

B.A (English)

Shantosh Ryl

Subsidiary

Part - I

Paper - I :- Julius Caesar

### Character of Portia

Portia is one of the most favourite fictitious characters ever be created by William Shakespeare. She is one of the greatest tragic heroines of Shakespeare's plays and occupies a very high position in the realm of Shakespearean dramatist art. She is proud of being the daughter of Cato and the grand daughter of Laska whose courage and firmness she feels, she inherits. She believes her ancestry has banished from her the ordinary frailities of a woman. She is also conscious of the greatness of her husband. She thinks that his constant association has added to the strength of her character.

"So fathered and so husbanded." She is naturally proud of herself."

An ideal woman :- Portia is an ideal of perfect womanhood. Her force of character is essentially emphatic. She is obedient to her husband. She loves him with a sense of sincerity and passion. She is always anxious about the welfare and well-being of her husband. She

shares to serve and serves to share the interests of her husband.

Brutus himself says about Portia :-

'You are my true and honourable wife,  
As dear to me as are thy ruddy drops  
That visit my sad heart.'

Brave, courageous and full of vigour :- Portia is resourceful and full of vigour. She has wisdom and foresight. She is brave, courageous and highly energetic. Many instances from the text of the play reveal these characteristics of hers. Her masculine strength of will speaks when she says, -

"Can I bear that with patience  
And not my husband's secrets?"

A soul-mate of Brutus :- With a lofty sense Portia claims to be an equal partner-in-life with her husband. She tells him she is not there merely to 'keep with him at his meals, comfort his bed and talk to him sometimes.' She asserts - "If it be no more, Portia is Brutus harlot not his wife." She asserts her right to know all that concerns her husband in his private, personal as well as political life. As long as Brutus does not unfold his secrets to her, she does not get peace, and feels awfully restless. She claims to be soul-mate of Brutus. She can not see him suffer in silence. She

Finds that a heavy secret is weighing upon his mind. Without peace she remains till the secret is known to her. Her devotion to her husband is seen when she tells Brutus - "You have some sick offense within your mind, which by the right and virtue of my place I ought to know . . . . ."

Essentially a woman :-

Portia is essentially a woman. There is no denying the fact. There can be no two opinions about it. She bows down to her sen and says:

"How weak a thing the heart of a woman is!"

Quite unable is she to sustain the strain of suspense. She is weighed down with anxiety. It is trying and tiring for her to keep the secrets of her husband in respect of his share in the plan and plot against Caesar. Plainly she tells to confess that she is but a woman trying to do a man's part. Later in a frenzy fit of madness caused by despair and dejection, her womanly heart breaks down and she commits suicide.

Brutus thus relates the cause of her death:

"Impatient of my absence,

And grief, that Young Octavius and Mark Antony  
Have made themselves strong; for with her death  
That tidings came, with this she felt distract,  
And, her attendants absent, swallowed fire."

## Comparison with Calpurnia :-

Portia and Calpurnia are two major female characters in Julius Caesar. Both are the wives of the two great and powerful personalities of Rome - Brutus and Caesar. They are devoted wives and love their husbands sincerely and are ever anxious to see them safe and happy. In spite of it there is much difference in their characters which are as follows -

- (i) Portia is a noble, high souled lady where as Calpurnia is a common place woman.
- (ii) Portia is brave, courageous, and full of vigour while Calpurnia is simply simple, innocent and virtuous.
- (iii) Portia has wisdom, foresight and self-control while Calpurnia is foolish and superstitious.
- (iv) Portia is a philosopher guide and friend to her husband while Calpurnia is a loving wife and merely a toy in her husband's hand.
- (v) Portia tries to struggle against her sex, while Calpurnia is content to be a weaker vessel.
- (vi) Portia, at best, is a tragic figure, where as Calpurnia is a pathetic figure. We admire Portia, while we pity Calpurnia.

Thus Portia is one of the finest woman characters in the portrait gallery of William Shakespeare. She is brave, innocent, philosopher, guide and a loving wife.