CONCLUSION

As we have already seen Magical realism and Metafiction have become popular within general movement of post-modernism. They tend to work in favour of pluralism like postmodernism. We also see the past brought into the present, time and space distorted to the point that they no longer matter. In the present study, I have demonstrated that Magical realism and Metafiction were present in twentieth century also but they were present as an alternative to more established norms such as surrealism and post modernism through its privileging of the mimetic function and its emphasis on the representation of history. Fiction and history has been perceived as separate and individual concepts. Aristotle distinguished between the functions of history and fiction saying that fiction is concerned with universal truth whereas history is concerned with facts. This argument has been used to constitute a common difference between history and fiction whereas historiographic metafiction challenges this notion. Historiographic metafiction argues that there is a lot in common between these two styles. Taking a cue from this the novels of Susan Sontag also redefine the relationship between history and fiction. Like in postmodernism, where truths are neither looked into nor interrogated, the characters in Magical realism also pay little attention to and often downplay the magical events occurring in the novel. The original theory of Magical realism as defined by Roh argues to go beyond the traditional mimesis and to represent the hidden. This heightened reality perception which is characteristic of Magical realism is visibly present in the novels of Susan Sontag. (The Benefactor, Death Kit) The novels present not only realities but also multiple realities. The multiplicity of realities in Magical realism emphasizes the historical dimensions of the narratives. In this study, I have tried to present that magical realism in fact is a new form of historical novel which can be interpreted as a reflection of historical reality already of a fantastic nature (The Volcano Lover, In America).

Metafiction and Magical realism are not genres of fiction but these are the “tendencies within the novel”. As Robert Scholes observes metafiction is “borderline between fiction and criticism”, thus, it is an attitude to fiction. These tendencies became clearly visible in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1980s this gave way to discovery
of new forms of fantastic, fabulatory magical realism. These tendencies are features of postmodern fiction also. Thus, the novels of Susan Sontag written between 1963 and 2000 deploy identifiable postmodern strategies in her representation of historical events and figures. Theoretically also magical realism was born in the twentieth century, thus connecting it to postmodernism. The characteristics which one might attribute to postmodernism also describe literary magical realism. The self-reflexivity, metafiction, intertextuality and the blurring of boundaries are some of the features shared by both magical realism and postmodernism.

On the surface of things, applying Faris’s definition, the novels written by Sontag can be categorized as Magic realist novels as they combine realism with fantasy in such a way that it does not allow either element a greater claim to truth. Close scrutiny of Sontag’s novels reveals that though the novels share a common set of narrative procedures, they are different in some aspects. The magic in the novels of Susan Sontag is closer to the postmodern fashion in unmasking the real, showing up its claims to the truth. Sontag’s critical essays scorn realistic function and advocate an avant-garde style of writing, which challenges conventional ideas about the self, and society. The novels include dreams which take place during the normal life, the return of the dead, extremely complicated plots and also include myths and fairy tales in their narratives. In the novels, Sontag also includes the references from classical to Biblical myths. Myths are an integrated part of the stories that help to understand the concept of culture itself and its relationship to the world. As every culture has a myth concerning the origin of the world, in the same way the four novels depict different cultures and in a way different interpretations about the origin of the world.

The analysis of Sontag’s novels displays features and strategies that have been outlined by Faris, Hutcheon, Patricia Waugh and Scholes as major features of Magical realism and Metafiction. The novels manifest as constructs and depict a reality, which is different from the pre-conceived reality of historical events and facts. The novels violate the standard novelistic expectations and experiment with subject matter, form, style and temporal sequence. Because of the ever-changing nature of the definition of Magical realism, it is quite reasonable to continue to expand it to include the works that might not have been categorized as magic realist novels.
The proposed project has analyzed how Susan Sontag has interlinked various metafictional devices and magical realism in her novels. The crisis in the concept of the novel that began in the 1960s led to an extremely intense and fertile exploration within fiction itself, of the nature and limits of its own being as fiction. Susan Sontag, being the pioneer figure of this era has addressed this experimentalism and radicalism in her fiction as well as in her essays. Sontag’s works made a radical break with traditional post-war criticism in America blurring the boundaries between high and popular culture. She advocated an aesthetic approach to the study of culture. After writing her first two novels *The Benefactor* and *Death Kit*, she travelled outside the wealthy countries to North Africa, Mexico. Vietnam was the first country where she saw suffering. The present project has also tried to investigate Susan Sontag’s self-claim of addressing real suffering and the larger world. The first novel *The Benefactor* written on dreams prepared the way for her most famous essay *Against Interpretation* in which she emphasized that art was art only not a message or a meaning. She emphasized form over content. Sontag’s second novel *Death Kit* was written during the Vietnam War and it probes the senseless brutality and self-destruction that was prevalent in America at that time. Her third novel *The Volcano Lover* is a historical romance. It is grounded in realities, the actualities of life but the novel also imaginatively expands upon history to create a fictional historical space. The project on the one hand has aimed to explain the imbibing of magical realism and metafiction by Sontag in the texts, on the other hand I have also tried to explore the recording of the terrible revenge by the monarchists in *The Volcano Lover*. In fiction, Sontag has clearly felt the allure of the past. *The Volcano Lover* and *In America* are the recordings of the past in the documented form. *In America*, which chronicles the travails of a late 19th century actress, shows Sontag in a time-travelling form. The novels in a way also illuminate her motives for glancing persistently backward and conform to her assertion that, “The past is bigger than the present” (*IA*,23).

