

CHAPTER - 8

MEMORIES OF THE CHILDHOOD

QUESTIONS FROM TEXTBOOK SOLVED

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.

MORE QUESTIONS SOLVED

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

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

Ans. It was a bitter-cold day. The snow still covered the ground. The trees were bare. A large bell rang for breakfast. Its loud metallic sound crashed through the belfry overhead and penetrated into their sensitive ears.

Q2. How did Zitkala-Sa react to the various sounds that came when the large bell rang for breakfast?

Ans. The annoying clatter of shoes on bare floors disturbed the peace. There was a constant clash of harsh noises and an undercurrent of many voices murmuring an unknown tongue. All these sounds made a bedlam within which she was securely tied. Her spirit tore itself in struggling for its lost freedom.

Q3. Where were the girls taken and how ?

Ans. The girls were marching into the dining room in a line. The Indian girls were in stiff shoes and tightly sticking dresses. The small girls wore sleeved aprons and shingled hair. They did not seem to care that they were indecently dressed.

Q4. "I felt like sinking to the floor", says Zitkala-Sa. When did she feel so and why ?

Ans. It was her first day at school. She was marching into the dining room with other girls in a line. She walked noiselessly in her soft moccasins. But she felt that she was immodestly dressed, as her blanket had been removed from her shoulders. So, she felt like sinking to the floor.

Q5. "But this eating by formula was not the hardest trial in that first day", says Zitkala-Sa.

What does she mean by 'eating by formula' ?

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

Q6. How did Zitkala-Sa find the 'eating by formula' a hard trial?

Ans. She did not know what to do when the various bells were tapped and behaved unlike others. When the first bell rang, she pulled out her chair and sat in it. As she saw others standing, she began to rise. She looked shyly around to see how chairs were used. When the second bell was sounded, she had to crawl back into her chair. She looked around when a man was speaking at the end of the hall. She dropped her eyes when she found the paleface woman looking at her. After the third bell, others started eating, but she began to cry.

Q7. 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. She was talking about cutting their long, heavy hair. Judewin said, "We have to submit, because they are strong." Zitkala-Sa rebelled. She declared that she would not submit. She would struggle first.

Q8. 'Why, do you think, was Zitkala-Sa so opposed to cutting of her hair?'

Ans. Zitkala-Sa had heard from her mother that only unskilled warriors, who were captured, had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among their people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards. Since she was neither, she was dead against cutting of her long hair.

Q9. How did Zitkala-Sa try to avoid the inevitable loss of her long hair ?

Ans. She crept up the stairs and passed along the hall. She did not know where she was going. She turned aside to an open door. She found a large room with three white beds in it. The windows were covered with dark green curtains. She went to the corner farthest from the door and crawled under the bed in the darkest corner.

Q10. How was the search made for Zitkala-Sa?

Ans. First, they called out her name in the hall in loud voices. Then the steps were quickened. The voices became excited. The sounds came nearer. Women and girls entered the room. They opened closet doors. They peeped behind large trunks. Someone threw up the curtains. The room was filled with sudden light. Someone stooped, looked under the bed and found her there.

Q11. How was Zitkala-Sa treated on being traced from her hiding place ?

Ans. Zitkala-Sa was dragged out. She tried to resist by kicking and scratching wildly. But she was overpowered. She was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair. She cried aloud and kept shaking her head.

Q12. What did Zitkala-Sa 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 in the air like a wooden puppet and now her long hair was shingled like a coward's. In her anguish, she moaned for her mother. She felt herself as one of the many little animals driven by a herder.

Q13. Which words of her brother made a deep impression on Bama? [Delhi 2014]

Ans. While returning home, Bama's elder brother told her that although people do not get to decide the family they are born into, they can outwit the indignities inflicted upon them. It left a deep impression on her.

Q14. Name some of the novelties and oddities in the streets that attracted Bama?

Ans. These included the performing monkey, the snakecharmer's snake, the cyclist who had kept on biking for three days, the spinning wheels, the Maariyaata temple and the huge bell hanging there. She also noticed the pongal offerings being cooked in front of the temple.

Q15. What were the articles in flit stalls and shops that fascinated Bama?

Ans. She saw the dried fish stall by the statue of Gandhiji; the sweet stall, and the stall selling fried snacks. There were many other shops next to each other. Then there was the narikkuravan huntergypsy. He had his wild lemur in cages. He sold needles, clay beads and instruments for cleaning out the ears.

Q16. What sort of shows or entertainments attracted the passers-by?

Ans. Sometimes various political parties put up a stage. They addressed people through their mikes. There might be a street play, a puppet show, or a "no magic, no miracle" stunt performance. There was some entertainment or the other happening there from time to time.

Q17. Which actions of the people would Bama watch keenly in the bazaar?

Ans. She watched how each waiter in the various coffee clubs would cool the coffee. He would lift a tumbler high up. Then he would pour its contents into another tumbler held in the other hand. She observed how the people, chopping up onion, would turn their eyes elsewhere to avoid irritation in their eyes.

