A woman's proper sphere is the family where marriage is to be her ultimate fate. Family life, however, does not mean a relationship between man and woman alone. It takes into account a woman's relation to parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and others. Jane Austen applies her mind to woman in different relationships in the family as it suits her experiences and thought-pattern. She, for instance, describes rather briefly the relationship between husband and wife. For the hero and the heroine, this life is clearly envisaged. However, the story ends as soon as the marriage-bells ring. The married life of others is never described at length. Only some hints of Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Bennet's married life are given:

"Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop."

(PP, p. 5)

This is largely true of the Middletons, the Palmers, the Allens, the Gardiners, the Philips, the Grants, the Bertrams, the Prices, the Knightleys, the Westons, the Wentons and the Musgroves.
By her circumstances Jane Austen did not have first-hand experience of the married life of husbands and wives. Nor does she make this relationship the nucleus of her study in the novels. As the study in her novels is of love-marriage up to the declaration of love, this falls outside the purview of her pattern. The only point she still emphasises in her study of this relationship is that for a healthy concord and harmony in family life, a little more of adjustment, understanding, allowances for each other's natural faults or follies and imaginative farsightedness are essential. Mrs. Collins carries on by being indifferent to her husband's pompous nothingness. Mr. Bennet, disappointed in his wife, takes refuge in sarcasm and study of books. Jane Austen does not seem to approve of this escapism as the ideal. She suggests that unequal marriages, particularly on an intellectual level, are continually a painful affair.

It is the relationship of woman as sister that is dwelt on with great care and interest. Jane Austen had herself felt this relationship. She was very fond of her brothers and excessively attached to her elder sister, Cassandra Austen. This relationship is described or
suggested in strong and explicit terms. Colonel Brandon, who often comes to look at Marianne and speak to Elinor, is just a brother to Elinor Dashwood. Mr. Parcy's love for his sister, Georgiana Darcy, is effectively suggested and shown. If Charles Bingley does not love his sisters strongly, he does not hate them either; he has great regard for them and their wishes. One of the reasons for his long absence from Netherfield is the wish of his sisters. Mr. Croft loves her brother, Captain Wentworth, very much. It is natural that the brother is so open and frank with her. In Jane Austen brothers and sisters also include brothers and sisters-in-law. Elizabeth Bennet, for instance, tells Wickham, when the latter is married to Lydia Bennet, that they are after all brother and sister:

"Come, Mr. Wickham, we are brother and sister, you know. Do not let us quarrel about the past."

(PP, p. 329)

All brothers and sisters are largely well-disposed towards one another. William Price, a year older than herself, has been a constant friend and companion to Fanny Price in Portsmouth. Both of them miss each other very much when they are separated:

"William did not like she should come away; he had told her he should miss her very much, indeed."  

(MP, p. 16)
All her brothers and sisters are dear to her, yet William runs in her thoughts more than the rest. In Mansfield Park, more particularly, Jane Austen's own love for her brothers has been reflected. Fanny Price is extremely happy, when she learns of the promotion of her brother, William. So is Jane Austen when she learns that her brothers, Charles Austen and Frank Austen, are likely to get promotions in the near future. While giving an account of the same, quoting the exact language of a letter to her father written by Admiral Gambier to her sister, she expresses her immense joy:

"There! I may now finish my letter and go and hang myself, for I am sure I can neither write nor do anything which will not appear insipid to you after this." -1

Mr. John Dashwood is a cruel and heartless brother. There is a distinct tone of irony in the way he is introduced:

"He was not an ill-disposed young man, unless to be rather cold-hearted, and rather selfish, is to be ill-disposed . . . ." (SS, p. 5)

Yet, he is also less stupid than his wife. Time and again he thinks of helping his sisters. But his mind is corrupted by his wife's selfish and mean nature. Even though unhelpful,
he also feels that the action is not in keeping with the decorum expected of him. He is narrow-minded and selfish, and his wife is meaner than he is. With a more agreeable wife he might have been respectable, even "amiable".

