

# Viscount John Morley's Writings: An Appraisal

**Md. Shahazada Basunia**

*Former Faculty Member, Department of English  
Dhaka International University  
Email: basunia65@gmail.com*

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**Abstract:** Viscount John Morley was born at Blackburn on 24 December 1838 and died on 23 September 1923. He was a man of versatile genius and untiring energy which went through various fields like politics, statesmanship, journalism, and literature with notable distinction all the way. He acquired name and fame as a man of letters, particularly as a biographer. He was a British Liberal Statesman, Writer and Newspaper editor. His contribution to literature is indeed praiseworthy.<sup>1</sup> This article is to uphold a critical evaluation of Morley's writings, since now-a-days, he is better embellished as a philosopher and contributor to literature and more political press.

## **Introduction**

Morley dedicated a significant quantity of time in the field of literature, his anti-Imperial views being flooded by the irresistible popularity of Unionism and Imperialism. His monographs had early determined his place as a prominent British writer on Voltaire (1872), Rousseau (1873), Diderot and the Encyclopedists (1878), Burke (1879), and Walpole (1889). Burke was Morley's contribution to Macmillan's "English Men of Letters" series of literary biographies, of which Morley himself was general editor between 1878 and 1892. The Life of Cobden (1881) is an able defence of a statesman's views rather than a critical biography or an accurate picture of the period.<sup>2</sup>

Morley's activities were always centred to literature. As a political leader he has a keen observation and overall idea about the country, people, politics, their dream, desire, hope, despair.<sup>3</sup> The reason being, his writings are the true depiction of all these aspects of society. As a good writer he is disciplined, bears clarity, strong vocabulary. His career in politics overshadowed Morley's literary life and was influenced by the liberalism of John Stuart Mill. Morley was a Trustee of the British Museum from 1894 to 1921, Honorary Professor of Ancient Literature at the Royal Academy of Arts, and member of the Historical Manuscripts Commission. He was Chancellor of the Victoria University of Manchester from 1908 until 1923, when he resigned. He was nominated for a Nobel Prize in literature eleven times.<sup>4</sup>

## **Objectives of the Study**

This piece of research evaluates Morley's position as a literary writer. The objective of this study is to illustrate Morley's attitude towards contemporary society and politics. It addresses the writer's view of political thought and the life of the people.

## **Methodology**

This study is entirely a state-of-art-of approach for readers and researchers and. A secondary source of knowledge has been adopted in this study. It is an empirical study. A good number of magazines, articles, reports and research articles have been considered for this article. Both exclusion and inclusion criteria were followed to adjust with the overall objective of the study.<sup>5</sup>

### **Limitations of the Study**

Some limitations or barriers were faced when conducting the study, such as there is no previous study on such a topic; it is a new study. All latest information and analysis on Morley's work is not available. Majority of Morley's work centre on the biography of some famous persons.<sup>6</sup>

### **Significant Publications of John Morley**

Morley authored a good number of writings. These are:

1. Edmund Burke (1867), 2. Critical Miscellanies (3 vols.)3. Voltaire (1871)4. Rousseau (1873)5. The Struggle for National Education (1873)6. On Compromise (1874) 7. Diderot and the encyclopedists (1878)8. Burke (English Men of Letters series 1879) 9. The Life of Richard Cobden (1881)10. Aphorisms (1887) 11. Walpole (English Statesmen series; 1889), 12. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1884), 13. Studies in Literature (1891)14. Oliver Cromwell (1900),15. The Life of William Ewart Gladstone (Three volumes 1903)16. Notes on Politics and History (1913 & 1914) 17. Recollections (Two volumes; 1917)18. Indian Speeches (1907-9).<sup>7</sup>

His significant essays are:

1. Carlyle 2. Byron3. Macaulay 4. Emerson 5. Robespierre 6. Turgot 7. Vauvenargues8. The Death of Mr. Mill 9. Mr. Mill's Autobiography 10. The Life of George Eliot 11. On Pattison's Memories 12. France in The Eighteenth Century.

