigative team of Carl, Assad, Rose, and Gordan. The universe of Department Q series does not feature a lot of female characters

and the police procedural which reflects the intricate working of a police force does not feature a single female detective which itself reveals the position of women. While there are some female employees in the police department, they are mostly presented as secretaries and assistants. Likewise, the writer presents woman as nurses but never the doctor, woman as lab assistants but never the lead researcher. Hence, in this prejudiced world of gender inequality which highlights the position of women in Scandinavian society, the character of Nete in *Guilt* comes as a breath of fresh air. *Guilt* focuses on the dark activities of right-wing thinkers of Purity party who believe in the creation of a pure race which leads to a brutal regime of forced sterilization of women deemed unfit.

The character of Nete is a well-rounded character as we get to delve into her psychology and history. Nete is born in a rustic farm away from the cosmopolitan city of Copenhagen. Her mother dies at a young age and therefore, she is raised by her father along with her brothers. The lack of family guidance and growing up in an all-male household leads to certain behavioural issues in Nete especially when she goes to school. She does not know to behave as a woman as stated by societal rules. She is an outspoken and confident young girl who works on the farm along with her brothers. She is not treated differently on the farm so she learns how to repair fences and take care of the animals. But when she joins school she does not fit into the expected role of feminine behaviour due to which she is labelled as a delinquent and treated as a social outcast. Her elder brother eventually teaches her that—"human beings could be divided into two kinds, male and female.[...] the fundamentals of life were divided between these two groups. Matters of work and all went on within the four walls of the home. It was all designed so that one group or the other would take care of any given issue" (129).

At the age of fifteen, she ends up being pregnant with her cousin's child who vehemently denies his involvement. This incident becomes one of the turning points in her life as she becomes the victim whereas her cousin Tage goes scot free. The humiliation that she undergoes as the result of this pregnancy and the ensuing miscarriage is vividly written by the writer—"here", he said, depositing a fistful of rice grains on the floor in front of her. 'eat!'. He placed a jug of water next to her. 'and drink!'"(164). This interrogation by her father to find out who is behind the pregnancy is pointless as he refuses to believe his daughter when told the truth. It highlights the lack of support but also reveals how women end up being victims in a structure dominated by men.

This incident begins the downhill journey of Nete which leads to multiple pregnancies and abortions, her rape by her Doctor, her stay in homes for 'Fallen Woman' and eventually her journey to the island of Sprogo where she is forcefully sterilized when the doctor deems her unfit and inferior. Nete becomes a victim of social prejudices and she is brutally silenced when she tries to raise her voice. Her rapist Dr. Wade goes scot free because his appearance is respectful. She is hounded and tormented like an animal with no hope. Yet she survives all this only for it all to come crashing down when her past is brought to light. The accusing fingers are raised yet again and this is when Nete decides to stop being the victim. Like a phoenix rising from her ashes, she meticulously plans her revenge on each one of her tormentor who brought about her ruination.

The parallel narrative of Nete as a victim and her as a murderer makes a gripping story. By giving a background story to the character of Nete, Olsen manages to make a detailed study of the transformation of her as a victim to a perpetrator. Fed up of lifelong social injustices Nete does not rely on the justice system to give her a fair hearing. She meticulously plans her revenge and manages to subvert the role of the victim and the victimiser. She builds an airtight room with her own hands. She invites her victims to her home and serves them poisoned tea while calmly watching them splutter and die. The role reversal is complete when she smashes the head of one of her victims and forces them to drink the poison.

A look into the life of Nete reveals certain important points. She is made an outcast because she does not fit into the role of an ideal woman and mother as society deemed fit. She is brash and outspoken as a child and tries to fight for herself even in the prison-like hospital. The dominance of men over her and on all marginalized in general is highlighted by the Purity programme which aimed at racial superiority—"if a woman's behaviour was deemed to be antisocial she'd be in the spotlight.[...] they could be sent to Sprogo indefinitely without being convicted of any crime. The doctors thought they could do that [...] because these women weren't part of the 'normal' society to which everyone else belonged" (*Guilt* 176). At the face of such right-wing thoughts women come off as worst victims as they are not given any say in this sterilisation. In this light, Nete's vengeance and her role as a victimiser become all the more significant. She manages to escape this internalisation of patriarchal norms of which many women are a victim of resulting even in woman abusing woman, where women believe that they are the inferior gender—"I am good enough"(69), she reminds herself as Nete's life becomes a tale of abuse of power.