James Morland and Catherine Morland are a loving brother and sister pair. Henry Tilney rightly observes that affectionate sister, Catherine Morland, must always be a source of great comfort to her brother, James:

"Poor James is so unhappy! You will soon know why."
"To have so kind-hearted, so affectionate a sister," replied Henry, warmly, "must be a comfort to him under any distress." (NA, p. 204)

At times Catherine dislikes John Thorpe, yet she likes him as her brother's friend.

In *Emma*, Emma Woodhouse and Frank Churchill are just like sister and brother. She is asked to choose a wife for Frank. She readily undertakes the enterprise, although she does not or need not see it through. She wishes to keep Frank Churchill for Harriet Smith. Since Harriet Smith is a sort of sister to her, he will be a brother to her. Her liking for him is so conspicuous that even Mr. Knightley suspects it. For a considerable period, as between Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram, the relationship between Mr. Knightley and Emma Woodhouse is also like that of an elder brother and younger sister. Sometimes they quarrel with each other over
petty things as any brother and sister, differing with each other here and there without any hatred for each other. Rather, the quarrels express their concern for each other's welfare. This goes on for a long time. A stage comes when it dawns upon them that, after all, they are not brother and sister and they can dance together. In the ball arranged by Mr. Weston, where he calls upon everybody to dance together, this becomes quite clear:

"I am ready," said Emma, "whenever I am wanted."
"Whom are you going to dance with?" asked Mr. Knightley. She hesitated a moment, and then replied, "With you, if you will ask me."
"Will you?" he said, offering his hand. "Indeed I will. You have shown that you can dance, and you know we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it all improper."
"Brother and sister! No indeed."

(E, p. 331)

The relationship between sisters is also studied with considerable intimacy and tenderness. Generally the heroine has a sister or several sisters. When there are no real sisters or really loving sisters, the close intimacy between two girls borders on sisterly relationship. Sense and Sensibility is the story of two loving sisters. They may differ in tastes or habits, but they often confide in and console each other at the time of distress. A sister is thus a great comfort in misery. Henry Tilney tells Catherine Morland
that her visit to Miss Tilney is very welcome to her as Miss Tilney has had no female companion:

"His sister, he said, was uncomfortably circumstanced; she had no female companion."

(NA, p. 157)

Miss Tilney herself confesses later that she very often feels lonely as she has no sister:

"I have no sister, you know—it is impossible for me not to be often solitary."

(NA, p. 180)

As this relationship is prized by the novelist, its absence is seriously lamented. When John Thorpe does not like to ride with his sister, he makes a coxcomb of himself:

"No, no, I did not come to Bath to drive my sisters about; that would be a good joke, faith!"

(NA, p. 48)

It is observed with pain that Elizabeth Elliot "was repulsive and unsisterly to Anne" (P, p. 43). Anne Elliot pines for the sisterly affection supposed to be existing between the Musgrove girls. She

"envied them for nothing but...that good-humoured mutual affection, of which she had known so little herself with either of her sisters."

(P, p. 41)

The rivalry between Maria and Julia over the affection of
Henry Crawford reveals the girls' lack of sisterly feeling, which is derided. The reader is told that they

"under such a trial as this, had not affection or principle enough to make them merciful or just, to give them honour or compassion. Maria felt her triumph, and pursued her purpose careless of Julia; and Julia could never see Maria distinguished by Henry Crawford, without trusting that it would create jealousy, and bring a public disturbance at last." (MP, p. 163)

Mrs. John Dashwood's coldness and selfishness are underlined with particular emphasis in her behaviour towards the Miss Dashwoods. At one place, she "met her husband's sisters without any affection, and almost without having anything to say to them" (SS, p. 229).

The relationship between a brother and a sister is also used to strengthen the main plot; it is used to bring about the union of the hero and the heroine, as it seems to her a plausible and dignified method of desiring and increasing acquaintance and understanding of each other. In Sense and Sensibility, Mrs. John Dashwood's brother, Edward Ferrars, visits his sister where he meets Elinor Dashwood. Captain Wentworth is Mrs. Croft's brother. So the lovers are brought together through them.