### **Critical Evaluation of Morley's Major Works**

*Edmund Burke* (1867):

This volume on Edmund Burke during 1729-97, published in 1879 in the first series of English Men of Letters, was written by John Morley, the general editor of the series. Earlier Morley had published a 'historical study' of Burke in 1867, but emphasized on an introductory note saying that this book 'is biographical rather than critical' and was intended as a narrative life. Morley himself was a radical in politics, and he characterized Burke as a narrow-minded reactionary, may seem surprising, but he greatly admired his subjects' independent political stance. Accordingly, he described Burke as a mixture of long-lasting liberalism and historic conservatism, unfettered by abstract doctrine. He believed might again come to dominate political discourse in the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup>

*Voltaire* (1871):

Voltaire was French Enlightenment writer, historian, and philosopher who is famous for his wit, criticism of Christianity, advocacy of freedom of religion, and separation of church and state. Voltaire was a versatile and prolific writer, producing works in almost every literary form including plays, poems, novels, essays, histories, and scientific expositions in many ways. About him it is said:

*"A man who prefers to see clearly in all matters; in religion and in philosophy, he believes willingly only what he understands, and he admits that there are things he does not know; he values application above speculation, simplifies ethics as well as doctrine, and tries to direct it toward useful virtues; he likes a moderate political system that preserves natural liberty, the liberty of conscience, of speech and of the individual, reduces evil as much as possible, procures the greatest good, and places justice among the highest benefits; in the arts."<sup>9</sup>*

He was fundamentally serious and set himself to learn the accepted literary forms. He worked at an epic poem whose hero was Henry IV, the king beloved by the French people to lead an end and to the wars of religion. He was often called the Father of the French Revolution.

*Rousseau (1873):*

John Morley's appreciative biography on Rousseau (1873) is a rare exception. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a Geneva philosopher, writer, and composer. His political philosophy influenced the progress of the enlightenment throughout the Europe and to some extent of the French revolution. His work spans an incredibly wide range of subjects—ethics, religion, sociology, language, fiction, political theory, music, drama, biology, botany, and anthropology—is only part of the problem of trying to summarize his life and contributions. His literary triumphs earned him a pension with the approval of Queen Marie and eventually he began his career of the court-poet.<sup>10</sup>

*The Struggle for National Education (1873):*

Morley was engaged throughout many of the decades in more rigorous search for a solution of the intellectual's perennial problem of defining his relationship with politics and finding a way out to solve the problem of the education system in England. In *The Struggle for National Education*, he observes some basic issues of the education system. The real problem addressed by the people in this issue is about the church. In *The Struggle for National Education*, Morley upheld the political superiority of the rebels in history, mass people's expectation in 1870 and their disappointment. The Education Act of that time was a perpetuation of the old time, lack of qualified teachers, lack of funds or grants, concept of free education, the proposal for the deduction of education cost. Consequently, by discussing all this issue, he gave an overall view of England's National Education Policy, its strength, weakness, threat, and progress.<sup>11</sup>

*On Compromise (1874):*

John Morley describes the objective of his book '*On Compromise*' by telling "The design of the essay is to consider shortly and directly, some of the limits that are set by sound reason to the practice of the various parts of accommodation, economy, management, conformity or compromise. The right of thinking freely and acting independently, of using our minds without unquestioning obedience of custom, is now a finally accepted principle in some sense or other with every school of thoughts that has the smallest change of commanding the future."<sup>12</sup>

Morley discusses the causes of tendency, the influence of French examples, the increase in the power of the press, the growth of material prosperity and the sway exercised by a state church. In another chapter, he talked about individual intellectual responsibility in the sphere of politics and religion.<sup>13</sup>

*Diderot and the Encyclopaedists (1878):*

This book was the last attempt made by Morley about the French Revolution as he utters clearly "The present work closes a series of studies on the literary preparation for the French Revolution."

Denis Diderot was born 5 October, 1713, France and died 31 July, 1784, Paris. He was a man of letters and philosopher who, from 1745 to 1772, served as chief editor of the *Encyclopédie*, one of the principal works of the Age of Enlightenment. In 1745 the publisher André Le Breton approached Diderot intending to bring out a French translation of Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*, after two other translators had withdrawn from the project and Diderot undertook the task. The *Encyclopédie* was to bring out the essential principles and applications of every art and science. Diderot was carefree by the government's censorship of the work and by the criticism of conservatives and reactionaries. Later on, the posthumous publication of these manuscripts, in which Diderot included several bold and original works in the sciences, philosophy, and literature, have made him more highly appreciated in the modern era than he was in France during his lifetime.<sup>14</sup>

*Burke (English Men of Letters series; 1879):*

English Men of Letters was a series of literary biographies written by leading literary figures of the day and published by Macmillan, under the general editorship of John Morley. A second series, again under the general editorship of Morley, was published between 1902 and 1919. In these series, Morley composed a biography on Burke who was a proponent of underpinning virtues with manners in society and the importance of the religious institutions for the moral stability and good of the state. Burke also criticized the actions of the British government towards the American colonies about its taxation policies.

