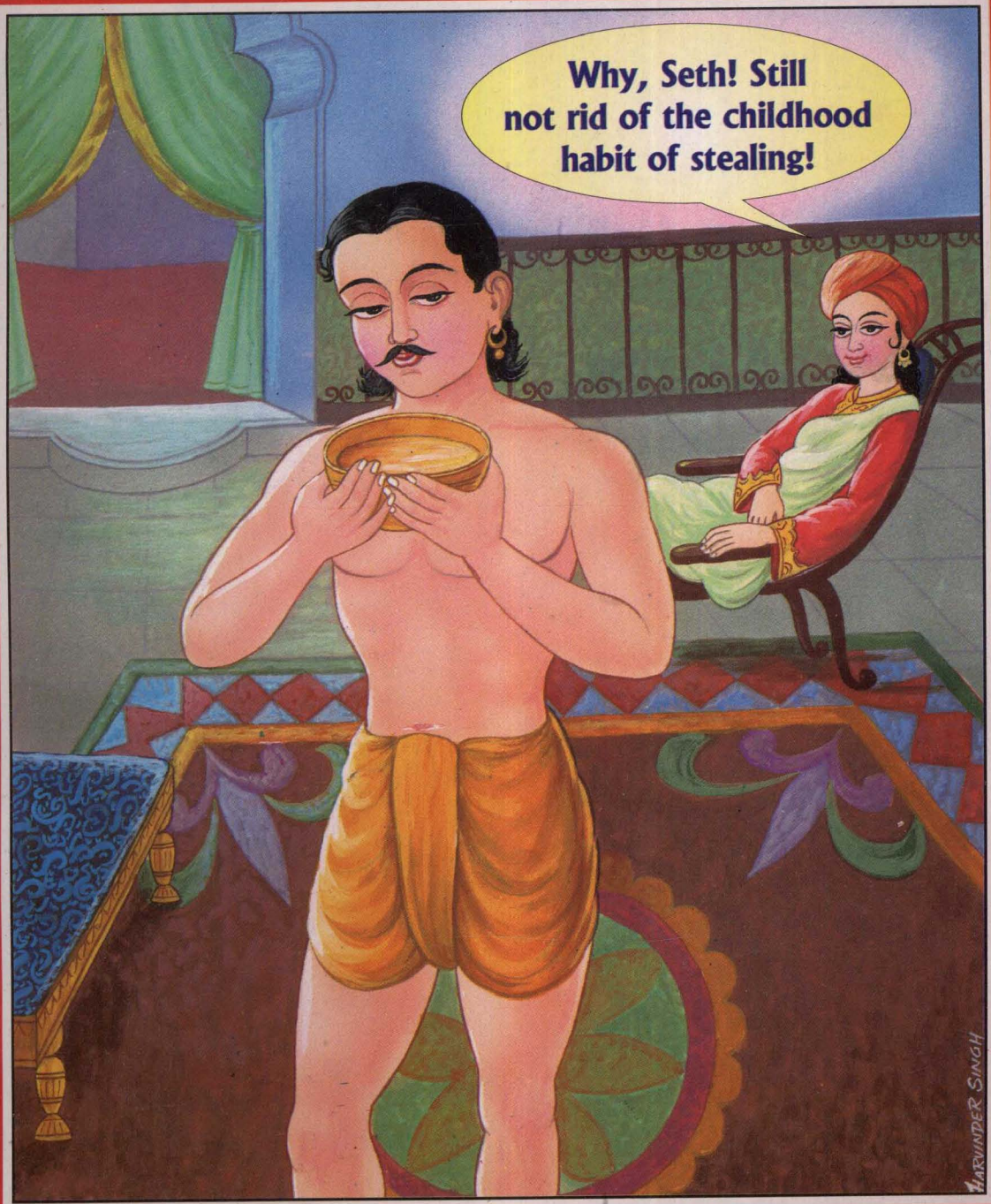


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SUR SUNDARI



HARINDER SINGH

SUR-SUNDARI

There is no remark that in itself is insignificant or important; it is the intention concealed in the remark that is important. Sometimes even an insignificant remark becomes so important in one's life that it changes the direction of life.

In ancient Prakrit narrative literature there is a poetical saga titled 'Sur-sundari Chariyam.' It is the interesting story of Sur-sundari and Amar Kumar. During their schooling, Amar Kumar stealthily takes seven kaudis (a specific type of shell used as lowest denomination of Indian currency in the past) tied at the end of princess Sur-sundari's scarf, buys sweets and gives a treat to fellow students. The princess scolds him for this mischief. Amar Kumar retorts, "I have stolen mere seven Kaudis; not looted all your treasury. Could you purchase a kingdom with seven Kaudis?" Sur-sundari replies, "Of course, I could purchase a kingdom with seven Kaudis." And this insignificant remark turned into an obsession. As luck would have it, the two got married to each other. One day Amar Kumar abandoned helpless Sur-sundari in a jungle with a challenge to possess a kingdom with seven Kaudis. Sur-sundari gave a fitting reply to the challenge by acquiring a kingdom with the help of her wisdom, courage, and strength of character. Thus an insignificant frivolous remark set forth an upheaval in her life.

Renowned scholar Upadhyaya Shri Keval Muni ji turned this story into a novel. His able disciple Shri Suresh Muni ji inspired us to adopt that novel into this picture story. We are deeply indebted to him.

—*Shrichand Surana 'Saras'*

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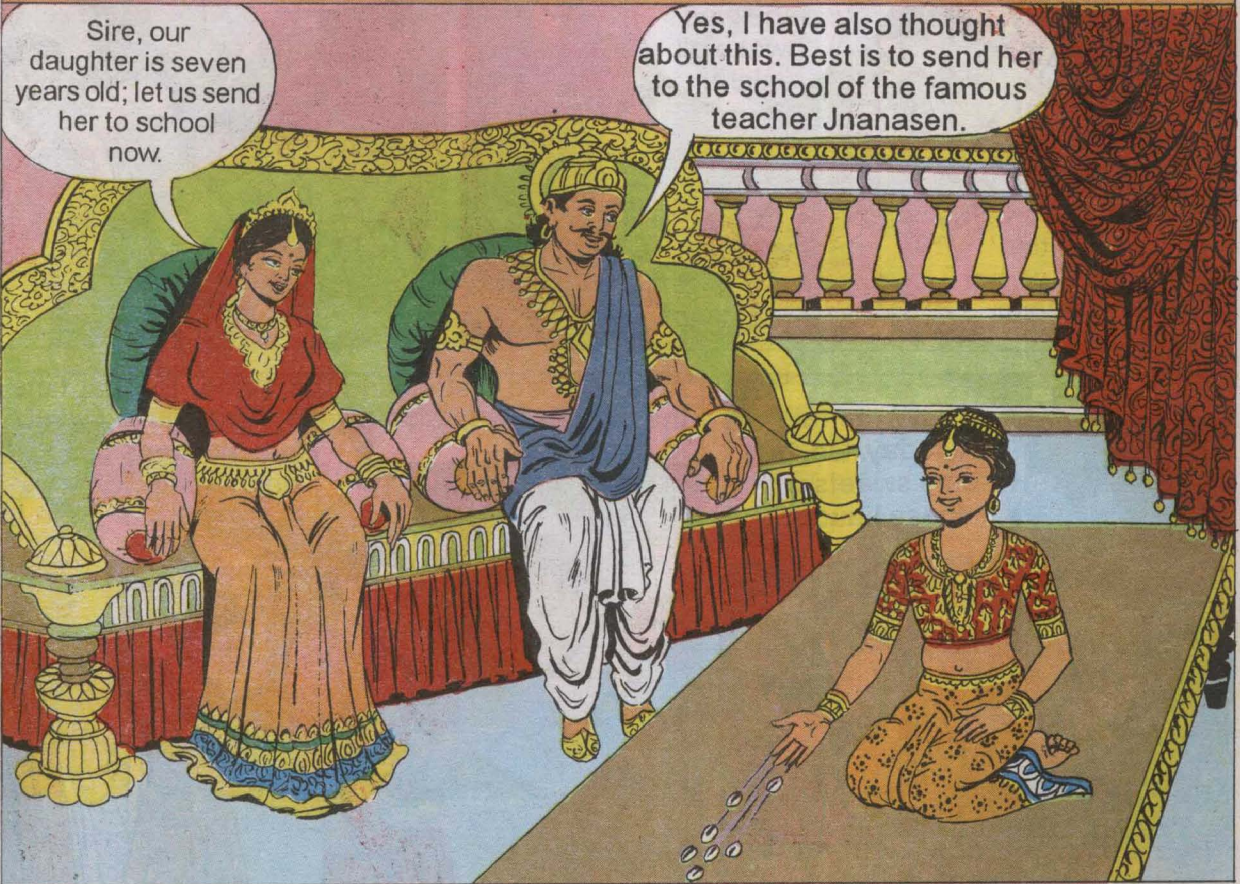
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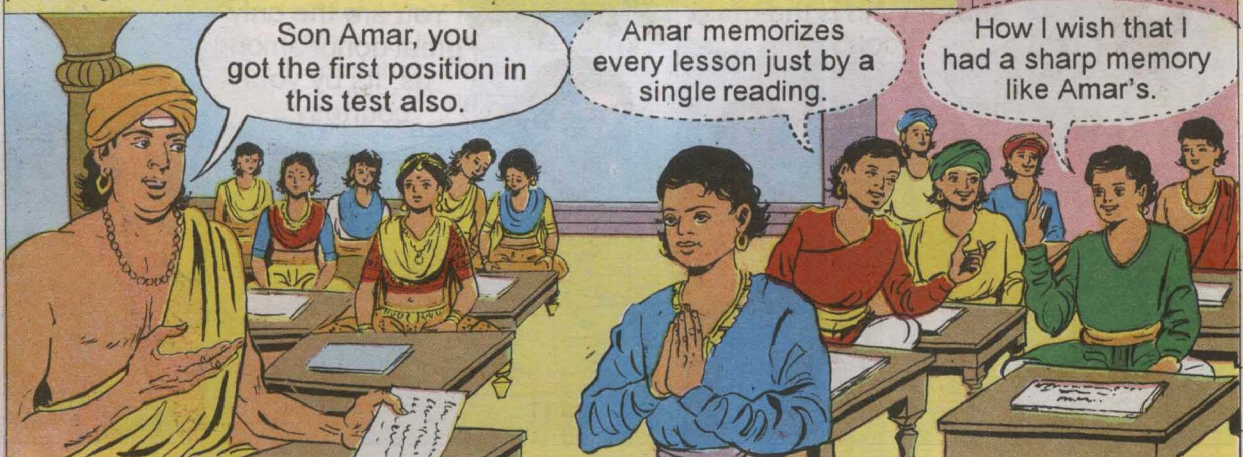
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SURSUNDARI

Sur-sundari was the only and beloved daughter of king Ripumardan and queen Ratisundari of Champapuri. She was beautiful and intelligent, and very fond of playing with kaudis. One day while she was playing, the queen said—



Sur-sundari joined the school of Acharya Jnanasen. Amar Kumar, the son of the nagar-seth,[#] also studied in the same school. Amar was the best student of the school. He was handsome and pleasing, and witty as well. All the students accepted him to be their leader.