Sometimes the relationship is used deliberately to enhance this union. Captain Wentworth visits his sister in Bath; but he visits her only for Anne Elliot's sake.
"You alone have brought me to Bath," he confesses to her (P, p. 237). In *Northanger Abbey*, acquaintance and intimacy between Catherine Morland and Miss Tilney strengthen Catherine's ties with Henry Tilney. While at Bath, Catherine Morland once remarks that she wants to extend her acquaintance with Miss Tilney. One, however, feels that deep down she is desirous of enhancing her association with Henry Tilney; Miss Tilney is a dignified tool, a natural and effective means to a desired end.

Robert Martin's sisters are known to Harriet Smith. This is one strong tie that serves as a unifying force between Martin and Harriet Smith; not infrequently, Harriet remembers his sisters. In a letter Martin proposes to her. This is the indirect method of making a direct proposal. Edmund's consideration for William Price, Fanny's brother, helps in bringing about greater affection between him and Fanny Price.

There is still greater concentration on this alliance in *Pride and Prejudice*. Miss Bingley, desirous of marrying Mr. Darcy, plans to get his sister married to her brother, Charles Bingley. She time and again informs Jane Bennet about her 'design'. Both the sisters quite often enquire from Mr. Darcy about his sister. She once tantalizes him about Elizabeth Bennet's features, and tries to endear herself to him by speaking highly of his sister, professing great interest in her.
When Mr. Darcy meets Elizabeth he humbly asks her permission to introduce to her his sister, Georgiana Darcy:

"There is also one other person in the party," he continued after a pause, "who more particularly wishes to be known to you. Will you allow me, or do I ask too much, to introduce my sister to your acquaintance during your stay at Lambton?"

(PP, p. 256)

This surprises Elizabeth. She, however, instantly guesses the reason:

"She immediately felt that whatever desire Miss Darcy might have of being acquainted with her, must be the work of her brother . . . ."

He also urges upon them, later, to accept their invitation to dinner and

"called upon his sister to join him in expressing their wish of seeing Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner and Miss Bennet to dinner at Pembroke, before they left the country."

(PP, p. 263)

Elizabeth soon finds that he wishes and helps the acquaintance between her and his sister to grow:

"And Elizabeth saw that he was anxious for his sister and herself to get acquainted, and forwarded, so much as possible, every attempt at conversation on either side."

(PP, p. 269)
It is also by making an allusion to his sister that Elizabeth starts a conversation about her final fate in marriage with him. Her sentiment for Darcy has changed from hate to love. Yet, how can she enter into a conversation with him to reveal that change? She uses Miss Darcy as the tool. At a large party assembled at Longbourn, she seizes the opportunity of saying to him, when he is near her: "Is your sister at Pemberley still?" And then she shows great concern in her well-being. It is with emphasis that Jane Austen, at the end, speaks of the great sense of satisfaction over the mutual attachment of the two sisters:

"Pemberley was now Georgiana's home; and the attachment of the sisters was exactly what Darcy had hoped to see. They were able to love each other even as well as they intended. Georgiana had the highest opinion in the world of Elizabeth."

(PP, p. 387)

II

The parent-child relationship is another important aspect that deserves notice in Jane Austen's world. Jane Austen had not the experience of being a mother. Therefore, she scrupulously avoids the ground not known to her. What a daughter is to a mother or mother to a daughter, she must, however, have felt herself. She studies this relationship in some detail. When there is no real mother, some elderly woman is there to serve as a mother. Lady Russell to
Anne Elliot, Miss Taylor to Emma Woodhouse and Mrs. Allen to Catherine Morland, for example, are mothers. But what a son is to a mother or a mother to a son is not authentically known to her. Although she must have some idea of it while living in a big family and also reading about it in books, yet she avoids the whole spectrum of relationship between sons and mothers. Lady Bertram's remorse over the death of her son is slightly and ironically touched upon. The Bennets have no son. The Lucases have several children but the reader is mainly introduced to only two elder daughters. Only Charlotte Lucas, the eldest, is described in some detail:

"They had several children. The eldest of them, a sensible, intelligent young woman, about twenty-seven, was Elizabeth's intimate friend."

