

## LESSON - 8

### MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD

#### PART - I (ZITKALA SA)

**Q1. What does Zitkala Sa remember about her first day in the land of apples?**

**Ans.** It was a bitter cold one. The snow still covered the ground and trees were bare. A large bell rang for breakfast. Its loud metallic sound crashed through the belfry and into their sensitive ears. There was annoying clatter of shoes, clash of harsh noises creating a bedlam. Amidst all this, her spirit struggled for freedom.

**Q2. What does Zitkala Sa mean by 'eating by formula'?**

**Ans.** A large bell rang summoning the students to the dining room. Then a small bell tapped. Each pupil drew a chair from under the table. Then a second bell sounded. All were seated. A man's voice was heard at the end of the hall. Everyone hung their heads over the plates. The man ended his murmurings. Then a third bell tapped. Everyone picked up his/her knife and fork and began eating.

**Q3. What did Judewin tell Zitkala Sa? How did she react to it?**

**Ans.** Judewin knew a few words of English. She had overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting of their long heavy hair. She gave this terrible warning to Zitkala Sa.

Zitkala Sa declared that she would not submit and would struggle first. Judewin however said, "We have to submit because they are strong."

**Q4. Why do you think was Zitkala Sa opposed to the cutting of her hair?**

**Ans. 1.** Their mothers had taught them that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy.

**2.** Among their people short hair was worn by mourners and shingled hair by cowards. Since she was neither, she was against the cutting of her long hair. It was against her culture and tradition.

**Q5. How did Zitkala Sa avoid the inevitable loss of her long hair?**

**Ans.** She crept up the stairs and passed along a hall. She didn't know where she was going. She found a large room with three white beds. The windows were covered with dark green curtains. She went to the corner, farthest from the door and crawled under the bed in a dark corner.

**Q6. How was Zitkala Sa treated on being traced from her hiding place?**

**Ans.** She was dragged out from under the bed. She resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of all her efforts, she was carried downstairs and tied fast to a chair. She cried aloud shaking her head all the while.

**Q7. What did she feel when her long hair was cut?**

**Ans.** When she heard them remove one of her thick braids, she lost her spirit. She had suffered utmost indignities there. People had stared at her. She had been tossed about like a wooden puppet. She felt like a defeated warrior and a coward. In her anguish, she moaned for her mother. She felt like an animal being driven by a herder.

Q8. What did she notice about the Indian girls in the school?

Ans. The girls were in stiff shoes and closely clinging dresses. Small girls wore sleeved aprons and shingled hair.

Zitkala Sa felt that they looked immodest.

Q9. "Then I lost my spirit." What made Zitkala-Sa utter these heart rending words?

Ans. Zitkala Sa uttered these heart rending words after her long hair was cut. She was tied to a chair and the scissors snipped off the thick braids of her hair. She felt helpless and powerless. She felt as if she had lost her spirit and stopped struggling any more. According to her culture only captured warriors had their hair shingled by the enemy.

Q10. Why was the girl tied to the chair in Memories of Childhood?

Ans. Zitkala Sa was warned by her friend, Judewin. She had overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting her long and heavy hair. Among her people short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards. She decided not to submit but to struggle. She hid herself under the bed but was caught. She resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. But at last she was dragged and tied to a chair.

## PART-II

### WE TOO ARE HUMAN BEINGS

Q1. How long would it take Bama to walk home from school and why?

Ans. 1. About half an hour to one hour. The distance could be walked in 10 minutes.  
2. She would stop to watch all the fun and games that were going on. There were entertaining novelties and oddities (strange things) in the street, shops and the bazaar.

Q2. What sort of shows and entertainments attracted the passers by?

Ans. There was a performing monkey, a snake charmer and a cyclist peddaling round and round. Sometimes, people from various political parties would put up a stage and address people loudly through their mikes. Then there was a street play, a puppet show, a magic show, a stunt performance etc that would entertain the people.

Q3. What made Bama want to double up and shriek (shout) with laughter?

Ans. Bama saw an elder of their street coming along from the direction of the bazaar. He was holding a packet by a string without touching it. The sight of such a big man carrying a small packet in that manner made her shriek with laughter.

Q4. What explanation did Bama's elder brother Annan give her about the elder's funny behavior?

Ans. He said that the man wasn't being funny when he carried the packet like that. The upper caste people believed that others must not touch them. If they did so, the former would be polluted. That is why the elder man had to carry the packet by its string.

5. How did Bama react on learning about untouchability?

Ans. Bama was terribly sad on learning how the upper caste people behaved towards low caste people like them. She felt provoked and angry. She wondered why their elders should run errands for rich, upper caste landlords, hand them over things respectfully, bowing and shrinking all the while. They too were human beings.

