

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

As the previous chapters' have highlighted, this thesis has been primarily concerned with the generic study of Scandinavian crime fiction tracing the distinctive features of this subgenre. While crime fiction has always been a popular genre, the subgenre of Scandinavian crime fiction has become a global phenomenon as crime fiction from the cold northern land has become a major export in the international market. As compared to other subgenres of crime fiction, Scandinavian crime fiction has been hailed for its literary merit. This thesis has, therefore, delved into the question of whether this literary excitement is justified or not. In order to do so, this study has looked into the history of crime fiction going back to the traditional school of crime writing to show how crime fiction from Scandinavia was initially a product of this school. It is only when the crime writers from this region reacted and reworked this genre did the unique sub-genre of Scandinavian crime fiction come into being. This thesis has therefore made a study of how Scandinavian crime fiction has grown to be a sub-genre of its own. By taking five authors from five Scandinavian nations this study has also analyzed the emerging trends of Scandinavian crime fiction.

The foregoing study has revealed that the influence of the British clue puzzle form was initially felt on crime fiction from Scandinavia but a closer analysis of Scandinavian crime fiction shows that it owes a greater debt to the American tradition of Hardboiled fiction. As seen in the first chapter, the introduction of the police procedural changed the trajectory of this subgenre which was a direct influence of the American Mcbain series. The traditional clue puzzle form was

soon discarded for more realistic writing presenting a team working in a police department. This proved to be a crucial change in the history of Scandinavian crime fiction as the police procedural form proved an apt vehicle for the sociopolitical critique which remains at the core of the art. The use of the police procedural allowed the crime writers to raise vital issues about the workings of the bureaucracy in the state along with various governmental organizations.

The assassination of the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme also had a profound impact on the genre of Scandinavian crime fiction. This event was a turning point in the history of the nation as this event jolted the public out of their comfort zones as faith upon the government and the welfare state took a severe blow. Crime fiction proved to be an apt vehicle to deal with this crisis as writers took to this genre to voice their social as well as political anxieties. Likewise, when rampant consumerism threatened the Marxist ideal, crime reporter Per Wahloo in collaboration with Maj Sjöwall turned to crime fiction to present their disenchantment with the welfare policies. Their ten book series featuring detective Martin Beck as the lead detective reinvented the genre of Scandinavian crime fiction creating the subgenre that we know of today. The influence of the Martin Beck series has been felt on all the novels and crime series discussed in this study. In fact, most features of contemporary Scandinavian crime fiction can be traced to this iconic series aptly subtitled— ‘The story of crime’. As seen in the previous chapters, these features have been put under a critical light in this study.

A study of the five series has revealed the different trends that make this sub-genre unique but the question of sociopolitical critique has remained paramount as revealed in this study. This study has shown that Scandinavian crime fiction is born out of the cracks that appeared in the welfare state and continues to actively question its policies and stand on various issues. This is highlighted not only in the central theme of the novels discussed here but in the way the setting

and characters work together to present a grim picture of the nations that are celebrated as the happiest in the world. In the age of globalization, the anxieties of immigration, financial crashes, political de-stability, environmental crisis, and consumerism find a voice in a literature that is specifically designed to present various crises. Scandinavian crime fiction has effectively taken a generic form of crime fiction and specifically the police procedural to give it an added literary merit.

It is revealed that the characters' moral complexity in Scandinavian crime fiction is not merely an aesthetic choice for the writers. On the contrary, this approach speaks directly to these writers' worldview reflecting how people are the products of their environments. The world is flawed, and government and society are corrupt and intolerant, therefore, no one can be truly 'good' which in turn would mean that no one is completely 'bad' either. With this perspective, it comes as no surprise that Scandinavian crime writers used their novels as platforms for social critique. Aside from the distrust in the justice system that came out of the 1986 assassination, Scandinavian crime writers found inspiration from the failed welfare state, economic class divisions, and other social issues. Stieg Larsson, the author of *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* of the 'Millennium' series, was initially compelled to write the novel to expose the hypocrisy and danger of allowing neo-Nazi protests in Sweden. Ever since the Scandinavians' idyllic worldview crashed after PM Palme's assassination, Scandinavian crime writers could not help but slip a biting critique of the real world into their fiction, making their stories even more relevant and engaging to readers.

