

ENGLISH



JOURNEY TO THE END OF THE EARTH

~Summary~

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The Story Retold

The Journey to Antarctica Begins

The narrator heads towards Antarctica aboard 'Akademic Shokalskiy, a Russian research vessel with a group of high school students. She reveals that Antarctica is the coldest, driest and windiest continent in the world. She commences her journey from Madras, crosses nine time zones, six checkpoints, three water bodies and many ecospheres to reach her destination. Travelling over hundred hours, she feels relief and wonders about the isolation of the continent and the historic time when India and Antarctica were a part of the same landmass.

Gondwana and the Shaping of the Modern World

The narrator takes the reader back to six hundred and fifty million years. At that time, Antarctica was a part of a giant amalgamated Southern supercontinent called Gondwana.

At that time humans had not arrived. The climate was warm and there was a huge variety of flora and fauna. For around 500 million years Gondwana existed. Eventually the landmass broke up and was forced to separate into countries. This shaped our present globe.

Narrator Wonders at Antarctica; Finds It Blissful

Belonging to a relatively warm country, the narrator who is a South Indian is shocked to be in place where 90% of the Earth's total ice volumes are stored! She feels she's walking into a giant ping-pong ball. There is no human life there and nothing to show that human life exists on this planet. She is surrounded by midges, mites, blue whales and limitless expanse of huge icebergs. The surreal twenty four-hour summer lights and eerie silence that is interrupted only by the breaking of an iceberg, is mind-boggling.

Human Impact on the Environment

Human beings have been on the Earth for about 12000 years. In this short span of time we have changed the face of our environment for worse. We have dominated the Earth by establishing cities and megacities. This has led to encroachment of Mother Nature. We are limiting resources

on the planet for other creatures. Burgeoning population has added to our woes. The average global temperature is rising and the blanket of carbon dioxide around the world is increasing.

The Paradox of Climate Change

There are many unanswered questions about climate change and the narrator is alarmed by them.

Will the West Antarctic ice sheet melt entirely?

Will the gulf stream ocean current be disrupted?

Will the world come to an end?

In this debate, Antarctica has a major role to play. This is because as compared to other places it remains relatively 'pristine' and contains half-million-years-old carbon records trapped in its layers of ice. The Earth's past, present and future lies hidden in Antarctica.

'Students on Ice' Programme

This programme aims at studying the ecological processes in Antarctica. The narrator works on this project on board Akademik Shokolskiy, It takes school students on the trip of Antarctica. The visit aims at generating a new awareness and respect for our planet in young, impressionable minds.

The programme has been in operation for six years. It is headed by a Canadian, Geoff Green. Earlier he used to take celebrities, retired rich and curiosity seekers to Antarctica for money. Gradually he got sick of those people who gave nothing to the Earth in return. So, he decided to take school students there. It was his firm belief that young minds could learn and act better about the potential hazards regarding the environment which our Earth faces.

The programme was a success because children could see with their own eyes collapsing ice shelves and retreating glaciers. They realised that the threat of global warming was real.

Lessons to be Learnt

The greatest lesson to be learnt is little changes in the environment can have big repercussions. The microscopic phytoplankton are nourishment for marine animals and birds in the region. Any more depletion in the ozone layer will affect the activities of these grasses. This will in turn affect the lives of others in this region and the global carbon cycle. The phytoplankton leads us to conclude that if we take care of small things, the big things can be saved.

A Memorable Walk on the Ocean

The narrator says that the experience of strolling on the ocean at Antarctica was a never-to-be-forgotten incident for all. At 65.55 degrees South of equator, the narrator and the students were told to get down. They put on Gore-Tex ice shoes and Sun glasses. On over 180 metres of salt water, there was one metre thick layer of ice. It was a breathtaking experience to see crabeater seals sitting in the periphery. It was truly a memorable experience for all.

The Difference the Antarctic Trip Made

The author is overwhelmed with the beauty of balance in play on our planet. She has many questions in her mind for e.g., what would happen if Antarctica becomes a warm place? Will human beings survive on Earth? Whatever be the answers to these questions, she is full of optimism about the teenagers who are full of idealism to save the Earth after having made the trip of Antarctica.