Class: XII	Department: ENGLISH	2026-27
VISTAS	Topic: MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD ZITKALA SA AND BHAMA	

Summary

I. Zitkala-Sa: The Cutting of My Long Hair

Zitkala-Sa, a Native American girl born in 1876, narrates her first experience at a boarding school far from her home. The school, part of the government's attempt to "civilize" Native Americans, imposed strict rules and suppressed indigenous culture.

Her first day is terrifying. Snow covers the ground, the bell rings loudly, and the hall is filled with harsh noises. She notices other girls, but the environment feels alien and frightening. Zitkala-Sa is particularly disturbed when she learns that the school plans to cut her long hair. Among her people, long hair symbolizes strength and identity, and only cowards or captives had shingled hair.

Despite her fear, she initially tries to resist and hide. She crawls under a bed to avoid the paleface women who enforce the rules. But eventually, she is found, tied to a chair, and her long braid is cut off. The act leaves her feeling humiliated and powerless, marking the beginning of her struggle to retain her identity in a place designed to erase it.

This episode highlights the clash between personal identity and enforced conformity. Zitkala-Sa's early memories show her courage, her pain at losing her cultural identity, and the injustices faced by Native American children in boarding schools.

II. Bama: We Too Are Human Beings

Bama, a Tamil Dalit woman, recounts her childhood in a marginalized community where caste discrimination was a harsh reality. Unlike Zitkala-Sa, Bama's experiences occur within her own society, but the prejudice is no less intense.

One day, Bama observes an elder of her street carrying a parcel of vadais (snacks) for an upper-caste landlord. Even though the food is safely wrapped, the elder must hold it at a distance and bow while handing it over. Bama is struck by the injustice and absurdity of this

behaviour. She realizes that people are humiliated and forced to act submissively because of caste-based discrimination.

Her elder brother, Annan, emphasizes the importance of education to overcome such indignities. He encourages her to study hard and excel in school so that she earns respect and dignity despite societal prejudice. Inspired by his words, Bama dedicates herself to learning, eventually standing first in her class. Through determination and education, she begins to break free from the limitations imposed by caste.

This story illustrates resilience and the pursuit of equality. Bama's *memories of childhood* reflect how awareness, observation, and guidance from family members can empower children to challenge social injustice.

III. Conclusion

Memories of Childhood presents powerful autobiographical episodes that highlight courage, resilience, and the struggle against social injustice. Zitkala-Sa and Bama show that even as children, individuals can recognize unfairness, resist oppression, and grow stronger through education, awareness, and determination. Their stories encourage young readers to understand history, appreciate cultural identity, and value equality.

- **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

COMPETENCY BASED QUESTIONS

1. **"** People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's! In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do; for now, I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder…"

a. The reason why people stare was possibly because of…..
b. The incident the writer is referring to was…..
c. She was against cutting her long hair as…
   i. She liked to keep her hair long
   ii. Only cowards wore shingled hair in her culture
   iii. Her mother had instructed her not to
   iv. She didn't like the rules of the school.
d. A synonym for 'anguish' would be ……
e. The literary device used in the last line is…
   i. Simile
   ii. Metaphor
   iii. Transferred epithet
   iv. Hyperbole

2. **Choose the correct option with reference to the two statements given below.**

- **Statement 1: The author had been subjected to humiliation when she was separated from her mother.**
- **Statement 2: Nobody was able to ease her distress and empathize with her.**

a. Statement 1 is true but Statement 2 is false.
b. Statement 1 is false but Statement 2 is true.
c. Both Statement 1 and Statement cannot be inferred from the passage
d. Both Statement 1 and Statement 2 can be inferred from the passage**.**
Ans. Option (d)

3. **Read the following extracts and answer the questions given:**

I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's! In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do; for now, I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder.

I. Complete the following suitably.

Zitkala-Sa's description of her experience at the boarding school conveys a sense of abandonment through her portrayal of _____ .

II. List any one emotion that Zitkala-Sa experiences as her hair is being cut.

III. Select the suitable option to complete the following.
The metaphor of being 'tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet' contribute to the reader's understanding of Zitkala-Sa's feelings of being _____ .

A. forced to interact with others
B. manipulated and controlled
C. preached at and insulted
D. made to exist like toy animals

IV. In what ways does the imagery of her 'long hair shingled like a coward's' symbolize the erasure of Zitkala's cultural heritage and the imposition of Western norms?

