Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

PART – I

The truth is always something that is told, not something that is known. If there were no speaking or writing, there would be no truth about anything. There would only be what is.

Susan Sontag

Magical realism and metafiction stand at the centre of some of the heated debates in contemporary theory and literary criticism. As every literary form entails certain loss of originality and subversive impact during its establishment, magical realism and metafiction have also been influenced by political and ideological agendas. Whether it is a novelistic genre, a movement or a convenient label or a fashionable literary practice or an encompassing philosophical world view, has been the thrust of many research projects. Various critics have tried to define the terms in their own way. Defining the terms has even caused some controversy among some literary critics. Magical realism though hailed as Latin American phenomenon earlier, enjoys worldwide popularity today. Though the origin of the term, ‘magic realism’ is frequently dated back to the publication of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude in 1967 but even today after almost four decades, the term enjoys much popularity. Moreover, the debate about magical realism is not only about its origin but also about it being more than a literary concept as the term has always been influenced by political and ideological agendas. The focus of my project is to identify and discuss the ways in which magical realism and metafictional elements have been used in fiction, in general, and by Susan Sontag, the prolific writer of America, in her novels, in particular. The present study aims to examine how Susan Sontag has challenged the conventions of normative ideological codes of realism, hegemonic colonial ideologies, political systems and overarching grand narratives. As a postmodern approach to narrative, she has used dreams, historical past and other devices to explore human consciousness.
The “besotted aesthete”, “zealot of seriousness” and “obsessed moralist”, (the words used by Susan Sontag to describe herself) Susan Lee Rosenblatt was born on January 16, 1933 in New York City. She did not acquire the last name of Sontag until after her father’s death on October 19, 1938 and her mother’s second marriage in 1945 to Nathan Sontag, an Air Force officer. Her memories of her father, Jack Rosenblatt are vague, though her powerful need to identify with him is clear in her short story “Project for a trip to China”. Her father was a fur trader in China. She carries an image of her parents in her mind as the glittering and least concerned of foreigners, “playing Gatsby and Daisy at the British Concessions”. Their house was filled with the Chinese jades and porcelains of the kind, “colonialists collect”. Her father died of tuberculosis in 1938. The death of her father shook her, which is visibly depicted in her story, “Project for a trip to China” where she writes, “I still weep in any movie with a scene in which a father returns home after along desperate absence, at the moment when he hugs his child. Or children” (12).

Susan Sontag presents a highly ambivalent picture of her mother, Mildred Jacobson in her fiction, stories and interviews. Sontag presents her as an alcoholic, a lonely woman, a self-absorbed beauty who seemed at a loss as to how to raise her precocious daughter. Sontag had a younger sister named, Judith but Sontag has said very little about her, leaving the impression that Judith did not share her intellectual interests. Her parents, Jack Rosenblatt and Mildred Jacobson were the children of Jewish immigrants eager to assimilate into American life. Susan was not raised as a Jew. In fact the only religion, she knew first hand was Roman Catholicism. Susan once asked her grandmother Gussie, where she came from. “Europe” was the reply. Mature enough to know that it was not a very specific answer, Susan tried again. “But where, Grandma?” “Europe”, Gussie repeated. “And so to this day I don’t know what country my parental grandparents came,” Sontag told her interviewer Geoffrey Movius in 1975.

After the death of her father, Susan suffered an asthma attack. Her mother decided to leave New York City in search of a better climate for her sick daughter. They stayed for a short period at Miami and then finally settled in Tucson, Arizona. Here the environment alleviated Susan’s symptoms. Already an avid reader, Susan did not like the place. In her story “Project for a Trip to China”, she recalls digging a
hole in her backyard and announcing that she was tunnelling to China, which represented the world of her father, the world that she longed to explore. In fact, the story expresses Susan’s need to re-imagine a past that her family denied her.

In childhood, Susan found solace in classics such as the *Secret Garden*, which spoke to her of the need to fashion her own world. Travel books by Richard Hallisburton and novels like *Les Misérables*, which made large political statements set against broad canvases of society, stimulated her imagination. Edgar Allan Poe made the first of most effective influences on Susan Sontag. His influences are visibly recorded in her signature essay *Against Interpretation*. The very arduousness of making a successful writer aroused her ardour. She began her own neighborhood newspaper during World War II and experienced the satisfactions of publishing.

While in Tucson, Susan’s mother married an Air force officer, Nathan Sontag. They moved to California where Susan joined North Hollywood High School. Sontag presents a contemptuous picture of her step father in her memoir, *Pilgrimage*. He has been presented as handsome but superficial and contented with his backyard barbecues. Sontag remembers with disgust her school experiences. She felt that childhood was a waste of time. She told her interviewer Barbara Rowes:

> I was put in 1A on Monday when I was 6 years old. Then in 1B on Tuesday, 2B on Thursday, and by the end of the week they had skipped me to third grade because I could do the work (Rollyson and Paddock, *Susan Sontag: The Making of an Icon*, 6).

At the age of thirteen, Susan had already discovered *Partisan Review* while her teacher assigned the class the *Reader’s Digest*. She longed to go to New York City and write for distinguished critics like Lionel Trilling and Hannah Arendt. At Sixteen, Susan Sontag graduated from North Hollywood High in January 1949. She wanted to attend the University of Chicago to which one of her teachers also encouraged her. But Sontag’s mother Mildred did not like the idea of Sontag living in an urban and radical environment. Therefore, she joined Berkeley very reluctantly but Chicago remained her dream city. Finally, her mother relented and Susan joined Chicago in fall semester of 1949 and sped through the University Curriculum in just two years. Writing per se was not her aim at this point, rather she wanted to absorb as
much as she could. Her first task was to comprehend the canon of literature and philosophy. She told in an interview to Roger Copeland:

When I was a fifteen-year old kid at North Hollywood High School, I discovered a newsstand at the corner of Hollywood and Highland that carried literary magazines. I’d never seen a magazine before… I picked up Partisan Review and started to read ‘Art and Fortune’ by Lionell Trilling; and I just began to tremble with excitement. And from then on, my dream was to grow up, move to New York and write for the Partisan Review. Then within a year, I’d read all the New Critics and had become a great fan of Kenneth Burke. The following year I went to the University of Chicago where I became a student of Kenneth Burke (Copeland, “The Habits of Consciousness” Commonweal, 83-87).

Philip Rieff, a young sociology professor was working on a groundbreaking study of Freud at that time. Sontag attended one of his classes. Rieff spoke with her the first day she attended his class. In ten days, they were married. Rieff was steeped in literature as well as in philosophy, sociology, and psychology. They became collaborators on his important book Freud: The Mind of the Moralist. After only one year, she realized that she had made a mistake. Even in the preface to her novel In America, Sontag compares Rieff to Dr. Casaubon, the dried up pedant in Middlemarch who married the intellectually live Dorothea Brooke. She seems to have discerned that Rieff was too stodgy for her, but it took her nine years to be convinced that she had a moral right to get separated. She told Rowes in an interview, “It was in many ways a very good marriage. But I didn’t want to go back to that. I thought there were other lives to live” (Sayres, Susan Sontag: The Elegiac Modernist, 29).

Sontag graduated with B.A. degree from Chicago in 1951. She earned a Master’s Degree in Philosophy in 1957 and won a fellowship to study at Oxford during 1957-58. They separated at this point but not divorced. They were like the couple in her story “Baby” who say to each other that it will be good for their relationship if they split for a while. Her son David whom she named after the “Michelangelo sculpture” lived with Rieff’s parents. When he was just thirteen years old, James Toback described him as, slipping into conversation on Reichian analysis
and the philosophy of history with the self-assurance of a Harvard graduate student” (“Whatever you’d Like Susan Sontag to Think, She Doesn’t”, *Esquire*, 60).

Sontag was highly attracted by H.J. Kaplan, then a young American writer living in Paris. The self-conscious narrator of Sontag’s *The Volcano Lover* and of ‘Zero’, the preface to *In America* has their genesis in Kaplan’s figure of the narrator as a foreigner. Sontag, in her interview in *People*, a magazine, confessed that she arrived in New York in January 1959 with her six-year-old son named David, two suitcases and $30. She wanted to be on her own. Biographical research shows that at this stage, Sontag was set about making herself known, cruising parties – as Didion did in *Death Kit* the second novel by her, making connections with important writers, editors and publishers. Sontag taught philosophy and theology at Sarah Lawrence College, City University of New York and Columbia University for some time but she did not like the idea of academic career. She helped to form an informal group in which manuscripts could be exchanged and critiqued. In fact, she was laying the groundwork for her first novel called *The Benefactor*.

