



INDIAN SCHOOL MUSCAT
SENIOR SECTION
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
CLASS XII



VISTAS - MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD
ZITKALA-SA and BAMA

Gist of the Lesson: Part –I: The first part deals with the account of Simmons, An American Indian, who fought against the prejudices of the society against American Indians. - She describes her experiences on her first day at the Carlisle Indian School. - The customs and rules of the place were strange and new to her. - She was forced to wear clothes that were considered undignified in her culture - At breakfast, she was embarrassed as she did not know the routine of the place. - When she comes to know that they were planning to cut her hair, she protests by hiding under the bed, even though she knew it was futile. In her culture, it was the cowards whose hair was shingled. - She felt like an animal driven by a herder.

Part – II: - The second part is an excerpt from the autobiography ‘Karukku’ by Bama – a Tamil Dalit. - She was in her third grade when she becomes aware of the indignities that the lower caste people face. - She happens to see an elderly person from her community abase himself in front of a higher caste person as he was not supposed to touch the food that he was ordered to fetch for the landlord. - Later, her brother explains to her that the incident was not at all funny as she initially thought, but very pathetic. The people from the lower caste were treated as untouchables. - She was deeply saddened and decided to study hard to overcome discrimination.

Questions and answers:

Q1. The two accounts that you read above are based in two distant cultures. What is the commonality of theme found in both of them? Ans: - The unit presents autobiographical episodes of the lives of two women from marginalized communities who look back on their childhood, and reflect on their relationship with the mainstream culture. Both -victims of prejudice, oppression, - experienced indignation, sadness and outrage, - -Affected by their unpleasant experience of childhood, - Fought against the injustice, - Both use the power of pen to fight 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- victim of racial discrimination / cultural invasion. The lesson presents a good account of two different girls living at distant places. Both the women belong to the marginalized communities. Zitkala-Sa was a Native American. She was taken away from her mother forcibly because the white people wanted the native Indians to adopt their culture. Zitkala revolted the way the Indian girls were forced to wear dresses in an immodest way. She was shocked to know that that the school authorities were going to cut her long hair because in her community shingled hair were worn only by cowards. She hid herself under a bed in a large room. But when she was caught, she resisted by kicking and scratching. But she could do nothing when they took her bravely, tied in a chair and cut off her hair. But her spirit could not be suppressed. On the other hand, Bama was a low –caste girl. She saw the upper caste people showing discrimination against lower caste

people. They could not touch food and other items of the upper caste people. They had to work for them and bow their heads. Her spirit too revolted against this injustice. She felt terribly sad and agitated. She could not understand this inhuman treatment since all are human beings. She wanted honour for all. Her brother Annan told her that she could do away with these indignities if she worked hard. Bama studied hard and stood first in her class. Many people became her friends.

Short Answer Questions:

1. “I felt like sinking to the floor”! Who felt so and why? Ans: - Zitkala-sa felt so when on her first day in Carlisle Indian School her blanket was rudely stripped off her shoulders. She felt exposed, as if her very identity had been snatched away so cruelly.

Q2. What were the indignities that the new girls were subjected to at Carlisle Indian School? Ans:- The girls were scrutinized thoroughly and supervised by a grey-haired woman. They were made to wear tight fitting immodest clothes and stiff shoes. During breakfast a systematic and regimental discipline was observed. The girls with long hair had to get them shingled and they had to submit to the authorities who were strong, unfeeling and cruel.

Q3. Why does the author feel that she has been deprived of freedom in the hostel? Ans: - Moccasins not allowed in the hostel, strict discipline, long hair- cut, and loss of freedom.

Q4. Why was the girl, Zitkala tied to a chair in ‘Memories of Childhood’? Ans: - Zitkala Sa tells about her first day in school. She had long hair. According to the culture of the whites they wanted to cut her long hair. But she refused to obey their decision. She was dragged out and tied fast with a chair for cutting her hair. She resisted but all in vain.

Q5. What did Zitkala-Sa feel when her long hair was cut? Ans: - Felt indignant / anguished / lost her spirit / looked for comforting / felt like an animal driven by a herder / felt helpless like a puppet.

Q6. What was the incident that made Bama laugh as well as feel so provoked and angry? Ans: - Bama saw an elderly man of her street carrying a packet of ‘Vadais’ by the strings and walking gingerly, holding the parcel away from his body. Bama found his manner of carrying the parcel very funny. But her brother explains to her the higher caste people believed that if the lower caste people touched the parcel it would be polluted. That’s why the elder was carrying it in that manner. This provokes and angers Bama.

Q7. Who was Annan? Why was he not amused by Bama’s story? Ans: - Annan was Bama’s elder brother. Bama’s story didn’t amuse him because he knew the elderly man of their street was carrying a packet of food in the odd manner because they were untouchables and if the food came in contact with their body it would become polluted and unfit for consumption by his upper caste master.

Q8. What did the author (Bama) think of upper caste people ? Why they didn’t treat them ‘human beings’? Ans: - Bama thought that upper class people thought so much of themselves –they had wealth- didn’t mean lose all human feelings.