Like Nete, we do come across women victims who turn into fighters in their own rights in the Department Q series. Rose, we learn in *The Scarred Woman* was abused by her father all through her life till he is crushed by a one-tonne block of steel in front of her. Though psychologically affected by the abuse and the gruesome death, she defies all odds to become an indispensable part of cold cases team. She is an intelligent woman with an exceptionally good memory which is at odds with the traditional gender definitions. Her detecting skill is also at par with the male members of her team as she comes to her conclusions rationally and logically. Like Detective Elinborg in the Reykjavik murder series, Rose goes against the norms of a female detective who relies on her intuitive skill to draw her conclusions. Instead, we find Rose meticulously combing through records in search of a single red herring. Her sexual life also subverts the norms of her gender as she moves through many men without a backward glance. Together both these women put a brave face against the odds but their lives also become a tale of abuse which exposes the rotting foundation of the egalitarian state.

Finnish writer Matti Joensuu has a different approach to the role and position of women. He gives voice to his social critique by presenting women as objects of prey for the men in the prowl. *To Steal her Love* narrates the story of a person named Tweety, a young man who breaks into apartments of women to watch them. This voyeuristic story depicts certain truths of how the entire society perceives women. Women are clearly objectified by Tweety because he likes to shadow them and silently watch them sleep. The nocturnal visitor becomes a disturbing factor for many women who wake up to an unknown presence within the protective space of their home. Tweety ends up falling in love with one such woman. The results of which are

tragic for him. This woman, unlike his other women, is given depth by the writer. She is a recent widow who lives alone. After waking up to a strange presence many times she initially questions her sanity but finally decides to buy a gun for protection. This moment of self-assertion on the part of this woman is a positive step on the part of the writer to do away with gender binaries. The fact that this woman buys a gun for protection rather than request for protection from a male member becomes significant in this light.

In *The Priest of Evil* Joensuu narrates a parallel story of a damaged family alongside the story of a deranged killer. The readers are taken into a journey of a twisted family who lives in perpetual fear of an abusive father. The neglected children live in an imaginary world to deal with the terror they feel. But the worst victim of the family is the mother who has to go through mental as well as physical abuse—"his mother cried out: help! Marja wrenched the door open; the air was blue, chairs lying across the floor; a row of cigarettes lay smoking in the ashtray, a thin, curly tail rising from each of them into the air. Mother was lying on the floor. Her face was red. Father was sitting flat on top of her, his hand around her throat" (6). Joensuu captures the chaos that has undertaken the household due to regular abuse. The damages have a lasting effect as it creates a number of dysfunctional individuals. Domestic violence is the ugly side of the family who deals with it by living in denial. After the episode where the father searches for a gun to shoot his wife the haze is lifted as the family goes back into a skewed sense of normalcy. The mother who has been abused has internalised the lack of self-worth so she does not realise that she is a victim of misogyny. Instead, she still looks up to her husband and takes care of him. Joensuu leaves his readers with this image of a battered woman which subverts the ideology upheld by the welfare state.

"Globally known as one of the most progressive nations when it comes to gender equality and quality of life for families, Norway is, like the other Scandinavian nations, still struggling with de facto inequalities, particularly when it comes to more ingrained sociocultural expectations of motherhood" (Stougaard-Nielsen 2017: 200)—Karin Fossum in her works reflects this struggle of a nation to outgrow its patriarchal notions. In her typical nuanced manner, she presents the traces of inequality that has remained in the society which claims to be close to perfection. Her in-depth character studies reveal this traditional outlook which refuses to be eliminated. *The Water's Edge* presents an image of a man walking in a forest with the woman behind trying to keep up. This sets up the stage for the readers to understand the relationship of a married couple-Reinhardt and Kristine who find a dead body of a little child on their habitual walk.