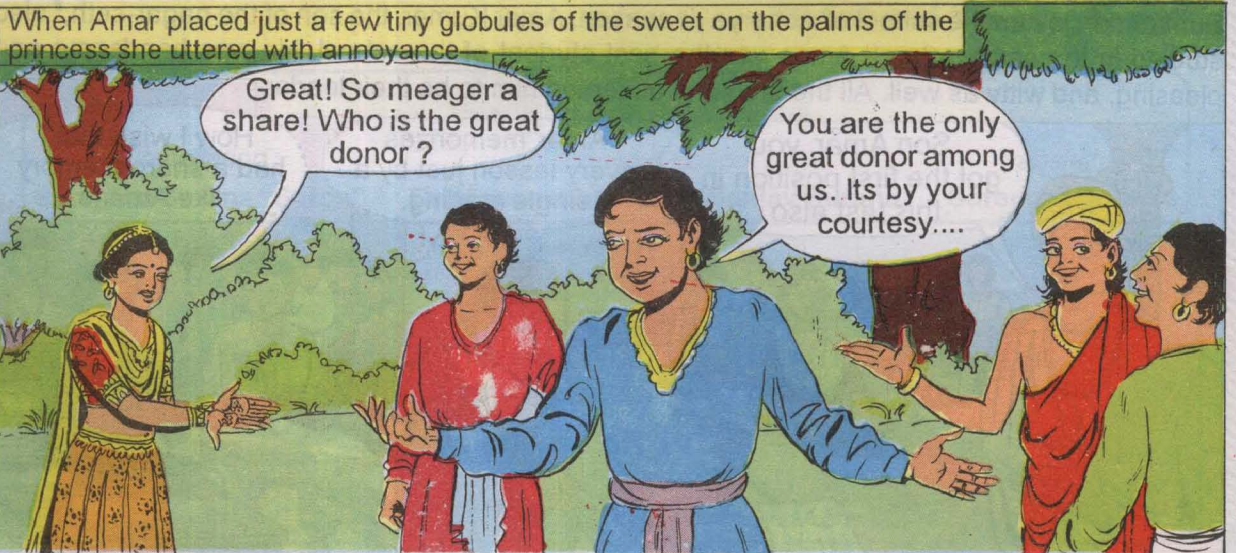
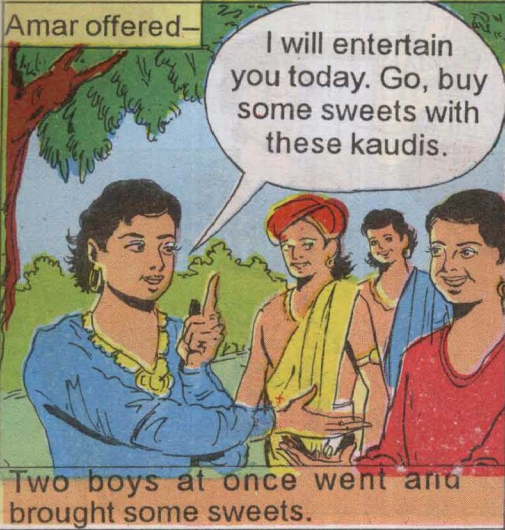
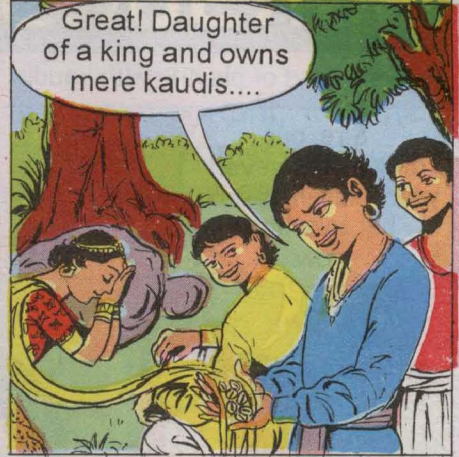


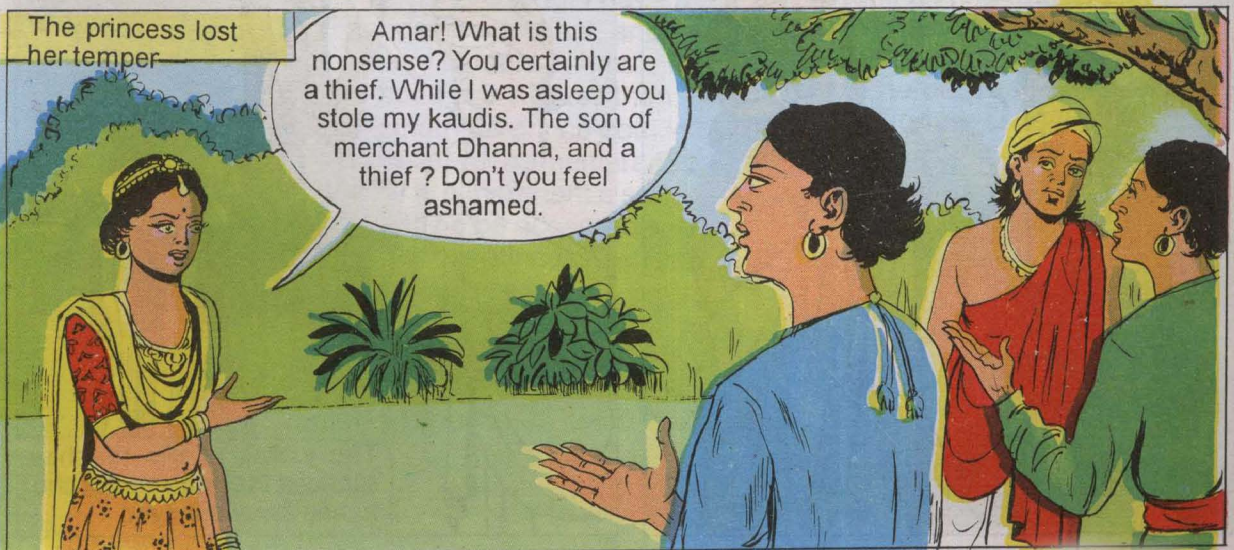
A title awarded to the richest merchant of the town.

One day during the lunch recess students were playing around. The princess was sleeping under a tree. Some students laughed at this—



When untied the scarf he found seven kaudis. Amar laughed—

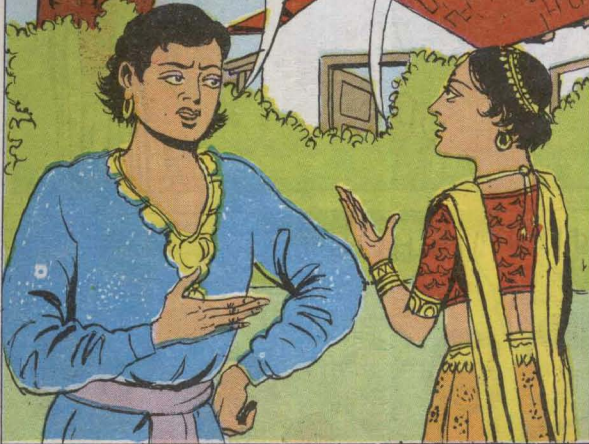




The biting remark from the princess irritated Amar as well. He retorted—

Princess! Mind your language. It was just seven kaudis, not priceless diamonds. Could you get a kingdom with those kaudis?

Yes! Of course, I could get a kingdom. How are you concerned? A thief and such insolence!



Just then teacher Jnanasen arrived—

What is the matter, children? Why do you quarrel?

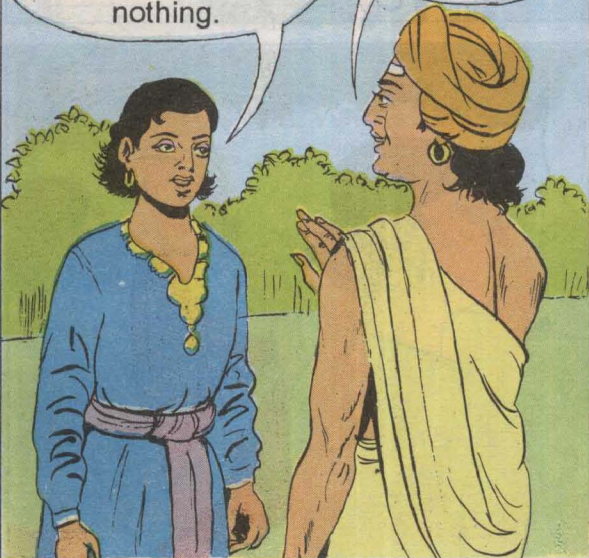
Look Sir, this Amar is a hardened thief. He has stolen my seven kaudis and is also making fun of me.



The teacher looked at Amar. Amar narrated the incident and added—

Sir, it was just a plaything. The princess has made a mountain of a mole-hill just for nothing.

No, Amar, stealing, even out of fun, is bad.



Turning to the princess he said—

Princess, you too should not get so angry. Harsh words uttered out of anger sting like an arrow.



The words of the teacher silenced the princess but she turned away annoyed.

Amar Kumar went and sat in his class. He thought sadly—

I committed a mistake today by ridiculing the princess so crudely.

But how ill tempered and conceited she is? She called me a thief. Am I a thief? Let me get a chance, I will show...

The matter was forgotten. A little later they went to their classes.

FIFTEEN YEARS LATER

One day the king called Kalacharya Jnanasen and requested—

O great acharya, the princess is now of marriageable age. Many talented and brave princes study in your school. Please tell me if you find some suitable match for the princess.

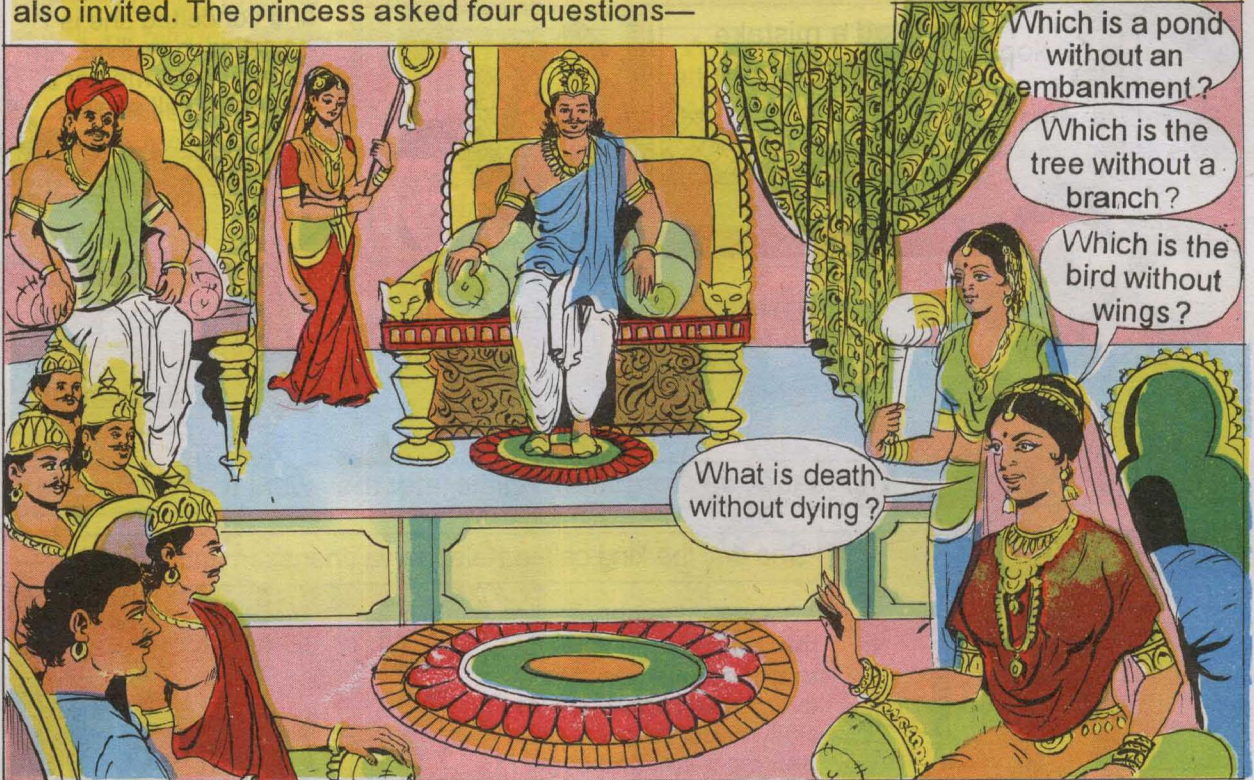
After pondering for sometime the teacher said

O king, I have a handsome, brilliant, and brave student in Amar Kumar. He is no less than any kshatriya* prince both in studies as well as martial arts, but he is a merchant's son. Would he be acceptable for the princess?