Sontag’s literary career began and ended with works of fiction. Despite a small output in the genre, Sontag thought of herself as a novelist. However, it was as an essayist that she gained fame and popularity. After completing the first two chapters of her first novel, *The Benefactor*, she showed them to Jason Epstein, a powerful editor of the times, who further recommended that she should contact Robert Giroux. The reviews of her first novel, *The Benefactor*, were mixed but the general response was that she was a figure who could not be ignored. Sontag made the impression that she had a formidable intelligence and curiosity about viewing art and was making an impression on contemporary culture. She wrote about the intersection of high and low art and the form and content dichotomy in arts. Sontag’s next two works *Death Kit* (1967) a novel, and *Styles of Radical Will* (1967) characterize the same dynamic. Kazin, a well-known critic concluded about Sontag:

Sontag writes about situations, is always figuring out alternatives to her existing ideas about them and thus works at situations in the way that a movie director works something out for an induced effect. A book is a screen, as she is a mind visibly ‘projecting’ her notion of things onto it. Screen and mind are separated by Sontag’s refusal to tell a story for its own sake (Kazin, “Sontag Is Not a Camera” *Esquire* 50-51).
It seems Kazin was responding to a form of fiction, yet his criticism sounds like that it is of a person or at least of a sensibility. He has an image of the writer implicit in his criticism, just as Sontag was to some extent imagining her own life as she wrote novels like *The Benefactor* and *Death Kit*. Kazin portrayed a writer who was in love with ideas, characters who also embodied those ideas. Sontag herself echoes this in her book *Under the Sign of Saturn* saying, “One cannot use the life to interpret the work. But one can use the work to interpret life”(111). *Under the Sign of Saturn* is a collection of essays in fact a series of portraits and narratives about some intellectuals who had influenced Susan Sontag. The collection has story like elements which in a way denotes her full time return to fiction. The essays are in fact disguised autobiographies. “On Paul Goodman” is a tribute to a writer who wrote in many different genres: poetry, fiction, drama, and various kinds of non-fiction. In “Approaching Artaud” Sontag argues that he is one of those authors, who question the conventional idea of authorship. “Mind as Passion” is a fitting conclusion to *Under the Sign of Saturn* as Sontag explores Elias Canetti and narrates how he strove to place himself in a certain tradition of writers. In this essay Sontag employs the vocabulary which she also used in her novel *The Benefactor* to define Hippolyte which I will explain later.

Sontag had acquired a secure stature as an essayist by 1969. Susan Sontag was considered one of the most liberated thinkers of the United States in the twentieth century. She wrote seventeen books, which have been translated into thirty languages. The publication of her essay *Against Interpretation* accompanied by a dust jacket photo helped establish her as “Dark lady of American Letters”. Sontag has been made not into one, but many symbols: ‘The evangelist of the new’, ‘Miss Camp’, and ‘The last Intellectual’. William Philips the editor of *Partisan Review* observed in 1969:

More than any other writer today, Susan Sontag has suffered from bad criticism and good publicity. If she could be rescued from all her culture-hungry interpreters, it might be possible to find the writer who has been made into a symbol. This is no longer easy because a popular conception of her has been rigged before a natural one could develop-like a premature legend (Philips, “Radical Styles” *Partisan Review* XXXVI).
After the publication of her essays Sontag became a sort of legend. Her fame was becoming intrusive. Not much has changed since then as Sontag’s name still carries with it explicit intellectual, cultural and political connotations. Since the aim of my study is not to defend Sontag or protect her from criticism, rather my aim is to illuminate her contributions to major cultural debates and to situate her works within a wider critical history of the changing conceptions and conditions in the recent times. Sontag also wrote many aborted novels. During this time, she was also invited to make films in Sweden; she also became involved in protests over the Vietnam War. Sontag’s films, *Duet for Cannibals* and *Brother Carl* got mixed reception. Her essays take on a quasi—Marxist language but her films project a highly skeptical view of a political life. Sontag herself was aware of this as she admitted to Edmund White, an eminent writer who worshipped her like a hero:

> You know my essays are much more intelligent than I am. Do you know why? It’s because I rewrite them so many times, and slowly, slowly, I nudge them up the hill from my natural state of medium intelligence to a high state of intelligence (Rollyson and Lisa Paddock, *Susan Sontag: The Making of an Icon*, 197).

By the early 1970s, Sontag began to make a mark of her intellectual development as a feminist also that she had ignored earlier. Sontag insisted, “It must be expected that most women will work.” Until women had the means to support themselves, they would never be free. “Liberation means power,” she reiterated. By the late 1970s, Sontag had published three remarkable books, *On Photography*, *Illness as Metaphor* and *I Etcetera*. *On Photography* has been one of the most successful books by Sontag. It also won her The National Book Critics Circle Award. It gave students of media an entirely different perspective on use of camera. She pointed out that to use a camera or to ask someone to “stand still” is a kind of control or aggression. But Sontag was not against photography rather she herself loved photography. Exploring the relationship between reality and photographs, Sontag clarified that photography is a realistic documentary mode of perception. Sontag had published six articles on photography in the *New York Review of Books* before compiling them in a book. In fact the development in the publication of *On Photography* exemplified the way Sontag liked to work. She favoured revising and
revising and revising until she reached at a height of observation. She poured out 26 essays, many book reviews, film reviews, theater reviews in the next ten years. Her work seems even more impressive considering that for more than two years, she was under treatment for breast cancer. She made no mention of her illness in her writing, though she discussed her own case in many of her interviews. She wrote her famous essay *Illness as Metaphor* after that. The novel writing was a revelation. Hereafter Sontag identified herself as a fiction writer. Although she wrote many books on creative literature, she got the acclaim for her critical essays that examined different kind of social and artistic issues. Daphne Merkin evaluates her contribution as:

> If consistency is truly the hobgoblin of little minds, Sontag's mind must be very large, for she has never been stopped by her own last pronouncement. In the past decade, for instance, while continuing to champion the kind of elliptical European fiction that meets her much elaborated and stringent critical standards, she began writing best-selling, plot-heavy novels. But whatever the position or wherever the situation, Sontag has managed to hold the limelight as few of her kind have done (Daphne Merkin, “The Dark Lady of the Intellectuals”, *The New York Times*).

Sontag also directed a play in 1985, *Jacques and his Masters*, an adaptation by Czech writer Milan Kundera of *Jacques le Fataliste*, a Diderot novel. As we all know Kundera is well known for his work, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. Moreover Sontag’s novel *The Volcano Lover* is somewhat reminiscent of Kundera’s work. She has successfully pursued the theme of “couple relations” in the novel. The direction of the play by her also provided the ground for her development in dramaturgy as she wrote an experimental play, *Alice in Bed* after that. The play *Jacques and his Masters* raises the question between real and illusion, and Sontag’s film *Duet for Cannibals* also addresses the same issue. The reception of Sontag as a stage director was mixed. Frank Rich in the *New York Times* appreciated the “Pirandellian devices” but commented that “Miss Sontag lacks the requisite velocity and fizz.” She devoted much of her time in 1980s to the cause of human rights. From 1987 to 1989, she was president American PEN Centre, a branch of the international writers’ organization founded in 1922. She received worldwide attention for her defense of Salman Rushdie for his novel *The Satanic Verses*. She not only demanded lifting of the *Fatwa*, (the
sentence of death for Rushdie) but also said that the threat to him was a threat to civilization itself. Sontag emphasized that Rushdie stood for pluralism and tolerance, the values that were also under attack in 1992 in Bosnia.

As suggested by her son David Rieff in 1993, Sontag visited Sarajevo when it was under siege. The city was heartened by her visit. Deeply moved Sontag made visit after visit into the war zone also. Sontag staged a play there, Waiting for Godot. David Toole in his book – Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo: Theological Reflection on Nihilism, Tragedy and Apocalypse has commented that staging a play in Vietnam became a form of facing suffering with dignity. In an article in New York Times, entitled, “Godot Comes to Sarajevo,” Sontag explained her decision to stage Samuel Beckett’s play Waiting for Godot as an act of solidarity, a “small contribution” to a city that refused to capitulate to “Serb fascism.” In Against Interpretation, Sontag has characterized Beckett’s and Genet’s plays and used the expressions such as, “a nightmare of repetition, stalled actions, exhausted feelings” which closely match what she observed in Sarajevo. She has in a way depicted the unstoppable agony of Bosnian suffering and the will to resist.