As the story unfolds we can draw a picture of a toxic relationship where the wife has always remained suppressed —"her voice was devoid of authority, it was more of a pitiful plea. He snarled in irritation" (4). This description of an everyday conversation reveals the level of domination the husband has over his wife. In moments of affection Reinhardt calls her 'his doll' (6) which objectifies her as well as treats her as a possession. In the description that follows we are told how Kristine is tiny whereas Reinhardt is 'taller, broader, stronger [and] he always led the way'(4). Kristine's everyday hesitation and anxiety is in sharp contrast with the self-assurance of Reinhardt.

Reinhardt's biggest weapon of control over his wife is to indirectly feed her hope for a child. Kristine longs for a child but knows that at thirty-seven years old it is too late for her to find

another partner. This is one of the reasons Kristine stays in a marriage where there is no scope for her to give voice to any of her wishes. Hence, her small acts of defiance in the narrative become small victories for womanhood and her final rebellious act of walking out of her marriage comes as a moment of triumph for the readers too. In doing so she reclaims her body and asserts her own identity. Though only part a minor sub-plot the relationship of Kristine and Reinhardt reveal some uneasy truths about a society which turns a blind eye to injustices that occur within the security of a domestic space. Yet by showing the final self-assertion of Kristine, she manages to draw attention to women who take a stand.

Fossum often delves deep into the psychology of her characters exposing their darkest desires. In keeping with her writing, Fossum presents *When the Devil Holds the Candle*, which begins with an old sixty-year-old lady going to the police station with some information but she is misunderstood and turned away. What follows is a gripping story of what happens when ordinary people give in to the call of evil. Irma, a sixty-year-old is a seemingly ordinary woman. Initially, she fits into the stereotypical image of a woman who is fussy and meticulous whose cleaning ritual leaves the house smelling of soap and bleach—"I always use soap and deodorant. I wash my hair frequently. And my floors. My windows are shiny. All my door handles are polished and clean" (42). She has been living alone after her husband leaves her and has a son who dutifully visits her. She is healthy for the age and occasionally goes to the theatre with her friend Runi.

It is during one of these excursions into town that she is stalked by Andreas and Zipp who plan to mug her—"they noticed her at the same moment. A stout woman in a brown coat" (60). At

this moment of stalking, we are given a glimpse into the thoughts of both the stalker and the stalked—"I am in the business.' Andreas said in English [...] not the biggest or most dangerous animal in the forest, but the slimmest, boldest, and possibly the most cunning. Not an enemy was in sight, only an easy prey" (62). The scene unfolds slowly like a hunt. Irma manages to reach her home before Andreas catches up until she realises she has left the door open. What ensues next is a scene of havoc as Andreas threatens the old lady to give up her money.

The distress of Irma is captured in her thoughts—"I wanted to throw up, I wanted to run away" (68). Irma has a secret which is the heaviest burden for her and in the fight that ensues, it is revealed—"it was my intestine he was looking at. It sticks out through the skin of my abdomen and ends in a colostomy bag" (69). When this sickness of her is revealed to someone else it destroys the peaceful world she has built till now. We see a moment of humiliation for Irma as Andreas rages on until the moment when the hunter becomes the hunted—"and so I pushed him, I heard him gasp as he fell backward down the steep staircase. There was a crashing and thumping and thundering on the stairs. I heard a disgusting, dull thud as he hit the cement. A faint rattling sound that lasted a few seconds. Then silence" (69).

What follows is a reversal of roles in the power equation as Irma who was seen as the weaker person is given all the power in the narrative. Andreas lies paralysed on the floor unable to move even his head and ends up being at the mercy of his former prey. A strange relationship is formed between the two as Irma refuses to call for help for the eighteen-year-old boy lying bleeding in her cellar. He is forced then to listen to whatever Irma deems fit to share with him. This act of making the young boy listen to her becomes significant for Irma because she has

remained invisible all her life. Her powerlessness is highlighted throughout the narrative as she remains powerless to stop her husband and son from leaving her—"we always imagine the worst: we know what it's like to grow up in the world of men" (66), she concludes. Even Andreas reiterates this thought—"women are strange [...] it's as if they can smell that something is up. Or maybe they just look at things in a different way from men. Because they have more enemies, maybe that's it. To be a woman and have to be on guard all the time, what a [...] strain that must be!" (30). This quote draws attention to the fact that even the most egalitarian nations cannot get rid of the age-old power structures which allow men to have power over women.

