

AN EVALUATION OF WILLIAM GOLDING'S POSTHUMOUS NOVEL, *THE DOUBLE TONGUE*

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Born on September 19, 1911 in Cornwall, William Gerald Golding was a British school teacher, writer, poet and playwright. He studied at Marlborough Grammar School. He got admission in Brasenose College, Oxford for the of Natural Sciences but after two years, he diverted his intention to study English Literature. He got success in his graduation in 1934 and his first volume of *Poems* was published in the same year. Golding joined Royal Navy and participated in Second World War with various missions before the war ended. After war Golding started a new life of teaching philosophy and science. In 1953, Golding wrote a novel, *Lord of the Flies* which became the tool for his success. Golding sacrificed his all time for writing and composing. He was bishop in Wordsworth's School also. He resigned from there to save time. He went to his native home to Virginia to concentrate only on the writing. He wrote thirteen novels. He continuously started to write novels following one after other including *Pincher Martin* (1955), *The Inheritors* (1955), *Free Fall* (1956), *The Spire* (1964), *The Pyramid* (1967), *Darkness Visible* (1979), *To the Ends of the Earth* – trilogy (1980, 87, and 89). Golding was a multi-faceted genius and also wrote essays short fiction, and plays. His travel book is also very famous. William Golding also had some works that is still unpublished.

The Double Tongue is his last novel that was published posthumously in 1995. He wanted to revise it and left in his desk but unfortunately he could not. He got the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1983, and died in Cornwall in 1993. William Golding's style mostly used classical literature, Christian symbolism and mythology and all his novels are distinct from each other. The plot construction in all of his works is uncommon and all of his works have their protagonists from rural areas, religious places, courts and isolated places. He got many like 'James Tait Black Memorial Prize' in 1979 and Booker Prize next year. He was honored and entitles as 'Sir' by the Queen in 1988. *The Times* proclaimed him as one of the greatest person among British Writers in 1945.

The Double Tongue is William Golding's last novel which was found in his table and to which he wanted to revise but could not. This novel is highly imaginative in ancient concept of Roman religion. It has a fictional theme of an old female prophet. Delphi sometime was the most sacred oracle of ancient Greece but Greece was dominated after some times by the Roman Empire. Arieka is a common girl at her house in the company of parents but she is not pretty and her parents are afraid that she could not be married with anyone. They decided to make her a priestess and in this work Ionides helped her parents to appoint her as Pythia in the oracle. Oracle used to be one of the finest place in the ancient Rome. As a young girl, Arieka is ugly, worldly, unconventional, uninterested in study, a source of great shame to her parents, who fear they'll never marry her off because her ugly complexion will need a lot of money. Ionides decides to

take her to Oracle and finds something like that of a friend in her. Now she is appointed as the voice of God Apollo.

Arieka is taken to the Temple in the presence of two other Pythia. There she is appointed as the third Pythia to study hymns and other classical books related to religion and philosophy. Arieka decided here to pass her life as a saint, priestess and devotee to god in the shrine. She well noticed the impact and the practices of the shrine. She finds it mysterious that the Athenian priest is cruel enough and there a lot of mysteries in the oracle. On the one hand she is sad enough on the way how the Romans are robbed of the gifts and on the other hand she finds in her the humanly weakness not to use them. The Double Tongue is a psychological novel also with some mockery on the double standard of the worldly people. It is something rare in the Golding oeuvre. An aged prophetess at Delphi, the most sacred oracle in ancient Greece, looks back over her strange life as the Pythia, the embodiment of the god Apollo.

Arieka herself is worldly child surrounded with the atmosphere in which she lives. Her life is a mystery in the same way as the world of first BC century is expected in Rome. People believe in God but they cannot get rid of from the materialism and human nature like Arieka. The novel is a conflict between realism and superstition or supernatural philosophy. The novel is a “Memory. A memory before memory...and nothing preceded it and nothing came after” There are different mysterious questions in the mind of Arieka related to the existence of man and God, “Could I speak before I could speak? ... there is a whole bundle of knowledge we bring with us instantly; knowledge of what anger is, pain is, pleasure is love.” (P.3) On the other hand, Arieka finds herself inferior to men as she is simply a girl, girls don’t know how happy they are because they don’t know they’re girls ...” (P.5) Arieka is a true human being, pitiful even for the animals also. She asks herself whether we human beings are free to do anything or not. Her maid cooked fish for her and kindly narrated to Arieka that fish was made to be eaten and did not feel things the way we free people did. She is in confusion, “I have never known the truth of that.” (P.6)