(PP, p. 18)

This, however, causes no vacuum, as the pattern of the novel does not suffer much because of this omission.

Jane Austen underscores her dislike for disagreeable parents. Except in Sense and Sensibility, in all novels there is a marked disparity between parents and children. Jane Austen seems to despise parents when they become an ordeal to go through for well-intentioned children. Jane Austen holds that parents should only suggest, recommend, but not compel the youngster about their matrimonial choices. Youngsters should have a full and free will. Quite often a
faulty upbringing by parents is responsible for much evil in her world. As Walter Allen holds:

"In Miss Austen's world the errors and follies of the young are always, in part at any rate, the result of faulty upbringing." -1

Lydia, Kitty and the Misses Bertram are examples in point. The parents should know how to look after their children. Mrs. Bennet encourages the folly of Kitty and Lydia. Elizabeth blushes for her more often than not. She is sad to find that the lack of parental care has been responsible for Lydia's elopement:

"Sometimes one officer, sometimes another had been her favourite, as their attentions raised them in her opinion. Her affections had been continually fluctuating, but never without an object. The mischief of neglect and mistaken indulgence towards such a girl—Oh! how acutely did she now feel it."

(PP, p. 280)

Mr. Bennet is negligent of his duty as a head of family. Elizabeth Bennet brings this aspect of his nature to him. She, for instance, warns him of the imminent danger involved in sending Lydia out to Brighton and not keeping her in control. However, Mr. Bennet laughs her fears away.

"We shall have no peace at Longbourn if Lydia does not go to Brighton. Let her go then."

(PP, p. 232)

This is certainly not proper for a parent. He repents later when Lydia elopes with Wickham. He says:

"Say nothing of that. Who should suffer but myself? It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it."

(PP, p. 299)

But he forgets the lesson so nicely driven home to him, when all ends well. He relapses into the same neglectful attitude. He likes Wickham much:

"I admire all of my three sons-in-law highly," said he, "Wickham, perhaps, is my favourite."

(PP, p. 379)

He is ready to dispose of his remaining two daughters, he says, to any persons who come for them. He irresponsibly remarks: "If any young men come for Mary or Kitty, send them in, for I am quite at leisure" (PP, p. 377).

Of all the fathers in Jane Austen's novels, Sir Bertram is the only respectable and agreeable one. He, too, commits mistakes in the upbringing of his children. But, he genuinely repents and rectifies them. His repentance signifies that he has attained a degree of self-knowledge. It is not a temporary repentance like that of Mr. Bennet. It is real and deep. Fanny Price's father is negligent and crude. Fathers in Emma, Pride and Prejudice, Northanger Abbey and Persuasion lack both fortitude and principle.

Daughters, however, are still considerably affectionate towards fathers. Jane Austen approves of this even when the
father is quite a nincompoop. Elizabeth, at times, feels ashamed of her father, but she does not dare say anything offensive to him. She only goes as far as a dutiful and respectful daughter may go. Quite gently and persuasively she points out to him the need to check the exuberant spirits of Lydia and Kitty. When Sir Walter speaks disparagingly of her friend, Mrs. Smith, Anne Elliot minds it. Yet, she does not say anything to her father. This is so because her "sense of personal respect to her father prevented her". "She made no reply" (P, p. 158). Emma Woodhouse does not want to annoy Mr. Woodhouse. He is hypochondrical, and she is quite aware of his weaknesses. When he is unhappy that she is going to be married, Emma Woodhouse also becomes sad: "She could not see him suffering, to know him fancying himself neglected" (E, p. 483). Fanny Price misses her mother when she comes to Mansfield. As Edmund says, this proves her to be an affectionate daughter. "You are sorry to leave Mamma, my dear little Fanny," said he, "which shows you to be a very good girl" (MP, p. 15). A Regan or Goneril is, indeed, unthinkable in Jane Austen's novels.