In 1991-92, Sontag produced three more important works, a play, Alice in Bed (1991) and two novels The Volcano Lover (1992) and In America (2000). All three have female protagonists. All three works are historical and based on documented past. The novel In America though was charged with plagiarism, but it won her National Book Award for fiction in 2000. The Volcano Lover is about the famous love triangle between Sir William Hamilton, Emma and Charles. These will be discussed in detail in later chapters. Alice in Bed is about a woman tormented by and yet escaping male perceptions. The play reflects anger at men that Sontag has very rarely expressed. It has also been labeled as autobiographical by many critics. The play is about Alice James, the brilliant sister of William and Henry who is diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of forty-two. Sontag herself was also diagnosed with cancer at this age. Alice dies at fort-three and the play depicts her living in a room of her own. The play about the grief and anger of women, and finally about imagination seems to be inspired by Alice in Wonderland, another major text for Sontag, which also speaks to the world of imagination. Diagnosed with acute myelogenous Leukemia, Sontag died in New York City on 28 December 2004. Two days after her death, the mayor of Sarajevo announced the city would name a street after her, calling her an “author and a humanist” who actively participated in the creation of the history of Sarajevo and
However, it took a long time for the announcement to become official because of some political compulsions in the country. On March 30 2009, it was officially announced that Theater Square in front of National Theater in Sarajevo would get the name of Susan Sontag. Sontag was fond of reading and writing and she wanted to be known for that only. When asked by Daniel Halpern to draw her self-portrait for *Who’s Writing This?*, Sontag sketched a female head perusing a book. In *Who’s Writing This?* Sontag conceives of a literary tradition as a series of arguments with itself, just as she conceives of herself as shaped by deputation:

I say this when you are saying that not just because writers are professional adversaries, not just to redress the inevitable imbalance or one-sidedness of any activity that has the character of an institution (and writing is an institution) but because the practice—I also mean the nature—of literature is rooted in inherently contradictory aspirations. A truth about literature is one whose opposite is also true (Halpern, *Who’s Writing This?: Notations on the Authorial I with Self-Portraits*, 1995).

Susan Sontag was one of the main literary figures of her times. She had designed herself as the new-model intellectual. She emphasized form over content and argued that art is art only when matters of style and structure, not message and meaning, predominated. Sontag also sparked controversy for her remarks on September 11 attacks. She wrote in *The New Yorker*:

Where is the acknowledgement that this was not a ‘cowardly’ attack on ‘civilization’ or ‘liberty’ or ‘humanity’ or the ‘free world’ but an attack on the World’s self-proclaimed super power, undertaken as a consequence of specific American Alliances and actions? How many citizens are aware of the ongoing American bombing of Iraq? And if the word ‘cowardly’ is to be applied, it might be more aptly applied to those who kill from beyond the range of retaliation, high in the sky, than to those willing to die themselves in order to kill others. In the matter of courage (a morally neutral virtue): whatever may be said of the perpetrators of Tuesday’s slaughter, they were not cowards (Sontag, *The New Yorker*, 2001).
Sontag was the main cultural figure of her times. She introduced many stimulating ideas to American culture. Her essays on diverse subjects such as photography, Aids, Camp, and fascist aesthetics contributed significantly to her being a celebrity writer and an embodiment of her times. In her essays and fiction, she foregrounds the inwardness of intellectual activity, what she terms the ‘private revolutions’ of the mind. Sontag’s fiction deserves a careful reading as her fiction and non-fiction have an essayistic quality. Sontag confessed this to Jonathan Cott in her interview:

I’ve always thought of the essays and the fiction as dealing with very different themes…It’s only quite recently because it’s been forced on my attention, that I realized the extent to which the essays and the fiction share the same themes…It’s almost frightening to discover how unified they are (Cott, The Rolling Stone, 46-53).

Sontag’s role as a radical thinker has never been recognized in the United States. The reason for this was that her essays never got published in United States. But whatever were the reasons for that, Sontag has been the most widely read intellectual of her generation. In 1970s Sontag began to recast her intellectual development in terms of feminism. Feminism was not an issue which Sontag could afford to ignore but she also did not want to address it personally. Sontag wanted to be an exemplary writer, but how could she be recognized and exemplary without acknowledging the new wave of feminism. Thus Sontag recognized the importance of women’s movement and participated in the protests by women joining them in the streets. Sontag insisted that all women should work. Until women have the economic power, they would never get liberated. Sontag was one of many women who signed, “Abortion Law Repeal Petition” in 1972. She also described her movie Brother Carl as a movie about a working woman (Lena) enslaved to a bastard of an ex-lover, and a married woman (Karen) trapped in a boring middle-class marriage. Her films and the essay on photography reoriented her career again. Sontag moved away from radical issues and inquired in great depth individual subjects and writers.

Illness as a Metaphor is a work of criticism in which Sontag criticized those writers who have used cancer as a metaphor. In fact, Sontag cautioned against using disease to define personality. She admitted that we can not do without metaphors but
we should use metaphors taking into account the consequences. She further explained it saying that to suppose that a certain personality type is prone to cancer is in fact taking away from the individual his or her ability to fight that particular disease. The Women’s National Book Association listed *Illness as Metaphor* as one of the seventy-five books by “women whose words have changed the world”. Her own illness had driven her to re-examine her thinking. During this time she also transformed her aborted novels into short fiction. Stirred by the deaths of friends, who had succumbed to a new terrifying, and bewildering disease, AIDS, Susan Sontag responded with a book-length essay titled, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*. The story “The Way We Live Now” written by Sontag is also about the terrifying disease. In fact the story won more acclaim than the essay. The word AIDS is never mentioned in the story which is like her other fiction. What makes it a compelling piece of fiction is the use of allegory and twenty-six narrators (one for each letter of the alphabet). The plight of Max, who has AIDS, is told through the voices of his friends. They visit him and observe his first reaction to his illness. Some of his friends sympathize with him whereas others worry that he is not seeking medical help so his condition can deteriorate. They decide to indulge him with things he likes, like chocolate, etc and his mood seems to lighten. She admitted in one of her interviews to Kenny Fries that she wrote the story after getting a phone call from a friend who told her that he had AIDS. The urgency of creation and the frankness of fiction appealed to her: “Fiction is closer to my private life, more immediate, direct, less constrained--more reckless. Essays involve more effort in layering and condensations, more revisions” (Fries, “AIDS and its Metaphors: A Conversation with Susan Sontag.” *Coming Up*, March, 1989. 49-50). In a way the story also explains Sontag’s theory of fiction.

The present study has taken four novels of Susan Sontag, viz., *The Benefactor*, *Death Kit*, *The Volcano Lover* and *In America*. The novels exhibit a number of peculiar characteristics, which set them apart from their predecessors. Already by the late 1960s, a shift away from the standard realistic strategies towards a more autonomous and at the same time less mimetic style of composition had made itself apparent, especially among French and American authors of the avant-garde. The present study focuses on the emerging genre of experimental writing of the writers of 1970s and after. Many writers of this era including Susan Sontag did not only violate or subvert the prevalent conventions of novel writing but also explicitly discussed the
act of experimentation while they performed this very act. While doing so Susan Sontag has interlinked the various metafictional and magical realism devices in her novels. I understand that to research a writer who has been made into a symbol will not be an easy task as she has been widely criticised also. The cultural significance of Susan Sontag resides both in her body of writing and in the public role she has performed. In this study I examine the relationship between the self-conscious poetics of Sontag’s thinking and the objective conditions contextualizing it. Since all her novels imbibe magical realism and metafiction on a large scale so the study also aims to work out a definition and examine the historical roots of magical realism and metafiction as well. In the next part of introduction, I aim to analyze the origin and characteristics of the terms and literary styles of magical realism and metafiction.

**Part II**

The crisis in the novel that began in the 1960s led to an extremely intense and fertile exploration of its own being as fiction. Susan Sontag being the pioneer figure of her times has addressed this experimentalism in her fiction as well as in her essays. She implodes the boundaries between high and low art, fiction and fact, fantasy and reality. Sontag is primarily concerned with form and play of language and adopts supportive, ironic, and metafictional techniques that flaunt artifice and emphasize the act of writing over written word. The postmodern novel also exhibits a number of such peculiar characteristics, which set it apart from its predecessors. Already by the late 1950s, a shift away from the standard realistic strategies – those common throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century – towards a more autonomous and at the same time less mimetic style of composition had made itself apparent, especially among French and American authors of the avant-garde. These novels, as they were categorically ‘New’ and different were designated accordingly: American and British critics found the term ‘New Fiction’ to be an adequate classification, while many continental writers preferred the French ‘noveau roman’.

The classification of postmodern novel into literary genres is a much-debated topic. Apparently, this debate has emerged because postmodern authors have a flair for writing works that are not easily categorized. Difficulties have arisen not only when trying to classify a postmodern work but also when defining literary techniques used by such authors. These works are hard to classify but these are not signs of the
weaknesses of novel as a genre, they simply show that we are living in an era of reflection and that the novel is in the process of reflecting on itself. According to the British critic Tom Woods, literary postmodernism is a many-faceted formation which has led to a debate among the critics. He further explains it:

It is in the field of literary studies that the term ‘postmodernism’ has received the widest usage and provoked the most intense debate. There have been many attempts to theorise the consequences and manifestations of postmodernism for literature, all usually running into problems of historical and formal definition (Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999. 49).