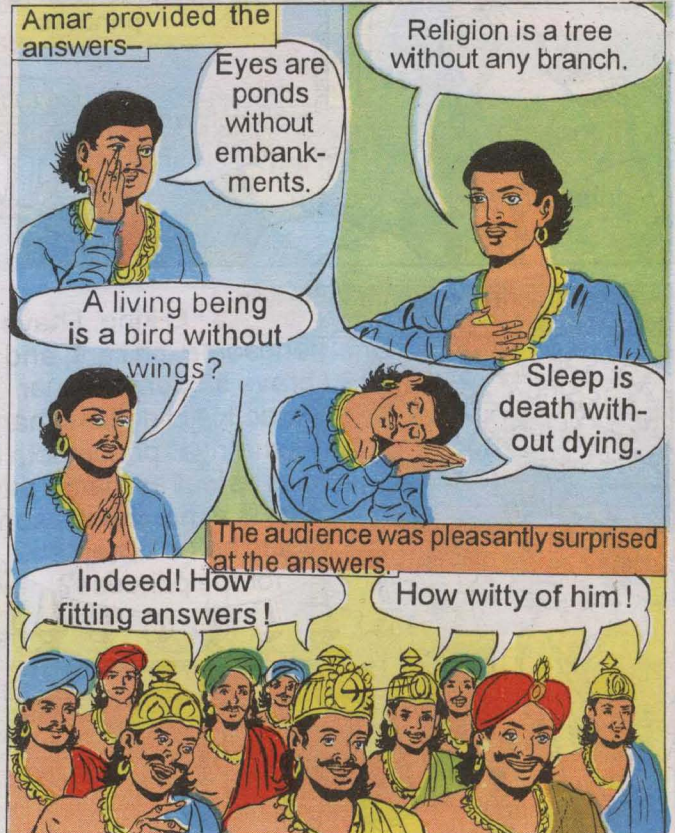
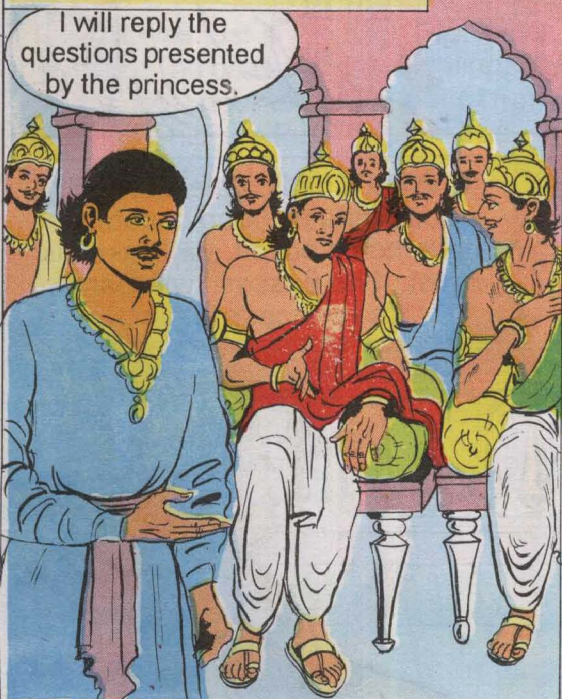
What if he is a merchant's son? If he is found capable I have no objection. I will take his test. If he passes I will marry the princess to him.

* The warrior or the regal caste.

The king arranged for a puzzle competition to test Amar Kumar. Many other princes were also invited. The princess asked four questions—

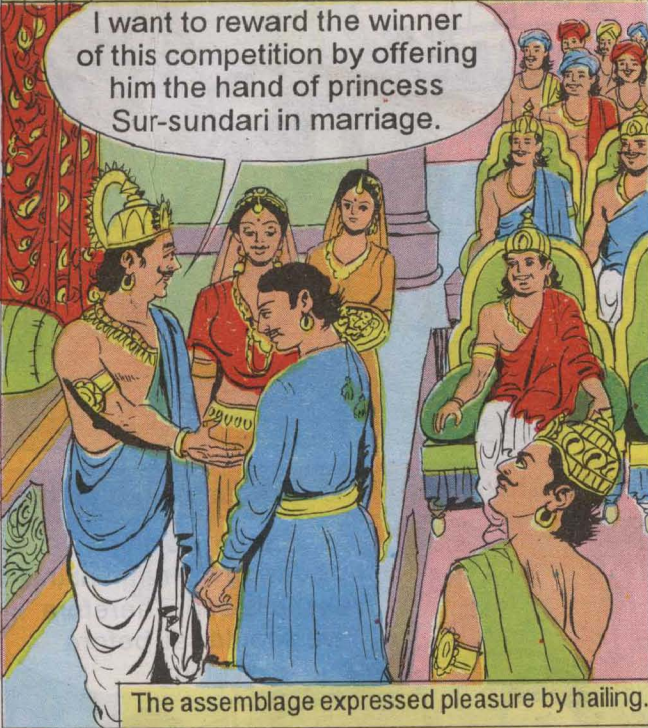


Everyone was baffled at these questions. No one could reply correctly. At last Amar Kumar stood up and said—



The king was pleased at the ability, wit, and graceful bearing of Amar Kumar. He made an announcement—

I want to reward the winner of this competition by offering him the hand of princess Sur-sundari in marriage.



The assemblage expressed pleasure by hailing.

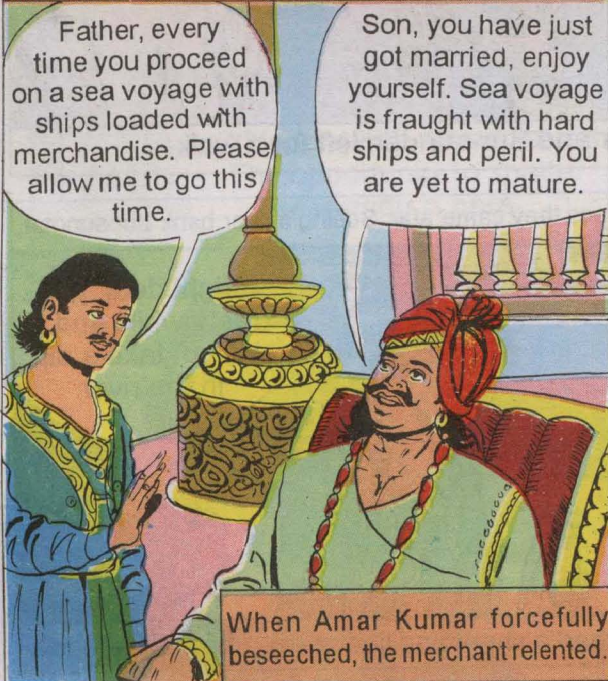
On an auspicious moment they were married with fanfare.



Thus the childhood colleagues, Amar Kumar and Sur-sundari commenced their joyous married life. One day Amar Kumar requested his father—

Father, every time you proceed on a sea voyage with ships loaded with merchandise. Please allow me to go this time.

Son, you have just got married, enjoy yourself. Sea voyage is fraught with hardships and peril. You are yet to mature.

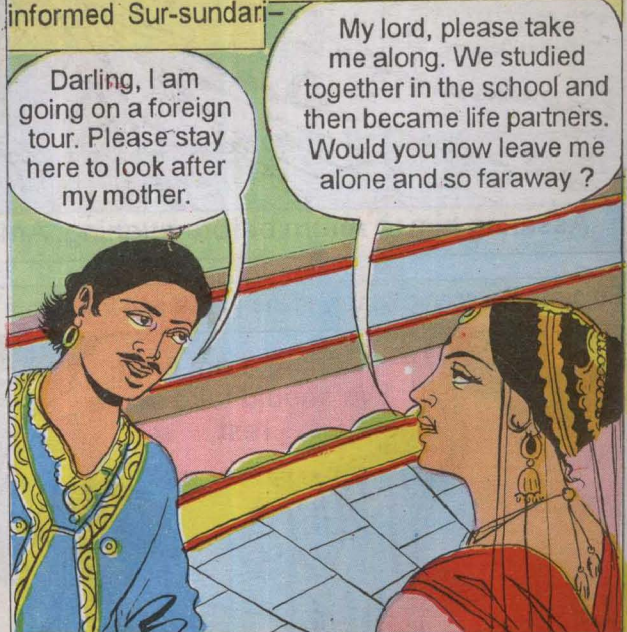


When Amar Kumar forcefully beseeched, the merchant relented.

Amar Kumar started preparing for the voyage. He informed Sur-sundari—

Darling, I am going on a foreign tour. Please stay here to look after my mother.

My lord, please take me along. We studied together in the school and then became life partners. Would you now leave me alone and so faraway?



When all his efforts to dissuade Sur-sundari failed Amar Kumar yielded and took permission from his parents to take her along.

Amar and Sur-sundari started their voyage on an auspicious moment with twelve shiploads of merchandise and hundreds of sailors.



After sailing for a week the flotilla anchored at Yaksha island. Amar Kumar instructed the captain—



Replenish drinking water, fruits, and other essentials here. In the meantime we will look around the island and return.

Kumar, no ship stops during the night at this Yaksha island. Therefore we should sail before evening.

Assuring him to return before evening, Amar and Sur-sundari left for a walk.

