

## **I. The Cutting of My Long Hair**

### **Summary**

This extract is a painful revelation of a particular period of the life which the writer had to suffer during her hostel days. It was the first day of her boarding school situated in the land of apples. The children were given the task of apple picking in the bitter and biting cold. They were taken to the breakfast hall and the girl was feeling stressed. She did not know the table manners. She was being watched very carefully by a strange pale-faced woman. The girl felt very fearful and insulted.

Her friend who could understand some English, told her that the pale strange woman intended to cut her long hair. Zitkala-Sa learned from her mother that hair would be shingled only for the unskilled warrior, cowards and mourners. She decided to fight back and got herself hidden in a dim room under the bed. Everybody looked for her and called her name but eventually caught. Her long hair was cut, although she resisted a lot. She spent her rest of the life there like a small animal being a part of a herd, which was driven by a herder.

### **Main Points**

1. Zitkala-sa was a victim of social & cultural oppression by the victors who had overpowered them by their sheer strength. They were prejudiced towards Native American Culture & women.
2. Zitkala-sa was forced to cut her long hair compulsorily.
3. The cutting of the long hair of Zitkala-sa was a symbol of their oppression.

### **Short Answer Type Questions**

#### **Q1. How were the Indian girls dressed?**

**Ans.** The Indian girls were in stiff shoes and closely clinging dresses. The small girls wore sleeved aprons and shingled hair. It was Zitkala-Sa's first day in school. She was not yet in the school dress. She was dressed in the modest dress of her tribe.

#### **Q2. How did Zitkala-Sa compare her own dress with that of the other girls?**

**Ans.** The other girls wore stiff shoes and closely clinging dresses. Zitkala-Sa thought it was immodest to dress like that. She was wearing soft flat shoes and

the loose clothes of her tribe. Even without her blanket on her shoulders, she was feeling very shy.

**Q3. “I felt like sinking to the floor,” says Zitkala-Sa. When did she feel so and why?**

**Ans.** native American girl traditionally wears a blanket on her shoulders. It is considered immodest if a girl is without a blanket on her shoulders. But when Zitkala-Sa was marching in a line to the dining room, her blanket was stripped from her shoulders. In her shame, Zitkala-Sa felt like sinking to the floor.

**Q4. What were the indignities that the new girls were subjected to at Carlisle Indian School?**

**Ans.** The girls were scrutinized thoroughly and supervised by a grey-haired woman. They were made to wear tight fitting immodest clothes and stiff shoes. During breakfast a systematic and regimental discipline was observed. The girls with long hair had to get them shingled and they had to submit to the authorities who were strong, unfeeling and cruel.

**Q5. Who was Judewin? What warning did she give to Zitkala-Sa?**

**Ans.** All the girls were placed in a line before entering the dining room. While the girls entered from one door, the boys came in from the opposite door. Zitkala-Sa watched for the three boys of her tribe who had come in the same group. They were feeling as uncomfortable as Zitkala-Sa was.

**Q6. What did Judewin tell Zitkala-Sa? How did she react to it?**

**Ans.** Judewin who could understand a little English informed the narrator that the strange woman intended to cut their long hair. But the narrator had learnt from her mother that the enemy cut the hair of the unskilled warrior when they are captured and among their people mourners wear short hair and cowards shingled hair. So, she decided to resist. She hid herself under a bed in a dark room.

**Q7. Why was Zitkala-Sa terrified When Judewin told her that her hair would be shingled?**

**Ans.** It was a tradition with Zitkala-Sa's tribe to keep long, heavy hair. Only unskilled warrior who were captured, had their hair shingled by the enemy. It was considered humiliating to have ones hair shingled. Naturally, Zitkala-Sa was terrified when she heard that her hair would be cut short.

**Q8. How did Zitkala-Sa try to prevent the shingling of her hair?**

**Ans.** She crept up the stairs when no one was noticing. She went into a room. The windows were covered with dark green curtains. It made the room very dim. Zitkala-Sa went down on her hands and knees and crawled under a bed. There she lay huddled in the dark corner.

**Q9. How was Zitkala-Sa found from her hiding place?**

**Ans.** Zitkala-Sa heard voices calling her name. She knew they were searching for her. Some women and girls entered her room. Someone threw back the curtains. The room was filled with light. She was found hiding under the bed. She was dragged out.

**Q10. How did Zitkala-Sa feel after her long hair had been shingled?**

**Ans.** Zitkala-Sa was terribly shocked. She was in tears. She moaned for her mother. But no one came to comfort her. No one came to reason with her as her mother used to do. Now she felt herself as one of many little animals driven by a herder.

**Q11. On learning that her long hair would be cut, the author decided to struggle first. What does this tell us about the author?**

**Ans.** The author knows that she could never prevail against the authorities, yet she struggles against the injustice. Her mother had told her that only cowards had their hair shingled and she firmly believed that she was not one. To prove her point as well as raise her voice against the indignity, she struggles.

