INTRODUCTION

Jay B. Hubbell wrote, “No American writer of the twentieth century is now so highly praised as Faulkner” (qtd. in Wagner 1). William Faulkner is now recognised as “the American Shakespeare” (qtd. in A William Faulkner Encyclopedia ix). The praise is due for he is indeed an original talent. Certainly, he is over researched. Yet more investigations are needed to unfold the myriad dimensions of the man and his work. Donald M. Kartiganer in his opening remark in 2000 Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha Conference comments to the audience, “After all these years, is there anything more to be said about Faulkner and his works?” (qtd. in Hamblin ix). The answer is obviously yes. Hamblin argues that here “more” indicates “looking backward and forward” (ix). Taking the cue from Hamblin this present thesis, wants to visit a neglected area of Faulkner studies and try to explore its wider ramifications on Faulknerian studies with the help of some sociological and psychological inputs. Family-centric nature of Faulknerian fiction is well-established in the arena of Faulknerian criticism. But the functional aspect of family, I think, remains somewhat neglected. And the primal function of family is to parent children with parental resources. Parents’ active interest in children is badly needed to make children socially responsible, psychologically stable, morally strong, and economically independent in their future life. But Faulknerian parental figures prove inadequate in discharging their parenting role in moulding children’s lives. The thesis circles round this thematic paradigm, that is, inadequate parenting in Faulkner’s fiction and its disastrous consequences on children, adolescents, and adults alike.

Faulkner, the premier American novelist of family, presents several families in his novels—the Compsons, the Bundrens, the Burdens, the
Sartorises, the Sutpens, the Snopes, and the Mcaslings etc. And he depicts all these families in a process of decay “caused by the absence of [parental] love” (Bowling 111). This particular aspect, that is, inadequate parenting or parental inadequacy engineered by the lack of love or supervision on the part of Faulkner’s fictional parents, is one of the recurring themes which is a key to understanding Faulkner’s creativity. Gary Storhoff in “Faulkner’s Family Crucible: Quentin’s Dilemma” writes, that in Faulkner “we discover the ravages of alcoholism and its effects on the family, miserable marriages that lead to spousal abuse, threats of sibling incest and sibling violence against infants and children, and violence of adult children against their parents.”(n. pag.). The theme of inadequate parenting or parental inadequacy in respect of parenting has an indelible presence in Faulkner as well as his fiction.

According to Kartiganer, the driving forces of Faulknerian fiction are “linguistic, generic, social, economic, political cultural, moral” (“In Place of Introduction” xiv). Richard C. Moreland asserts that Faulkner’s writing “unsettles prevailing assumptions about time, space, language, loss, the self, the family, gender, culture, and history” (60). A recent review article by John E Bassett William Faulkner: An Annotated Bibliography of Criticism Since 1988 (2009), according to Lorie Watkins Fulton, seems to point out the overall trend of Faulknerian criticism which encompasses such broad areas as race, class, gender, realism, modernism, postmodernism, feminism, poststructuralism, rhetorical and ideological theories, and cultural studies. Here, Bassett conspicuously excludes, as this thesis considers, another crucial aspect of Faulknerian studies which is mainly concerned with the family centric nature of Faulkner’s fiction. This particular aspect, if Fulton is understood, has not been given due priority in Bassett’s study. Moreover,
reams of paper have been used on a particular text or a particular major or minor character. Some studies also explore either Faulkner’s fictional mothers or fathers. As Noel Polk confirms, “He [Faulkner] remains elusive for us, even with umpteen volume-length biographies, several volumes of letters, and more than a zillion essays that explore various aspects of his life in his works and out of them” (“Was Not Was Not” 19). Here the present thesis considers that there is relatively a dearth of research activities on Faulkner and parenting and its unique relevance to him, as Faulkner himself in his childhood has been a victim of parental inadequacy, as indicated and supported by David Minter’s celebrated work *William Faulkner: His Life and Work* (1980), and Philip M. Weinstein’s recent study *Becoming Faulkner: The Art and Life of William Faulkner* (2010).

The theme of inadequate parenting is inevitably related to family whose basic function is to parent child. And to examine and explore it widely, this thesis takes the liberty of interdisciplinary approach. By applying the concept of parenting to Faulkner’s fictional parents, the thesis attempts to unearth some crucial familial and social issues in Faulkner. And by doing that it endeavours to add another crucial dimension to Faulknerian studies. The theme of parental inadequacy, as stated earlier, is directly linked with Faulkner. Faulkner in his childhood has resentment for his father and mother who prove too remote and too authoritative respectively. There is also a close proximity among Faulkner’s fictional parents and his biological parents, Maud and Murry Falkner. In both cases, parents are grossly inadequate, ineptitude, flawed so far parenting is concerned. They are remote, selfish, cruel, and tyrannical. Toward their children they show neither commitment nor responsibility. Whatever they may be, as parents, they miserably fail to be role
models before their children. Consequently, children of Faulknerian fictional parents have been psychosocially impaired, emotionally unstable, and morally degenerated. In other words, parental inadequacy invariably leads to children’s emotional and psychological impairment in Faulknerian texts. And the focus of the thesis centres round this particular aspect in Faulkner’s four texts – *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Light in August* (1932), and *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936).