Q18. Why was Zitkala-Sa in tears on the first day in the land of apples? [All India 2014]

Ans. On the first day in the land of apples, Zitkala-sa was in tears. The main reason of tears was that her hair was mercilessly cut. She had heard from her mother that only unskilled warriors, who were captured, had their hair shingled by the enemy. That is why she shook her head in resistance.

Q19. Which fruit or sweet delicacies did she observe in the bazaar?

Ans. There would be mango, cucumber, sugar-cane, sweet potato, palm-shoots, gram, palm-syrup, palm-fruit, guavas and jack-fruit, according to the season. She would see people selling sweet and savoury fried snacks, payasam, halva, boiled tamarind seeds and iced lollies each day.

Q20. How were the threshing proceedings going on in the corner of the street?

Ans. There was a threshing floor set up in the corner of the street. People were hard at work. They were driving cattle in pairs, round and round, to tread out the grain from the straw. The animals were muzzled so that they couldn't eat the straw. Bama stood there watching for fun. The landlord was watching the proceedings. He was seated on a piece of sacking spread over a stone ledge.

Q21. What, do you think, made Bama want to double up and shriek with laughter?

Ans. Bama saw an elder of their street coming along from the direction of the bazaar. He was a big man. He was carrying a small packet, holding it out by its string. The manner in which he was walking along made Bama want to double up. She wanted to shriek with laughter at the funny sight.

Q22. How did the elder approach the landlord and offer him the packet?

Ans. The elder went straight up to the landlord. Then he bowed low and extended the packet towards him. He cupped the hand that held the string with his other hand. The landlord opened the parcel and began to eat the vadais.

Q23. What explanation did Bama's elder brother Annan give her about the elder's "funny" behaviour?

Ans. Annan told Bama that the man was not being funny when he carried the package by the string for his landlord. The upper caste people believed that others must not touch them. If they did, they would be polluted. That was the reason why he (the elder man) had to carry the package by its string.

Q24. How did Bama react on learning about untouchability?

Ans. Bama became sad on listening how the upper caste people behaved towards low caste persons like them. She felt provoked and angry. She wanted to touch those vadais herself. She wondered why their elders should run errands for the miserly rich upper caste landlords and hand them over things reverently, bowing and shrinking all the while.

Q25. 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 as soon as Annan told his name. The man immediately asked the name of the street he lived in. The purpose was to identify his caste from the name of the street.

Q26. 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 or dignity or respect. They were deprived of all that. Thus, the caste system was discriminatory. But, if they studied and made progress, they could throw away those indignities.

Q27. What advice did Annan offer Bama? What was the result?

Ans. Annan advised Bama to study with care and learn all that she could. If she was always ahead in her lessons, people would come to her of their own accord and attach themselves to her. Bama followed her brother's advice and studied hard. She stood first in her class, and because of that, many people became her friends.

LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

Q1. Why did Zitkala-Sa feel oppressed in new establishment?

Ans. Since the day, the author was taken away from her mother, she had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at her. She had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. Her blanket had been removed from her shoulders. She felt that she was immodestly dressed. She was so shocked and oppressed that she felt like sinking to the floor. Later, her soft moccasins were taken away. These were the traditional footwear of the local Indian American. They were replaced by squeaking shoes. She saw other Indian girls in stiff shoes and tightly sticking dresses. The small girls wore sleeved aprons and shingled hair. The worst indignity she suffered was the cutting of her long hair. The coward's shingled hair made her moan with anguish. She felt she was not a human being but one of the little animals driven by a herder. The systematic erosion of their culture and disrespect to women was quite oppressive.

Q2. "But this eating by formula was not the hardest trial in that first day", says Zitkala-Sa. What do you understand by 'eating by formula' and how did she find it a hard trial?

Ans. There was a fixed procedure laid down for breakfast. Zitkala-Sa calls it 'eating by formula'. The ringing of a large bell summoned the inmates to the dining room. Boys and girls entered the dining room in lines from separate doors. Then a small bell was tapped. Each of the pupil drew a chair from under the table. The writer also did so. She supposed this act meant they were to be seated. So she slipped into the chair. She found others standing. Just when she began to rise, looking shyly, the second bell sounded and all sat down. Then she heard a man's voice at one end of the hall. She looked around to see him. But all the others hung their heads over their plates. She found the paleface woman watching her. When the man ceased his mutterings, a third bell was tapped. Everyone picked up his knife and fork and began eating. She began to cry. She was so afraid that she could not do anything further. Her discomfiture was caused by her unfamiliarity with the procedure. However, she found it a difficult experience—a sort of trial.

Q3. "I will not submit! I will struggle first!" says Zitkala-Sa. What was she going to resist and why? What efforts did she make and what was the outcome?

Ans. Zitkala-Sa had long, heavy hair. Her Mend Judewin had overheard the paleface woman talk that their hair was to be shingled. Zitkala-Sa decided to resist it. Among their people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards. Unskilled warriors captured by the enemy also got their hair shingled. Cutting a woman's long hair was thus against their tradition and culture.