Ans. I. …isolation and lack of support/absence of any solace or reassurance from others / being an animal to a herder thereby suggesting a loss of identity.
II. anguish/ sense of loss/ turmoil

III. B. manipulated and controlled

IV. The imagery symbolises the forced assimilation and suppression of Indigenous culture, portraying the cutting of her hair as an act of cultural violence and the imposition of Western ideals of appearance and behaviour.

4. **Zitkala-Sa mentions the indignities she had to suffer as a child. How do such indignities break the morale of a child?**

Ans. Indignities inflicted upon a child, like the forced haircut Zitkala-Sa experienced, erode their self-esteem and cultural identity. Such actions make children feel powerless and ashamed, leading to a loss of confidence and morale as they grapple with the trauma and injustice imposed upon them.

5. **Read the given extract and answer the questions given.**

The man ceased his mutterings, and then a third bell was tapped. Everyone picked up his knife and fork and began eating. I began crying instead, for by this time I was afraid to venture anything more. But this eating by formula was not the hardest trial in that first day. Late in the morning, my friend Judewin gave me a terrible warning. Judewin knew a few words of English; and she had overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting our long, heavy hair. Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!

i. Which of these can be inferred from the extract?
a. The speaker did not understand or speak English.
b. The speaker did not think highly of her own culture.
c. The speaker did not have any living family members.
d. The speaker did not know what a knife or fork was used for.
Ans. Option (a)
ii. How was the speaker feeling by the time the third bell rang? Why did she feel this way?
Ans.

- The speaker started crying because she felt confused and out of place.
- She couldn't understand the rituals and was probably feeling embarrassed.
- She was too scared to act because she was not able to do anything correctly.

iii. Complete the given sentence appropriately. The speaker compares her experience of eating to that of a trial because _____.
Ans.

- she was being watched and judged throughout
- it felt like a test of her survival
- it was as gruelling as a trial in court might have been

iv. Based on the extract, what would it mean to the speaker if her long hair was cut?
Ans.

- It would mean a loss of her culture/cultural identity
- It would bring her shame
- It would cut her roots to her culture and traditions

Short Answer Type Questions

Question 1.
When did Bama first come to know of the social discrimination faced by the people of her community?
Bama was in the third standard and she used to walk from her school to her home. One day she saw an elderly man carrying a small packet that contained some eatables. He held the packet by its strings without touching it and extended it to the landlord who opened it and began to eat. She thought it was something funny but Annan, her elder brother, told her that the man was not being funny and he was in fact from a low caste because of which he couldn’t touch the food packet.

Question 2.
How did Zitkala-Sa try to prevent the shingling of her hair?
Zitkala-Sa disappeared unnoticed and entered a large room with three beds. She crawled under the beds and cuddled herself in a dark comer. She could not hide there for long and was

soon dragged out. She resisted by kicking and scratching wildly but then she was tied fast in a chair and her long and heavy hair was shingled.

Question 3.
Why did the landlord's man ask Bama's brother, on which street he lived? What was the significance? (Delhi 2010)
Answer:
The landlord's man asked Bama's brother on which street he lived in order to find out his caste. During those times, when untouchability was prevalent, each caste lived in a particular street and by enquiring about the street where one lived, helped to determine his caste.

Question 4.
Why was Zitkala-Sa terrified when Judewin told her that her hair would be cut short? (All India 2016)
Answer:
Zitkala-Sa hid herself because she had got to know that the authorities wanted to cut her long hair. In her community hair of mourners, prisoners of war and cowards were cut and therefore she made a vain attempt to prevent her hair from being shingled by hiding herself.

Question 5.
What did Zitkala-Sa feel when her long hair was cut? (Delhi 2017)
Answer:
Zitkala-Sa felt rather anguished and indignant when her long hair was cut. She lost her spirit and felt as helpless as a puppet. She got the feeling of being an animal driven by a herder and desperately looked for some comfort. With her hair being shingled like a coward's, she moaned in anguish. She also felt she had lost her distinct cultural recognition and identity.

Question 6.
What advice did Annan offer Bama? (All India 2019)
Answer:
Annan loves his sister Bama dearly and acts as her true guide and philosopher. He told her that being Dalits they would never be given any dignity or respect. He advised her to study and make progress to throw away these indignities. He advises to his sister about the indigenous method of outdoing the upper class by winning laurels in their examinations and thus earning their admiration.