Magical realism, self-reflexivity and representation of history as a style in fiction have always attracted critical attention but this aspect had remained unexplored in Susan Sontag’s fiction. Her essays have attracted critical attention but her novels have remained unexplored. The present project has intended to highlight Susan Sontag’s approach to fiction, which is fundamentally different from other
authors as she herself declared in an interview to Edward Hirsch, “Fiction is freedom. Freedom to tell stories and freedom to be discursive” (“The Art of Fiction: Susan Sontag” Paris Review 137(Winter 1995): 175-208). Writing fiction to her has been a kind of performance, transcription or some pre-existing reality. The proposed project has pointed out how the novels of Susan Sontag achieved their effects in large part by exploiting a technique in rendering events that are in themselves fantastic, absurd or impossible. In her fiction, she has tried to make the reader aware of and as well challenged the reader to keep himself up not only in pace but in span as well. Thus, Sontag’s fiction deserves a careful reading, as a way of tracing her development as a writer, whose fiction and non-fiction have an essayistic quality.

The analysis of the novels shows that the novels depict a number of characteristics that have been outlined as major concerns of metafiction and magical realism. Sontag has used an aesthetic style in which magical elements have been blended into a realistic atmosphere in order to access a deeper understanding of reality. In all the four novels the characters are closely connected to the literary world through their work and love for reading and writing. The characters’ discussion and thoughts frequently center on books and authors allowing for numerous intertextual references. The novels tackle the metafictional preoccupation with the real and the imaginary and also the possible blurring of the two. The fabulous and the fantastic events have been included in such a way that otherwise maintain the reliable tone of objective realistic depiction. In The Benefactor the self construes an identity through the dreams. Hippolyte, a wealthy man attempts to find meaning in his dreams and ultimately rejects them and also the outside interpretation of his dream life. Using dreams, Sontag has imbibed magical realism in this novel. She justifies the protagonist’s attempts of not finding meaning in his dreams yet experiencing the dreams in themselves. His journey is a quest equilibrium and tranquility of the self. Sontag has depicted the inner working of mind, the analysis of thought and feeling, the presentation of the nature of personality and character. Such depiction requires a fictional character and he is Hippolyte. The opening of the novel is about a Chinese tale, about a butterfly, in which the man dreams about being a butterfly. Sontag here applies chiefly a literary style of magical realism that combines fantastic or dreamlike elements with reality. The analysis of the novel has also taken into account the
character of Hippolyte as a self-reflection of Sontag to which critics have called as an image of a life lived posthumously disburdened, of which Sontag herself seeks disburdenment.

The second novel *Death Kit* closely related to *The Benefactor* is again an exploration of the disintegrated self. The novel is about the burdens of consciousness and the narrator’s efforts to disburden himself of his thoughts as he comes to terms with them. The project has also tried to prove Sontag’s own insistence that the novel can be read as a straight narrative in which magical events take place exactly at the same level as those events, which are convincing in terms of everyday life. The novel is also an illustration of her theory about form. The novel is understood not so much as a work of art but as a mirror to reality. Blending realism and drama, Sontag favours focus on visible form i.e. on happenings. Sontag has depicted the psychic crisis that leads the protagonist to suicide.