Q6. How did the landlord's man behave with Annan?

Ans. The man thought that Annan looked unfamiliar and asked his name respectfully. However, his manner changed when he told his name. The man then asked the name of the street he lived in. The purpose was to identify his caste from the name of the street.

Q7. How according to Annan was the caste system discriminatory? How can one overcome the indignities?

Ans. Annan said that the lower caste people were never given any honour, dignity or respect. Thus, caste system was discriminatory.

But if they studied and made progress, they would throw away those indignities.

Q8. What advice did Annan offer to Bama? What was the result?

Ans. 1. He advised her to study with care and learn all she could. If she was always ahead in her lessons, people would come to her on their own and attach themselves to her.

2. The words had a deep impact on Bama. She studied hard and stood first in the class. Because of that many people became her friends.

Q9. Explain Bama's first encounter with untouchability.

Ans. Bama one day saw one of the elders of her village carrying the food packet by the string without touching it. He bowed low before the landlord and extended the packet towards him, cupping the hand that held the string with his other hand. Later Bama's elder brother told her that the village elder did so because he was not allowed to touch the food packet with his hand lest it should become unholy.

### LONG ANSWERS

Q1. The two accounts that you read above are based in two distant cultures. What is the commonality of them found in both of them?

Ans. The two accounts given in the unit "Memories of Childhood" are based in two distant cultures. Two grown up and celebrated writers from marginalized communities look back on their childhood. They reflect on their relationship with the mainstream culture.

The discrimination, exploitation, oppression and humiliation they faced are common to both. Zitkala Sa highlights the severe prejudice that prevailed towards native American culture and women. She criticises the Carlisle Indian School and the indignities she had to face. Depriving her of her blanket that covered her shoulders made her look indecent in her own eyes. The cutting of her long hair reduces her to the status of a defeated warrior as in her culture shingled hair is only worn by cowards. The replacing of her moccasins by squeaking shoes and 'eating by formula' at the table are the signs of forcible erosion of their culture and imposition of dogma on them.

Bama highlights the humiliation faced by the untouchables who were never given any honour, dignity or respect as they were born in lower classes. They were made to live apart, run errands and bow humbly to the masters. They had to avoid direct contact with the people of higher classes or the things used by them.

The sense of rebellion against the existing state of affairs and their decision to improve them are also common themes.

**Q2. It may take a long time for oppression to be resisted, but the seeds of rebellion are sowed early in life. Do you agree that injustice in any form cannot escape being noticed by children?**

**Ans.** It is true that children are more sensitive and observant than adults. They see, understand, feel and experience whatever happens around them. They are quick to notice changes and many of them take up the cause of upliftment of their fellow members when they grow up. (Dr. Ambedkar as a child was a victim of such discrimination. This made him spend his entire life for the upliftment of the untouchables in India.)

Bama at first finds the behavior of the elderly of her community quite funny. He is holding the packet by a string. But when she learns the reason of this particular behavior, her anger is aroused against the cruel, rich people of upper caste who exploit them and insult them. She is ready to rebel against the oppression by snatching the packet of 'vadais' from the landlord and eating them herself. Her elder brother shows her the path and tells her to study hard to fight against the system. So, we see the seeds of rebellion in her.

Zitkala Sa too shows that she has seeds of rebellion at an early age. Her friend Judewin tells her that the authorities will cut their long heavy hair and they would have to submit. But Zitkala Sa rebels. She says that she will struggle first. And she does carry out her resolution. She hides under the bed to save her long hair. When she is detected and dragged out, she resists by kicking and scratching wildly. In the end she is tied in a chair and her hair is cut but she does not take the things lying down.

The spark of rebellion in her is not put out by oppression.

**Q3. Bama's experience is that of a victim of the caste system. What kind of discrimination does Zitkala Sa's experience depict? What are their responses to their respective situations?**

**Ans.** Zitkala-Sa faced racial discrimination. Her experience depicts the severe prejudice that prevailed towards native American culture and women. The white Europeans considered themselves superior to all the other races and tried to impose their way of life on everyone. Zitkala-Sa was forced to cut her long hair and was given clothes stitched in the English manner. She was forced to wear stiff shoes. People had stared at her. She had to face extreme indignities. Her long hair was forcibly cut despite stiff resistance. She felt like a defeated warrior, a coward, an animal being driven by a herder.

Both of them rebel against the existing circumstances. They struggle hard to remove the discrimination with the tool of education. Bama works hard and stands first in her class. Now people come to her on their own.

Zitkala Sa fights and struggles till she is overpowered. Both of them take to writing and earn a name for themselves.