Mothers, more than fathers, are responsible for the proper upbringing and guidance of their daughters. Miss Tilney misses her dead mother, as she often feels lonely:
"A mother would have been always present; a mother would have been a constant friend; her influence would have been beyond all other."

(NA, p. 180)

In Jane Austen's world mothers are generally negligent of their duties towards their daughters. Catherine's parents ignore her feelings when she comes home after having had a broken love-affair. Their conduct is not liked by the novelist. She comments:

"They never thought of her heart, which for the parents of a young lady of seventeen, just returned from her first excursion from home, was odd enough!"

(NA, p. 235)

Lady Elliot is described with great care as she was a loving mother. Mrs. Bennet, Lady Bertram, Mrs. Thorpe, Mrs. Price are trying mothers, all careless towards their daughters. Mary Crawford blames mothers who do not know how to bring up their daughters well:

"Mothers certainly have not yet got quite the right way of managing their daughters. I do not know where the error lies. I do not pretend to set people right, but I do see that they are often wrong."

(MP, p. 50)

Mr. and Mrs. Price have no affection for Fanny. The fact is seriously lamented. Fanny's father "sarcely ever noticed her, but to make her the object of a coarse joke". As for her mother:
"Mrs. Price was not unkind—but... her daughter never met with greater kindness from her, than on the first day of her arrival. The instinct of nature was soon satisfied, and Mrs. Price's attachment had no other source. Her heart and her time were already quite full; she had neither leisure nor affection to bestow on Fanny."  

(MP, p. 389)

Jane Austen rebukes in severe terms the neglect of their daughters' upbringing by mothers. She underlines this when the negligent mothers are held to ridicule. Mrs. Bennet blames others, particularly the Forsters, for Lydia's elopements: the clear ironic tone is evident:

"If I had been able," said she, "to carry my point of going to Brighton, with all my family, this would not have happened; but poor dear Lydia had nobody to take care of her. Why did the Forsters ever let her go out of their sight? I am sure there was some great neglect or other on their side, for she is not the kind of girl to do such a thing, if she had been well looked after. I always thought they were very unfit to have the charge of her..."  

(PP, p. 287)

Many mothers do not manage their daughters well. According to Edmund, "wrong education" by parents is at the bottom of the evil:

"The error is plain enough," said the less courteous Edmund; "such girls are ill brought up. They are given wrong notions from the beginning. They are always acting upon motives of vanity—and there is no more real modesty in their behaviour before they appear in public than afterwards."

(MP, p. 50)
Tom Bertram thinks that good mothers alone can guide daughters:

"Those who are showing the world what female manners should be," said Bertram, gallantly, "are doing a great deal to set them right."

Mrs. Dashwood is a tolerable mother. The business of her life, like that of Mrs. Bennet, is to get her two daughters married. However, she is not so mean as Mrs. Bennet. For the sake of Marianne, she "could even be prudent". Lady Middleton is cold and insipid, though an indulgent mother. Her husband is decidedly better-mannered and more civilized than she is. She too "was more agreeable than her mother in being more silent" (SS, p. 54).

Mrs. Allen almost 'mothers' Catherine Morland. She is her parent. However, she is a chatty, old woman, who is much more 'dressy'; she takes great care of her gowns. Mr. Allen, a more sensible person, does not think it proper for young men and women to ride together in open carriages. But his wife's objection to such a scheme is on different grounds. She argues:

"Open carriages are nasty things. A clean gown is not five minutes' wear in them. You are splashed getting in and getting out; and the wind takes your hair and your bonnet in every direction. I hate an open carriage myself."

(NA, p. 104)

Being without beauty, genius, accomplishment or manner, she
is boring and noisy, teasing even at times. But she is never designing. She frequently allows Catherine her own discretion. For instance, when Catherine Morland wants to be with the Tilneys, she easily yields: "Do just as you please, dear" (NA, p. 61).