While much has been said about sociopolitical critique in Scandinavian crime fiction, it is the detectives who make these novels so popular. A thorough analysis of the five detectives taken up for study in this thesis has revealed the humane quality of the detective who is an ordinary

man trying to make sense of the world he lives in. As the series progresses, the authors discussed in this study have unfolded the different character traits of the detectives along with a slow revelation of their histories which makes for a fascinating read. The presentation of the relentless detectives who are grappling with senseless crimes happening around them has made them human and hence, relatable to the readers. In a world of constant flux and change the figure of the detective remains steadfast as he manages to solve the mystery even when his world is falling apart around him. Like the clues throughout the stories, the embedded histories of the detectives have had a significant contribution to the creation of an organic whole as well as to the overall popularity of Scandinavian crime fiction.

As revealed in the previous chapters, the character of the detective has an important role to play. His role is not limited to just solving the crime but goes further to reveal the working of the various political and social machinery. His failing relationships along with his failing health become a symbol of the failures of a state which has failed to keep its promises. This is true not only for the five detectives discussed in this thesis but many other Scandinavian detectives share these character traits. One such example would be the character of Harry Hole, the hard-drinking lead detective of Jo Nesbo's crime series. Hence, the brooding detective standing against the harsh northern landscape has become an iconic image of crime fiction from this region especially in the cinematic versions of these novels.

This study has revealed the care with which the central protagonist has been drawn with their elaborate histories. Likewise, a lot of thought has gone into the selection of the figure of the criminal/murderer. Scandinavian crime writers have laid stress on the back stories of the detectives as well as their criminals. One seldom comes across crimes for the sake of crime in the novels discussed here. Instead, the authors have created an intricate web of failures of the

state which have pushed these human beings unto the path of crime. A long and abusive history usually culminates in violent crime when keepers of law and order fail to rise up to the occasion. Hence, Scandinavian crime writers have laid stress on the presentation of history as well as on the thoughts of the criminal. They do not justify the horrendous crimes that take place but by making the reader's privy to the thoughts of the criminals these crime writers make them more human. Since, sociopolitical critique is so important to this subgenre of crime fiction the criminals crowding the Nordic landscape are ones created due to failures of family, community, and society at large. This further reflects the failures of the welfare ideal where the state policies lead to isolated and alienated individuals effectively pushing them to the fringes of society and towards delinquent behavior.

Scandinavian crime fiction is concerned with women too as their role in society is also reflected in this genre. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, crime fiction has often been referred to as one of the more sexist sub-genre of fiction due to their focus on the male lead protagonist. On the other hand, the northern land of Scandinavia is a place where women enjoy equal rights as men. In this space Scandinavian crime fiction has given a distinctive perspective to the question of women and the place they enjoy in the Scandinavian egalitarian society. The study of crime fiction from this region has revealed how women are victims. Together these books reveal the dark side of this egalitarian society where women do not have a safe haven even within the four walls of their homes. The rising crime of domestic violence against women has been put under critical light by the crime writers as the governmental policies safeguarding women are also put under the scanner. The theme of socio-political critique finds a voice in the question of women but Scandinavian crime fiction goes beyond critique to subvert a masculine genre. Crime fiction has been considered to be a masculine genre due to focus on physical prowess and the

intelligent rational male detective. The female detective has made her mark in this genre but surely the barrier of gender stereotypes has been difficult to break down. Female detectives are invariably described as being weak and lacking rationality often looking up to her male counterpart for protection. A look into the novels of the crime writers discussed here has revealed a number of strong females who subverts all gender expectations. These women do feel the constraints of their sex and they do sometimes lapse into a momentary powerlessness but they refuse to play the damsel in distress. Instead, they take charge of the situation and come out victorious be it Detective Elinborg or the murderess Yvonne Ander. By recasting women in active roles rather than a passive role of a victim and a femme fatale, a detailed study of female characters has revealed how Scandinavian crime fiction has pushed the boundaries of what has been traditionally a masculine genre.

Scandinavian crime fiction has also pushed the boundaries of what a traditional crime novel should be like especially reflected in their endings. All five authors discussed in this study have challenged the traditional ending of a crime novel where all the loose endings are neatly tied. The endings reflect a marked influence of the 'Noir' tradition where the order of a traditional crime novel is replaced by disorder and often a looming crisis ahead. This ending has effectively subverted the state projected image of a utopian ideal. By doing so Scandinavian crime writers have emphasized the sociopolitical critique which is so central to their work. The lack of neat endings has also pushed the readers out of their comfort zones where reading a crime novel is no longer an escapist reading. Instead, the readers are left with a disturbing image of looming crisis ahead even as the weary lead detective manages to close a case. By robbing the crime novel of its neat endings, Scandinavian crime fiction follows a realistic literary tradition. But more importantly, the endings of the novels that make up Scandinavian

crime fiction has captured the chaos of the contemporary world where all things do not fall into place.