Enjoying the scenic beauty of the jungle and fruits from trees they came afar. Seeing a river bank Sur-sundari said—

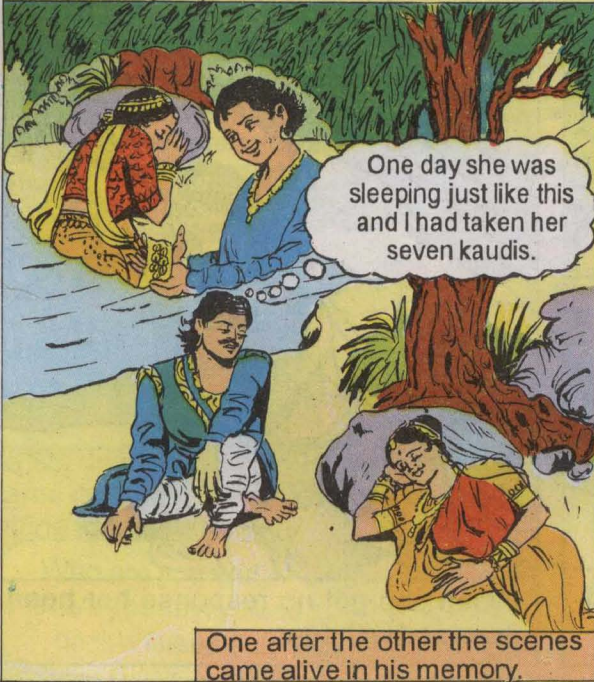


Darling, I am tired. We should take some rest.

Alright dear, you rest awhile and I will go, take a dip in the river.

Sur-sundari spread a sheet and lied down. She slept at once.

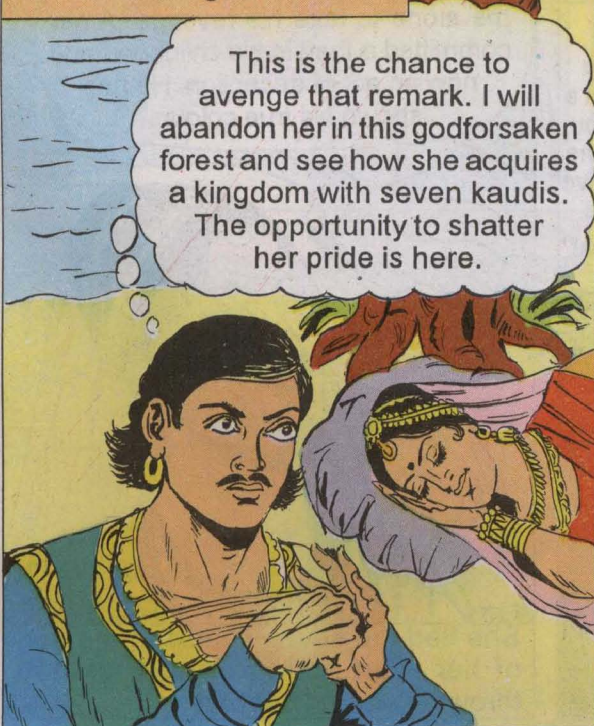
After the dip in the river Amar returned and sat down to rest near Sur-sundari. While looking at her he recalled the incidents from their student life.



The words of the princess echoed in his ears—



Like a ghostly roar, old memories haunted Amar. He thought—



Overpowered by ill-will Amar Kumar became callous. He placed seven kaudis near Sur-sundari and got up. On a nearby rock-face he wrote something and stared angrily at Sur-sundari.

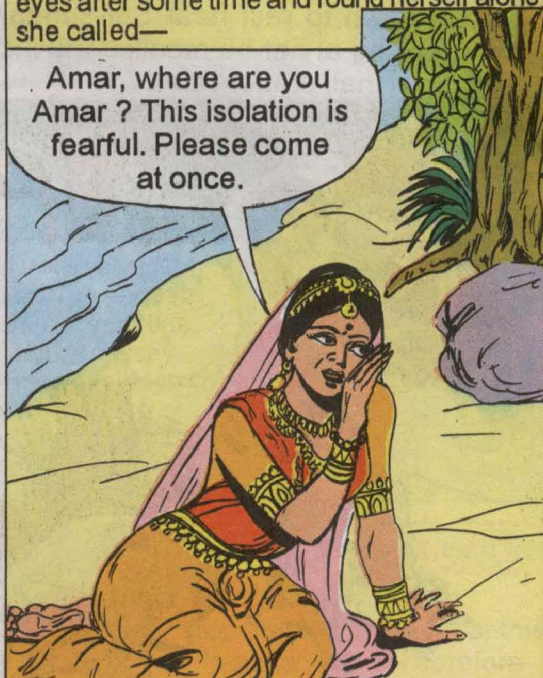


He rushed to the coast and said to the sailors with urgency—



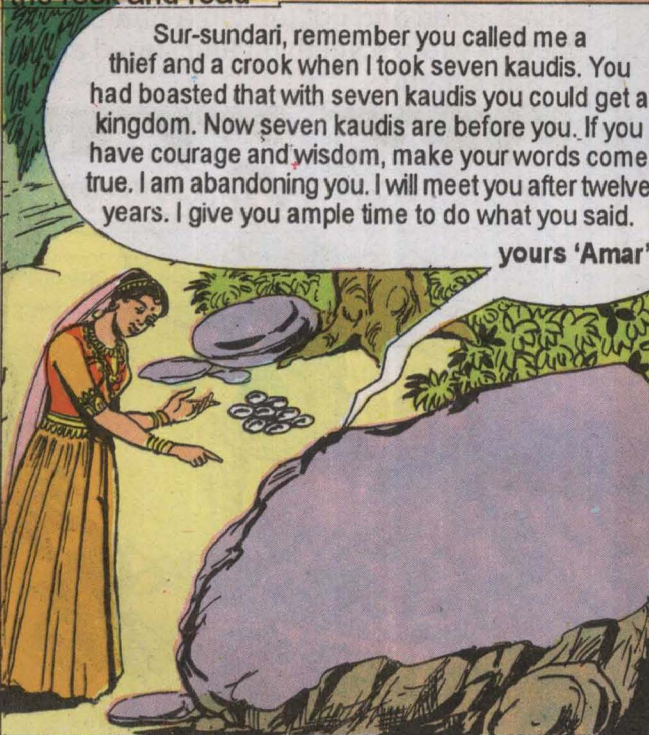
The sailors at once weighed the anchors and the ships left the shore.

On the island, when Sur-sundari opened her eyes after some time and found herself alone she called—

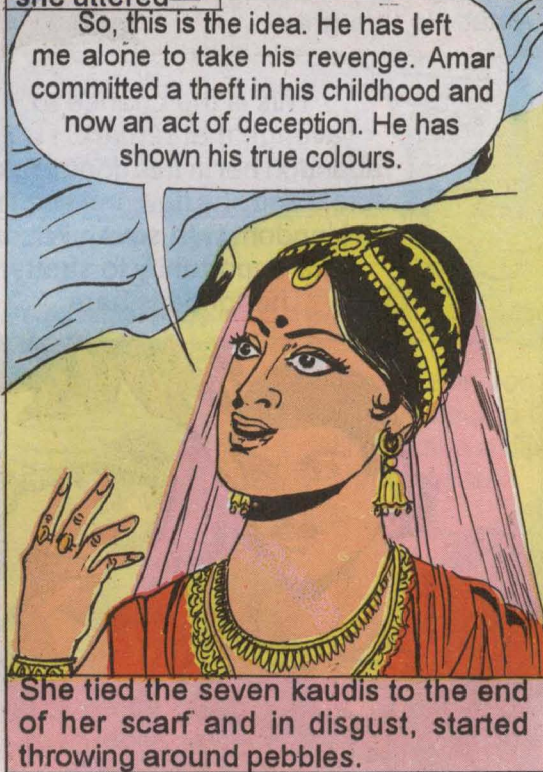


When she got no response her heart pounded with fear.

She looked around expectantly and her gaze fell on the nearby rock-face. She approached the rock and read—



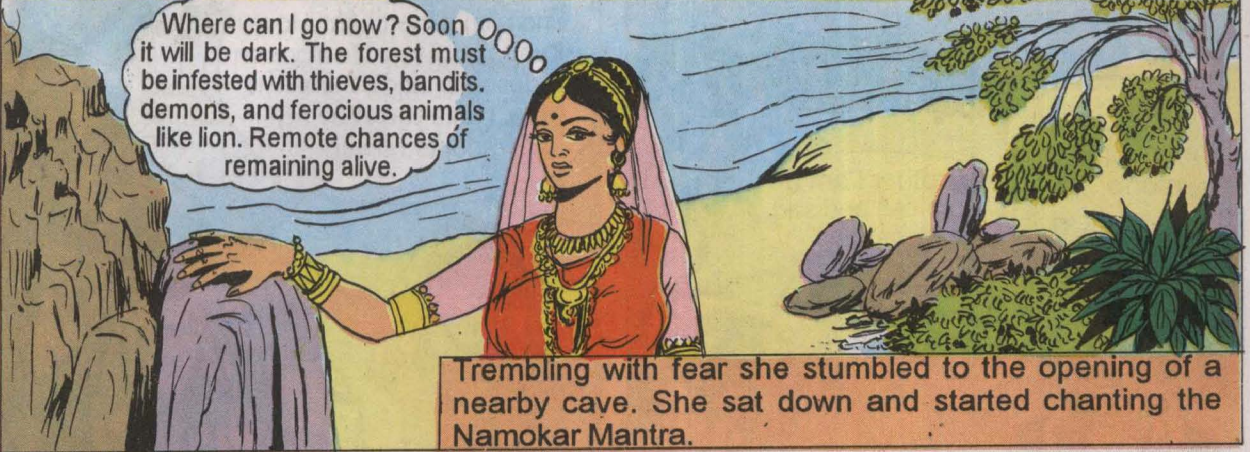
The letter on the rock made her angry, she uttered—



She tied the seven kaudis to the end of her scarf and in disgust, started throwing around pebbles.

* A type of lower gods.

She calmed down after some time and looked at the sun setting in the west. Night was approaching. Eerie sounds came from the jungle. She got shaken finding herself helpless and alone in the dense forest.



Where can I go now? Soon it will be dark. The forest must be infested with thieves, bandits, demons, and ferocious animals like lion. Remote chances of remaining alive.

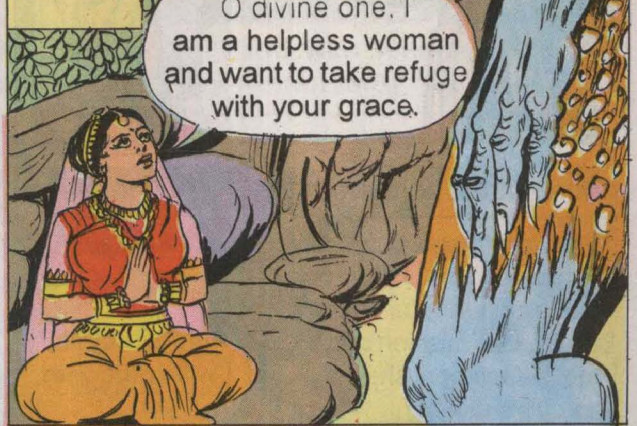
Trembling with fear she stumbled to the opening of a nearby cave. She sat down and started chanting the Namokar Mantra.

As the darkness increased, a giant yaksha came out of the cave. Seeing Sur-sundari sitting alone he asked—



Who are you and what are you doing alone on this island?

Hearing the sound Sur-sundari opened her eyes and was shocked as if she was facing death. Collecting her wits she said—



O divine one. I am a helpless woman and want to take refuge with your grace.

