

Tender Heart High School Sec-33B, Chandigarh

Class: X

Subject: English Literature 16.12.2024

ACT V: SCENE III

Synopsis of the scene

Cassius sees his men retreating. Brutus' forces, having driven back Octavius' forces advance in order to seek maximum advantage. This leaves Antony's army free to surround Cassius' troops. Cassius sends Titinius to ride towards the soldiers seen in the distance, in order to find out who they are. To make things doubly sure he sends Pindarus to mount the hill and watch Titinius. Pindarus returns and tells Cassius that he had seen Titinius surrounded by soldiers who were shouting with joy. Cassius mistakenly believes that Titinius has been taken prisoner. He arrives at a decision that he must kill himself. He tells Pindarus to keep his oath of obedience and stab him. Pindarus does as ordered. Cassius dies, saying, "Caesar, thou art revenged, Even with the sword that killed thee."

It becomes obvious that Cassius had made a mistake. Titinius had not been captured. He had in fact been hailed by Brutus' troops when he arrived in their midst. He soon returns with Messala to comfort Cassius with the news that Octavius' men have been overthrown by Brutus. The two find Cassius dead. Titinius kills himself with the same sword with which Cassius had committed suicide. Messala goes to report the tragedy to Brutus.

Brutus comes to where Cassius' dead body is lying. He is accompanied by Messala, Young Cato, Strato, Volumnius and Lucilius. Brutus pays a sad farewell to Cassius, and calls him "the last of all the Romans". He then leaves with the others to engage the enemy once again.

Dramatic Importance of the scene

We now realise the tactical blunder committed by Brutus in the previous scene. His premature attack permits Antony to encircle Cassius. It is also easily obvious that Brutus' men do not have their master's upright integrity. They indulge in looting after their victory over Octavius' army. Their looting means that they are not ready to do battle when Cassius is surrounded by Antony's men. This makes Cassius' position very vulnerable because Brutus' tactics would have only worked if there had been complete synchronisation between his and Cassius' armies.

Shakespeare could not possibly have stimulated a battle on the primitive Elizabethan stage. He does the next best thing by letting Pindarus report the action occurring on the surrounding battlefield to Cassius and to the audience.

It is Cassius' mistaken judgement of Pindarus which leads to his suicide. Pindarus reports that Titinius is captured by the enemy. Cassius sends Pindarus because his own eyesight is "thick". On stage Pindarus would climb to the upper level. This would represent a point "higher on the hill

Brutus had been extremely sure of his victory in the previous scene. We quickly learn how illusory his hope has been. Cassius is defeated by Antony but Brutus wins against Octavius. The problem arises when Brutus cannot come to Cassius' help. It is ironic that the upright Brutus' men indulge in looting instead of coming to Cassius' rescue. It is even more ironic that the same Cassius, who had lived his entire life through pragmatic realities, is now duped into believing what a servant's limited intelligence can convey. Shakespeare brings about a huge transformation in both Brutus and Cassius.

In a way he lets us know that most of us can uphold our philosophy only till the going is smooth. We discard our values when we succumb to the pressure of the moment. Shakespeare shows another side of Cassius, in order to dramatically advance his play. Until Caesar was killed, there was sharp dramatic contrast between the unscrupulous Cassius and the upright Brutus.

Once Caesar is killed the conflict is largely between Antony and the conspirators. There is no inconsistency in the presentation of Cassius. He was the hunter in the first half of the play; he becomes the hunted in the second half. Cassius had predicted that he will have to commit suicide, and now when he kills himself he can only sadly remark that Caesar's murderer has become his avenger.

Shakespeare concentrates the two battles of Philippi into one. This leads to a minor error. Titinius had mentioned about the setting sun, but later Brutus talks about another encounter with the enemy at three o'clock in the closing part of the scene. Ferguson talks about the pathos in the deaths of Cassius and Titinius thus: "Brutus, however, hopes to live and triumph. The play approaches its climax as does a symphony. The rhythm quickens momentarily, offering a tentative hope of a return to a happier theme. Then chord after chord leads to the tragic close.