But as the previous chapters reveal, the one thing that gives this sub-genre the distinct stamp of 'Scandinavia' is its location and settings as emphasized by the cover of these novels. The snow-covered landscape has been used in covers of these novels multiple times to the extent of this image turning into a stereotype. The chilly atmosphere of the northern landscape goes hand in hand with the bone-chilling crimes that take place in a crime novel. By evoking the harsh landscape these crime writers have given a glimpse of the exotic landscape that has fired the imagination of the international readers. But this exotic landscape has a darker story to unfold as revealed when Scandinavian crime fiction is examined. The beauty of the unending forest and massive lakes is contrasted with the most gruesome crimes that the human mind can conjure. The blood against the pristine snow makes for a stark image but this graphic image exposes the undercurrent of violence in all human beings even the ones residing in the happiest of nations. All five novelists have used the cold northern landscape to not only evoke a sense of foreboding but also to symbolize the inner turmoil of the characters. The setting has been used in a skilful manner to capture the minds of the non-Scandinavian readers. But it also acts as an apt literary device to give voice to the larger concerns of the writers.

While this thesis has made a selective study of Scandinavian crime fiction by selecting a single author from each of the five nations that make up Scandinavia, the characteristic features discussed here are shared by almost all writers hailing from this region. Some important writers who are part of this global phenomenon are Norwegian writer, Jo Nesbo whose Harry Hole series has garnered critical acclaim. Another Norwegian writer is Anne Holt, a former minister of justice who created waves with her series featuring a lesbian police officer. Swedish crime

writers have always been in the forefront like Stieg Larsson but Finnish crime writers are slowly entering this global market as writers like Minna Lindgren are receiving international acclaim. Hakan Nesser's Van Veeteren series and Peter Hoeg's post-modernist tale *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* are part of many examples of a wide array of crime fiction which is being produced from this region. A number of these books are being translated into English and other languages which in turn has made them accessible to a larger global audience. At the same time, many of these books have also been turned into films and series like Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy which has a Swedish as well as a Hollywood adaptation, both of which has contributed to the overall popularity of the genre.

Hence, it is clear that these characteristic features discussed in this study have contributed to the development of Scandinavian crime fiction but at the same time readers must take into consideration that the development of this sub-genre did not take place in isolation. Therefore, it is possible to trace to influence of various factors on the development of this subgenre. The clearest influence as mentioned earlier is that of the American hardboiled fiction which used the genre of crime fiction to give voice to various social and political concerns. Avid readers of the genre can also trace similarities between the master of 'Tartan Noir', Rankin's Inspector Rebus—a flawed but humane detective and the detectives that make up the universe of Scandinavian crime fiction. As seen previously, the influence of the noir is also felt strongly on the endings of the novels.

On their own, these features of the various sub-genres of crime fiction make for a popular and interesting read. But Scandinavian crime fiction is a combination of all these features set against the backdrop of a real-life utopia making it worthy of literary merit and attention. There is no single explanation for the popularity of this genre but the various aspects discussed here

play a key role. The geographical location along with commitment towards sociopolitical critique with nuanced characterization becomes a core driving force for the Scandinavian crime novel. The growing popularity has also revitalized the genre of crime fiction so they can no longer be dismissed as mere page-turners.

It is apparent that the global phenomenon of Scandinavian crime fiction can no longer be denied as seen by the number of literary translations and television and film adaptations. Yet it must be noted that the word Scandinavian is a broad and general term to describe something very diverse in nature as revealed in the first chapter of this thesis. Each of the five nations discussed here have their own unique history and culture. While this study does focus on the similarities shared by crime fiction from these nations due to the welfare system, there is a scope for a study of the dissimilarities too as seen in the multiple historical and cultural differences. I have used the broad term of Scandinavia to describe the sub-genre of crime fiction from these Nordic lands due to the similarities of the welfare state and the setting in of disenchantment that followed. But a close inspection may reveal the differences between Norwegian crime fiction- 'Krim' and 'krimi' from Denmark. The word Scandinavian is all-encompassing and necessary to project the global success in the international sphere but it also reveals a need for a study of crime fiction from each of the five nations discussed in this thesis as each nation has its own rich literary history and traditions leaving scope and space for further studies.

With such an abundance of writing talent currently producing a wealth of crime fiction in the Scandinavian countries, the continuance of this genre seems guaranteed. Deemed and dismissed as popular fiction, there is a possibility that this current popularity will become less

pronounced. However, the Scandinavian crime fiction phenomenon is much more than a passing fashion- it is based on a solid, quantifiable literary achievement.