The sweet and humble words of Sur-sundari pleased the yaksha. He said—



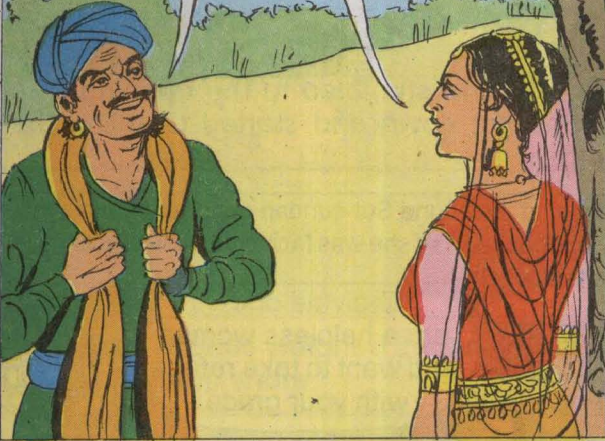
Angel, you are free to live here without any fear. You will have no problems here.

Getting permission from the yaksha Sur-sundari started living on the island.

Some months later a merchant came to the island. He was surprised to see Sur-sundari fearlessly roaming around the island alone. He approached her and asked—

Sister, who are you and why alone....?

Brother I am a helpless and sad woman.



The merchant sympathized with her—

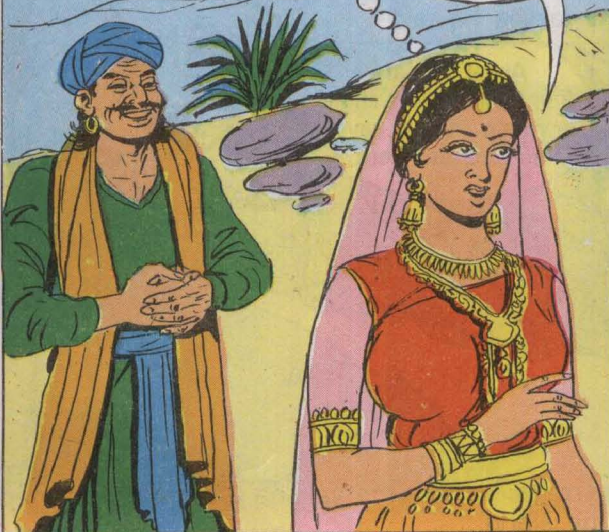
My name is Kamaldatt and I am a merchant. How will you spend your life alone on this desolate land? Come with me. I take you to be my adopted sister.



Sur-sundari pondered—

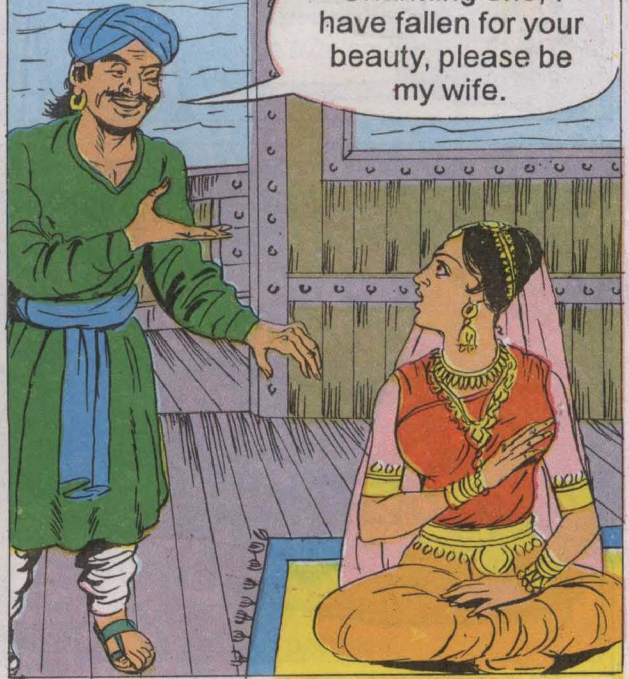
I have to show my husband that I can have a kingdom for seven kaudis. This mission could not be accomplished if I remain here.

Alright brother, I will come with you....



Kamaldatt took her in the ship and left the island. When the ship was on high seas, he approached Sur-sundari and said—

Charming one, I have fallen for your beauty, please be my wife.



These words shook Sur-sundari to the core.

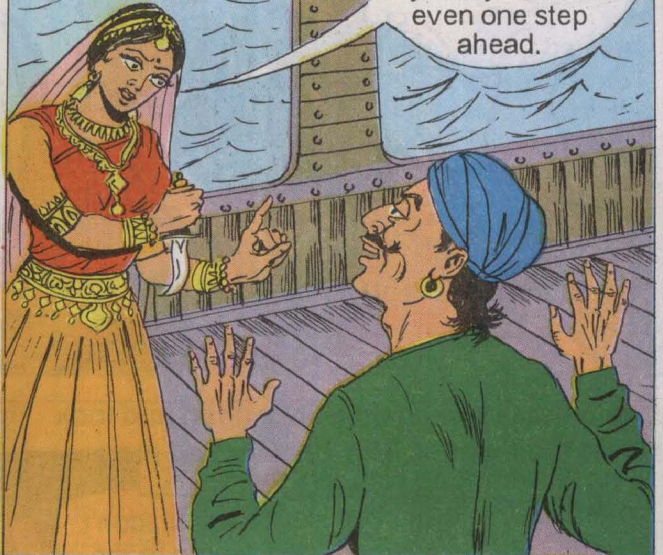
Brother, do you know what you say? Don't commit such treachery.

Stop this brother business. You will submit to my desires, otherwise....



The moment Kamaldatt proceeded to grab her, she took her concealed dagger out.

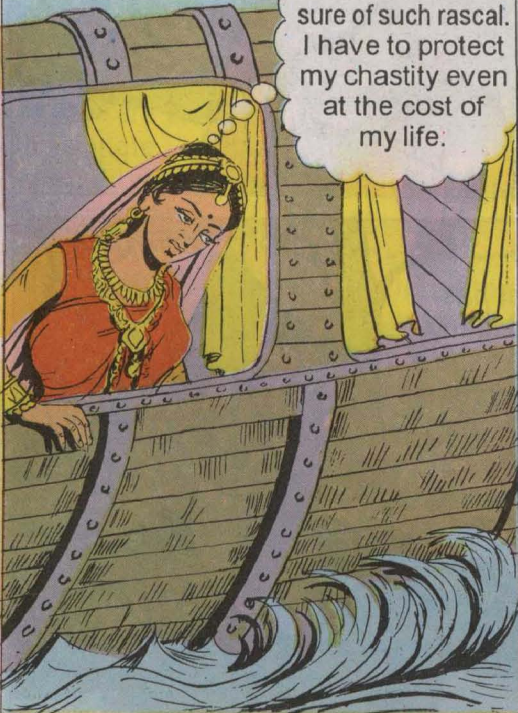
Rascal! Don't you dare touch me. It will not be good for you if you take even one step ahead.



Kamaldatt was filled with fear seeing Sur-sundari's ferocity. He ran away from the cabin.

Sur-sundari thought—

One cannot be sure of such rascal. I have to protect my chastity even at the cost of my life.



And she jumped out of the window into the sea.

Just then a cyclone hit the sea. The ship wrecked on the rocks. Kamaldatt drowned. Sur-sundari caught hold of a log of wood and swam towards the shore.



Reaching the shore, very tired Sur-sundari sat down to rest. Suddenly four bandits arrived there. Seeing Sur-sundari alone they deliberated—



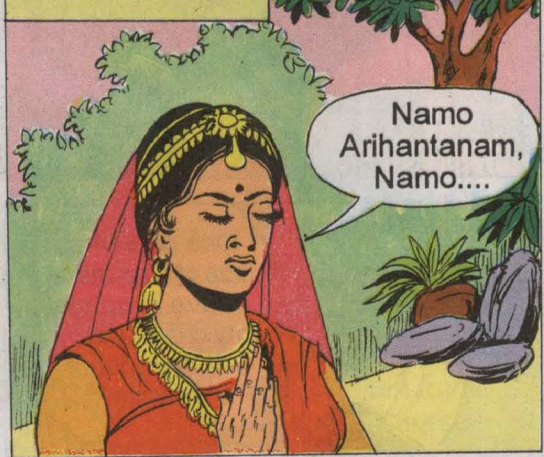
See there, today we were returning empty handed. If not wealth, the fate has provided us a beautiful woman. When we present her to the boss he will jump with joy.

The bandits picked up Sur-sundari and took her to their leader. The chief looked at trembling Sur-sundari with evil eyes—



Ha! Ha! beautiful, don't be afraid. Come to me.

Sur-sundari closed her eyes and started chanting the Namokar Mantra—



Namo Arihantanam, Namoo....

And a miracle occurred. The chief started wailing—



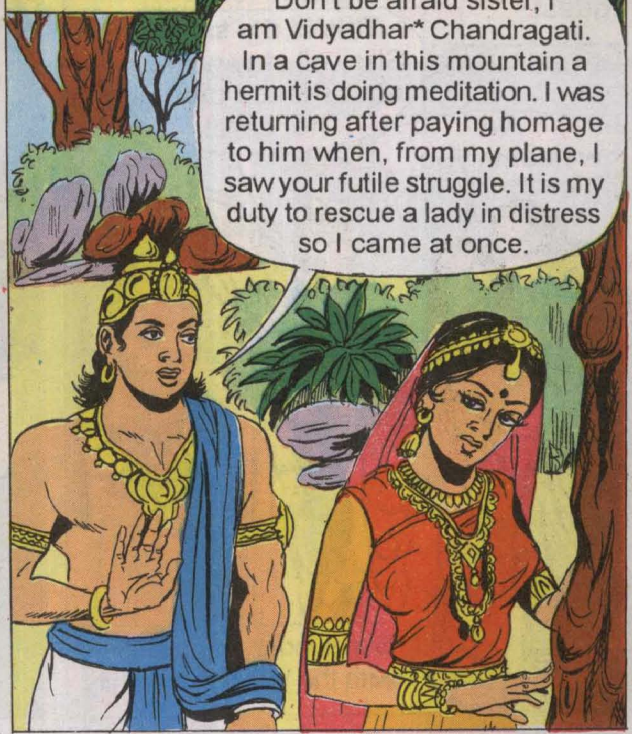
Oh! What has happened to my eyes? I don't see a thing. This sorceress has made me blind.

At the wailing of their chief the bandits drew their swords and rushed at Sur-sundari. All of a sudden a brave youth jumped in the fray and started fighting them fiercely with his sword.



Mortally wounded by the mighty blows by the youth, the bandits ran away.

The youth approached Sur-sundari and introduced himself—



Don't be afraid sister, I am Vidyadhar* Chandragati. In a cave in this mountain a hermit is doing meditation. I was returning after paying homage to him when, from my plane, I saw your futile struggle. It is my duty to rescue a lady in distress so I came at once.