The crisis in the concept of the novel that began in the 1950s led to an extremely intense and fertile exploration within fiction itself, of the nature and limits of its own being as fiction. A high degree of reflexivity can be seen as a major consequence of the crisis in the theory of fiction. The novels of this era are prime examples of self-reflexive narrative, with the narrator directly addressing the reader at regular intervals requesting them to read more attentively and reminding them incessantly of the act of reading the fiction. This type of fiction upsets and even erases the boundaries between the fiction and reality by merging the two into one. This is not only ‘narcissistic’ narrative in the sense of being self-indulgent, but it is indeed ‘metafiction’ (Linda Hutcheon). Around the late 1960s, there was much talk of ‘the death of the novel’ or as the American author, John Barth described ‘a literature of exhaustion’. At this point, the traditional techniques of fiction suddenly seemed absolute or irrelevant.

The complexities of the modern age were impossible to capture in a conventionally realist style, but more experimental or we can say avant-garde ways of writings seemed either elitist, burned out or pointless. The writers of this era faced a dilemma to find a new voice appropriate to the era of mass-communications. The mood of exhaustion is a common feature of postmodernism. In fact, the postmodern text is openly assembled from different genres and styles. In fact Jean Francois Lyotard has given an insight on the role of a post modern writer. Lyotard feels that the post modern writer is in the position of a “philosopher”. The text written by him is not governed by pre-established rules. His work can not be judged by “the given
categories”. Postmodernism blurs the boundaries between different categories and breaks the rules both of form and content. It is out of postmodernism that the styles of magical realism and metafiction have developed.

Since the 1980s, the terms ‘magic realism’ and ‘metafiction’ have become both highly fashionable and highly derided. Commenting on the American fiction of the 1960s, William H Gass pointed out that a new term was needed for the emerging genre of experimental texts that openly broke with the tradition of literary realism still dominant in post World War II American literature. Many established terms like ‘anti-novel’ or ‘anti-fiction’ failed to characterize the radical narrative innovations of American writers such as John Barth, Susan Sontag, and Raymond Federman. These writers not only violated or subverted the dominant conventions of novel writing but also explicitly discussed the act of experimentation while they performed this very act. Most critics who explored the development of experimental writing felt upon the need to invent their own terminology and soon such terms as ‘self-reflexive fiction’ (Robert Scholes) ‘surfiction’ (Raymond Federman) ‘self-conscious fiction’ (Robert Alter) ‘narcissistic fiction’ (Linda Hutcheon) and the like were competing for acceptance. It was not primarily the proliferation of alternative terms that caused confusion but the fact that these terms were often used to label different textual phenomena. The critics employed this new terminology rather indiscriminately as a means of describing a new narrative genre of designating the self-reflexive mentality which seemed to correspond to the postmodern representation or of systematizing particular self-reflexive devices which can be found in the texts of 18th century writers like Lawrence Sterne, as well as in late 20th century narrative movements. Moreover, the critical acknowledgements of the occurrence of metafictional and magical realism devices in writings of even sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the present day writings has blurred the terminological boundaries even further. This has finally opened up the term’s reference to all forms of narratives. Since the study is going to point out and discuss self-reflexivity in the novels of Susan Sontag in detail so I aim to analyze the term ‘self-reflexive fiction’ also.

Linda Hutcheon, who has given useful insights on postmodern literature, has classified self-reflexivity in his famous book, *The Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* He refers to postmodern fiction as “self-informatory”, “auto-
In self-reflexive fiction the attention of the reader is drawn not to what is being narrated but to how it is being narrated. Thus the process of narration becomes a major concern for the reader. A new and more active role is demanded from the reader. According to Hutcheon, there are two types of self reflexivity—overt and covert. In overt forms, the self reflexivity is done with the use of allegory, whereas in covert forms many models such as “detective story”, “fantasy”, “game structure” and “erotics” are used (23). Modernist self-reflexivity also displays features typical of postmodernism: the self-reflexive images; critical discussion of the story within the story; Chinese-box structures; explicit parody of previous texts. However there are a number of critics who feel that postmodernism can be located through out literary history. If postmodernism is considered as a style than a period, then the texts from earlier times may also be considered as postmodern. Thus, Don Quixote by Cervantes and Tristram Shandy by Laurence Sterne may also be considered as postmodern as they employ all the characteristics identified by McHale, Jameson, Hutcheon, and Lyotard. Each text explodes the traditional form of the novel, disrupts the normal process of narration and invites the reader for active participation. Both the novels have been classified as magic realist and metafiction also. The terms ‘magic realism’ and ‘metafiction’ have also become highly fashionable and popular. They are used to refer to a particular type of narrative mode. In fact the writers are reluctant to be categorized as magic realist but the publishers have used the terms to increase their sales. This study aims to study the origin of the term, its different usages and its purpose in fiction. The history of magical realism is a long and complicated story. Moreover the many varieties of magical realism have also attracted the attention of the critics.

The term ‘magical realism’ was coined in the early twentieth century to describe a new, neo-realistic style in German painting. While the term magical realism wasn't introduced until 1955, magical realism was first used in 1925 by the German art critic Franz Roh to refer to a painterly style also known as ‘Nein Sachlichkeit’. The term, earlier applied to Latin American Fiction, now designates the most contemporary trend in international fiction. Magical realism has become an important mode of expression worldwide, especially in postcolonial cultures, because it has provided the literary ground for significant cultural work, within the texts. Marginal voices, submerged traditions and emergent literatures have developed and created masterpieces. The term ‘magical realism’ coined by German Critic named
Franz Roh was simply referred to a painting where real forms were combined in a way that does not conform to daily reality. In fact, what Franz Roh called magical realism was an Expressionist painting. In recent years, the term ‘magical realism’ has become the most popularly used term referring to a particular narrative mode. It has offered alternative approaches to reality. It is this aspect of magical realism, which has made it most pertinent to the late twentieth century literature.

The history of magical realism is long debated since its origin in the 1920s. It comprises many periods and many prominent authors such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie. Many writers have been associated with the development of magical realism in its recognized form in the modernist and postmodernist mode of writing such as, Gunter Grass, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Isabel Allende, Toni Morrison, and Ana Castillo. There are many more, in fact the list is constantly growing. In this part of introduction, I will first investigate magical realism as a mode in literature and then situate it in the postmodern era.

Magical realism combines the realism and the fantastic so that the marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them. Although magical realism has been most widespread in Latin American literature, my aim here is to continue the critical trend that extends the mode, beyond “el boom” which popularized them. While I claim to analyze magical realism and metafiction as worldwide phenomenon, I have also followed my own limitations and confined myself to the texts of Susan Sontag only. So firstly, I begin my investigation of magical realism by brief working definition of the mode. In this section, along with the various definitions of magical realism, I also propose to discuss characteristics of magical realism and locate these at the intersection of modernism and postmodernism.

Before moving further, let me first consider the origin of magical realism. The consensus among the majority of contemporary critics such as Lois Parkinson Zamora, Wendy Faris, and Amaryll Chanady is that the term was introduced by German Art critic, Franz Roh referring to a new form of painting, which he felt differed greatly from its predecessors’. For Roh, the most important aspect of magical realist painting was the mystery of the object he painted realistically. The influence of Roh’s term ‘magic realism’ had greater influence than that of painting. The well-known critic, Carpentier is mainly known for bringing magical realism to Latin America. Carpentier has always been cited as the most important influence on the writers such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Elores created a new history of magical
realism that can be traced back to the sixteenth century Spanish writer Miguel de Saavedra Cervantes. Although written about three hundred years ago, Don Quixote by Cervantes is often considered as a precursor to magical realism. Many Latin American magical realist writers like Carpentier and Marquez have played an important role in the rapid adoption of this form of writing worldwide. Magical realism has been widely recognized in India, Canada, United States and several other countries. One or the other effect governing this term has influenced all magic realist writers. However, whatever the influence may be, while discussing the term we also have to understand the varieties covered by magical realism. As a basis for investigating the nature of magical realism we need to work out a definition of the term. For this purpose I will first discuss the various definitions as given in the different dictionaries. In Oxford Dictionary the term magical realism has been defined as:

A kind of modern fiction in which fabulous and fantastical events are included in a narrative that otherwise maintains the reliable tone of objective realistic report. Designating a tendency of the modern novel to reach the confines of realism and draw upon the energies of fable, folk tale, and myth while maintaining a strong contemporary social relevance. The fantastic attributes given to characters in such novels levitation, flight, telepathy, telekinesis are among the means that magic realism adopts in order to encompass the often phantasmagoric political realities of the 20th century (Oxford Dictionary, 3rd edit 2008).