Question 7.
"I felt like sinking to the floor," says Zitakala-Sa. When did she feel so and why? (All India 2019)
Answer:
Zitkala-Sa felt like sinking to the floor when the blanket she had donned over her immodest-looking dress was stripped from her shoulders. She felt uncomfortable in her tight-fitting clothes and because she was ill at ease.

Question 8.
What did Judewin tell Zitkala-Sa? How did she react to it?
Answer:
Judewin, who knew a few words of English, told Zitkala-Sa that she had overheard the pale-

faced woman saying that Zitkala-Sa's long hair would be cut. Judewin advises her to submit and resign to her fate but Zitkala-Sa disagrees with her and decides to resist and stand-up against it.

Question 9.
How long would it take Bama to walk home from her school and why?
Answer:
It took Bama half an hour to one hour to walk home from her school, although it was possible to cover the distance in ten minutes. This was because on the way many attractions slowed her down. These included fun, games, entertaining novelties and oddities in the streets, the shops and the bazaar.

Question 10.
When did Bama first come to know of the social discrimination faced by the people of her community?
Answer:
Bama was in the third standard and she used to walk from her school to her home. One day she saw an elderly man carrying a small packet that contained some eatables. He held the packet by its strings without touching it and extended it to the landlord who opened it and began to eat. She thought it was something funny but Annan, her elder brother, told her that the man was not being funny and he was in fact from a low caste because of which he couldn't touch the food packet.

Question 11.
How could Bama rise above indignities?
Answer:
Bama's brother advised her to concentrate on her studies and outshine everybody in the examinations in order to rise above indignities. So Bama followed her brother's advice religiously and earned the respect of members of the higher class by standing first in her class.

Question 12.
What made Bama return home invariably late from school? Answer:
Bama took thirty minutes to an hour to reach home as she would watch all the fun and games that were taking place on the road. She would also stop and look at the shops and the bazaars and even see the performance of the snake charmers and the monkeys.

Question 13.
What were the articles in the stalls and shops that fascinated Bama on her way back from school? (All India 2013)
Answer:
On her way back from school Bama would be extremely fascinated by various articles available in the stalls and shops. These included the dried fish stall, the stall selling fried snacks, the stall of the hunter gypsy selling needles, clay beads and instruments for cleaning ears. Every day she would see people selling payasam, halwa, boiled tamarind seeds, iced lollies, etc.

Question 14.
What sort of shows or entertainment attracted Bama?
Answer:
Bama was attracted by the shows that people from various political parties would put up on a stage. These included a street play, or a puppet show, or a “no magic, no miracle” stunt performance. All these happened from time to time.

Question 15.
Which activities of the people would Bama watch keenly in the bazaar?
Answer:
Bama watched the way each waiter would cool the coffee in the coffee clubs in the bazaar. She would watch the way some people sat in front of the shops chopping up onion, their eyes turned elsewhere so that they would not smart. At times she would watch people from various political parties put up a street play or a puppet show.

Question 16.
Which words of her brother made a deep impression on Bama?
Answer:
Bama’s brother told her that because they were born into a lower community, they were never given any honour, dignity or respect. But if they studied and made progress they could get rid of these indignities. His words made a deep impression on Bama.

Question 17.
Why was Zitkala-Sa in tears on the first day in the land of apples? (All India 2014)
Answer:
Zitkala-Sa was in tears on the first day in the land of apples because she was in a new environment. She received a cultural shock because of the unknown language. The strict regime of eating by formula, squeaking shoes and the news about cutting her hair were also unknown to her.

Question 18.
What is common between Zitkala-Sa and Bama?
Answer:
Zitkala-Sa and Bama have a lot in common as far as their suffering is concerned. They both belonged to marginalised communities. Zitkala-Sa was a victim of cultural invasion where her own cultural identity was being threatened and Bama was a victim of untouchability that is a form of struggle for class.

Question 19.
Why did Zitkala-Sa resist the shingling of her hair?
Answer:
Zitkala-Sa hid herself because she had got to know that the authorities wanted to cut her long hair. In her community hair of mourners, prisoners of war and cowards were cut and therefore she made a vain attempt to prevent her hair from being shingled by hiding herself.

Question 20.
Why did Bama reach home late after school?
Answer:

It took Bama half an hour to one hour to walk home from her school, although it was possible to cover the distance in ten minutes. This was because on the way many attractions slowed her down. These included fun games, entertaining novelties and oddities in the streets, the shops and the bazaar.