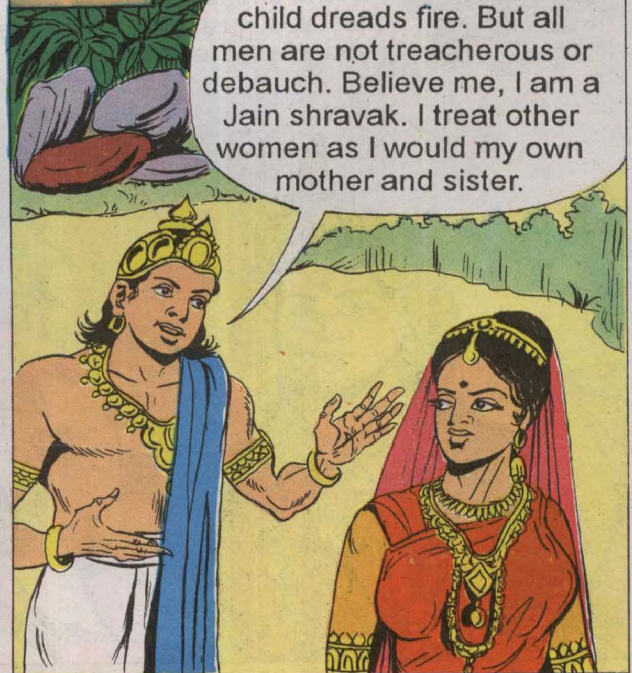
The Vidyadhar added—



Sister you will not be safe alone in this jungle....come with me, I will provide protection.

No brother, I have been often cheated by men. I am left with hardly any faith for any man.

Vidyadhar—



It is true that a burnt child dreads fire. But all men are not treacherous or debauch. Believe me, I am a Jain shravak. I treat other women as I would my own mother and sister.

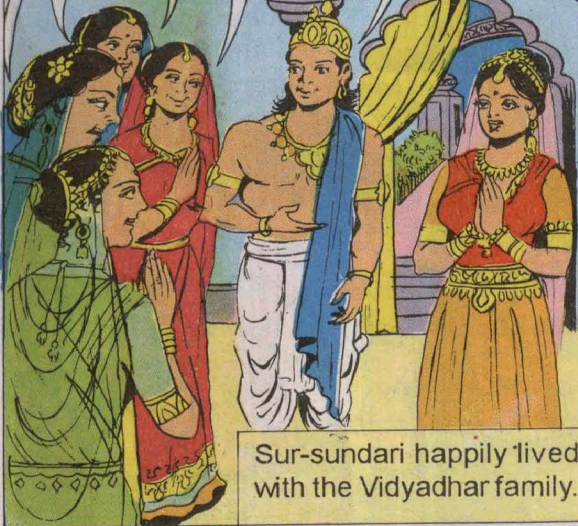
Sur-sundari believed what the Vidyadhar said. She boarded his plane and went with him.

* Vidyadhar = a benevolent god with special skills and powers.

The Vidyadhar took Sur-sundari to his palace where his four wives greeted the guest.

This is my sister. She will stay with us now. Please take all her care.

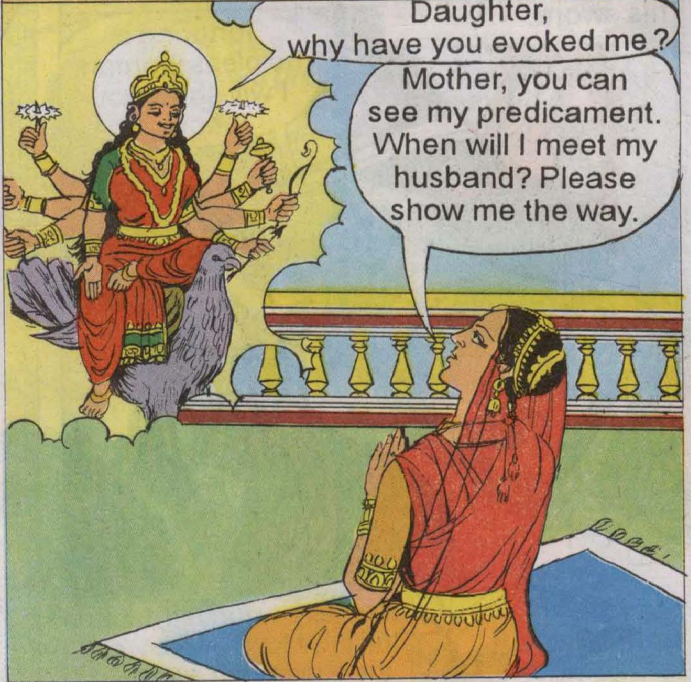
We welcome you.



Sur-sundari happily lived with the Vidyadhar family.

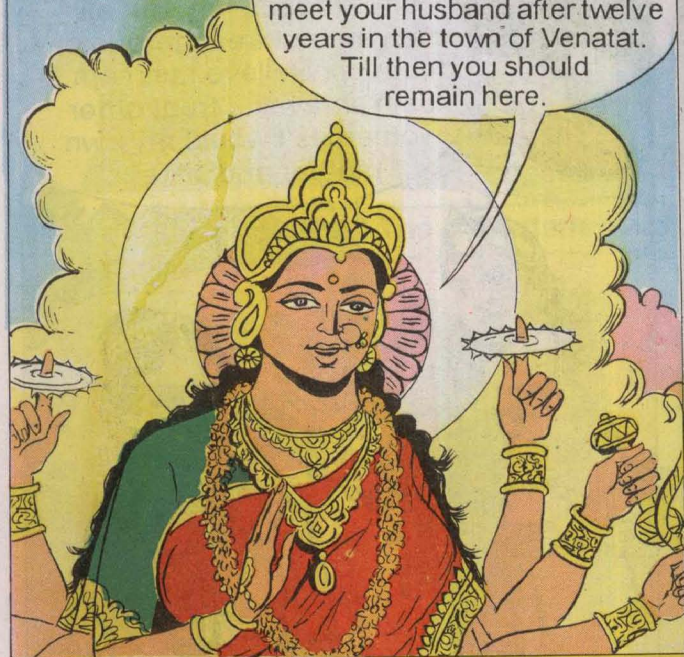
During the month of Ashvin (Aaso), Sur-sundari practiced the nine day Oli-tap.* She observed Ayambil** during this period and did not stop chanting of Navapad. On the ninth day goddess Chakreshvari appeared.

Daughter, why have you evoked me? Mother, you can see my predicament. When will I meet my husband? Please show me the way.



Goddess Chakreshvari—

Daughter, your husband is safe in Simhal island. You will meet your husband after twelve years in the town of Venatat. Till then you should remain here.



Following the instructions of the goddess Sur-sundari spent twelve years in the palace of the Vidyadhar.

When twelve years were past she one night saw Amar Kumar in her dream.

Sur-sundari, acquire a kingdom with seven kaudis. I am soon reaching Venatat.



A specific Jain austerity.

**# Eating once in a day, food cooked with a single ingredient even without any salt or other condiments.

Next morning Sur-sundari told Vidyadhar her story in detail and said—

Brother, now I should proceed for Venatat as soon as possible.

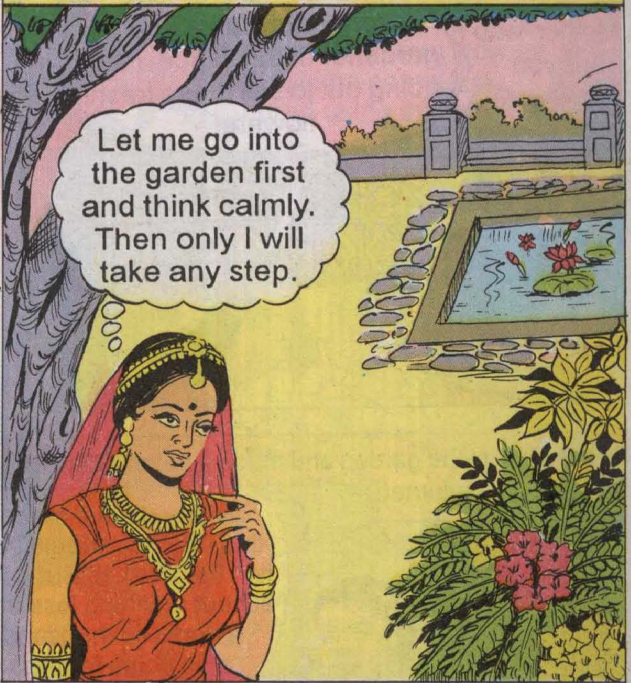
Sister, the work you have to accomplish would require special powers. I will teach you five unique divine powers. It would be easy for you to accomplish your goal with the help of these.



The Vidyadhar taught her five special powers.

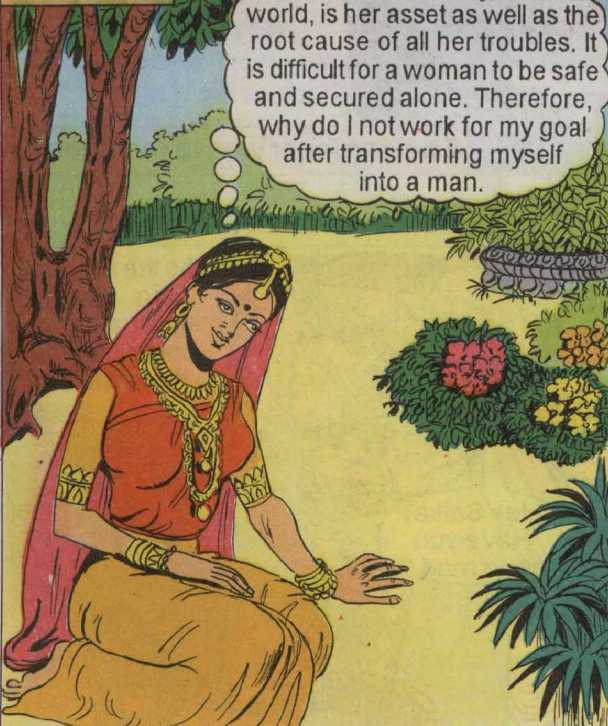
After that he took her to Venatat in the plane and left her there. Seeing a large and beautiful garden Sur-sundari thought—

Let me go into the garden first and think calmly. Then only I will take any step.



In the garden she sat down under a beautiful tree and contemplated—

A woman's beauty, in this world, is her asset as well as the root cause of all her troubles. It is difficult for a woman to be safe and secured alone. Therefore, why do I not work for my goal after transforming myself into a man.



She sat in lotus pose and started meditation. By invoking the power of transformation she at once turned into a handsome young man.



Since this moment my name is Vimalyash.

Getting up from there he was about to leave the garden when he saw a woman carrying a basket full of fragrant flowers. He asked—

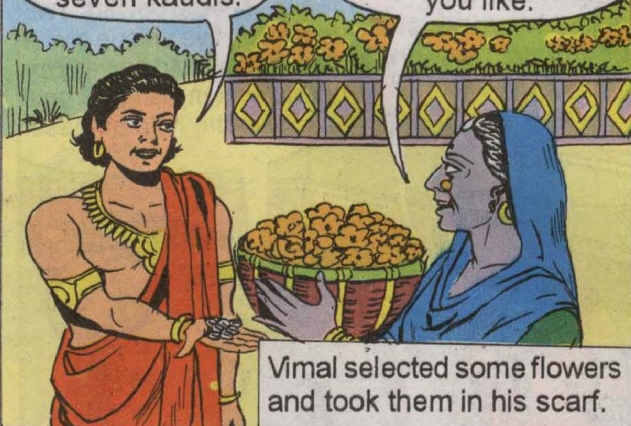
Mother, who are you?