The American Heritage Dictionary defines magical realism as a “literary style or genre originating in Latin America that combines fantastic or dreamlike elements with reality”, whereas the Encyclopedia of World Literature in the Twentieth Century defines it taking into consideration the cultural influences it has undertaken:

Magic realism--the result of a unique fusion of the beliefs and superstitions of different cultural groups that included the Hispanic conqueror, his criollo (creole) descendants, the native peoples and the African slaves. Magic realism, like myth, also provides an essentially synthetic or totalizing way of depicting reality. It was firmly grounded in daily reality and expressed man's astonishment before the wonders of the real world, [and] conveys[s] a vision of the fantastic features of reality (Encyclopedia of World Literature in the Twentieth Century).
Thus, taking into consideration, the wide spread distribution of magical realism we need to define the term in away such that it includes a theoretical perspective which includes the study of formal characteristics spanning different traditions and also that it includes interaction between different cultures. Magical realism is an aesthetic style in which magical elements appear in an otherwise realistic setting. Widely used in literature, art and film, magical realism has become an international phenomenon. In magical realism, the ‘magic’ refers to any extraordinary occurrence. In a magical realist writing, these extraordinary occurrences include ghosts, miracles, extra ordinary atmosphere but it does not include the magic as we find in a magic show. Magical realism as a literary form yields a painterly quality, which distinguishes it from other forms of literary realism. But to understand magical realism is to take into account its many influences: cultural, political, and spiritual. Magical realism often brings to us marginal characters, places and ideas not marginal in the sense that they are extraordinary. Given the elusiveness of the concept of magical realism, my research project attempts to bring out a clear understanding of its use and significance in literature.

Different theorists have provided different definitions of magical realism. The landmark publication on magical realism is Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris’s Magical realism: Theory, History, Community. The well-known work treats magical realism as a mode of writing that has been a catalyst in the development of new regional literatures as well as a revitalizing force for narrative traditions. According to Faris, magical realism has mainly five major characteristics. First of all the magic realist text contains an “irreducible element” which cannot be explained according to the laws of universe. This means that the magical things really do happen in our daily life to which we do not have any logical explanation. Secondly, the magic realist text contains realistic descriptions, which create a fictional world that resembles the world we live in. This is the feature, which distinguishes magical realism from fantasy and allegory. On the one hand, the realistic descriptions create an impression that this story is real but the magical details interwoven in the story signal that this might be imaginary. Thus, the reader might hesitate between the two understandings of the events. This experience of unsettling doubts by the reader comprises the third feature of magical realism. Fourthly, the magic realist text exists at the intersection of two worlds: the real and the imaginary, the living and the dead,
the ordinary and the extra-ordinary. Another related intersection is the one between fact and fiction, which brings magical realism closer to postmodernism. Magic realist texts also question and reorient the received notions about space, time, and identity. Like metafiction, these texts also provide commentary on themselves. Faris says:

Metafictional dimensions are common in contemporary magical realism: the texts provide commentaries on themselves, often complete with occasional mises-en-abyme—those miniature emblematic textual self-portraits. Thus the magic power of fiction itself, the capacities of mind that makes it possible, and the elements out of which it is made—signs, images, metaphors, narrators, narratees—may be foregrounded (Faris, Magical realism: Theory, History, Community, 175).

Magical realist fictions have been interpreted on the basis of various critical and theoretical perspectives. As magical realism is not a genre, which belongs to a particular period, therefore, it is not defined by any particular critical approach. Many critics in understanding magical realist fiction have considered the critical approaches like cross-culturalism, post-colonialism and postmodernism as appropriate. One of the main features of magical realism is its transgressive and subversive quality. The poststructuralist theory proposes that magical realism is transgressive as it blurs the boundary between the magical and real, and further creates the magical real. This is the most frequently adopted approach to magical realism.

Magical realism is not a trend or literary fluke; it has enjoyed a presence in world literature for hundreds of years. Though Latin American writers popularized it, but magical realism’s ongoing presence in world literature suggests its enduring cultural significance. The western readers of 21st century have much to gain by reading magical realism. Regarding the location of magical realism, we have it well defined in A Glossary of Literary Terms by M. H. Abrams:

The term magical realism has been applied to the fiction of Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina, as well as to the work of Gabriel Garcia Marquez in Columbia, Gunter Grass in Germany John Fowles in England; they interweave in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism with fantastic and dream like elements (122).
The development of magical realism in Latin America was the perception of the continent as being exotic. So the texts like *Midnight’s Children* and *The Famished Road* have presented the postcolonial cultures to the readers at international level. Moreover these questions of locations suggest that magical realism resembles like Caliban who learns the master’s language and then uses it to curse. But now as Amaryll Chanady has suggested that magical realism has mastered the European realism and now uses it not to curse but to undermine some of his master’s assumptions. He further elaborates it that just as Caliban’s swear words are not the combinations of sounds Prospero intended for him to use, so magical realism’s use of realistic detail to describe an impossible event, which moves us beyond everyday reality was not the aim of magical realism. It challenges the assumptions of realistic representation but is enraptured with its practices. For example realism does not believe in miracles but it has given magical realism the means to describe them. Thus when a text overturns the assumptions of western empiricism and question the binary opposition of magic and realism, they persist because they are embedded with in the conventions of realism. While addressing the question of the location of magical realism we also come to know that while combining the genres of realism and fantastic, magical realism is also culturally hybrid. As realistic narrative and the magical come from different cultural traditions, thus much of magical realism is multicultural in its history and structure. The novel that put magical realism on the international map *One Hundred Years of Solitude* comes from the small Latin American Country of Columbia. The second definitive example of magical realism text is *Midnight’s Children* that is from India. Both of these texts are aggressively postcolonial texts. Another major text *The Tin Drum* in this regard is from Germany.

As far as the development of magical realism in the west is concerned it developed from a combination of realism and surrealism. Magical realism is of course located with in postmodernism but it has its roots in modernism. Regarding this Brian McHale has given useful insight that modernism is concerned with the questions of knowledge that is epistemological; whereas postmodernism is concerned with the question of being that is ontological. As magical realism also questions time, space and identity, thus it can be said that magical realism has its roots in modernism but branches and leaves in postmodernism. Moreover in modernism character generates story out of psychic depth, and in postmodernism the story generates character out of
events, histories and intertextual bricolage, thus it can be said that magical realism mediates between the two.

Magical realism has a vision that offers some relief from the gritty and depressing realism of the last century. It is not that all readers need escape from the truth but it may be that we have entered a cultural realm in our own collective history where it has become necessary to question what is real or what is truth? We are also in a culture of conspiracy theories and urban legends; we invent our folklore in order to fill facts that are otherwise left blank. We love reading murder and true crime stories and we get fascinated with crime scene investigations. That is not because we have a collectively vulgar desire to see dead bodies, but because we want to know what happened to the victims. It is their stories we crave. For their stories could be our stories. That is why magical realism offers lasting appeal for readers. People like to be transported to places that are unusual or exotic, they like to read stories that blur the edges between what is real and what is unreal. However, in the end it is about finding new territory for telling our own stories. We need the honesty, the humor, the audacity and the marvel of magical realism as a way to acknowledge, capture, indeed to celebrate our common humanity when talked about.

Magical realism cannot be identified with fantastic or with psychological analysis. Magical realism is an attitude towards reality that can be expressed in popular or cultured forms. In magical realism, the writer confronts reality and tries to untangle it to discover what is mysterious in things, in life, in human acts. It is discovery of the mysterious, relations between man and his circumstances. It is the existence of the marvelous real that started magical realist literature. In magical realism, key events have no logical or psychological explanation. The magical realist does not try to copy the surroundings and the reality like a realist does. His aim is to seize the mystery that breathes behind circumstances. As P. Gabrielle Foreman also suggests in his essay:

Magical realism, unlike the fantastic or the surreal, presumes that the individual requires a bond with the traditions and the faith of the community, that s/he is historically constructed and connected. (“Past on Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on
A magic realist text displays many characteristics, like the fantastical events, hybridity, plenitude, authorial reticence, metafiction, political critique, mystery, etc. The novels may exhibit few or all of these elements but these serve as a tool for the classification of novels. The novels containing fabulous and fantastical elements easily fall into the category. The novels which contain the fantastic events and characters depicted otherwise in a reliable mode fall in the category of magical realism. The fantastical elements such as levitation, flight or telepathy are used in order to bring out the political realities and depict a truer picture.