Question 21.
At the dining table why did Zitkala-Sa begin to cry when others started eating? (All India 2016)
Answer:
As Zitkala-sa glanced at the long chain of tables, she caught the eyes of a pale face woman upon her. She wondered why she was being so keenly watched by the strange woman. She was not used to eating by formula. When the third bell tapped and the others started eating, she felt out of place and began crying instead.

Question 22.
How did Zitkala-Sa's first day in the land of apples begin? (All India 2022)
Answer:
Zitkala-Sa's first day in the land of apples was a bitter-cold one. The snow covered the ground and the trees were bare. A large bell rang for breakfast, its loud metallic sound crashing into their sensitive ears. The annoying clatter of shoes and the constant clash of harsh noises gave her no peace.

Question 23.
According to Zitkala-Sa what does 'eating by formula' mean?
Answer:
According to Zitkala-Sa 'eating by formula' meant following an eating-decorum in the dining room. At the sound of the first bell the pupils drew a chair from under the table. All were seated when the second bell was sounded and when the third bell was tapped everyone started eating with forks and knives.

Question 24.
Why did Zitkala-Sa hide herself?
Zitkala-Sa hid herself because she had got to know that the authorities wanted to cut her long hair. In her community hair of mourners, prisoners of war and cowards were cut and therefore she made a vain attempt to prevent her hair from being shingled by hiding herself.

Question 25.
Why was Bama always late while returning from school? (Comptt. Delhi 2022)
Answer:
It took Bama half an hour to one hour to walk home from her school, although it was possible to cover the distance in ten minutes. This was because on the way many attractions slowed her down. These included fun games, entertaining novelties and oddities in the streets, the shops and the bazaar.

Question 26.
What did Bama's brother want her to do? Why? (Comptt. All India 2021)
Answer:
Annan loves his sister Bama dearly and acts as her true guide and philosopher. He told her

that being Dalits they would never be given any dignity or respect. He advised her to study and make progress to throw away these indignities. He advises his sister about the indigenous method of outdoing the upper class by winning laurels in their examinations and thus earning their admiration.

Long Answer Type Questions (5 Marks)

Question 27.
What kind of discrimination did Bama and Zitkala experience? How did they respond to their respective situations? (Delhi 2019)
Answer:
Bama and Zitkala belonged to marginalised communities. Zitkala was an American Indian woman who was ill-treated by the whites who adopted force and oppression to compel the natives to shed their age- old customs and traditions. The worst indignity she suffered was the cutting of her long hair. Her long and beautiful hair were cut after she was dragged out. She cried and resisted by kicking and scratching wildly as she was tied fast in a chair but still she did not submit. No one came to help her or to console her. Bama, who belonged to a Dalit community was a victim of the caste system. She was upset by the inhuman attitude of the people belonging to the 'higher' caste towards the 'lower' caste. She had experienced the evils of untouchability when she was studying in the third standard.

Both these women fought and struggled against exploitation and oppression. Zitkala does not submit but struggles when her hair is being shingled. She fights till she is overpowered. Bama fights against the evils of untouchability in her own way. She works hard and stands first in her class. People then come to her of their own accord.

Question 28.
What are the similarities in the lives of Bama and Zitkala though they belong to different cultures? (All India 2019)
Answer:
Bama and Zitkala belonged to marginalised communities. Zitkala was an American Indian woman who was ill-treated by the whites who adopted force and oppression to compel the natives to shed their age- old customs and traditions. The worst indignity she suffered was the cutting of her long hair. Her long and beautiful hair were cut after she was dragged out. She cried and resisted by kicking and scratching wildly as she was tied fast in a chair but still she did not submit. No one came to help her or to console her. Bama, who belonged to a Dalit community was a victim of the caste system. She was upset by the inhuman attitude of the people belonging to the 'higher' caste towards the 'lower' caste. She had experienced the evils of untouchability when she was studying in the third standard.

Both these women fought and struggled against exploitation and oppression. Zitkala does not submit but struggles when her hair is being shingled. She fights till she is overpowered. Bama fights against the evils of untouchability in her own way. She works hard and stands first in her class. People then come to her of their own accord. The similarity between their lives is the struggle and fight against racial and social discrimination. They did not accept this exploitation and injustice meekly but fought against it.