**Q12. How had Zitkala -Sa been subjected to extreme indignities?**

**Ans.** Since the day she was taken from her mother Zitkala had suffered many indignities. She was stared at and tossed like a wooden puppet. Her long hair was shingled like a coward's. In her pain when she cried for her mother no one came forward to comfort her. She was just like one of animals driven by a herder.

**Long Answer Type Questions**

**Q1. Describe Zitkala-Sa's experience of 'eating by formula' on the first day of her school.**

**Ans.** There were tables and chairs arranged in the dining room. Boys and girls entered the hall from opposite doors. A small bell was tapped. Each of the pupils drew a chair from under the table. Zitkala-Sa, too, pulled her chair and slipped into it. But when she turned her head, all others were still standing. She shyly began to rise but then there was a second bell and all were seated. A man's voice was heard at one end of the hall. Zitkala-Sa looked around to see him. But all others hung their heads over their plates. When the man stopped his mutterings, a third bell was tapped. Everyone picked up their knife and fork and began eating. Zitkala-Sa began crying instead. This 'eating by formula' was too hard a trial for her.

**Q2. What did Zitkala-Sa do when she came to know that they were going to cut her hair?**

**Ans.** Zitkala-Sa crept up the stairs quietly when no one was noticing. There she found a large room with three white beds in it. The windows were covered with dark green curtains. It made the room very dim. Zitkala-Sa went down on her hands and knees. She crawled under the bed that was farthest from the door. There, she lay huddled in the dark corner. Soon, she heard voices calling her name. Women and girls entered the room. Someone threw up the curtains. The room was filled with light. Zitkala-Sa was found under the bed and dragged out. She was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair. She cried aloud, shaking her head all the while. She felt the blades of scissors against her neck. She heard them cut off one of her thick braids. Now she lost her spirit and stopped struggling. When her long hair was shingled, she moaned for her mother. But no one came to comfort her.

## **II. We too are Human Beings**

### **Summary**

Bama was a student of third class. She never heard of the word untouchability during her childhood. Certain small events of her life made her feel that she was born in the marginalized caste. She was a happy peppy girl and once when she was in the third class, while going home she saw her people working hard for their land- lords. In spite of their hard work the landlords treated the workers very humiliatingly. She saw from the direction of the market an elder from their community was coming with a parcel in his hands. The manner he carried the poly bag, the manner he was carrying it with its strings, without touching the Vadas inside the parcel, really made him to be funny. He handed over the parcel to the landlord very sacredly too. She narrated the incident to her brother, taking the incident as humorous and funny. He told that it was not humorous but

humiliating as the elderly person was not supposed to touch the item inside the parcel. On hearing that Bama felt infuriated.

She saw her people bowing, to the upper caste people. She was enraged why her elders work so hard for those people who despised them so much. She wanted her people to stop paying undue respect and reverences to these upper caste people. Her brother told her that if they study hard and make progress in their lives, it would help them in throwing away the indignities. Education is their weapon with which they fight back the society. Bama did the same and got many friends in her life. Education made her as double- sided sword to fight very sharply against the unjustified caste system.

### **Main Points**

1. Bama was a victim of caste system, she had seen, felt & experienced the evils of untouchability.
2. She struggled hard against this social discrimination.
3. She studied hard & topped in her class & many students became her friends.

### **Short Answer Type Questions**

**Q1. Why was the narrator taking an hour or half to reach home instead of ten minute?**

**Ans.** The narrator was taking an hour or half to reach home as she used to watch the roadside fun and games. The entertaining novelties like the performing monkey, snake charmer's display of snake, marathon cycling, dried fish stall by the statue of Gandhi, street play or puppet show used to pull her stand still on her way back home.

**Q2. What was going on at the opposite corner when Bama came to her street one day?**

**Ans.** A threshing floor had been set up there. Some people of Bama's community were hard work. They were driving cattle round and round in pairs. They were treading out the grain from the straw.

**Q3. Why did Bama want to laugh on seeing an elder of her street?**

**Ans.** The elder was carrying a small packet by its string. He was holding it out so as not to touch it. There seemed to be Vadais in the packet because it was stained with oil. Bama wanted to laugh because that way the packet could get undone and the Vadais could fall out.

**Q4. How did Bama come to know about untouchability?**

**Ans.** Bama saw an elder of her community carrying a packet of vadais by its string. The packet was for the landlord. For Bama, it was a funny sight. But her brother told her that they were not supposed to touch the upper caste people. Their touch could pollute them. It was only then that Bama knew of the social discrimination faced by their community.

**Q5. How did Annan explain to Bama that there was nothing funny about the elder carrying the packet by its string?**

**Ans.** Annan told Bama that the landlord and his people were believed to be of upper caste. The Dalits were not supposed to touch them. By their touch, the upper caste people thought they were polluted. That was why the elder had to carry the packet by its string.