Mrs. Thorpe, an indulgent mother, is a fit companion for her. Mrs. Allen's conversation with Mrs. Thorpe—if it can be called conversation—is amusing and revealing: one talks of gowns and garments, the other of her children. Mrs. Thorpe always visits others, while in the company of one or the other of her children, as the child provides her a fit subject of conversation. Like Mrs. Bennet, she frequently forgets the topic of her speech—since she is also many times a thoughtless talker. Like Mrs. Allen, she is also simply stupid, not selfish or ill-designing. There is, indeed, something heroic in her placid satisfaction with her children. Mary Musgrove is a trying mother, because she is indifferent to her child. Her nature is revealed when she regards Anne Elliot as a better nurse for her ailing child:

"To be sure, I may just as well go as not, for I am of no use at home. You, who have not a mother's feelings, are a great deal the properest person."

(P, p. 57)

The proverbial image of a cruel mother-in-law is reflected in two novels. Elizabeth's confrontation with
Lady Catherine reminds one of this relationship, as Lady Catherine emphatically claims to be Mr. Darcy's aunt. She repeatedly calls Darcy "my nephew", "my own nephew". When Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth are engaged, she "sent him language so very abusive, especially of Elizabeth, that for some time all intercourse was at an end." Even when she ultimately overlooks the offence, it is due to "her affection for him, or her curiosity to see how his wife conducted herself". This is obviously no sound reason as far as the wife is concerned. Mrs. John Dashwood wearies her mother-in-law, Mrs. Dashwood. The mother-in-law does not hold purse-strings or power; she is only a widow with very limited resources. The step-son and his wife are very cruel and mean. It is in Mrs. Ferrars that the traditional mother-in-law comes into her own. She is easily flattered by Lucy Steele. However, she hates prudent Elinor Dashwood right from her early acquaintance. It is to be noted that even when both Lucy and Elinor become her daughters, she hardly likes Elinor who is superior both in birth and fortune.

III

The bleak chances of dignified female employment and the dread of being a poor old woman in her time account for the absence of the portrait of an honourable maid-aunt in contemporary literature. In Jane Austen's world also one misses an ideal maid-aunt. But she herself has been an
affectionate maid-aunt. And the position of an aunt in the family is quite high in her opinion. She wrote to her niece, Caroline Austen, in 1816:

"I have already maintained the importance of Aunts as much as possible and am sure of your doing the same... now that you are become an Aunt, you are a person of some consequence." -1

Jane Austen's study of woman as an aunt is deeply interesting. Aunts are important for the nourishment and upbringing of nieces. Mrs. Gardiner is a much-loved aunt. She

"... was an amiable, intelligent, elegant woman, and a great favourite with all her Longbourn nieces. Between the two eldest and herself especially, there subsisted a very particular regard."

(PF, p. 139)

Elizabeth finds a sympathetic aunt in Mrs. Gardiner. There is a note of marked tenderness and sympathy in all her dealings with Elizabeth. There is indeed a unique rapport between them. In addition to other things, they share a tendency to be sportive and light. Mrs. Gardiner, for example, advises her to be serious in her relationship with Wickham, for the engagement would be between unequals. But the playful Elizabeth promises nothing as she assures her

1. L, p. 428.
to "take care of myself and Mr. Wickham too". He will not be in love with her, if she can prevent that (PP, p. 144). Mrs. Gardiner refers to her ultimate union with Mr. Darcy in a similar way. Having given an account of Mr. Darcy's past in tracing out and bringing about Lydia's marriage with Wickham, she goes on in a light tone:

"I thought him very shy;—he hardly ever mentioned your name. But shyness seems the fashion. Pray, forgive me if I have been very presuming, or at least do not banish me so far, as to exclude me from P. I shall never be quite happy till I have been all round the park. A low phaeton, with a nice little pair of ponies, would be the very thing."

(PP, p. 325)

Anne Elliot is an affectionate aunt of little Charles and Walter. Miss Bates is a loving aunt to Jane Fairfax. It is to be noted that she invariably speaks well of Jane Fairfax. On one occasion she dwells at length on her letter.