*The Life of Richard Cobden* (1881):

Richard Cobden was an English Manufacturer and Radical Member of the Parliament. Through his biography John Morley conveys multifarious sides of his life. He illustrates early life of Cobden, commercial and mental progress, his travels in west and east, his life in Manchester during 1837–9, his foundation of Anti-Corn-Law League, entry into parliament, distinguished political life and many more of his life. Even John Morley depicts Cobden as a successful commercial traveler who became co-owner of highly profitable printing factory.

*Walpole* (*English Statesmen series* 1889):

Another important biographical writing of Morley is *Walpole* (*English Statesmen series* 1889) where he describes early and first stage of political life, last four years of succession of Queen Annie and its connectivity with Walpole and his support to Whig and his diversified political life. In April 1721 he was appointed First Lord of the Treasury, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons. He was an influential figure serving for twenty years as the first British Prime Minister. He sustained power for the Whig party, established Downing Street as home of the Prime Minister, won favor with the Crown and negotiated with great skill and panache. Walpole is an important figure in a long line of influential leaders in British history.<sup>15</sup>

*Studies in Literature* (1891):

*Studies in Literature* (1891) is divided into different chapters and each chapter contains different subject matters. In the first chapter the writer tells us about Wordsworth's life and works. He concludes the chapter by telling:

*"Wordsworth has not Shakespeare's richness and vast compass, nor Milton's sublime and unflagging strength, nor Dante's severe, vivid, ardent force of vision. Probably he is too deficient in clear beauty of form and in concentrated power to be classed by the ages among these great giants. We cannot be sure. We may leave it to the ages to decide. But Wordsworth, at any rate, by his secret of bringing the infinite into common life, as he evokes it out of common life, has the skill to lead us, so long as we yield ourselves to his influence, into inner moods of settled peace, to touch "the depth and not the tumult of the soul," to give us quietness, strength, steadfastness, and purpose, whether to do or to endure."*

Next, he focuses on Aphorisms, its use, scholastic approach on enhancing the beauty of literature and many more. He gradually points on Maine on popular government, a few words on French models, and the study of literature.

*Recollections*

Lord Morley's career as Westminster is unfolded in his book *Recollections*. In August 1917 Viscount Morley wrote the introduction for his *Recollections*; some more value was added in this book by depicting the politics of the United Kingdom and British Empire. The book's two volumes are devoted to Lord Morley's services at the Irish and India Offices. The revelation of his book shows

how late in life of Queen Victoria, the queen sought to impose in some matters her will on the premier.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Indian Speeches:*

*Indian Speeches* gives an overall view of Indian polity. With no rhetorical pretensions, these speeches contain some of the just, prudent, and necessary points and considerations that have guided this transaction and helped secure for it the sanction of parliament. It marks the spirit of British rule in India, at three successive stages, for three generations past; and bear directly upon what is now being done. The book contains Indian Budget (House of Commons, 6 June, 1907), Constitution of India (Arbroath, 21 October, 1907) description of Indian Civil Service (London, July 1908), Proposed Reforms (House of Lords, 17 December, 1908), the conditions of contemporary Hindus and Muslims (January 1909), Second Reading of Indian Councils Bill. (House of Lords) and included Indian Probationers. (Oxford, 13 June, 1909).

#### **Conclusion**

Morley inspired many leading figures of the 20th century, including Mahomed Ali Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan. Dwain E. Moore says that Viscount John Morley is a political man; an editor and biographer with far-sighted vision who used historical-biographical- critical methods to produce the valuable comments on public address of the nineteenth century. He must be remembered among those who "directly concerned with the criticism of speeches or speakers. Indeed, Morley set about stating, systematically his basic ideas of the nature and uses of public address in no one place. Morley did have some definitive ideas about public address which formed basis for critical judgement, Morley's thoughts on literature, his profound wisdom on social life and his humanitarian insights embodied in his speeches, essays and monographs which needs to be reclaimed and upheld before our students.

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