

Reading With Insight

Que. 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. Both of the autobiographical chapters, which are based on two distinct cultures, depict the lives of two women from underprivileged areas who reflect on their formative years and consider how they interact with popular culture. The autobiographical vignettes in "Memories of Childhood" are performed by two ladies, each from a culturally underrepresented area in a different society. The pain and disrespect experienced by both of the ladies from marginalised societies runs through both of the stories like a similar thread. One emphasises the wrongdoing of racial prejudice, while the other discusses the caste system and untouchability in India. A woman who is American Indian provides the first narrative. The author of the second report is a Tamil Dalit writer from today. The women in question are related to two distinct civilizations. Both ladies face pain and sorrow in their early years. Native Americans in America are not treated with respect or importance. They must adhere to their customs, whims, and trades. The unfortunate Indian woman was taken out and confined to a chair while having her long, dark hair shingled. Bama, on the other hand, became acutely aware of the dehumanising effects of having been raised in a community of outcasts and consequently focused all of her strength on combating the prejudice inherent in such a system. They both battle injustice and bigotry and demonstrate against it.

Que. 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. Yes, indeed, injustice in any form can't escape being noticed even by children. The world is full of inequality. While the adults have grown used to this, the innocence of childhood does not understand hate and prejudice. Innocent-looking children have their knowledge of the world and its people. In the case of the two extracts given in Memories of Childhood, this is evident.

Zitkala-Sa understood as soon as she entered the school run by the whites that they meant to transform her into a distinct person than what she had been before. In the story 'The Cutting of my Long Hair' the author describes the emotional torture she has to go through because she is discriminated against based on her race. She wants to have long and heavy hair, it is the culture of a society. Only cowards have shingled hair among them. She struggles and says she is defeated.

In the other extract "We too are human beings", the writer addresses how she and her community is neglected by society under the appearance of untouchability. Bama has a first-hand experience of untouchability in India. The people of high castes don't think of the low castes even as human beings. She had seen an elder conquered by a landlord on a street and she observed how even the elders in her society are disrespected and despised.

Que. 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. While Bama was subjected to untouchability and caste discrimination, Zitkala-Sa was a victim of racial prejudice. Zitkala-Sa was packed off to a European missionary school where, being a local tribal, she was looked down upon. Bama and Zitkala-Sa highlight the humiliation and exploitation of the defeated people. They write about women from marginalized societies. Zitkala-Sa belongs to the community of native Americans and she is expelled from her community and separated from its culture. She feels robbed of her name and dignity. The poor girl struggles till she is defeated.

On the other hand, Bama, who saw the violation of untouchability, decided to blur the difference of castes with the knowledge of education. The people who belong to a low caste have to fight against the higher caste. She is motivated by the terms of her elder sibling, now works hard, and stands first in the class. Both Zitkala-Sa and Bama fought with courage against the humiliation they were subjected to.

