

Vistas Chapter-8

Memories of Childhood

Two accounts took place in two cultures at different places and in different times but they explore a common universal theme of prejudices and humiliation faced by marginalized communities from mainstream culture and how both brave girls use their talent and education to stand up for their own and community rights. Both use the power of pen to fight oppression.

1. The Cutting of My Long Hair

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. Zitkala SA's first day at school is unpleasant. 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 the breakfast table, she does not understand the rules and makes several mistakes. Eating by formula- at the first bell everyone had to pull a chair. Zitkala sat down and realised that others were still standing. At the second bell everyone had to sit down. Zitkala stood up when the second bell rang. She felt humiliated. Another bell rang and she was too scared to do anything. She burst out crying. She was scared of the pale face woman. She was told about the cutting of her hair by her friend Judewin. In her culture, unskilled warriors who were captured had shingled hair and short hair was worn by mourners. She tried to hide but was dragged, tied to a chair and her long hair was cut off. This cruelty crushed her spirit. She remembered the comfort of her home.

2. We Too Are Human Beings.

The second part is an excerpt from the autobiography 'Karukku' by Bama – a Tamil Dalit. Bama was an innocent child living in a village. She used to walk back home from school and covered ten minutes of walk in half an hour to one hour as she watched all the fun games such as street play, puppet show, snake charmer, performing monkey.

Her innocence was lost when she experienced untouchability very early in life. One day she saw an elder of her community carrying food packet holding it by its strings. She was amused but her brother told her that they belonged to a low caste. So people from upper caste believed that the food packet would be polluted if it was touched by them. Her brother was once asked about the street he lived in to determine the caste he belonged to. He told her to work hard to win honour and dignity. She studied hard and stood first in her class.

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.