Q9. What advice did Annan offer Bama? Ans: - He advised her to work hard / study with care and make progress to throw away indignities / if you are ahead in your lesson, people will come to you.

Q10. What impact did Annan’s advice have on Bama and with what effect? (P-99, last para, p-100)

Long Answer Questions:

Q1. Seeds of rebellion are sown early in life injustice even can't escape the eyes of child. Justify the statement with reference to the lesson and "Memories of childhood."

Ans. The lesson 'Memories of Childhood' is an amalgamation of two autobiographical episodes: one by an American Indian woman and the other by a Tamil Dalit writer. Both stories highlight the women's oppression, class barriers, racialism, discrimination and exploitation that tend to pull them down. Both the stories advocate the statement that seeds of rebellion are sown early in life. In 'The Cutting of my long hair' the feeling of breaking free and gaining freedom are seen in the girl. Zitkala-Sa, in the very first line reports that her first day in school was "bitter-cold". For her, it not only describes the weather, but also represents the atmosphere of the boarding school. Though she was a child but she could observe the overly disciplined students of the school and its unfriendly staff. She faced indignity & oppression since she had left her mother. She is not ready to get her hair cut, to lose her & identity. She fights till the end but is helpless as she overpowered.

Also in 'We Too Are Human Beings', when Bama was in class 3rd, no had talked to her about untouchability but still she had experienced it and could notice the difference between landlords and Dalits. The little girl was amused to see how the old man was holding the packet but when she came to discover the truth, she is extremely upset & citizens the way of the rich. Through her struggle & hard work she stands first & wins many friends. Thus we can see that though the children are small & innocent but they cannot tolerate injustice if they are taught early in their life.

Q2. It took almost an hour for Bama to reach back home from school. Why? OR, What were the 'novelties and oddities' in the bazaar which entertained Bama?

Ans: Bama was a young playful girl studying in class three. Her school was at a distance of ten minutes from her home but she normally took at least thirty minutes to traverse this distance. The bazaar on the way was full of novelties and oddities for her-the performing monkey, the snake kept by the snake charmer in its box, the cyclist who had not got off his bike for three days, the spinning wheels, the Maariyaata temple, the pongal offerings being cooked in front of the temple; the various food stalls in front of the temple, the different hues of the street light and the narikkuravan hunter gypsy with its wild lemur in cages. A different kind of performance on stage such as a street play, a puppet show, a magic show or speeches by budding politicians also caught her attention. Even the way the waiters cooled the coffee at the coffee clubs or the way people cut onions held the little girl spell-bound. The fruit growing on a tree as well as the seasonal fruits being sold held her captive.

Hence we see that before Bama was rudely oriented to the unfortunate reality of her caste she was an innocent child buoyed by the simple sights of life.

Q4. How does 'Memories of Childhood.' Bring out the plight of marginalized communities in India?

Hints: – the text –experiences of two small girls from marginalized communities—forced to accept the rules laid by people of so called high caste—both humiliated and tortured for being from low caste—throws light on how they had to sacrifice their self, right to self-esteem and were subjected to unbearable

humiliation—characters symbolize communities—personal experiences universalized – compels the reader to think how humane is the human world.

Answer the following in about 30-40 words.

1. What are the views of the author about the dress code in the school?
2. Why did the author begin to cry in the dining hall?
3. Why did the author not want her hair to be cut short?
4. How would you interpret the author's statement, 'now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder'?
5. Why did it take Bama nearly one hour to cover a distance needing just ten minutes walking?
6. What made the little girl want to double up with laughter at the sight of the strange man?
7. Who was Annan? How did he justify the strange behaviour of the elder?
8. What advice did Annan give to Bama? How did his words affect her life?
9. How did Bama win friends?
10. Comment on the theme of the two episodes narrated.

Points for the Textual Long Answer Questions:

1. The two accounts that you have read are based in two distant cultures. What is the commonality of theme found in both of them? Ans:- Both the autobiographical extracts are based upon two distant cultures- depicts the lives of two women from marginalized communities- the first account- American Indian woman- expresses the indignations suffered- resented this mistreatment- could not easily adjust to the culture -still tried to bridge the gap-did not let herself believe that her native American culture was at mistake.

The second is that of a Tamil writer- looks back on her life when she understood how their clan were discriminated- caste system deeply ingrained in the Indian society- understood that education can help them gain the lost dignity. Both speak of the discrimination and indignity suffered by the marginalized communities at the hands of the supposedly superior caste or culture.

2. 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- a victim of class distinction and oppression - was ill-treated and discriminated right from the beginning- could not accept their culture easily- at school was treated like a plaything- tossed up and down by the authorities- felt scared and extremely uncomfortable - though she hated everything- had to abide by the rules for fear of being punished- still worked in her own way and never gave in to the discrimination.

Bama remained undeterred- convinced that she had a role to play to do away with the discriminations - stood for her beliefs- championed against the evil of caste system- took the advice of her Annan seriously- and established that education can empower people of any economic level- both did not succumb to pressure but stood by what they believed to be true.