Arieka finds that man has slaved man, slaved birds and animals. She asks cynical questions from herself whether this was the rule of the Apollo in ancient time which is prevalent even today. She is not clear about the boundaries of the casts, customs, national boundaries and different religious opinions. Ionides leads her to Delphi to appoint her as the third Pythia. There she will hover around the oracle. She mocks that, “The oracle is a woman who is inspired by the God to say what is going to happen and so on. You’ll know all about that whoever you are and wherever you live, all the world knows!” (P.8)

The Double Tongue is a novel of conflict between ancient Roman and Greek culture as well as a conflict between their religious and political views. Arieka is new here in this custom and she remembers the lessons given by her father that the oracle now has been changed enough since the ancient time. There were a few fires in Delphi started by the mercenaries which was sufficient at the time to make her outcry quite understandable. Some famous prophecies have been made from there in old time that the man would die by the fall of a house. Therefore, the man started to stay out of the house in the open and an eagle dropped a tortoise upon his head and the man died. This is a mockery of the old presages. “The god speaks with a double tongue which he inherited from a huge snake he killed at Delphi.” (P.10)

Arieka remembers her brother, Demetrios and joins the shrine in the company of Ionides. There she is provided ancient books and authors to study in the poetic form which she is hardly able to understand and remembers the homely time when his brother used to teach her the letters from her books. She says, “I learnt about love and grief when my brother Demetrios went away for the second time.” (P.13) It is pathetic that a girl in the age of playing with fiends is compelled

to leave the parents, brother, friends and neighbors. She innocently was indulged in the game with her friend, Leptides but it proved a punishment for her that he was sent away for three months' military training. Arieka lost everything which was around her. She at last consoles herself and concludes that, "We are wrapped in mysteries." (P.16) To her the world is riddled with coincidences and nobody can prove it. "... it is furtive and dishonest, knows how to hide, how to claim, how to disguise, avoid, speak double like the snake or not at all." (P.18-19) Arieka did not like "rangy and restless and gaunt" face of Ionides but she will have to bear it all because she is a woman and, "Women must be married or where should we be? It is ordained by the gods and who was I and so on" (P.24) She is never pessimistic. She in her intuitions finds the way to get out of these drastic feelings because she knows that people always do not believe what they say or do. Nature has a world of imperatives and she needed to obey one of them. To her, life is not bad. It is different thing that it is intolerable. It proves the heroic character of Arieka that she is always strong in front of the storms of life.

Life of Delphi, to Arieka is horrible enough in the beginning. She feels that, "I was being dug up, torn up, transplanted without anyone asking my permission. I howled there as the sun rose on my future and I clung absurdly to my unhappy past." (P.42) Chapter II narrates Arieka's mental situation and her adaptation to the holy place apart from her house and parents. She feels that, "I was sad or happy or anxious or wholly achieved I find it impossible to say." (P.58) In Chapter III we find the practice of the priests in the shrine and their dealing with the common people. Arieka recollects the statements of her mother that women are hardly to do anything with the gods in the tripod or shrine.

Religious practice in the shrine with Romans is queer enough. Actually all of it seems either political or a source of seeking money out of their superstition that the Pythia is brought there with pomp and show in the presence of the people where she will utter the presage in psalms or in hymns which she has learnt from the ancient books. Common people do not understand the meaning of these hymns and the priest explains that in the double meaning. Pythia seated in the tripod is the voice of gods. This is a different thing that Pythia herself does not know what she has spoken under the strangling smoke. When Arieka asks Ionides what they are going to do with the public and their questions, Ionides replies with a professional confidence that, "Make the god do what we want." (P.69) An ultimate question strikes in the brain of Arieka whether anybody can compel the gods to do anything according to the desire of the priestly persons. Ionides is sure that this work is to be done by Pythia, "All that matters is that we should both move towards the desired end." (P.71)

To Ionides, Latin is a language with too much grammar and no literature but he presents Latin and Greek as if he is expert in these languages. He is of the opinion that, "One must have a little corruption." Since human law cannot be perfect, one must be able to bend and turn. Thus, religious practices in the temple have been a tool for them to befool the common people. Though some people do not like to give or take bribe. After all, Arieka cannot disobey Ionides because she is always in the confused state of mind and, "Any woman feels all the more secure with a man – with her man, and if Ionides was anyone's man it was mine." (P.74) Arieka does not like it morally good to take money and gifts in the temple but Ionides feels that the people are not investing that money in them, they are investing that money in the truth. Physical universe and spiritual cosmos brings a shower of gifts from the people – a satisfaction for both. And it is not bad in any sense because the law of the universe is not equal for all. In this way, as he says, the voice of Pythia is the voice of god for the kings, traitors, businessmen and common people

equally. In this way they can say whatever they like. If anyone complains they can say that they were inspired by the gods.