She tried to avoid it. She crept up the stairs quietly and hid herself under the bed in a room with dark green curtains. She had crawled to the corner farthest from the door and lay close in the darkest corner. Soon she heard her name shouted in the hall. Then the steps were quickened and voices became excited. Women and girls entered the room. They opened closet doors and peeped behind large trunks. Someone threw up the curtains. The room was filled with sudden light. Someone stooped, looked under the bed and saw her there. She was dragged out though she resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. She was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair. She cried aloud and kept shaking her head till the scissors cut her long hair.

Q4. What diversions in the streets, shops and the bazaar attracted Bama, tethered her legs and stopped her from going home?

Ans. There were many novelties and oddities that attracted Bama. These included the performing monkey, the snakecharmer's snake, the narikkuravan huntergypsy's wild lemur in cages, the cyclist who had been pedalling for three days, the spinning wheels, the Maariyaata temple and its huge bell. She also noticed the pongal offerings being cooked in front of the temple. There was a dried fish stall near the statue of Gandhiji. There was a sweet stall and a stall selling Med snacks. There were many shops next to each other.

The public meetings of political parties, street plays, puppet shows, and stunts were other entertainments. She would watch how the waiters would pour coffee from a tumbler held high to another low down to cool it. Then she saw people who chopped onion kept their eyes to another side to avoid irritation. She admired the various fruits that came to the bazaar according to the season. She also noticed people selling sweet and savoury fried snacks. These were the usual scenes and sights that tethered her legs and stopped her from going home.

Q5. How did Bama react to the threshing proceedings in a corner of their street and the spectacle of a big man carrying a packet by its string ?

Ans. Bama watched the threshing floor, people working with cattle to tread out the grain and the muzzled animals with a child's curiosity. She stood there watching the fun. The landlord was also watching the proceedings. He was seated on a piece of sacking spread over a ledge.

Then she saw a big man, an elder of her street, coming along from the direction of the market. The manner in which he was walking along made her want to double up. She wanted to shriek with laughter at the sight of such a big man carrying a small packet by its string, without touching. She thought that the package might come undone and its contents fall out. ' Then the elder went straight upto the landlord, bowed low and extended the packet towards him. He cupped the hand that held the string with his other hand. The landlord opened the parcel and began to eat the vadais. She found the whole scene quite funny and amusing. She related it to her brother in all its comic details.

Q6. How did Bama's brother explain the elder's behaviour to her? What was her immediate reaction?

Ans. Bama's elder brother, Annan, told her that the big man was not being funny when he carried the package by the string for his landlord. The upper caste people believed that others must not touch them. If they did so, they (people belonging to upper caste) would be polluted. That was why he did not touch the contents but held the packet by its string. Bama didn't want to laugh any more now. She felt terribly sad. She could not understand how the vadai, first wrapped in a banana leaf and then parcelled in a paper, would become disgusting if one of them held that package in his hands. She felt so provoked and angry that she wanted to touch those vadais herself straightaway. She wondered why they had to fetch and carry for these people. She was infuriated that an important elder of theirs went meekly to the shops to fetch snacks and then handed them over reverently, bowing and shrinking to the fellow who sat there and stuffed them in his mouth. She felt that they too were human beings. Their people should not do petty jobs for the miserly rich upper castes. They should work in their fields, take home their wages and leave it at that.

Q7. What indignities did the caste system heap on the lower castes? How could they end the discrimination? How did Bama react to her brother's advice?

Ans. According to Annan, the caste system was highly discriminatory. It put the lower castes in a very disadvantageous position. They were never given any honour, dignity or respect. They were deprived of all that. The only way to end this social discrimination was self-improvement. They should study hard and make progress. Then they could throw away all those indignities.

He advised Bama to study with care and learn all that she could. If she was always ahead in her lessons, people would come to her of their own accord and attach themselves to her. The words "work hard and learn" became the guiding principles of Bama's life. She studied hard with all her breath and being. She was almost in a frenzy. She stood first in her class and, because of that, many people became her friends. This was the beginning of her illustrious career.

Q8. What oppression and discrimination did Zitkala-Sa and Bama experience during their childhood? How did they respond to their respective situations?

Ans. Zitkala-Sa was a victim of social and cultural oppression by the victors who had overpowered them by their sheer strength. They were prejudiced towards Native American culture and women.

They adopted force and oppression to compel the natives to shed their age-old traditions and customs. The cutting of the long hair of Zitkala-Sa is a symbol of their oppression. She opposed this prejudice and oppression by rebelling against it. She protested with all her strength.

Bama was a victim of caste system. She had seen, felt and experienced the evils of untouchability when she was studying in the third standard. She felt humiliated by what it was. She struggled hard against this social discrimination. She studied hard and topped in her class. Many students became her friends.

Thus, both Zitkala-Sa and Bama fought the existing circumstances with courage and determination and ended the prejudice, discrimination and oppression.