

English Assignment

Class XII

Memories of Childhood notes and Important Questions

Two people recall their childhood when they were made victims of social inequalities.

i) The cutting of my long hair- Zitkala Sa

Zitkala Sa was a new student of the Carlisle Indian School. She felt like she had lost her freedom on the first day. She had to speak a new language, wear short skirts, shoes and short hair.

- She was never used to these modern etiquette.
- When the children were taken to the dining room, she made a mistake.
- There was a bell for prayer before breakfast. When the bell rang, Zitkala thought it was time to sit and eat.
- She sat down and began to eat but soon realized that all the children were still standing. This embarrassed her.
- Later she was informed by her friend Judewin that the school authorities were going to cut the hair of girls who hadn't got their hair shingled/cut.
- In her culture, short/shingled hair was worn by the three kinds of people:
 - Unskilled warriors caught by the enemy,
 - Mourners and
 - Cowards
- She went into the living room and disappeared under a cot/bed.
- She was searched for, found and was tied to a chair. They cut her hair.
- She cried, felt lost and weak.

What do you know about Carlisle Indian School?

Carlisle Indian School was a school run by the British to educate the Red Indians and the British students. It had strict rules and regulations for all students. The students had to wear uniforms, girls had to wear short hair and skirts and tight shoes. The eating style also was different there. There were bells before eating. There was a prayer before eating.

How was Zitkala Sa different from the other native American students?

Zitkala Sa was a native American girl. She had great love for her tradition and culture. She was proud of her beliefs. She held closer to her heart these beliefs and felt hurt when the rest of the girls followed the foreign culture without any hesitation. For example, when she saw that the other girls like her had put on closely clinging skirts, she felt ridiculed. She herself felt embarrassed for having worn immodest dresses that closely contrasted her culture and traditions.

What does Zitkala Sa mean by, 'this eating by formula'?

When Zitkala Sa was admitted in the Carlisle Indian School, she faced a number of rules the students had to follow. One of them was the manner of eating. There were three bells to be tapped before the students were allowed to start eating. Being a natural being, Zitkala Sa could not digest the meaning of these polished manners which were alien/unknown to her culture.

There was something that the school authorities had failed to recognize in Zitkala Sa. What was that?

The British authorities of the Carlisle Indian School were colonists and therefore could not understand the feelings of the people they ruled over. They believed that it was their duty to impart their civilization to the uncivilized native Americans but failed to understand their attachment to their own culture and traditions. When they passed their civilized manners like wearing shoes, uniforms, moccasins, short skirts and speaking

English, they failed to think of the impact of these upon the natives. Instead of trying to understand why the little child was protesting the rules, they blindly forced her to follow them.

Why was Sa against the idea of cutting her long hair?

Zitkala Sa's mother had taught her that shingled hair was worn by mourners, cowards, and unskilled warriors caught in war. She had a great deal of love for her traditions and her hair. For her the hair meant much closer to her culture. To save her identity, to uphold her civilization and pride Sa fought against the attempts of the authorities to cut her hair.

In spite of all, the school authorities too had their own justifications. What were they?

Although the school authorities appear to be dictatorial and unfeeling, we can see the validity of their rules in the modern world. Wearing uniform dresses has been proved practical in all the schools in the world. Under a uniform dress code, the poor hardly feel inferior to the rich. Putting on shoes was novel to Gertrude (Zitkala) but the safety and hygiene that shoes provide to the feet is undisputed. There is no denying that English language has brought the world much closer more than anything so we cannot entirely blame the school authorities for imposing English as the only medium of communication in the school. It goes without saying how good cutting of tangled hair can be. Besides keeping one's hair and head clean and safe from lice-like insects, it saves time in washing and drying. Praying before a meal or thanksgiving before a meal is one of the greatest prayers, no doubt, because we need to remember the farmers who have made our meal possible. Thus, the rules imposed by the school authorities did more good than bad. If they hadn't been rude in the way of imposition, there was no harm meant.

ii) We too are human beings- BAMA

Similar was the case with Bama, an Indian writer from Tamilnadu. She too was a human being but the richer and privileged society didn't consider her so. She was a happy girl but once she witnessed a scene of discrimination. A much respected elder of her society was once made the victim of caste system. This infuriated her. She wanted to react. She knew the only weapon to fight ostracism was acquiring equal status through education.

- Bama was a happy girl but until she heard that she belonged to the caste of untouchables.
- She took a lot of time to reach home from school. She looked at the following scenes, people, happenings:
 - Performing monkey.
 - Snake charmer's snake-show.
 - Cyclist's stunts.
 - Spinning wheels.
 - Maariyaata Temple
 - Dried fish stall, sweet stall, snack stall.
 - Narikkuravan hunter gypsy with his lemur (nari)
 - Vendors who sell needles, clay beads, ear-cleaners
 - Politicians who shout through loudspeakers
 - Magic shows, puppet show, street plays, stunts, etc.
 - Coffee clubs
 - People chopping onions
 - Almond tree and its fallen fruits
 - Mango, cucumber, sweet potato, gram, palm-syrup, guavas, jack fruits, etc.

