

REV-00

SELF-LEARNING MATERIAL



MA ENGLISH

MEN 203 : LIFE WRITING

w.e.f Academic Session: 2024-25



CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND ONLINE EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY MEGHALAYA

nirf India Ranking-2023 (151-200)

Accredited 'A' Grade by NAAC

Techno City, 9th Mile, Baridua, Ri-Bhoi, Meghalaya, 793101

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Master of Arts in English (MEN)

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UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY MEGHALAYA

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COURSE INFORMATION

The MEN 203 paper for the 2nd semester of MA English (Distance Learning) offers a comprehensive exploration of autobiographical and biographical writings, letters, and reflections by key literary, philosophical, and political figures. The course examines how these texts reveal personal lives, philosophical ideas, and historical events, offering insights into both individual experiences and larger cultural movements.

Through the study of texts ranging from Rousseau's *Confessions* and Gandhi's *Autobiography* to Dickinson's letters and Keats' reflections on poetry, students will engage with themes of self-representation, identity, moral philosophy, and artistic creation. Additionally, texts like V.S. Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* explore themes of exile, cultural alienation, and postcolonial identity.

The course is designed to enhance critical thinking and analysis, encouraging students to explore how authors use personal narratives to grapple with broader societal, political, and philosophical issues. By examining various forms of life writing, students will deepen their understanding of literary expression and historical contexts.

UNIT 1: Jean Jacques Rousseau – *Confessions Vol I: Book I: Childhood*

About the Author: Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was a philosopher and writer whose works contributed to the French Enlightenment and Romanticism. Known for his ideas on natural human goodness and education, Rousseau's autobiographical *Confessions* reveals his intimate thoughts and experiences. **Analysis & Explanation:** Book I of *Confessions* focuses on Rousseau's early life, his relationships with his family, and his developing consciousness. It presents themes of innocence, self-awareness, and the conflict between nature and society.

Important Themes: Self-reflection, individualism, childhood innocence, and the pursuit of truth.

UNIT 2: Giles Lytton Strachey – "*Florence Nightingale*" (From *Eminent Victorians*)

About the Author: Lytton Strachey (1880-1932) was a British biographer and critic. He pioneered modern biographical writing with his work *Eminent Victorians*, where he depicted key Victorian figures. **Analysis & Explanation:** The chapter on Florence Nightingale

examines her impact on nursing and public health. Strachey demystifies her persona, presenting her as a determined, yet flawed, reformer who challenged societal expectations. **Themes:** Victorian heroism, reform, gender roles, and public duty.

UNIT 3: Samuel Johnson – "Life of Milton" (*From Lives of the Poets*)

About the Author: Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) was an English writer, poet, and literary critic. His *Lives of the Poets* provides critical biographies of 17th-century poets, including Milton. **Analysis & Explanation:** Johnson offers both praise and criticism of Milton's life and works, particularly focusing on his political beliefs and personal hardships. **Themes:** Literary legacy, personal versus political life, and critical analysis of genius.

UNIT 4: M.K. Gandhi – *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth (Part I)*

About the Author: Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) was a leader in India's independence movement and an advocate for nonviolent resistance. His autobiography reflects his philosophical and spiritual journey. **Explanation of the Text:** In Part I, Gandhi discusses his early life in India, his time in London, and his developing thoughts on truth and nonviolence. **Themes:** Truth, nonviolence (ahimsa), self-discipline, and personal transformation.

UNIT 5: M.K. Gandhi – *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth (Part II)*

Important Themes & Analysis: Part II delves deeper into Gandhi's political activism, his role in South Africa, and his commitment to justice. The text reflects his spiritual growth and commitment to fighting colonial oppression through nonviolent means. **Themes:** Satyagraha, personal and political integrity, justice, and colonialism.

UNIT 6: Emily Dickinson – *The Letters (To Mrs. A.P. Strong, January 29, 1850; January 1, 1852; To William A. Dickinson, November 17, 1851)*

About the Author: Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was an American poet known for her reclusive life and innovative, introspective poetry. Her letters offer insight into her personal thoughts. **Analysis & Explanation:** These letters reveal Dickinson's deep emotional and

intellectual life, her views on death, nature, and relationships, providing a glimpse into her reclusive world. **Themes:** Isolation, emotional intensity, intellectual inquiry, and mortality.

UNIT 7: John Keats – *Letters (To Benjamin Bailey, Sat 22 Nov. 1817/ To George and Tom Keats, Sun 21 Dec 1817)*

About the Author: John Keats (1795-1821) was an English Romantic poet whose work explored beauty, mortality, and the imagination. His letters are essential to understanding his philosophy of "Negative Capability." **Analysis & Explanation:** The letters to Bailey and his brothers discuss poetry, philosophy, and Keats' concept of embracing uncertainty and mystery in art. **Themes:** Negative Capability, beauty, creativity, and the impermanence of life.

UNIT 8: Jawaharlal Nehru – *Letters to Priyadarshini (Nos 1 and 2 from Glimpses of World History)*

About the Author: Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) was India's first Prime Minister and a key figure in the independence movement. His *Glimpses of World History* is a series of letters written to his daughter, Indira Gandhi. **Analysis & Explanation:** In these letters, Nehru provides a broad overview of world history, instilling values of curiosity, critical thinking, and a global perspective. **Themes:** Education, world history, colonialism, and the transmission of knowledge.

UNIT 9: V.S. Naipaul – *An Area of Darkness (Part I)*

About the Author: V.S. Naipaul (1932-2018) was a Nobel Prize-winning British-Trinidadian writer. *An Area of Darkness* reflects on his first visit to India and his ambivalence toward the country of his ancestry. **Explanation of the Text:** Part I explores Naipaul's impressions of India, its poverty, and its contradictions, highlighting his sense of alienation. **Themes:** Exile, identity, colonialism, and cultural dislocation.

UNIT 10: V.S. Naipaul – *An Area of Darkness (Part II)*

Important Themes & Analysis: In Part II, Naipaul's conflicted feelings about India deepen as he wrestles with the nation's historical burdens and cultural identity. His narrative blends

personal reflection with broader critiques of postcolonial society. **Themes:** Identity crisis, postcolonialism, cultural alienation, and historical continuity.