Like parents, aunts have an important part to play. Mrs. Gardiner cheerfully performs her duty towards her nieces. She wishes them all happiness. Mrs. Philips, her sister, prepares the ground for Lydia's elopement. Both the younger Miss Bennets are very fond of her. She also encourages their follies and flirtations with officers. Lady Bertram is tiresome as an aunt. She is an old, fat, indolent, selfish lady: "Her affections were not acute, nor was her mind tenacious" (MP, p. 449). In the end, however, she voluntarily discards her passivity.
Mrs. Norris is perhaps the worst of aunts, particularly for Fanny Price. Mrs. Norris is a mean, miserly and selfish woman. Mrs. Price, after a silence of over eleven years, gets reconciled to her sister, Lady Bertram. What does Mrs. Norris do to help her? Jane Austen says:

"Sir Thomas sent friendly advice and professions, Lady Bertram dispatched money and baby-linen, and Mrs. Norris wrote letters . . . ."

(MP, p. 5)

She helps in getting Fanny removed from Portsmouth to Mansfield Park, though she herself does not help her anywhere. Rather she tries to create or increase her diffidence. She acts as a foil to her, trying to undo whatever Edmund Bertram wants to do towards Fanny Price. Mrs. Norris wants to help the Bertrams with advice only: "As far as walking, talking and contriving reached, she was thoroughly benevolent" (MP, p. 8). But towards Fanny Price at Mansfield Parsonage she is not helpful in dispensing even kind advice. Frequently she tries to demoralise her and make her feel small. She does not love Fanny. Jane Austen remarks: "Mrs. Norris had no affection for Fanny and no wish of procuring her pleasure at any time" (MP, p. 79). She encourages the vulgar conduct of the Miss Bertrams and tries to create diffidence in Fanny thereby causing much misery. Sir Bertram ultimately realizes that she has not been a dependable guide or friend to his daughters. When
she finally leaves Mansfield Park Parsonage, she is remembered by nobody: "She was regretted by no one at Mansfield Park" (MP, p. 466).

If aunts, in general, are wearisome in her novels, even Jane Austen herself does not like them. There is a clear note of irony in her portrayals. These portraits point out the importance of aunts by stressing the negative aspect. Mrs. Bennet's meanness is thoroughly exposed when she says that all Mr. Gardiner's money would have been her own, if he had no family. Her attitude towards the little Gardiners is very uncharitable:

"We are persuaded that he has pledged himself to assist Mr. Wickham with money."
"Well," cried her mother, "it is all very right; who should do it but her own uncle! If he had not had a family of his own, I and my children must have had all his money, you know . . . ."

(PP, p. 386)

However, no aunt is wholly bad or vulgar. Lady Bertram is redeemed to some extent by the end. Nor is Mrs. Norris described at her worst. Mrs. Philips, vulgar and silly, does resemble her sister, Mrs. Bennet, in nature. Even after Lydia's elopement, she provides much more information about wicked Wickham and thereby unwittingly adds to the misery of the Bennet family. Yet, she is neither designing nor unfeeling.
Outside the family sphere, woman's role as a neighbour is of considerable importance. In the days of under-developed communications in the countryside, this aspect was all the more significant. Being fond of neighbours, Jane Austen describes them with ease and loving care in her letters. She emphasizes this relationship and its importance.

Neighbours form an integral part in Jane Austen's world. In the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*, she has a dig not only at Mrs. Bennet but also at the neighbours. She observes:

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families that he is considered the rightful property of some or other of their daughters."

Elizabeth Bennet says to Mr. Darcy about the flutter caused in the minds of the girls by Wickham: "Every girl in, or near Meryton, was out of her senses about him for the first two months" (PP, p. 285).