The third novel *The Volcano Lover* recounts various seductions and scandals in the court of the Bourbon Monarchy in Naples. Sontag adds such historical texture to the saga of sexual intrigue that it comes to depict sordid life, full of passion and politics. Her warts and all versions of history rely on a profound imagining of each character’s point of view. In the novel, Sontag moves so elegantly in and out of heads and hearts of her three protagonists that the readers never feel the shift. She portrays the predicament of the great warrior as a man who has led armies, terrified his enemies and faced his own death only to be reduced to a state of fretful self-doubt over his ability to impress the woman he has begun to love. She depicts it just like and that is great art. Moreover, there is great relationship between Sontag’s career and *The Volcano Lover*. It is difficult not to imagine Sontag when she composes such sentences:

> It’s still common to begrudge a woman who has both beauty and intellectual brilliance---one would never say there was something odd or intimidating or ‘unfair’ about a man who was so –as if beauty, the ultimate enabler of feminine charm, should by rights have barred other kind of excellence fortunate (*TVL*, 277).
William Hamilton, British ambassador to the Bourbon Kingdom of the two sicilies evokes specific figures from Sontag’s earlier work, most specifically Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin. Sontag has employed chiefly a literary style of historiographic metafiction by fictionalizing the actual historical events and figures. Though this style has been under attack from historians as well as the critics yet it is this mix of history and fiction which is the main concern of historiographic metafiction. Hamilton is a ‘Volcano Lover’ as well as a writer also. He collects and then he writes about it. Like Sir William Sontag has also been a collector. In her famous short story “Project for a trip to China” which is also autobiographical, she explores the objects that her father used to bring from China. *The Volcano Lover* is also her most autobiographical work as in it she has also released a pent up romanticism that she had tried to mask in her earlier works. The study has deeply dwelt on the self-reflexive quality of *The Volcano Lover*, which is a dominant feature of metafiction. The very beginning of the novel where the narrator cannot resist entering the flea market is ample proof of this. She admits, “Desire leads me in” This connects her to the cavalieri who declares that he is “picture-mad”. Through the figure of Hamilton, she has critically portrayed destructive imperialism also. The study has dealt in detail with how Susan Sontag uses her narrative to create a work of fact and fiction.

Sontag’s final novel *In America* creates a fictional world full of contemporary resonance. In this study my primary focus has been to examine Sontag’s style with which she has captured the story, holding our attention as if we were watching the actress herself performing on the stage. She leads us through life in Krakow, vacation in Zakopane and on to America. The novel is about well-searched American events. Her last two novels *The Volcano Lover* and *In America* are about the discovery and coming of modern. Modern does begin in the late eighteenth Century and *In America* is set in post-civil war of United States. Sontag successfully conveys how the political and intellectual atmosphere of Poland and United States in the late nineteenth century affected her heroine’s life. In fact the self-conscious narrators of *The Volcano Lover* and *In America* have their genesis in American writer H J Kaplan’s narrators as foreigners. Sontag reviewed the novel *The Plenipotentiaries* by Kaplan in Chicago

The proposed project has brought into focus how Susan Sontag’s novels interweave various metafictional features. She has developed a writing that crosses borders, merges genres and deconstructs received literary conventions. She has adopted various techniques of fiction writing. She has worked within and outside the parameters of various genres. Her fiction is engaged with the revolutionary and revisionist acts of storytelling. The boundaries between the present and the past, the fictive and the factual are transgressed. ‘The self’, ‘history’ and reality have been combined in a fantastic way to create a fictional world. In all of the four novels, the characters are concerned and connected with literary world. Most of the characters are avid readers and writers. Their discussion of books and writers allows for intertextual references. In all of the novels, we have the characters that are intelligent, emotional and hungry for knowledge. They are passionate about thinking ideas. The four protagonists Hippolyte, Diddy, the Cavalier and Maryna are avid readers and connected with the written world through their passion for books and reading. Not only the protagonists but also majority of other characters are passionate for writing, be it letters, diaries, journals, reviews, scripts, etc.

The authorial reticence is another element which puts the novels into the category of magical realism and metafiction. The textual analysis of the novels shows that the narrators in the novels do not provide explanation of events rather the story proceeds with logical precision as if nothing happened. Moreover this is done deliberately as the act of explaining the supernatural or extraordinary reduces the legitimacy of this world in comparison to the natural world.