Coming to the structure of the present thesis, it is divided into seven separate chapters in addition to introductory chapter. The brief introduction chapter attempts to establish the relevance of the theme of inadequate parenting to Faulkner and at the same time presents the thesis statement. Chapter I is entirely devoted to the theoretical part of parenting and its multifaceted dimensions on a broader perspective. This chapter attempts to define the term ‘parenting’ first. And as the bulk of the task of parenting is occurred in family and is done by the parents, it endeavours to clarify the meaning of ‘family’ and its functions next. Then, it examines the concept of ‘father’ and ‘mother’ as they are the nucleus of family life. It also strives to show the changing conceptions of motherhood and fatherhood, spearheaded by the feminists and other social thinkers. Then, it examines various social, economic and cultural factors which have added complexity to the task of parenting, such as, women’s major participation in paid labour force, rising of single parent households, unwed, or, never married mothers, surrogacy system, the use of invitro-fertilization, gay and lesbian parents, the encroachment of family space by virtual space, such as computer and internet etc. Another point which this chapter stresses is the comparative analogy between biological and social aspects of parenthood. Then it strives to explore,
somewhat roughly, the major changes that have taken place in the arena of parenting in American culture, beginning from the colonial period and continuing up to the present day.

Chapter II examines the link between parenting and Faulkner and his fictions. Here it discusses one of the salient features of Faulknerian fiction, namely, parental inadequacy which plays a crucial destructive role in the degeneration of children. Though the theme of inadequate parenting has surfaced in most of his fictions and some of his short stories, the focus of the present thesis is, however, limited to Faulkner’s four fictions—The Sound and the Fury (1929), As I Lay Dying (1930), Light in August (1932), and Absalom, Absalom! (1936). In each of the novels, the parental generation—father, mother, grandparents, fosterparents etc, instead of supporting children, has destroyed them with their lack of love, emotional succour and warmth. I have also tried to contextualise pre-civil war concept of patriarchy which gives absolute power and authority to father figures who play pivotal roles to silence female and other subordinate voices. This patriarchal society has also been conducive to deteriorate the quality of effective parenting. It also minimally discusses a few authors like Kate Chopin, Toni Morrison to show that these writers are also concerned with the theme of inadequate parenting and this theme of parental inadequacy has an abiding existence in literary world. Next, this chapter examines the ambivalent relationship between Faulkner and his parents, Maud and Murry Falkner to show that his art is not entirely immune from his life or how his life has actually influenced his art. Theresa M. Towner wrote, “In his fiction, subconsciously and on purpose, Faulkner used the materials of his life in very subtle, often tertiary ways” (1). Toward the end this chapter attempts to explore the relational intricacies between Faulkner and
his parents and, thereby, try to demonstrate how Faulkner’s parents, though subtly, are being repeatedly portrayed in his fiction.

The subsequent chapters, **III, IV, V, and VI** are devoted to Faulkner’s four fictions—*The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, Light in August,* and *Absalom, Absalom!* respectively. Each chapter examines the relational nuances between parents and children or vice versa to argue that inadequate parenting by the parental figures has wounded the children emotionally and psychosocially and even morally. These chapters examine how the individual parent has failed in discharging his or her primal duty of parenting with love and control. The two basic yardsticks of parenting are love and supervision and the thesis has shown that Faulknerian parents have abysmally failed to apply these two criteria in parenting their children. This way they prove their parenting inadequacy and ineptitude.

The concluding chapter **VII** sums up the basic argument of the thesis. It examines how Faulknerian children have been wounded, mutilated, torn aside, and degenerated emotionally and psychosocially by the parental inadequacy. We know that parental love and control are needed for the all round development of children. And when parents fail to love and supervise their children, their failure in life is imminent. In Faulkner the same fact recurs most nakedly. The Compson children in *The Sound and the Fury,* the Bundren children in *As I Lay Dying,* Joe Christmas and Lena Grove in *Light in August,* and children of Sutpen in *Absalom, Absalom!* in the end have been in a state of brutehood. None of the children is capable of holding his or her head high in society. Children fail to be responsible citizens of the society. Some of them are killed, some have been insane, and the rest continue to live in a state of
sheer wretchedness. The present thesis strives to demonstrate that if the parental figures have been adept in parenting by applying the basic yardsticks of parenting style, namely to love and control in discharging their parental duties and responsibilities, the children’s lives might have been different from what they are now. Overall, the present thesis attempts to explore the theme of parental inadequacy and its inexorably vicious aftermath on children in Faulknerian fiction, and thereby, strives to add a new facet to Faulknerian studies.