The neighbours, particularly women, are considerably noted for their part in the day to day social intercourse. For example, the Middletons, the Allens, the Musgroves and the Crofts have important roles. Frequently, the neighbours
provide the social milieu. Lady Middleton, despite her silliness, is a tolerably good neighbour for the Miss Dashwoods. Miss Anne Taylor, later Mrs. Weston, is a companionable figure. Such characters get Jane Austen's implicit sympathy.

Bad neighbours, however, give her an occasion to have a hearty laugh at their expense. Mrs. Bennet, Lady Lucas and Mrs. Long are not agreeable neighbours. Mrs. Bennet is jealous of both of them. She laments over Mr. Bennet's reluctance to visit Charles Bingley at Netherfield Park whereas "Sir William and Lady Lucas are determined to go" (PP, p. 4). She also points out that Mrs. Long would not introduce her daughters to Charles Bingley:

"I do not believe Mrs. Long will do any such thing. She has two nieces of her own. She is a selfish, hypocritical woman, and I have no opinion of her."

(PP, p. 6)

Indeed, more than anything else, her deep-seated jealousy is the main cause of her suffering. She is heart-broken when she learns that Mr. Collins, who has been rejected by Elizabeth, is accepted by Charlotte Lucas in marriage. She expresses her feelings to her sister, Mrs. Gardiner:

"But, Lizzie, oh, sister! it is very hard to think . . . . He made her an offer in this very room, and she refused him. The consequence of it is, that Lady Lucas will have a daughter married before I have . . . . The Lucases are very artful people indeed, sister. They are all for what they can get."

(PP, p. 140)
Lady Lucas is also "not too clever to be a valuable neighbour to Mrs. Bennet". She, too, thinks it a matter of triumph to have her daughter married off first:

"Lady Lucas could not be insensible of triumph on being able to retort on Mrs. Bennet the comfort of having a daughter well-married; and she called at Longbourn rather oftener than usual to say how happy she was . . . ."

(PP, p. 127)

Mrs. Bennet invariably makes derogatory references to the Lucases. For example, she does so, and that too unasked, while answering Lady Catherine's query:

"You have a very small park," returned Lady Catherine, after a short silence. "It is nothing in comparison of Rosings, my lady, I dare say; but I assure you it is much larger than Sir William Lucas's."

(PP, p. 352)

Jane Austen stresses this relationship for women. She exposes the women who do not maintain good neighbourly relations. Besides being a despicable aunt, Mrs. Norris is also a mean and selfish neighbour to the Bertram family.

To be tolerant, to be helpful and to be interested in others' welfare makes for good neighbourliness. Jane Austen hints at the essence of a good neighbour's outlook, when she makes foolish Mrs. Bennet say about the Lucases: "They are all for what they can." Good neighbours, by implication, are those who are all for what they can do to others; that is,
they love their neighbours as they love themselves. This healthy relationship goes a long way in creating a congenial and peaceful social atmosphere.

In this aspect the role of even the minor women characters is of no mean consequence. They not only create an illusion of reality but sometimes perform important functional roles. Among such characters are Mrs. Younge, Mrs. Reynolds (Pride and Prejudice), Mrs. Clay, Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Russell (Persuasion), Miss Nash, Miss Bickerton (Emma), the Skinners (Northanger Abbey), Mrs. Churchill (Sense and Sensibility), and so on. Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret emphasize the Elliot snobbery.

In neighbourly and family lives of the polite society, servants are usually given quite minor parts. Their situation in the Jane Austen novels is different from what it is in the books of the great Eighteenth Century novelists. Servants are important figures in Tom Jones and Humphry Clinker. In Joseph Andrews and Pamela, they might even be considered as principal characters. However, in Jane Austen's novels their treatment is different. Their roles are comparatively less important. As Sheila Kayesmith remarks:

"In the six novels of Jane Austen, servants have very little to do besides open doors, wait at table, curl hair, and such other things as are expected of them." -1

The minor women characters are not deeply probed. Characters such as Mrs. Wallis, Mrs. Hill, Mrs. Jenkinson and Mrs. Clay are so very little defined. It is, indeed, the rational and amiable, and women not so agreeable who engage Jane Austen's attention most.