The aim of the study has been to point out that the novels of Sontag depict most of the characteristic of Magical realism. The analysis shows that the novelist crosses genres, combines concrete and the conceptual. The novelist has combined history, romance, and fantasy. She has also used metaphors and irony, which is another key element of magical realism to illustrate reality. For this, she has also introduced double murder in the novel: one mimetic of reality and the other imagined in the text. Sontag has also employed skillful time shifts; there are instances when time lapses or repeats and even stops sometimes. The novels tackle the metafictional
preoccupation with the real and imaginary. Sontag examines this blurred line between real and the imaginary, which points to the metafictional concern of examining the identity of fictional characters. Moreover, Sontag further complicates this when she introduces real-life personages into her fiction. The blurring/merging of the two worlds of fact and fiction becomes more complicated when the fictional authors realize that what they have been writing as fiction in the course of the narrative is their (own real) life. This leads to the thought that fiction can be more real than reality itself. Her method for depicting reality includes describing reality as a dream and using durative verbs to compare the past with the present. Sontag has also used the stylistic device of omniscient narrator who addresses the readers directly and sometimes discusses the alternate realities. That is why the novels have also been seen as precursor of the *nouveau roman*. Sontag has used symbolism extensively to make the readers aware of the power of imagination. She has employed a variety of symbols. The labyrinth as a symbol has also been used extensively in all the novels. Her writing in fact refers to actual labyrinths. Although there is no specific meaning for labyrinths but generally, a labyrinth is a geometric structure that encompasses, symbolizes a person’s consciousness. By using the labyrinth as a symbol, Sontag illustrates how a man may loose control over his fate and be destined to stay in maze of confusion. The story of *Death Kit* is a labyrinth for the reader who has to find first the meaning of Diddy’s existence and then further the meaning of the story. The narrative styles, which she has used in *The Benefactor, Death Kit*, are all labyrinthic. This is symbolic of the struggle a man endures in his life. A study by Robert Rowdon Wilson on the maze like plots in the novels of Susan Sontag reveals that there are two types of labyrinths in literature: those labyrinths that create “illusion of physical appearance” and “conceptual or strong labyrinths”. Applying the critical insight by Wilson it appears that Sontag applies both types in her fiction.

Sontag is a writer who has incorporated many themes in her novels. The human search for one’s identity is also the common theme of all her novels. In *The Benefactor*, it is Hippolyte’s search for self and in *Death Kit*, it is Diddy, who imitates him. The novels have the theme of death and dying. There is confusion between death and life in Sontag’s novels. In *Death Kit*, we do not know whether Diddy is living or dead or he is dreaming about his death because we do not have any
separation between the dream world and the real world in the novel. In the same way, we can also say that as Diddy tries to separate illusion and reality, he also wants to differentiate deception from truth.

Love and sex is another theme in Sontag’s novels. However, it is present in a very subtle way and is only of aesthetic value. The novels display the metafictional concern with writers and processes of writing the novels. All the novels have characters who are involved in the work of writing. We have the characters who have written books, plays, poems, journals, scripts etc. Hippolyte, Diddy, Eleonora and Ryszard are all professional writers. Not only do we have writers as characters but we also have their discussions on the writing styles of others. They discuss the influences of the writers on their own writings. These point toward the problems faced by the writers while constructing their fiction. Turning autobiographical Sontag also incorporates personal, local, national and then continental history into the novel. Many of the episodes in the novel are based on actual events from Sontag’s personal life. The narrator while narrating these events speaks to herself as well to the readers. We have self-reflexive commentary by the author, which gives an insight into the writing processes of the character-writers and literature in general. While elaborating on ‘collections’ she muses, “They unite those who love the same thing. (But no one loves the same as I do; enough”) (TVL, 29). The novel contains many similar musings on the impulse to collect.

Sontag has written novels, which contain quotations, illusions. She does not ignore history but reminds people of it. While re-presenting history, she reminds people of its fabulous effects. The fact that Sontag is a literary critic as well as a novelist gives scope for a better insight into her writing style. Her essays on universal topics clearly indicate her proficiency in understanding language. Sontag sets as background the recognized setting. Instead of specifying meanings to her novels, she has kept her novels open ended to make several readings possible.

The novels of Sontag display magical realism, metafictional and historiographic metafictional tendencies. The novels not only take its subject the fictionality of texts but they also discuss the ways the present texts have been constructed. Some critics feel that historiographic metafiction can be taken to be the paradigm of postmodern fiction. The reason for this is that it merges the boundaries
between fact and fiction while historiography is the reconstruction of the past events and is marked by authenticity and objectivity. Fiction is imaginary. In historiographic metafiction the endeavor is to point out that, every historical re-presentation is a subjective narrative construct.

Magical realism is a very unique style that introduces elements of the mythological and fantastical into a conventional literary setting. This unusual blending creates a style that is loved by many readers and writers. The style and voice in magic realist literature varies from work to work as it depends on what region the magic realist work belongs. In fact the magic in the work mainly depends upon the author’s background and culture. That is why a magic realist novel from Latin America will differ a great deal from a magic realist novel from Asian region. Magical realism is of course a controversial genre but seeing its popularity and acceptability, it is sure that it is going to stay.

Thus, the novels by Sontag are the ones which change with every reading. The multiple paths that a reader takes to read the novel enrich him in multiple ways. He may read them as magically realist, metafiction or historiographic metafiction or history. The novels provide a rich and complicated example that can be relished again and again.