Son, I am Salka, the gardener of this place. I am going out to sell these fresh flowers.



Mother, give me some flowers in exchange of these seven kaudis.

Son, this is the first sale of the morning. Take as many as you like.



Vimal selected some flowers and took them in his scarf.

He sat down in the garden and made a beautiful fan with the flowers. He cast the spell of his mantra on the fan. By then Salka returned.

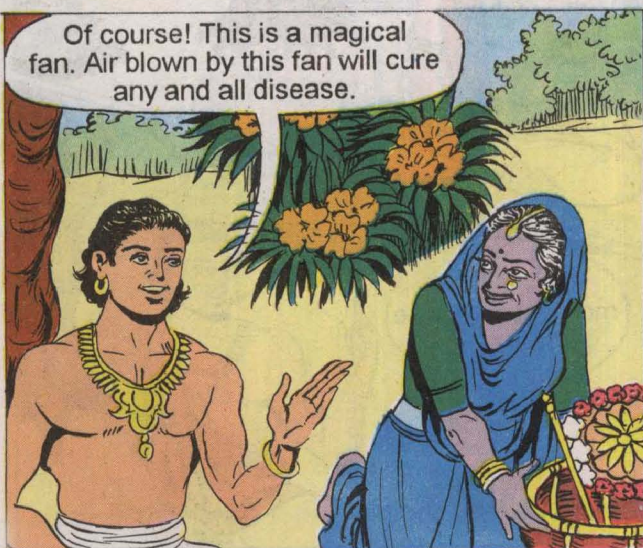
Mother, I have made this fan. You should sell it in the market. But don't accept anything less than a hundred thousand gold coins for this.

What! A hundred thousand gold coins?



The gardener was taken aback.

Of course! This is a magical fan. Air blown by this fan will cure any and all disease.

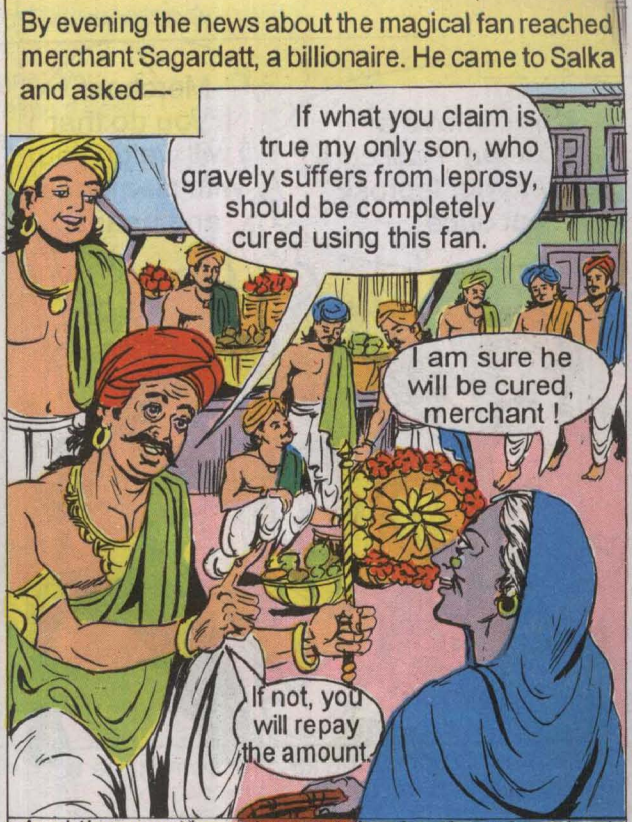
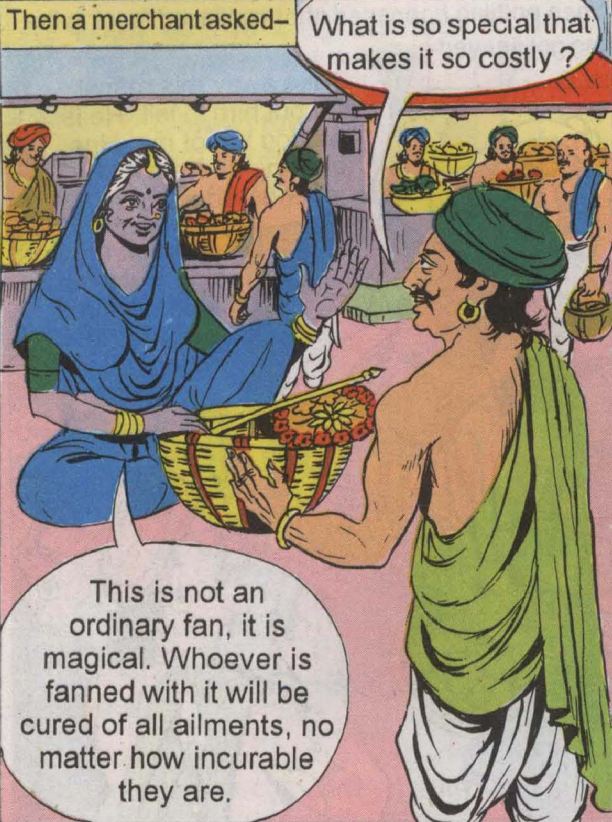


Salka took the fan to market for selling—

Take the magical fan. Take the magical fan. Price only a hundred thousand gold coins.

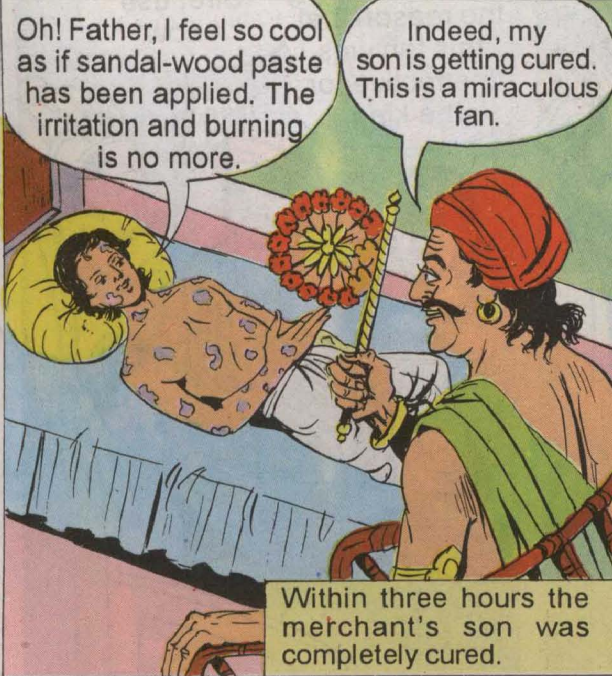
Hey Salka! Have you gone mad?

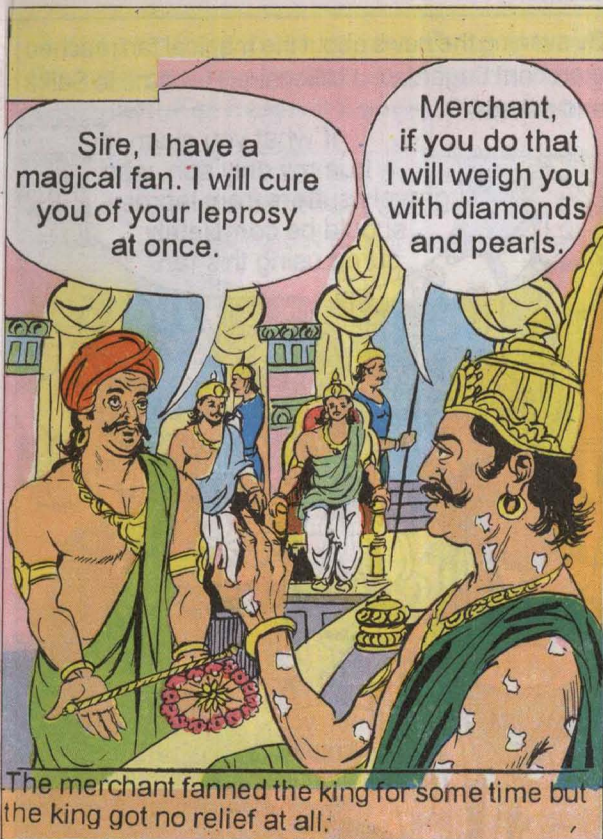




And the merchant bought the fan for a hundred thousand gold coins.

Sagardatt returned home with the fan. His son was a leper. The merchant fanned him with the magical fan.

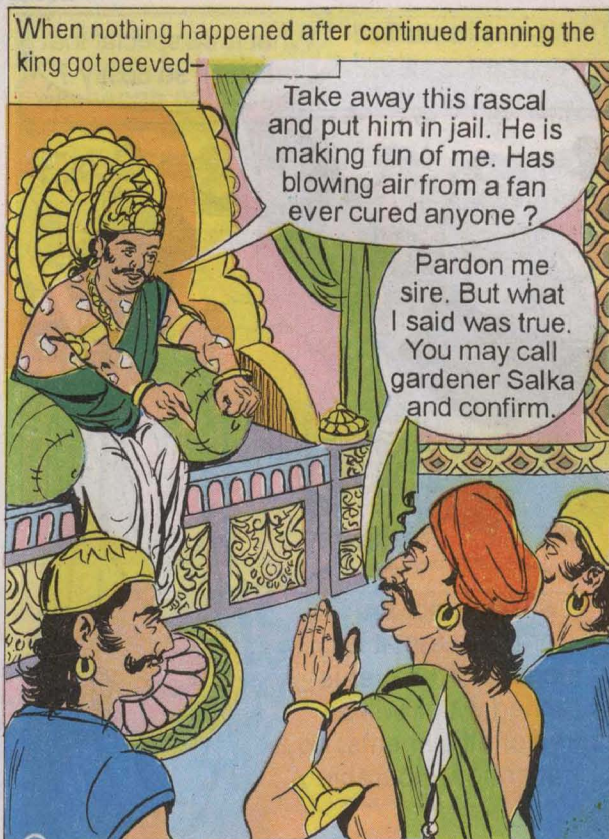




Sire, I have a magical fan. I will cure you of your leprosy at once.

Merchant, if you do that I will weigh you with diamonds and pearls.

The merchant fanned the king for some time but the king got no relief at all.

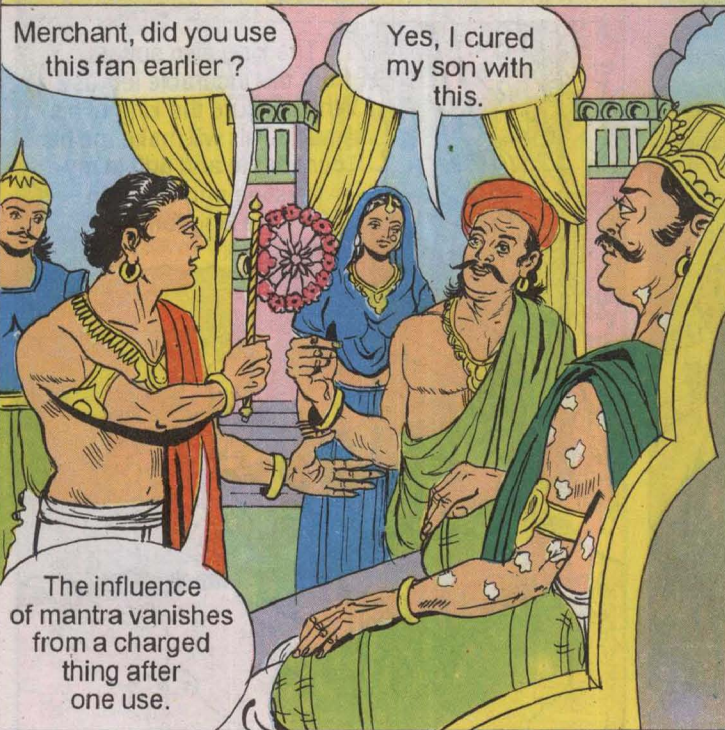


When nothing happened after continued fanning the king got peeved—

Take away this rascal and put him in jail. He is making fun of me. Has blowing air from a fan ever cured anyone?