How was Bama's innocent childhood ruffled up by the sight of an elderly man handing the parcel to the landlord at the threshing-field?

Bama was an innocent girl. She lived in a discriminated society with landlords above them and her community running errands for them. The first instance of class discrimination Bama experienced in her life was the incident of an elderly man of her caste carrying food for the landlord. The man had to carry the packet in the most shameful manner, holding the hand away from his body as a mark of untouchability.

What made Bama laugh at the sight of the elderly man handing the parcel to the landlord at the threshing-field?

Bama saw an elderly man of her society carrying a very small and light parcel to the landlord. The way the man held the parcel with its strings, the special respect the man showed towards the parcel and the way he offered it to the landlord without supporting it from the bottom made Bama laugh.

What did Bama feel when her annan explained to her why the village elder had to carry the parcel in a funny manner?

When Bama saw the elderly man from her society carrying a small parcel of eatable to the landlord, she laughed a lot but when her Annan told it was a scene of caste discrimination; she could not laugh any more. She grew angry with this social evil and wanted to touch the eatable herself and make it dirty. She felt helpless about her being untouchable and angry with the rich people who considered her so.

“Because they had scraped four coins together...” What did Bama mean?

According to Bama the cause of the rich people’s superior attitude and behavior is the possession of money. Money makes a man feel superior over the poor and it makes him blind. While the ordinary people have a little wealth in their hands, the rich ones have a lot.

What was the point of the question raised by the landlord’s man to Bama’s elder brother, “On which street do you live?”

The people of Bama’s time believed in untouchability and social discrimination. Some people were considered privileged while the majority of the others suffered from the shame of being backward class. People gave respect or disrespect to each other on the basis of caste, religion and being rich and poor. The landlord’s men wanted to know if Bama’s brother was touchable or untouchable and therefore he asked where he lived.

How did Bama fight against discrimination in her life?

Bama lived in a discriminated society with the evils of untouchability playing havoc. When she was aware of it Bama determined to fight it in her way. She was told by her Annan that education only could liberate her from being looked down by the society. Bama studied in a frenzy and stood top in the class and fought the class discrimination.

Questions for notebook Short Answer Type Questions (3 Marks, 30-40 words)

- Q.1. Why was Zitkala-Sa in tears on the first day in the land of apples? (All India 2014)
- Q.2. What comic incident did Bama narrate to her brother? Why was he not amused? (Foreign 2014)
- Q.3. Which words of her brother made a deep impression on Bama? (Delhi 2014)
- Q.4. What is common between Zitkala-Sa and Bama? (Compartment 2014)
- Q.5. What sort of shows or entertainment attracted Bama? (All India 2013)
or Which activities of the people would Bama watch keenly in the bazaar?
or Which actions of the people would Bama watch keenly in the bazaar? (Foreign 2011)
- Q.6. What were the articles in the stalls and shops that fascinated Bama on her way back from school? (All India 2013)
- Q.7. What did Zitkala-Sa feel when her long hair was cut? (Delhi 2011)
- Q.8. What was the advice that Annan gave to Bama? Did she follow it? (All India 2011)
- Q.9. “I felt like sinking to the floor,” says Zitkala-Sa. When did she feel so and why? (All India 2011)
- Q.10. What did Judewin tell Zitkala-Sa? How did she react to it? (All India 2011)
- Q.11. What does Zitkala-Sa remember about the first day in the land of apples? (Foreign 2011)
- Q.12. Why was Zitkala-Sa so averse to having her hair cut? (Foreign 2011)
- Q.13. Why did the landlord’s man ask Bama’s brother on which street he lived? What was the significance? (Delhi 2010)

Q14. Why was Zitkala-Sa terrified when Judewin told her that her hair would be cut short? (All India 2010)

Q15. Why did Bama take thirty minutes walking home from school when she could have covered the distance in ten minutes? (All India 2009).

Q16. When did Bama first come to know of the social discrimination faced by the people of her community? (Delhi 2009)

Q17. How did Zitkala-Sa try to prevent the shingling of her hair? (Delhi 2009)

Q18. Describe the experience Bama had on her way back home which made her feel sad. (Foreign 2009)

Long Answer Type Questions (6 Marks, 120-150 words)

Q1. What are the similarities in the lives of Bama and Zitkala-Sa though they belong to different cultures? (All India 2009)

Q2. What oppression and discrimination did Zitkala-Sa and Bama experience during their childhood? How did they respond to their respective situations? (All India 2008)