

## A Comparative Study of the Select 18th Century Novels

**Dr. Uttam Balu Koli**

Assistant Professor of English,  
Dr. J. J. Magdum College of Engineering,  
Jaysingpur, Kolhapur, Maharashtra, India.

### Abstract

The meanings of the words ‘comparative’ and ‘study’ have been incorporated. This research article presents a comparative study of the select 18th century two seminal novels, i.e., Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and Voltaire’s *Candide* (1759). In spite of their different national and cultural origins, these select novels use irony, satire and episodic narratives to criticise contemporary society. In this comparative analysis, the similarities and dissimilarities in line with thematic concerns, narrative techniques and character portrayals have been explored. Moreover, this article examines the select novels in tune with ideological and philosophical debates of the Enlightenment period.

**Keywords:** Comparative, Dissimilarities, Novels, Similarities, Study

### Introduction

The meaning of the word ‘comparative’ is “that compares things of the same kind” (Dhongde) and the meaning of the word ‘study’ is “the activity of learning about something” (Dhongde). The dominant literary genre, novel, rose in the 18th century. Henry Fielding (1707-1754), an English writer, wrote the novel *Joseph Andrews* (1742). Voltaire (1694-1778), a French writer, wrote the novel *Candide* (1759). In these two novels, we find narrative structures and thematic contents reflecting philosophical and socio-political matters. These novels typify the literary innovations of that period. In this research article, the writer’s approaches to morality, satire and human condition as well as their treatment to justice, hypocrisy and personal virtue have been compared.

### Hypothesis

Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* and Voltaire’s *Candide* have many similarities and dissimilarities.

## Objectives

- To clarify the meanings of words ‘comparative’ and ‘study’.
- To propose the hypothesis.
- To specify the sources of data collection.
- To find out the similarities and dissimilarities in the select novels.
- To conclude this comparative study.

## Sources of Data Collection

In order to explore the hypothesis and meet the objectives of this comparative study, the data has been collected from the multiple sources such as scholarly books, dictionaries, theses, dissertations, academic journals, libraries and online resources.

## Similarities in the Select Novels of *Joseph Andrews* and *Candide*

The notable similarities in the select 18th century novels of *Joseph Andrews* and *Candide* are as follows:

- Both writers belong to 18th century.
- Both novels contain journey, adventure, etc.
- Both novels are titled after the names of protagonists.
- Both novels criticize structures of society related to religion, morality and class.
- Both novels go through important character development as they steer their own worlds.
- The nature of the better life, virtue and contentment have been questioned in both novels.
- Both novels apply satire to reveal the corruption in social institutions. The moral failings among the aristocracy have been mocked in Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* while political corruption and philosophical optimism have been mocked in Voltaire’s *Candide*.

- Religious hypocrisy has been criticised in both novels. Fielding uncovers the self-centred nature of clergymen who failed to keep Christian values whereas Voltaire charges religious bias and the involvement of religious institutions in sustaining suffering.
- In both novels, the protagonists face a series of misfortunes, meet abnormal characters and moral tests. Joseph Andrews and Parson Adams face various trials in their journey while Candide undergoes an unforeseeable series of difficulties in different countries.
- The experiences of both protagonists shape their moral development. Joseph Andrews remains faithful in his virtue in spite of many temptations and hardships while Candide slowly gives up naive optimism for practical wisdom.
- These novels end with pragmatic lessons. Joseph Andrews favours sincerity and virtue in human life, “chastity is as great a virtue in a man as in a woman” (Fielding) while Candide discards idealistic philosophy for practical labour and pleasure, represented in the famous statement, “We must cultivate our garden” (Voltaire).
- These novels illustrate distinct yet complementary viewpoints on human nature and the pursuit of contentment in the defective world.
- Both novels notably contributed in the development of the novel form while engaging with important Enlightenment debates.

### **Dissimilarities in the Select Novels of *Joseph Andrews* and *Candide***

The notable dissimilarities in the select 18th century novels of *Joseph Andrews* and *Candide* are as follows:

- Writers belong to two different nations, i.e., England and France.
- The novel *Joseph Andrews* is optimistic with happy ending. The novel *Candide* is cynical with absurdity in human existence.
- The novel *Joseph Andrews* is more light hearted and comic whereas the novel *Candide* practices intense and harsh satire to reveal the abnormalities of human existence.
- While the novel *Joseph Andrews* aligns with a moral growth through experience and empirical philosophy, representing John Locke’s ideas, the novel *Candide* aligns with a challenge to the rationalist optimism of Leibnizian belief, “all is for the best”.

