



READING WITH INSIGHT

Q1. The two accounts that you have read above are based in two distant cultures. What is the commonality of theme 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 marginalised communities look back on their childhood. They reflect on their relationship with the mainstream.

The discrimination, oppression, humiliation, suffering and insults that they faced as young members of the marginalised communities are common to both. Zitkala-Sa highlights the severe prejudice that prevailed towards the Native American culture and women. 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 are worn only by cowards. The replacing of her moccasins by squeaking shoes and "eating by formula" at breakfast table are other signs of forcible erosion of their own culture and imposition of dogma on them.

Bama highlights the humiliations 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 scrupulously avoided 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 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 even by children?

Ans: Children are more sensitive and observant than the adults. They see, hear, feel and experience whatever happens around them. They are quick to note any deviation from the normal or any aberration.

Bama at first, thinks the behaviour of the elder of her community is quite funny. He is holding the packet by string and running with it awkwardly. But when she learns the reason of his behaviour in that particular manner her ire is aroused against the cruel, rich people of upper castes who shamelessly exploit them and heap humiliations on them. She is ready to rebel against the oppression by snatching the packet of vadai from the landlord and eating them herself. Her elder brother channelises her anger. He tells her to study with care and make progress. We see the seeds of rebellion in her.

Zitkala-Sa too shows that she has the seeds of rebellion in her even at an early age. Her friend Judewin tells her that the authorities are going to cut their long, heavy hair. She says that they have to submit, because they (authorities) are strong. But Zitkala-Sa rebels. She declares that she will not submit. She will struggle first. And, she does carry out her resolution. She hides herself to foil their attempt. When she is detected hiding under the bed and dragged out, she resists by kicking and scratching wildly. She is overpowered and tied fast in a chair, but she does not take 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: Bama is a victim of the caste system as she has been born in a dalit community. Zitkala- Sa is a Native American who finds that the people who have overpowered the natives are out to destroy their culture. She notices the discrimination against Native American culture and women. The cutting of her long hair is a symbolic of subjection to the rulers. In their culture, only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. She is deprived of her soft moccasins—the shoes worn by Native Americans. Her blanket has been removed from her shoulders and she feels shy and indecent. The rules observed at the breakfast table are alien to her.

Both of them rebel against the existing circumstances. They do not bow down to their situations. They struggle hard to remove the discrimination and other barriers raised by people in power. Their struggle is against oppression, prejudice, dogma, superstition and ignorance. The tool with which they carry out their struggle is education. Both Zitkala- Sa and Bama study hard and earn a name for themselves. They take to writing and distinguish themselves in their respective fields. Their works depict their viewpoints and carry on their struggle against the discrimination that constraint and binds the free flow of their spirits.

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