

JOURNEY TO THE END OF THE EARTH

Tishani Doshi

The journey - The narrator was aboard a Russian research ship -The 'Akademik Shokalskiy' that headed towards Antarctica, the coldest, driest and the windiest continent.

His journey began 13.09 degrees north of the Equator in Madras and involved crossing nine time zones, six checkpoints, three bodies of water and at least three ecospheres. He travelled over 100 hours in car, aeroplane and ship to reach there.

The purpose - *Students on Ice*, the programme that the author was working with on the *Shokalskiy*, aims at taking high school students to the ends of the world and providing them with inspiring educational opportunities which would help them foster a new understanding and respect for the planet. It's been in operation for six years then, headed by Canadian Geoff Green, who got tired of carting celebrities and retired, rich, curiosity-seekers who could only 'give' back in a limited way. With *Students on Ice*, he offers the future generation of policy-makers a life-changing experience at an age when they're ready to absorb, learn, and most importantly, act.

The results - The reason the programme has been so successful is because it's impossible to go anywhere near the South Pole and not be affected by it. It's easy to be blasé about polar ice-caps melting while sitting in one's home, but when one sees glaciers retreating and ice shelves collapsing, one begins to realise that the threat of global warming is very real.

Secondly, Antarctica, because of her simple ecosystem and lack of biodiversity, is the perfect place to study how little changes in the environment can have big repercussions.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

What are the indications for the future of humankind?

Thoughtless human activities as razing nature for constructing villages, towns, cities and megacities, the battle with other species for limited resources and the unmitigated burning of fossil fuel that has created a blanket of carbon dioxide around the world have brought about an increase in the average global temperature.

Further, melting ice caps, retreating glaciers and breaking down of ice shelves all point to a grim future for humankind and the very end of the world.

Why is Antarctica the place to go to understand the Earth's present, past and future?

The author states that to understand the earth's present, past and future, Antarctica is the right place to go. Antarctica is relatively untouched in this respect as it never sustained human population. It is thus, relatively pristine. It holds in its ice cores half a million-year-old carbon records, trapped in the layers of ice. It embodies all that is pre-historic: cordilleran folds, pre-Cambrian granite shields ozone and carbon, evolution and extinction. The simple eco system and lack of biodiversity indicate how little changes in the environment can fetch big repercussions.

How is Antarctica significant in climatic debates?

Antarctica is a crucial element in environmental debates, not just because it's the only place in the world, which has never sustained a human population and therefore remains relatively 'pristine'; but more importantly, because it holds in its ice-cores half-million-year-old carbon records trapped in its layers of ice. If the Earth's past, present and future is to be studied and examined, Antarctica is the place to go.

'Take care of the small things and the big things will take care of themselves.' What is the relevance of the statement in the context of the Antarctica environment?

This statement means that if small things are taken heed of, big things will take their own care. The microscopic phytoplanktons are single-celled plants that use the sun's energy to assimilate carbon and synthesise organic compounds through photosynthesis. Scientists warn that a further depletion in the ozone layer will affect the activities of phytoplankton, which in turn will affect the lives of all the marine animals and birds of the region and the global carbon cycle.

These grasses of the sea that nourish and sustain the entire Southern Ocean's food chain, thus is the great metaphor for existence.

The author states that her Antarctica experience was full of such epiphanies. Mention the best that occurred there.

The Akademik Shokalskiy got wedged into a thick white sheet of ice between the peninsula and Tadpole Island that prevented the vessel from going any further. The Captain decided to turn around and head back north, but before that, he instructed the students to climb down the gangplank and walk on the ocean. Underneath their feet was a metre-thick ice pack, and underneath that, 180 metres of living, breathing, salt water. In the periphery Crab-eater seals were stretching and sunning themselves on ice floes much like stray dogs will do under the shade of a banyan tree. It was nothing short of a great revelation.

LONG ANSWER QUESTION

What is the significance of the title ‘Journey to the End of the Earth’?

The title ‘Journey to the End of the Earth’ has multiple connotations.

It is the execution of a programme, *Students on Ice*, headed by a Canadian Geoff Green, and involved taking high school students to the ends of the world and providing them with inspiring educational opportunities which would help them foster a new understanding and respect for the planet.

For the author, it is a journey to the end of the earth that began 13:09 degrees north of the Equator in Madras and involved crossing nine time zones, six checkpoints, three oceans and many ecospheres. She travelled over hundred hours in combination of a car, an aeroplane and a ship. The journey being to the extreme south of the earth was really towards the farthest end of it.

The title, too, is suggestive of a caution, a veritable threat looming large on the earth as the warnings that Antarctica exhibit are appalling and much portentous for humanity and the million other species that exist on the earth. The changes taking place in Antarctica, thus, portend the end of the earth - the earth that is journeying to its end – if not immediately acted upon.