Plenitude is the feature captured by Alejo Carpentier in his essay, “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real”. He defines the baroque as a departure away from the rules. He further elaborates that “our world is baroque because of its architecture-this goes without saying-the unruly complexities of its nature and its vegetation, the many colors that surround us, the telluric pulse of the phenomena that we feel”(105). Such a complex system is found in One Hundred Years of Solitude.

Hybridity in magical realism is a feature which denotes that an individual experiences reality in "inharmonious arenas of such opposites as urban and rural, and Western and Indigenous". In this situation, an individual experiences two realistic situations simultaneously in the same place but during two different time periods, may be centuries apart. The realities are connected by his dreamlike state. In fact this is magical realism which allows the multiple realities to exist which would not have been possible otherwise. In this way a more true and deep reality is depicted that a conventional realist would not have been able to present.

Metafiction is another prominent characteristic of magical realism. This feature depends on the reader’s role in literature. As metafiction is fiction about fiction, so it also explores the multiple realities and also the impact, fiction has on reality. Moreover metafiction also plays a role in another magic realist phenomenon that is the textualization of the reader. Metafiction is very well suited for drawing attention to social as well as political criticism. Metafiction can happen in a text in two ways, Firstly, when the fictitious reader enters a story within a story and secondly when the textual world enters into the reader’s world. The finest examples of this are
Sontag’s novels *The Volcano Lover* and *In America* which I aim to discuss at length in last chapters of my study.

Authorial reticence is the feature which empowers the narrator to withhold the relevant information about the actual events. The narrator does not provide explanations about the accuracy or credibility of events described or views expressed by characters in the text. This feature is of utmost use in the texts where the supernatural element is introduced in the story. Moreover the act of explaining the supernatural will rob it of its effect. The reader would ultimately compare it with the natural world and disregard the supernatural. *Death Kit* the second novel by Susan Sontag exhibits this characteristic of magical realism.

Magic realist texts also depict some sense of mystery in the narrative. Alejo Carpentier has elaborated this feature saying that magical realism helps us to seize the mystery hidden behind the things. This also supports Faris’s contention that writer must heighten his senses to reach the higher reality. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Marquez is fine example of this. Faris further supported his claim by saying that the reader must leave his pre-existing ties in order to reach a state of heightened awareness about life. Sontag makes use of this feature in her novel, *The Benefactor*, where Hippolyte reaches the higher state of mind from where he comes to know the ultimate reality.

Magic realist texts are called subversive texts and also against the socially dominant forces. As I have explained it already, Latin America is supposed to be the origin of magical realism thus it is also linked with postcolonial literature. That is why the Americans have always been more reluctant to openly use the term. It may be because they consider themselves to be the most privileged. Theo .L. D’haen has discussed it in detail in his essay:

Latin American ground tone reveals itself as an artistic and cultural practice that reshapes the traditional models and the need for innovation into new, unique, and powerful articulations of historical necessities, into penetrating statements of critical and political convictions. These novels have their roots in common scene of international modernism, while at the same time confronting it with its own needs, problematizing it, and parodying it. They likewise go beyond existing definitions and frameworks by giving their
postmodernity an even more critical accentuation, voicing yet new aesthetic needs and social revindications (D’haen and Bertens, eds, *Postmodern Fiction in Europe and the Americas*, 206).

The term ‘magical realism’ has persisted for over half a century but it is not yet entirely current, and it is also important to situate the mode with regard to postmodernism. Like ‘postmodernism’, the terms magical realism and metafiction have gained wide recognition and acceptance only since the 1960s. Analyzing the views and discussions by famous theorists like Linda Hutcheon, Brian McHale, Simon Malps, Fredric Jameson, Lyotard, I would say that postmodern literature itself is marked by self-reflexivity, parody, the blurring of boundaries, metafiction, the dissolution of character and narrative instance. In fact, the literature, which arose as a series of styles and ideas in the post World War II period and reacted against the perceived norms of modernism, has been termed as postmodern literature even as it extended many of the fundamental techniques and assumptions of modern literature. Postmodern literature in fact develops and extends the style making it conscious and ironic. Both modern and postmodern literature represent a break from nineteenth century realism, in which story was told from an objective or omniscient view. In character and depiction of reality, both modern and postmodern literatures explore subjectivism turning from external reality to examine inner state of consciousness styles of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. In addition, both modern and postmodern literatures explore fragmentariness in narrative and character construction. As British critic, Tim Woods has also suggested, literary postmodernism is many faceted formation and is a topic of debate among critics. Another well-known American critic, Brian McHale argues that the move from modern to postmodern fiction is marked by a change from a focus on epistemological, issues to an exploration of ontological questions. He means to say that postmodern fiction confronts the reader with questions about what sort of world is being created at each moment in the text and who or what is in a text that they can believe or rely on like the questions of ontology. Hutcheon further puts it saying that the literary techniques that make the postmodern such a contradictory ‘cultural enterprise’ come together to form a genre, what she calls, ‘historiographic metafiction’. This is a self-conscious mode of writing that metafictionally comments on and investigates its own status as fiction as well as questioning the idea of the relation between fiction, reality, and truth. Its focus on
history opens up problems about the possibility of access to a true past as a way of de-
naturalizing present ideas. Historical fiction puts in the data from past whereas
historiographic metafiction also puts the data (combines) but rarely assimilates. The
historiographic metafiction in fact sets out to challenge the received meaning of the
past event. The historiographic metafiction can be seen in the work of a wide range of
writers, each of whom uses a different set of literary devices to question the
traditional methods of historical representation for a different set of ends. Various
devices are employed in historiographic metafiction such as the use of unreliable
narrator, multiple frames, mixture of magical and realistic events, and parodies of
earlier literary and historical works. This type of writing challenges traditional or
preconceived notions of narrative construct realism and historical truth.

During the last thirty years, novelists have become much more aware of
theoretical issues involved in constructing fiction. As a result, the novels have become
more self-reflexive. The novels self-consciously draw attention to its status as an
artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality.
In supplying a critique of their own methods of creation, such fiction not only
examines the fundamental structure of narrative fiction, but also at the same time
explores the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary text. Such fiction
explores a theory of fiction. The term ‘metafiction’ is used for such type of writing.
Metafictional practice has become particularly prominent in the fiction of the last
twenty years.

This part of the chapter will briefly examine some alternative definitions of
self-conscious writing. These varieties have been termed as ‘the anti-novel’,
‘surfiction’ at the intersection of modernism and post modernism. As my basic aim in
the study is to explore the importance of magical realism and metafiction and its
power as a narrative style in the fiction of Susan Sontag, therefore before moving
further, let me first take into consideration the historical background of the term
‘metafiction’. The term ‘metafiction’ seems to have originated in an essay by the
American critic and self-conscious novelist William H. Gass in 1970. But the terms
like ‘metapolitics’, ‘metarhetoric’ and ‘metatheater’ present since 1960s remind us of
general cultural interest in the problems of how human beings reflect, construct and
depict their experience of the world.
During the last twenty years, the novelists have become more aware of the theoretical issues involved in the writing of fiction. As a result, the novelists have become more self-reflexive in their writings. Such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction but also explore the fictionality of the world outside the literary text. Metafiction is a term given to this type of writing which draws attention to its status as an artifact. However, to say that this has become prominent in the last twenty years is also misleading. Although the term metafiction might be new but the practice of this type of writing is as old as the novel itself. Therefore, the study of metafiction is not important only because of its presence in contemporary literature but also because metafiction offers insights into the representational nature of all fiction and the literary history of the novel as a genre. The prefix ‘meta’ means beyond or transcending; thus the term metafiction literally means "beyond fiction." Thus metafiction can be described as fiction about the nature and purpose of fiction.

Metafiction has been present in literature in different modes and under various terms. These have been named as ‘the anti-novel’, ‘surfiction’, ‘the self-begetting novel’, ‘the fabulation’. However, all the modes shift the emphasis in different ways. For example, ‘self-begetting novel’ is often first person account, ‘of the development of a character to a point at which he is able to take up and compose the novel we have just finished reading’. (Kellman, jstor.org/sici) The emphasis is on the development of the narrator. The Counterfeiters by Andre Gide is the finest example of this. Sometimes different categories often compete for the same text. For example Lost in the Funhouse by John Barth can be categorized as ‘self-begetting’, ‘surfictional’ and also ‘metafictional’ at the same time. In fact the ‘self-begetting novel’ is a sub-genre of modern metafiction in which the protagonist ends up writing the novel in which he appears. Metafiction thus expresses overtly what William H. Gass has argued:

In every art two contradictory impulses are in a state of Manichean War: the impulse to communicate and so to treat the medium of communication as a means and the impulse to make an artifact out of the materials and so to treat the medium as an end. (Waugh, Metafiction: The Theory and practice of self-conscious fiction, 15).
The theme of metafiction may be central to a work or it may appear once in a text. Italo Calvino is the most famous writer enlisted regarding this. He has been termed as the specializing novelist in the genre. His well-known novel *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler* is the classic example regarding this. According to Patricia Waugh, all fiction is “implicitly metafictional,” since all works of literature are concerned with language and literature itself. Many critics have tried to define metafiction but there is no consensus among them. The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines metafiction as “writing about imaginary characters and events in which the process of writing is discussed or described.” But despite the different definitions of metafiction, the critics agree on one point that metafiction is not a genre. They suggest that metafiction displays "a self-reflexivity prompted by the author's awareness of the theory underlying the construction of fictional works," without dividing contemporary metafiction from older works containing similar self-reflexive techniques (Waugh 2).