Arieka is shrouded woman, a figure in Delphi whose face was never bared. She is considered to be the voice of god and a virgin who is living apart from her husband in the age of fifty. She is highly amorous with Ionides. Though he is a slave but to her he is learned and distinguished. She confesses to herself that, “I doubt if any married couple ever approaches the intimacy of thought and feeling that we sometimes enjoyed – or, and I must make the qualification – that I for my part felt we enjoyed.” (P.91) To keep everything a secret is their one face and this is their another face how they get their living. People who are giving them are little people and they need not to bother for them. This is the double face or double tongue of the worldly people. For these rituals they sacrifice the goats for gods made by the gods. To them, all that glitters was gold. Whatever Ionides replies to the Romans in the explanation of prophecy, is “a form of speech more appropriate to the modern kind of drama which lacked dignity and religious feeling and had interest only in the mundane affairs of men.”

Arieka rightly utters her mysterious thoughts that, “anything we do concerned with gods is blasphemy if you must use that word. One god’s truth is another god’s blasphemy.” (P.116) Priest use the riddles in their prophecy. Romans are ‘spooky’ and superstitious people. This kind of practice compels Arieka to contemplate that she is an old fraud. These notions make her innocent. Ionides is a nationalist apart from being a true priest. To him, “A sacred Roman is the most dangerous beast in the world.” (P.126)

Arieka is not satisfied with the answers given to the followers. She has nothing to do herself according to her will and finds that it is a ‘rape’ of her desires. “I wept behind my veilings and could not tell whether it was in joy or sorrow.” (P.138) The shrine is rich enough but to Arieka it is of no use because here is one woman who has everything but no one behind her to give it to. Perhaps she acutely wishes some family behind her but it was away from the religious custom of the temple. She feels her life as ‘bored’ and she is hardly satisfied with her decisions. She assumes that, “It was true that god had raped me. It was also true that earlier he had turned his back on me and now seemed to be doing much the same.” (P.146) Moreover, the trouble with the gods is that they will fight if you put them together and as a girl she herself hadn’t much belief. This is the double tongue of the people having faith in the God. She did not believe in ‘All Father’ and she wants to travel somewhere in her old age.

Ionides is the mentor of Pythia yet she does not believe in him and his practices. She asserts that, “I knew nothing about him. So Ionides, cynic, atheist, contriver, liar, believed in god!” (P.162) and to her, “He is more than a husband, that quicksilver, quicksand, learned mountebank of the gods! I believe in him, liar soothsayer, self-deceiver, fool, the eighth wise man-.” (P.194)

No doubt that the novel is ancient in its setting but it narrates the double standard of the modern life, especially, religious persons, political chaos, superstitions. The characters are modern adhere to money and beauty in comparison of intellect. Throughout the novel Arieka is quite silent, a sentimental voice of the common woman. Though she is not ardent follower of the temple, yet she dislikes the false practices and in the end of the novel she wishes it to be in the way of belief. She is given the last gift by Ionides where she finds cleft of the stone, the source of the oracle. There she comes to know in a book that the world is what we are looking before us, what we are experiencing and what we imagine, and nothing more beyond that. That is why that the end of the book also has been done in the mysterious way to the unknown god.

The art of characterization by Golding does not seem as ancient but in its ancient setting it is debatable whether it is to be resolved in the modern era as he has ridiculed the modern

drama in the book. Golding creates an integrated mixture of the historical and the tragic. Golding's art is reactive but it needs a protagonist who is potential enough to act according his wishes and face the situations which he dislikes. Arieka is foil to other characters but of no avail. She dislikes the practices done there but she is silent spectator and compromises with her fate as it was ordained by the God. She reacts but with obedience. One of the quality of any novelist of the first rank is his ability for what might be called impersonation, the ability to speak through a character to reveal his motto in such a way that more is revealed than the character is directly aware of. Arieka, his mouthpiece is a woman who has never seen outer world and who is depending on the person whom sometime she likes and sometimes hates. Ionides hopes to attain power through sanctity, an idea that could only occur to a fool. The readers are bewildered about the history of the Roman history, gods and religious practices.

Workcited

All quotations have been taken from the book: Golding, William, *The Double Tongue* (London: Faber and Faber) 2013.