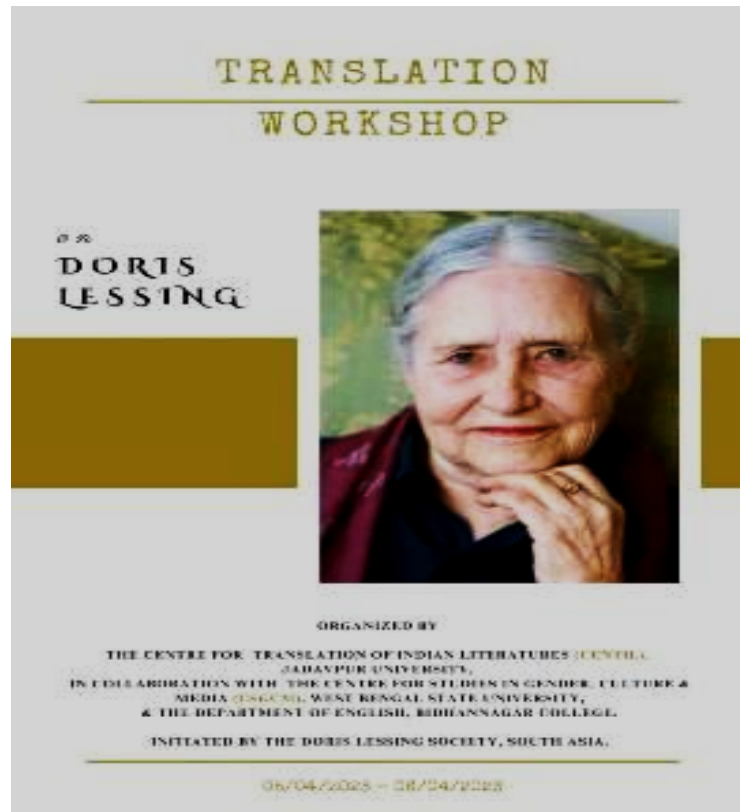


A WORKSHOP INITIATED BY DLSSA

TRANSLATING LESSING

A COLLABORATION OF 'CENTIL', JU, 'CSGCM' WBSU & BIDHANNAGAR COLLEGE,
KOLKATA, April 5&6 2023



The Plan

At the time of its inception in 2022 Doris Lessing Society, South Asia had decided that it will promote Lessing studies through webinars, reading sessions and through translations into South Asian languages. The first year of the chapter was limited to virtual events as Covid continued in India. However, the plan for a physical event, to mark its presence and reach out more palpably to readers and scholars, was necessary. So when CENTIL agreed to a translation workshop, somewhat hesitantly, DLSSA and CSGCM (of West Bengal State University), that houses it, went full out to actualise the event *Translating Doris Lessing into Bengali*.

The idea was to take up short stories of Lessing, in order to rope in more people in the project, thereby enlarging the readership. It was felt that the project will stand to gain greater access to modern readers, especially young readers. The short stories being academically less plumbed and possibly untranslated were additional encouragement. It was also decided that the project will be both product and process driven, hence it will spread over two days. Day One will be held at CENTIL, Jadavpur University, for the professional translators, selected from the Kolkata academe and with Professor Ahsanuzzaman, from Dhaka; unfortunately he couldn't join us in person. Day Two was planned for young scholars to be held in Bidhannagar College, to ensure the sustainability of the translation activity of Day One by sharing it with students and young scholars.

The Event



The workshop was conducted with more than expected success on April 5&6 2023. Fourteen short stories were chosen from Lessing's wide corpus: one for the young scholars' collaborative translation, and thirteen for the professionals. I am appending a list of the stories at the end for the record and for general interest. The discussion in the end was stimulating. Each translator pointed out their respective challenges and strategies.

The dominant points of the discussion were about Lessing's involved sentences and dense prose which posed a natural challenge. The circular nature of her narrative, that gives an impression of repetition till one recognises the trick of the pattern, often tempted the translators to edit and compress the passages, only to realise that by doing so they would go against the rules of translation. The nuances of the English language, at times untranslatable, and culture specific references were additional woes. The translators pointed out how the polyphonic nature of the texts required them to manoeuvre and employ different linguistic registers to faithfully represent the different voices. Use of pronouns and shifts in tenses between the diegetic and mimetic elements of a story required special attention. The 'you' of English was translated to its three Bengali synonyms based on the discretion of the

translator and matching the suitability of the context. Much discussion followed the question of tenses, and the differences between their application in English and Bengali usage. Some of the translator's were overwhelmed by her style and/or theme and felt somewhat out of their comfort zone of experiences. Then there were certain titles like 'A Story of a Non-Marrying Man' which is about a man who is married many times, but fails to stay in a relationship. It was difficult to capture the title in Bengali without disturbing the essence of the primary text and remained an unsolved problem.

The strategies adopted by the translators involved retaining English words which are natural loans in Bengali, while maintaining a parity of sorts. For instance, if 'drawing room' and 'perfume' were retained untranslated then there was no need to translate 'farm', 'flat', 'airport' or 'weekend', it was decided. The proficient translators offered interesting turns of phrases and compound words that brought out the power and beauty of Lessing's narratives and demonstrated the skill of the translator. It also promised to make the volume an enjoyable read.



Day Two was a big success. Professor Aveek Majumder, the 'Translation Resource Person' on both days was perspicacious with his comments, which added further worth to the worksop. In his plenary speech he outlined the tradition of translation into Bengali and the reasons why Doris Lessing's long and unconventional life and varied nature of her work would be both a delight and ordeal for the translator. The

story chosen was 'Storm' and the fifteen scholars were divided into three groups and the story was further divided within the groups. In a little over an



hour the first draft was ready. Each translator read out their portion of the translated story followed by observations and rectifications.

The workshop was a success not just because it got the participants of the project, *Translating Lessing*, together to discuss the issues of the process. It was a success as it had over thirty people, people who were not familiar with Lessing before this, entrenched in the nitty-gritties of Lessing's works. Though it is going to be a long way to go, with much hard work, to make the product commendable. The happy takeaway is the promising commencement that has put Lessing on the academic map in this region.



Translators and the Stories

(Assigned by CSGCM)

Chaiti Mitra—To Room Nineteen

Saurabh Bhattacharyya—The Temptation of Jack Orkney

Mitali Ganguly—A Woman on a Roof

Tanmaoy Bhattacharya—An Old Woman and her Cat

Monami Mukharjee —The Black Madonna

(Assigned by CENTIL)

Rikdeb Bhattacharya: Debbie and Julie

Payel Basu: How I finally Lost my Heart (11)

Epsita Halder: The Trinket Box 8 pages

Dyuti Mukherjee: Little Tembi

(Assigned by BNC)

Ahmed Ahsanuzzaman -Lucy Grange

Dipankar Sen -The Habit of Loving

Samrat Laskar - The Old Chief Mshlanga

Debapratim Chakraborty - The Story of a Non-Marrying Man