**Q6. What advice did Annan offer Bama?**

**Ans.** Annan advised Bama to study hard with care and learn all she could. He said that only by studying and by making progress, could they throw away their indignities.

**Q7. Why did Bama study so hard?**

**Ans.** Bama's brother who was studying at a University told her because they were born in a low caste they are deprived of honour and dignities. He advised her to study and make progress to throw away the indignities. The words of her brother left a deep impression in her mind and she studied hard.

### **Long Answer Type Questions**

**Q1. What was the scene that first amused Bama but then filled her with anger and revolt?**

**Ans.** A threshing floor had been set up at a corner of the street. It was a street where the Dalits lived. Some men of the street were working hard to separate the grain from the straw. The landlord was sitting on a piece of sacking spread over a stone ledge. Bama saw an elder man of the street coming from the side of the bazaar. He was holding out a packet by its string. The packet was stained with oil. It had probably vadais in it. Bama thought it was funny to carry the packet in that manner, because the packet could get undone and the vadais could fall out. But Bama's elder brother explained to her that there was nothing comic about it. The landlord and his people were believed to be of upper caste. The Dalits were not supposed to touch them. It could pollute the upper caste people.

On hearing this, Bama was filled with anger and revolt. She said, “We too are human beings. Our people should never do these humiliating things for them. We should work in their fields, take home our wages, and leave it at that.”

**Q2. What oppression and discrimination did Zitkala-Sa and Bama experience during their childhood? How did they respond to their respective situations?**

**Ans.** Both Zitkala-Sa and Bama had a terrible experience of social oppression and discrimination during their childhood. Bama was filled with revolt when she saw how the elder of their community was humiliated by the village landlord. She said, “We too are human beings. We should never bow low before these fellows.” Zitkala-Sa was also a victim of social discrimination. She belonged to a tribe of native Americans. The white-skinned settlers from Europe looked down upon the local tribes. They treated them like animals. Both Bama and Zitkala-Sa refused to bow to the injustice they are subjected to. Both of them protested in their own way. Zitkala-Sa does not want her hair to be shingled. Among her tribe, shingled hair is considered to be a sign of cowardice. She struggled with all her might when she is tied in a chair. But at last the little one has to give herself up. Bama, on her part, decides to work hard at her studies so that others realise her worth and come to her as friends.

**Q3. What are the similarities in the lives Bama and Zitkala-Sa though they belong to different cultures?**

**Ans.** Both Bama and Zitkala-Sa were the victims of social discrimination. Both of them protested in their own way. Bama belonged to an oppressed community. One day, she saw an elder of her community holding a packet of vadais by its string. This packet was for the landlord. Bama thought it was a funny sight. But Bama’s brother explained to her that the landlord and his people belonged to the upper caste. The touch of one from an oppressed class could pollute them. It filled Bama with anger and revolt. The experience of Zitkala-Sa was also of a similar one. She belonged to a tribe of native Americans. The white-skinned settlers from Europe looked down upon the local tribes. They treated them like animals. Zitkala-Sa did not want her hair to be shingled. Among her tribe, shingled hair was considered to be a sign of cowardice. She struggled with all her might when she was tied in a chair. But at last, the little one had to give herself up. Thus both Bama and Zitkala-Sa protested in their own way.

**Q4. 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.** The first account is that of Zitkala-Sa. She is a native American. She belongs to a tribe of people who were the original inhabitants of America. The white-skinned European settlers had a bitter prejudice against the native Americans. They treated them like herds of animals. The second account is that of Bama who was a Tamil Indian. She belonged to the Dalit community. She was pained to see how the upper caste people treated the Dalits in a humiliating manner. They thought that even the touch of Dalit would pollute them. Thus we see that though Zitkala-Sa and Bama belonged to different cultures, there was much commonality in their sufferings. Both the communities suffered from the racial prejudice of those who considered themselves to be superior to them.

**Q5. 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.** Elders become used to the kind of life they have been living. They stop grumbling or protesting because they take it as their destiny. But children are far more sensitive than elders. They acutely feel whatever they think is wrong or unjust. They may be physically weak but are emotionally quite awake. They feel quite disturbed when they see injustice being done to someone. Thus the seeds of rebellion are sown early in life. And when they grow up, they stand in open rebellion against the oppressor.

**Q6. 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.** Zitkala-Sa was a victim of social discrimination. She belonged to a tribe of native Americans. The white-skinned settlers from Europe looked down upon the local tribes. They treated them like animals. Both Bama and Zitkala-Sa refuse to bow to the injustice they are subjected to. Both of them protest in their own way. Zitkala-Sa does not want her hair to be shingled. Among her tribe, shingled hair is considered to be a sign of cowardice. She struggles with all her might when she is tied in a chair. But at last the little one has to give herself up. Bama, on her part, decides to work hard in her studies so that others realise her worth and come to her as friends.