Metafictional novels reject the traditional figure of the author as transcendental imagination fabricating, through an ultimately monologic discourse. Metafictional novels show not only that the ‘author’ is a concept produced through previous and existing literary and social texts but they also point out what is generally taken to be ‘reality’ is also constructed and mediated in a similar fashion. Thus ‘reality’ is to this extent ‘fictional’ that it can be understood through an appropriate reading process.

Metafiction explicitly lays bare the conventions of realism; it does not ignore or abandon them. Rather very often realistic conventions supply the control in metafictional novels. So it does not abandon the real world for the narcissistic pleasures of imagination. In fact, metafiction re-examines the conventions of realism in order to discover a fictional form that is culturally relevant and comprehensible to contemporary readers. Metafiction shows how literary fiction creates its imaginary world. It helps us to understand how the reality which we live is similarly constructed, similarly written. Patricia Waugh in his landmark book on metafiction defines it as:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such
writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. (Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and practice of self-conscious fiction*, 2)

Metafiction is an elastic term which covers a wide range of fiction at work. Metafiction is a mode of writing, a broader cultural movement often referred to as post modernism. Both metafiction and postmodernism exhibit loss of belief in an external authoritative system of order as that which prompted modernism. Both express new interesting direction in the old art of storytelling. Although metafiction is just one form of postmodernism, nearly all contemporary experimental writing displays some explicitly metafictional strategies. Any text that draws the reader’s attention to its process of construction is metafiction. It can be compared to presentational theatre in a sense that it does not let the audience forget that they are viewing a play whereas in fiction it does not allow the reader to forget that they are reading a work of fiction. Though it is highly associated with modernist and postmodernist literature, but the origins of it can be found as far back as Cervantes *Don Quixote* and even Chaucer’s 14th century *Canterbury Tales*. Metafiction may figure for only a moment in a story or it may be central to the work. Although the characteristics of metafiction may vary in texts as the spectrum of techniques used in them are different but still some common features of metafiction can be traced in the texts coming under this category. Some of the main features of metafiction are:

1. Metafiction often employs intertextual references and illusions by examining the fictional system.
2. Metafiction incorporates both theory and criticism.
3. Metafiction creates biography of imaginary writers in the text.
4. Metafiction presents and discusses the fictional works of imaginary writers.
5. Metafiction authors also violate the narrative levels by intruding to comment on writing, directly addressing the reader, involving him or her with the characters or openly questioning the narrative assumptions.
6. Metafiction also uses experimental techniques such as rejecting conventional plot, refusing any attempt to become real life or combining many genres.
Thus, first of all I will focus on the intertextual element in metafiction. Intertextuality is the shaping of texts’ meanings by other texts. It can refer to an author’s borrowing and transformation of a previous text. It can also refer to a reader’s interpreting the text through the lens of other texts. The term “intertextuality” was coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966. But the term has undergone a change since then and has completely acquired a new form. Though associated with postmodernism, the term is not new. The practice of intertextuality can be traced back to *The Bible* as the *New Testament* quotes passages from the *Old Testament*. Metafiction makes use of intertextuality to bring forth the reality which otherwise is ignored. Susan Sontag’s novels make use of this element of metafiction to exhibit the hidden reality and also to present the traditions and culture of other regions.

Metafiction also incorporates both theory and criticism. Many authors, while writing their piece of fiction write about the constructions of fiction such as plot, paragraphing, characterization, title, etc. They sometimes give statement not about their own writing but also pass judgments on the theory of fiction of other authors. *Lost in the Funhouse* and *On with the Story* by John Barth are about the constructions of fiction. Susan Sontag also exemplifies this in her novel, *In America* when she expresses her ideas on the concept of a writer and novel.

Metafictional texts also take into discussion the works of an imaginary author. Such novels create an imaginary writer as a character in the novel. The other characters discuss his literary work and pass comments on that. The writer in a way also expresses the views about that imagined author. With the help of this, metafiction not only talks about the creative process behind that particular work but also pass judgments. In *The Benefactor* we have the author Hippolyte and Jean Jacques whose works are discussed in detail in the novel and they discuss each other’s work also.

Another important feature of metafictional novels is that they directly address the reader, interrupt the narrative levels and ask the reader to be a part of the plot. Susan Sontag’s last novel *In America* openly practices this feature. The novelist in the chapter ‘zero’ talks about the various constructions of fiction, names the characters and talks about the creative process. All through the novel we have intrusions from Sontag which reveal who is the author of the novel.
To summarize, we can say that metafictional texts exemplify intertextuality, violate narrative modes, use different narrative devices, self-reflexivity and involve reader in the text. Through metafiction the writers explore a theory of fiction while they practice that particular theory of fiction. The present increased awareness about metafiction is partly because of an increased social and cultural self-consciousness. Another related term with metafiction is historiographic metafiction, which is quintessentially a postmodern art form only. Since Susan Sontag has used it elaborately in her novels so I aim to analyze it also.

Historiographic metafiction is an extension of metafiction as it combines self-reflexivity with the methods used to write and interpret history like Susan Sontag has used in her novels. She in a way has challenged the definition and conventions of history. Linda Hutcheon who initially coined the term historiographic metafiction says that historiographic metafiction works are those “well known popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (Hutcheon, The Poetics of postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction, 5). These kind of novels are labeled as “historiographic metafiction” because of their concern with history. They employ "a questioning stance through their common use of conventions of narrative, of reference, of the inscribing of subjectivity, of their identity as texuality, and even of their implication in ideology” (Hutcheon, 286).

Historiographic metafiction actually does not deny that events in the past happened. Instead, it challenges the way historians interpret past events and historical documents. Historiographic metafiction argues that historical facts are given meaning based on historians’ own subjective interpretation which is influenced by social, cultural and ideological contexts. In this, history is similar to fiction that is not based on an objective truth but on a perception of truth. As per metafiction, history really is an agreed upon fiction. Historiographic metafiction is written by taking upon historical fact, data detail and rejecting it by rewriting history through the interpretation of an individual’s experience. To accomplish this re-presentation of history, historiographic metafiction, "plays upon the truth and lies of the historical record. Certain known historical details are deliberately falsified in order to foreground the possible mnemonic failures of recorded history and the constant
potential for both deliberate and inadvertent error” (Hutcheon, 294). The aim is to prove that history is far from conclusive. History is not set in stone. It is constantly being changed and rewritten. The very act of rewriting and presenting the past in both fiction and history is to continually expose it to the influence of the present. Historiographic metafiction presents history from a fresh perspective while encouraging the readers to re-evaluate their own preconceived notions and ideas. In fact the rising new trends in metafiction are responsible for the revival of interest in history. But as Linda Hutcheon feels that the interest in history is also not without problems:

It is a return made problematic by overtly metafictional assertions of both history and literature as human constructs, indeed as human illusions-necessary but none of the illusions for all that. The intertextual parody of historiographic metafiction enacts in a way, the views of certain contemporary historiography…It offers a sense of the presence of past that can only be known from the texts, its traces, be they literary or historical (Hutcheon,4).

The scientific aspect of history in the past claimed that it could only be presented with actual events. But in the postmodern era, the critics argue that history can not be presented objectively, it has to come through historical documents and texts. Such a view gives more importance to the historian and historiography. It stresses the role of a historian as he may give account of some events while also ignore some other events. The postmodern theory has its basis in poststructuralist theory. It advocates the historicist study of literary text, thus analyzing the text taking social and cultural history into consideration. Under the influence of postmodern strategies the concept of history and fiction has also undergone change. The postmodern texts that deal with history reflect the assumption that there is no single history rather multiple histories exist. The old assumptions of historiography are no longer valid. As McHale has also asserted that when historical figures and events are presented in fiction the boundaries between the real and the factual become transgressed. It has been called by him as the “ontological scandal”. That is why Linda Hutcheon has called these novels as historiographic metafiction as they
thematize contemporary theory of historiography and also problematize the difference between history and fiction.

