

Hello listeners,

Welcome to a session of travel writing. Today we discuss *Motorcycle Diaries* by Che Guevara. This is me, your host Dr. Brian Mendonca, Assistant Professor from Carmel College for Women, Nuvem, Goa.

## INTRODUCTION

You might be wondering what the Department of English is doing in Latin America. Well, today, departments have exceeded themselves and are studying things outside England. What say? I invite you on a journey with me to enter the beautiful countries of Latin America. I would like you to spare a moment on the title *Motorcycle Diaries*.

We all have written diaries, haven't we? But what could 'motorcycle diaries' mean? Is the motorcycle writing a diary? Imagine writing a diary on a motorcycle. This is exactly what Che Guevara does.

I would like to take you back to the title of the book - 'Motorcycle Diaries.' What do we understand by a diary? I'm sure it's common-place knowledge. A diary is something you note down feverishly when you're thinking of expressing yourself, and then when there's nobody to talk to, you write it in your diary.

But *Motorcycle Diaries* would be something else, isn't it? Yes. Instead of writing about your journey in your car or on the train or on the plane, why not write when you're traveling on your motorcycle? This is exactly what Che did. And the subtitle is 'Notes on a Latin American journey.'

So travel writing distinguishes itself by not being a composite, integral and sequential largely, text of writing. It is actually notes. So notes refer to fragments of experience which are put together, culled together, edited to form some sort of pattern.

But if you will take a look at the book you notice that Che Guevara has been meticulous in documenting where he was and where he went. So, welcome to an analysis of his book.

## OUTLINE

The outline of this module is:

- a glimpse into the life of Che Guevara
- a glimpse into the book
- then we dive straight into the various sections offered for our study.
  1. 'Experts'
  2. 'Homeland for the Victor'
  3. 'City of the Viceroy's'

I must at this point impress upon the fact that these are just a few pages of this entire book. It is not possible to comment on the entire book one, and it's not possible to understand his writing if you don't read the entire book. So we are limited by our perceptions of just these three sections, which we will embark on in a short while.

- The conclusion follows the discussion of the last section
- You will find just before the last slide, a slide on key figures, which is important to keep in mind, to understand from where Che is coming from and what is the mental landscape that existed in Latin America at that time.

By the end of this module, I hope you appreciate Che Guevara as an example of travel writing. I hope we become sensitive to Che's perspective of Latin America and evaluate *Motorcycle Diaries* as an expression of its time.

I'm sure after reading this you will all want to read more and more of Latin American literature, isn't it? So join me and get on the bike with Che.

## CHE GUEVARA

He was born in Argentina in 1928. Actually he did his studies in a medical school in Buenos Aires. In 1951-52 he travels to North America with Alberto Granado, that is, his friend with whom he spent many days on the motorcycle. The escapades they're up to have to be seen or read to be believed in his enchanting book *Motorcycle Diaries*. In 1955 he joins Castro of Cuba to overthrow the dictator Batista. In a bold move, signifying his commitment to the organization of American States (OAS), he denounces the President of America - Kennedy at that time - and moots for a separate identity for Latin America in 1961. Che continues his traveling across Soviet Union, Algeria, and Africa. We all know the end of the story. In 1967 he is captured in Bolivia and executed because he is deemed to be too powerful in organizing the underprivileged and others like them.

I would like to quote a line from his daughter Aleida Guevara March where she says in the preface to the book:

*He grew increasingly aware of the pain of many others, and he allowed it to become a part of himself. He tells us about the complex indigenous world of Latin America, the poverty of its people, and the exploitation to which they are submitted.*

## **MOTORCYCLE DIARIES**

*The Motorcycle Diaries* describes a journey on a motorbike by Che and Alberto and begins, as we said, from Buenos Aires in January 1952 and takes all of six months till July of the same year.

So from Buenos Aires he crosses the Pampas in Argentina and moves to the west coast of Latin America. He lands in Chile, through the Andes. From Chile he moves through the west coast northward to Peru, northward to Colombia and northward to Venezuela where he flies out from Caracas back to Miami in America.

### **The Experts (Temuco, Chile)**

We turn our attention to the first section 'The Experts' which is located in Raul's home in Temuco, central Chile. This section is suffused with the poetry of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, which is recalled from time to time. But what is outstanding is Chilean hospitality. They're on their way from Port Valdivia in southern Chile, and what happens? What usually does - their bike breaks down. And Raul? An unknown person allows them the use of his house. At the same time, newspapers get wind of their agenda and describe them as leprosy experts. They are treated with love and respect.

### **Homeland for the Victor (Cuzco, Peru)**

In the next section 'Homeland for the Victor' the cathedral of Cuzco is described in Peru. We notice now that in this section we have moved from Chile northward into another country called Peru. Here, the spirit of the Catholic Church and the soul of the Andean people are contrasted. Che and Alberto are on the third leg of their journey from Machu Picchu i.e. Southern Peru. You must have seen those awe-inspiring photos of Machu Picchu so high above in the clouds. They were the center of the Inca empire. Cuzco, as an epitaph, is described here. But not without the lament of the march of the Spanish conquistadors who conquered and colonized Peru.

## **City of Viceroy (Lima, Peru)**

In the last section 'The City of Viceroy,' Lima, in northern Peru is described.

[Historical references are provided; the cathedral of Lima is compared to the cathedral of Cuzco; Che and Alberto continue their journey to Pucallpa on the banks of the Amazon river Ucayali in Peru]

## **CONCLUSION**

We move on to the conclusion where *The Motorcycle Diaries* is seen as an example of travel writing because of Che's descriptions, his objectivity, his humanism, and historical perspective of liberation, his readability and endurance. He is a fine shining example of travel writing today.

His understanding is not complete until we look at Simon Bolivar or Jose Marti, Miguel Cervantes, Ezekiel Estrada, Pablo Neruda, Fulgence Batista, and Thomas Cochrane, which I'm sure you will be very excited to search and research on.

With that, we end with a few references for your delectation.

It is me Dr. Brian Mendonca from Carmel College, Goa, Department of English bidding you adieu on this beautiful note. Thank you and all the best.