Question 29.
Describe how Zitkala-Sa tried in vain to save her hair from being cut. Why did she want to save her hair? (All India 2019)
Answer:
Zitkala-Sa's friend Judewin warned her that her hair was going to be cut. Judewin knew a few English words and had overheard the 'paleface woman' talking about cutting the native Indian girl's long hair. This news shocked Zitkala. Her friend told her to accept her fate but she was not ready to submit and decided to fight against this oppression. She disappeared unnoticed and went into a room where she crawled and hid under a bed, cuddling herself in a dark comer. But she was caught and dragged out. She then resisted by kicking and scratching wildly as she was carried down and tied fast to a chair. As they gnawed at her long hair, she kept shaking her head. No one came to her aid. Zitkala was desperate to save her hair because among her people short hair was kept by mourners and shingled hair was a sign of cowardice. So she did not want her long hair to be cut.

Question 30.
What activities did Bama witness on her way back home from school? (Comptt. All India 2021)
Answer:
On her way back home from school Bama would take thirty minutes to cover a ten minute distance. This was because she would witness various activities on her way back home. The performing monkey, the snake charmer, the cyclist who had not got off his bike for three days. She also watched the Pongal offerings being cooked in front of the Maariyaata temple. At times people from various political parties would arrive, put up a stage and harangue the public through their mikes. She would watch a street play, or a puppet show or a magic stunt performance. All these would happen from time to time. But almost certainly there would be some entertainment or other going on, that would delay Bama.

Question 31.-
How did the scene she saw in the market place change Bama's life? (Comptt. Delhi 2021)
Answer:
Bama usually reaches home late from school. She walks along leisurely watching and enjoying the sights on her way home. One day on her way back, she saw the harvest being threshed. The landlord stood watching the work being done. It was then that Bama saw one of the elders coming down the street holding a packet by a string. The packet contained vadais for the landlord. At first Bama thought that the elder man was being funny. But later her brother told her that the elder man was of a low caste so he was not allowed to touch the vadais brought for the landlord. This scene infuriated Bama and brought about a 'change in her life wherein she decided to study well, make a position for herself in life and rebel against caste inequalities.

Question 32.
What were Zitkala-Sa's experiences on her first day in the land of apples? (Comptt. All India 2019)
Answer:
The first day in the land of apples was bitterly cold and as the bell rang for breakfast, there was an annoying clatter of shoes which gave Zitkala-Sa no peace. Though her spirit tore itself in struggling for its freedom, it was of no use. Zitkala-Sa was placed in a line with the Indian girls and marched into the dining room. All the girls were rather immodestly dressed in

tightly fitting clothes. As Zitkala-Sa sat down she observed that she was being keenly watched by a strange pale-faced woman. Later her friend Judewin gave her a terrible warning that this pale-faced woman was talking about cutting their long, heavy hair. Zitkala-Sa crept into a room and crawled under a bed and huddled herself in the dark corner. But women and girls entered the room and dragged her out. She resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of her resistance she was carried downstairs, tied fast in a chair and her long hair was shingled.

Question 33.
Untouchability is not only a crime, it is inhuman too. Why and how did Bama decide to fight against it?
Answer:
There is no denying the fact that untouchability is not only a crime but it is also inhuman. Bama, who belonged to a marginalised community was a victim of the caste system. As a little girl, studying in the third class, she had seen, felt and been humiliated by its effect. So the spark of hostility towards this social evil had been ignited in her heart from a very early age. Upset over the inhuman attitude of the people of the so-called higher caste towards the lower caste, she decided to fight against this evil in her own way. Bama's brother advised her to study and make progress to throw away indignities. She took the advice of her elder brother seriously, studied diligently and stood first in her class thereby compelling people to respect and befriend her.

Question 34.
In India, the so-called lower castes have been treated cruelly for a long time. Who advised Bama to fight against this prejudice, when and how?
There is no denying the fact that untouchability is not only a crime but it is also inhuman. Bama, who belonged to a marginalised community was a victim of the caste system. As a little girl, studying in the third class, she had seen, felt and been humiliated by its effect. So the spark of hostility towards this social evil had been ignited in her heart from a very early age. Upset over the inhuman attitude of the people of the so-called higher caste towards the lower caste, she decided to fight against this evil in her own way. Bama's brother advised her to study and make progress to throw away indignities. She took the advice of her elder brother seriously, studied diligently and stood first in her class thereby compelling people to respect and befriend her.

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