Historical novels have been discussed under various names and labels but Linda Hutcheon’s term historiographic metafiction is considered as all-encompassing term. Many critics have debated about the purpose of historiographic metafiction in fiction. To this McHale and Hutcheon have responded by saying that historiographic metafiction tells us about the forgotten aspects of history and also the facts which were deliberately not told. This may be because of some ideological reasons also. It has also served women as liberating genre as their histories have been verbalized. Likewise the post colonial history is an attempt to give a totally different account of history as opposed to the documented account of history. Salman Rushdie’s novels fall into this category. In the same way, Susan Sontag has also taken into account the actual events as happened in her novels. By including history in her novels Sontag has described the lesser known events and personages. She has also depicted many cultures and traditions of those eras. Moreover she has also incorporated feminist historiography in her *The Volcano Lover* and *In America* by making the women speak for themselves.

Thus, many devices are used in metafiction and historiographic metafiction which I have tried to explain in detail. Mixing of several styles, commenting on other fictional works, deliberate use of anachronisms, beginning and ending the story by discussing the conventions/difficulties of beginning and ending stories, characters reading about their own fictional lives and directly addressing the reader in the act of writing are incorporated by writers of metafiction and historiographic metafiction. Thus, metafiction is a flexible term under which a wide range of fictional works are covered. As Patricia Waugh in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* says:

> In metafiction, though, writers experiment more commonly with the formulaic motifs of popular literary traditions which have often passed into cinematic forms of representation in the twentieth century: science fiction, ghost stories, westerns, detective stories, popular romance (Waugh, 81).
Like many other literary terms, the terms of magical realism and metafiction have also been subject to criticism. Many critics feel that magical realism has been very fashionable during the last few decades of the twentieth century and is becoming a more popular mode of twenty-first century so the term will also be under threat if the trends change. There are three main points of difference regarding magical realism among the critics. Some of the critics argue that the over association of magical realism with Latin America has made it a passing trend in the history of a particular region. Many authors belonging to Latin America have labelled their works as magic realist whereas the novels do not practice the mode. An interesting example of this is the book *Magical Reels* written by John King. The book was based on a Latin American film. Though the book did not discuss magical realism in the film, but he used the title so as to attract the readers and to their further assumption that anything which comes from Latin America must be magic realist. This worked for John King. However as the analysis of the term shows that magical realism has attracted many cross-cultural and post colonial authors so it should not be limited to Latin America only.

The second argument regarding the criticism of magical realism relates to its subversive and transgressive quality. As magical realism is constructed through the conflicting forces of magical and real and the colonialists put more emphasis on realism than on magical. But this can also be countered as many novelists outside Latin America have also incorporated magical realism in their novels in such a way that it does not point out the difference between magic and real rather it assimilates the two in an integral way. One excellent example of this is Toni Morrison whose novel *The Bluest Eye* relies on magical realism. She includes magic and the supernatural in her novel and defends it also saying “that's the way the world was for me and for the black people I know”.

Brenda Cooper is another critic who is against the practice of magical realism. His contention is that since magic realist authors imbibe beliefs, myth and traditions of a particular region, they should first confirm those beliefs before presenting those in their fiction. Cooper claims that the non-scientific magical point of view must be dealt carefully by the author. He feels:
What is always the case, however, is that it is neither possible nor appropriate for magical realist writers to present in an unmediated, undistanced way, the pre-scientific view of the world that some of the characters may hold. The gulf between the peasant’s and the writer’s point of view is a critical space where the negotiations between magic and realism take place (Cooper, *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye*, 1998, 33).

Cooper supports his argument with the help of an example. He is opposed to Salman Rushdie and Marquez’s elevation to the label of magic realists. He feels that both these writers belong to cosmopolitan society and they have lived in a world of freedom. They had little experience of the uneducated local people they have portrayed in their fiction. Thus their depiction of the aftermath of colonialism is created and flippant. But his claims seem to be weak when we consider that Marquez declares that he himself believes in the myths he has depicted in his works as these have been passed to him from his grandmother. But since magical realism does not impose judgment towards its realist or magical aspects and it allows multiple interpretations, so its future as a particular narrative mode is vulnerable. Magical realism has in fact opened up the discussion regarding relationship of fiction and reality and also examining the role of the reader in that relationship. Maggie Ann Bowers elaborates it further:

> discussion of magic(al) realism during the past eighty years has opened up the debate concerning the relationship between reality and fiction, and the reader’s/viewer’s role within that relationship. Far from being simply a fashionable narrative device, magic(al) realism has proved itself through the criticism it has generated to simulate consideration of the relationship of fiction and representation to reality (Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism*,128).

Like the term magical realism has been subject to criticism metafiction also has not escaped it. Critics of Metafiction refuse that it portrays the real because of its
“decadent forms of self-absorption”. A well-known critic Monika Fludernik is of the view that the term has been used to refer to all sort of writings that explicitly or implicitly break the traditional narrative forms. Moreover there are no clear demarcations between metanarrative and metafiction. She demands the further subdivision of the term. Brian Stonehill is another prominent writer who has raised the issue of the open thematization of the fictional process. His argument is that sometimes the open address to the reader and talking about fictional process can detach the reader as he might think that this is all fabricated and thus lose interest in the narrative. However some other critics have encountered it saying that the revealing of the creative process in fact creates a “bond of intimacy” much like between a story-teller and a listener.

In spite of the critical attacks ‘metafiction is simply flaunting what is true to all novels: their outstanding freedom to choose (Waugh, 9). It is this openness and flexibility which has helped the novel to survive as a genre. Metafiction has helped to establish an identity for the novel. With metafiction “the traditional fictional quest has thus been transformed into a quest for fictionality” (Waugh, 10).

Working from this basis, the second chapter of my thesis will investigate how and which type of magical realism and metafictional elements have been imbibed in *The Benefactor* by Susan Sontag. The story told in a Kafkaesque mode examines how Hippolyte tries to interpret his dreams. The novel is based on dreams and consciousness of a man who plagued by distressing dreams resolves that they are the higher reality to which he must make his life conform and sets doing so. Sontag has applied a literary style of magical realism and metafiction that combines dreamlike elements and the fantastic with reality. The novel exemplifies metafictional traits as it deals with the writers and readers as characters. The protagonist of the novel Hippolyte is a writer who writes for films, journals, etc. The chapter aims to examine the novel in the light of the aforesaid discussion.
The division of the chapters is based on the chronological order of the chosen novels. Then on to chapter three, the study aims to have a textual analysis of Susan Sontag’s second novel *Death Kit* by investigating a series of narrative techniques it employs. The novel closely related to *The Benefactor* is again an exploration of the disintegrated self. The chapter will aim to prove Sontag’s own insistence that the novel can be read as straight narrative in which certain events take place at the magical real level. An illustration of Sontag’s theory about literary form, the novel is also marked by self-reflexivity.

The fourth chapter of the project will focus on *The Volcano Lover*, the third novel by Susan Sontag. The novel is a historical romance set in the 18th century. Sontag prefers to think of the past as a launching pad for her explorations of human character. Her stories are often about the narrator’s or the writer’s dilemma, how to be creative, how to find the proper structure for a story, a story that is often an account of the writer’s own perception. This chapter will deal with how Susan Sontag uses her narratives to create a work blending fact and fiction. I aim to explore the postmodern and metafictive elements put together.

The fifth chapter of my research project will observe magical realism and the metafictional strategies imbibed by Susan Sontag in her final novel *In America*. Again a historical novel, *In America* is a well turned out piece of metafiction. The novel is profound and brilliant investigation into the fate of thought and culture in America. Rooted in the past the novel is also about the experiences of immigrants. In this chapter my effort will be to investigate how the novelist has used history and fiction to bring the untold stories to the fore.

The sixth chapter of this study aims to conclude the observations made in the research. Metafiction and magical realism have been liberating genre for Susan Sontag as she has offered multiple realities and also histories. Susan Sontag “an androgenous figure”, brilliant essayist, experimental novelist, analyst of culture was an international institution. Her name has become “synonymous with a set of
expectations-most notably of the dream of self-creation, of self fulfillment, of standing alone, on the cutting edge, articulate, independent, and attractive” (Rollyson and Paddock, Susan Sontag: *The making of an Icon*, xii).

The basic aim of the study is to explore the importance of magical realism and metafiction in fiction and its power as a narrative style. The study aims to explore how magical realism and metafiction explore the theory of writing fiction by writing fiction that addresses literary techniques and devices. The study brings into focus the magical realism and the interweaving of various metafictional devices in the novels of Susan Sontag. Her fiction is engaged with the revolutionary and revisionist act of story telling. The boundaries between the fact and fiction and the present and the past have been transgressed.