- These novels tender contrasting views on human situations and societal affairs. The novel *Joseph Andrews* is a more conventional and focusses morality emphasizing the significance of social order and personal honesty while the novel *Candide* is satirical and philosophical venture that questions the nature of contentment and societal optimism exploring the meaning of contentment in a world afflicted by injustice and suffering.
- The novel *Joseph Andrews* is based on English society and opens issues related to the class system, human nature and religious hypocrisy within a familiar setting. The satire here highlights social mores and moral hypocrisy in English institutions. *Candide*, on the other hand, takes the protagonist through many countries, stating the universality of corruption and human suffering.
- These novels are vehicles for satire but their methods and targets are different. The satire in *Joseph Andrews* shows the moral failure in English society specifically in institutions like church and landed gentry. The satire here is more comic and realistic, projecting contradictions between outward holiness and inward corruption. However, the satire in *Candide* has a broader philosophical viewpoint of Leibnizian optimism, religious bias and colonial exploitation. The protagonist in *Candide* goes through a series of misfortunes, revealing the absurdity of the belief that “all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.”
- The picaresque tradition is used in *Joseph Andrews*. It is episodic novel, relatively straightforward with narrative arc. It includes the series of loosely connected episodes that state the protagonist’s social and moral development. It is written in third person style which employs burlesque and irony to criticise hypocrisy in the clergy and aristocracy. In contrast, *Candide* accepts a more compact and metaphorical structure, exaggerating abnormalities to criticise the corruption of society and the philosophical optimism. The fast paced episodic storytelling in *Candide* reflects the unpredictability and disorder of the real world, intensifying satirical effect. It has less defined plot line and adventure based narrative.
- Moral and social criticism, rooted in realism, has been found in *Joseph Andrews*. Virtue in the context of English society has been explored in it. The light hearted tone in it helps readers to involve with its good lessons without the huge pessimism found in *Candide*. It ensures that goodness and virtue are finally rewarded, strengthening a belief in moral integrity and social justice. In contrast, *Candide* is an exploration of philosophical

inquiry, suffering and fate. The misfortunes, presented here, dismantle the idea of an inherently just world. Fielding provides a resolution in which virtue is approved but Voltaire leaves readers with an unclear message, refusing idealism for pragmatic action. This dissimilarity focusses the bifurcation between French philosophical satire and English moral satire in the Enlightenment era.

- The character Joseph Andrews is active who consciously supports virtue in spite of many challenges while the character Candide is passive, responding to situations rather than shaping them.
- The characters in *Joseph Andrews* evolve morally through experience. Joseph, a virtuous protagonist, contrasts with hypocritical figures and his journey represents the victory of true virtue over superficial morality. It has conventional happy ending, underpinning moral values. On the other hand, Voltaire's Candide is naive and passive, representing the absurdity of blind optimism. It closes with an ambiguous and more existential note, proposing that happiness is found in easy and practical labour rather than idealistic philosophies.
- Joseph Andrews upholds virtue through active involvement with society whereas Candide eventually suggests a quietist philosophy "We must cultivate our garden" (Voltaire).

## Conclusion

The novel *Joseph Andrews* presents the moral and social criticism with realism and humour while the novel *Candide* presents the irony and exaggeration to dismantle philosophical beliefs. These two novels emphasise the adaptability of the novel as a means for criticism and reflection. The effect of these two novels extends beyond time as these novels continue to be studied for their artistic novelty and their connections in discussions on satire, social criticism and philosophy. The present comparative study of the select novels states the different but interconnected ways in which the eighteenth century novels criticised the contemporary society. While these two select novels use satire as a medium of presenting human absurdity, their different approaches to thematic concern and storytelling focus their distinctive literary contributions. Both novels, however, perform a key role in framing the modern novel. The use of character driven narratives, episodic storytelling and irony reveal the growing intricacy of fiction as a medium of social and intellectual engagement. While

Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* promotes human virtue in the organised society, the novel *Candide* challenges the very base of human belief, creating them complementary but different literary masterpieces of the eighteenth century.

## References

- Dhongde, Ramesh. *Oxford English - English - Marathi Dictionary*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Fielding, Henry. *Joseph Andrews*. The Project Gutenberg, 17 November 2011, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/9611/9611-h/9611-h.htm>. Accessed 27 March 2025.
- Kothari, C. R. *Research Methodology Methods and Techniques*. New Delhi: New Age International (P) Ltd., 2010.
- MLA Handbook* (Eighth Edition). USA: Modern Language Association, 2016.
- Voltaire. *Candide*. The Project Gutenberg, 5 November 2012, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/19942/pg19942.txt>. Accessed 27 March 2025.