By pushing Andreas down the stairs Irma unknowingly reverses the power equation but her cold refusal to call for medical help for the injured man represents the subversion of gender roles as well. Her moment of decision is described as thus—"I walked up the steps thinking. I owned nothing in this world. No one's face lit up at the sight of Irma funder. But this young man's life lay in my hands" (86). Irma then takes on the role of the perpetrator while letting her victim slowly die on her floor. There are episodes of kindness on the part of Irma to provide water to the young boy but that also takes a twisted turn because keeping him alive and hidden gives her a sense of power. Her lifelong invisibility and silent acceptance of life culminate into an unthinkable evil for—"I liked the fact that he had to lie there and couldn't escape [...] you have to understand what this means to a woman like me. Now I was making the rules and imposing them: on him. It feels good to make the decisions" (148). She eventually bashes his head to a pulp with a hammer yet it is significant that she is never a suspect in the investigation because she is looked upon as a passive character. This lifelong passivity acts as a mask for her which eventually leads to the death of Andreas. Hence, this becomes a reversal of the popular

motif in crime fiction of a female who becomes a victim of sadism. Instead, here the woman has the power over the body of a man and uses him to feed her sense of power making him the victim of exploitation. By doing so, Fossum subtly manages to redefine certain gender roles that are usually taken for granted by subverting the socially accepted norm of gender behaviour.

Hence, a look into the works of all five authors discussed here reveals the changing position of women and the role they play in Scandinavian society. In the context of the feminist point of view, these narratives are important rewriting of the genre which traditionally offers women a subordinate role to play. In this context, it is important to note that Scandinavian crime writers do not just substitute the male with a female lead to emphasize the position of women. There is a complex reimagining of the women who are no longer victims. Instead, they are recast in the role of transgressors and investigators which go beyond the reductive role that women were traditionally confined to play in crime fiction. While women do not play the lead role in the novels discussed here, all five authors make a thorough examination of gender stereotypes and male prejudices creating memorable characters in their own right. The depiction of female characters in the role of the victim or the transgressor is a reflection of social norms. Yet all these women as constantly questioning the conventions attached to stereotypical feminine behaviour and recasting and reclaiming their subjectivity.

It is clear that the Scandinavian crime fiction is toying with the notions and limits of the crime novel representing female characters who are going beyond the boundaries and limits of their genders becoming a face of resistance. This can be attributed to the influence of a new wave of crime fiction in Scandinavia which is credited with the introduction of strong women in a male-

dominated profession as law enforcers of private detectives and women who are no longer cast in the role of a victim alone. This subgenre acts as a platform for giving voice to the feminist debates that were part of the decades that characterised women movement in Europe and the rest of the world. They portray women as an effective problem solver representing women as a person with a successful career who is brave enough to delve into the dark hinterlands of the criminals' psychology.

Therefore, they raise voice against the inequality and violence faced by women in society. The depiction of women as victim in Scandinavian crime fiction goes beyond the role that women victims traditionally played in crime novels. This depiction of violence on women extends the theme of socio-political critique. All the authors discussed in this chapter depict violence on women as a way to expose the injustices they suffer even in places where they have been at the forefront in all spheres of life. The presence of domestic violence has been touched upon by all five authors to give voice to a crime which usually goes unnoticed. It also reveals how ill-equipped the state is to handle these situations as these prejudices against women are deep-seated.

Thus, Scandinavian Crime Fiction with its depiction of violence against women and with its groundbreaking female characters become pictures of the life of the modern women in a contemporary world which is more or less explicitly masculine-dominated. The crime novel serves to shed light into various social systems which projects the image of an egalitarian society where women share an equal place with their male counterpart. Together these crime novels and series raise important questions on the role of social institutions. The female in a

Scandinavian crime novel does emerge as a hero in her own right. But their stories also reveal a layer of underlying prejudices and stereotypical views that are yet to be shed. Thus, Scandinavian crime fiction in contemporary times is reinventing itself to provide a fruitful site for investigating changes in our conception of gender roles with the backdrop of representations of women in crime fiction over time.