Pardon me sire. But what I said was true. You may call gardener Salka and confirm.

When the guards brought Salka, Vimalyash also came along. After hearing the story he asked the merchant—



Merchant, did you use this fan earlier?

Yes, I cured my son with this.

The influence of mantra vanishes from a charged thing after one use.

He recharged the fan with the spell and gave it to the king.



That was the reason that this fan was ineffective for the king.

Sire, use it now.

As soon as the king started fanning he was on the mend.

Great! How soothing it feels. The irritation is reduced. After so many years I feel so relieved.



Soon the king was completely cured.

He hugged Vimalyash and said—

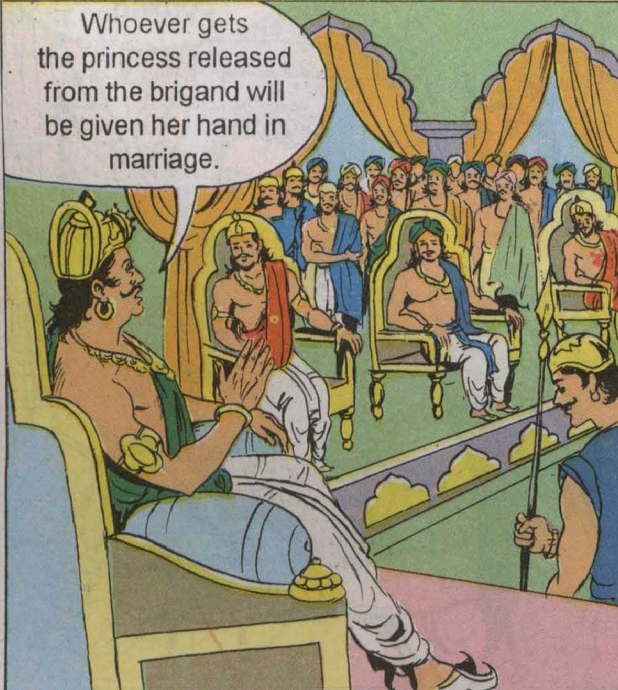
O foreigner, you have given me a new life. I reward you with half of my kingdom. You may enjoy all the comforts.



In spite of Vimalyash's reluctance to accept, the king insisted and gave him half his kingdom. Vimal gave a hundred thousand gold coins to Salka.

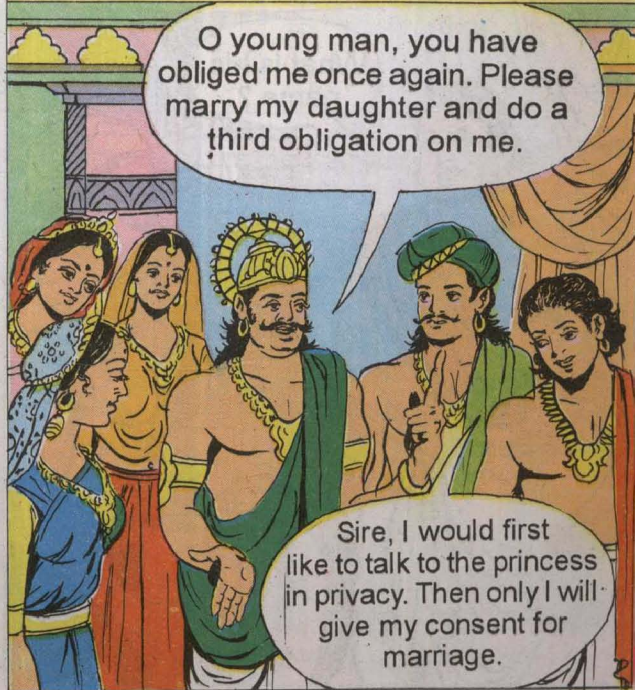
One day a cruel brigand kidnapped princess Kanakvati, the only daughter of the king. All efforts to find her went in vain. At last the king announced—

Whoever gets the princess released from the brigand will be given her hand in marriage.



When Vimalyash came to know of this he used his special powers to trace the brigand and get the princess released. The king said with joy—

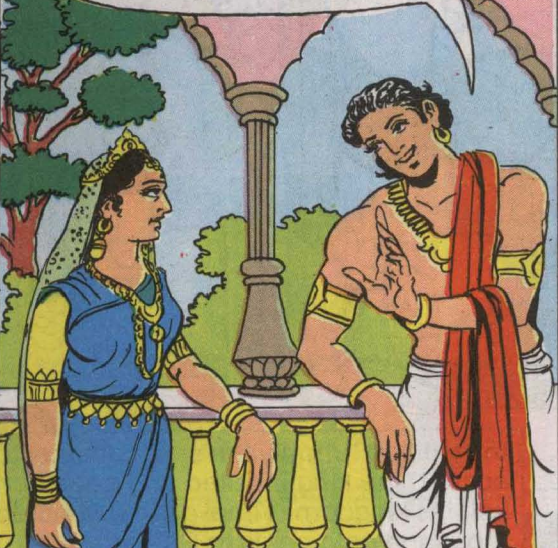
O young man, you have obliged me once again. Please marry my daughter and do a third obligation on me.



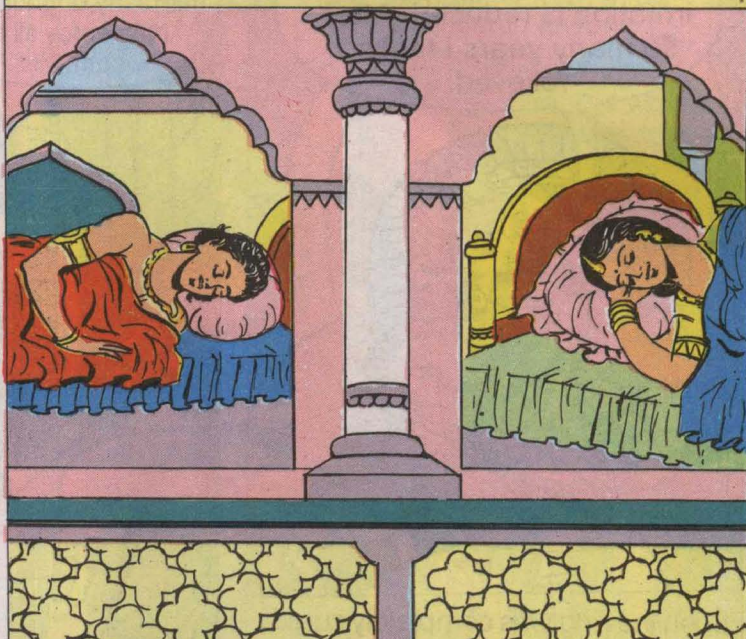
Sire, I would first like to talk to the princess in privacy. Then only I will give my consent for marriage.

Alone with princess, Vimal said—

I have taken a vow. A friend of mine is away to distant lands. As long as he does not return I will observe absolutely celibacy. I will not even touch you as long as my friend does not return. Please think about this before getting married to me.



The princess was already infatuated with the strength, wisdom, and beauty of Vimalyash. She agreed without any hesitation. Vimalyash (Sur-sundari) and Kanakvati were married with all fanfare. However, following the condition, they slept in separate bedrooms.



One day the coastguards informed Vimalyash—

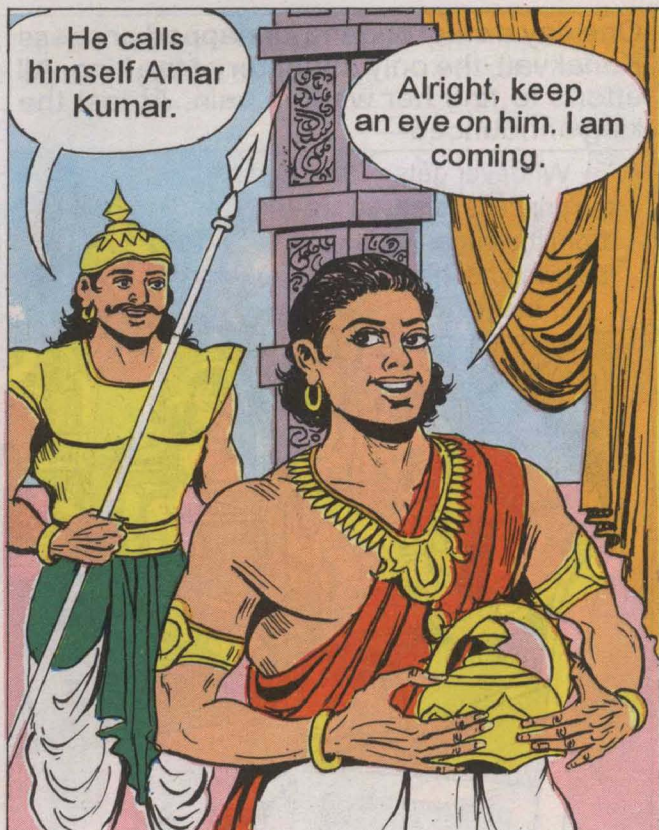
A merchant from Simhal island has arrived at the port with twelve ships.

What is his name?



He calls himself Amar Kumar.

Alright, keep an eye on him. I am coming.

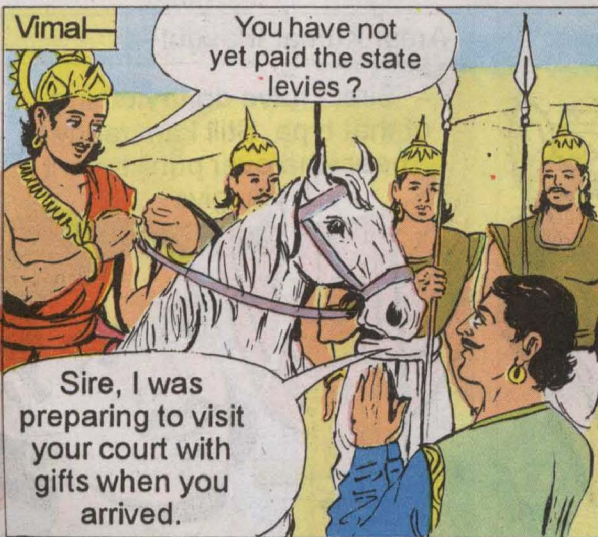


Vimal rode a horse and came to the docks. Amar Kumar was getting his ships unloaded. Seeing the son-in-law of the king he offered salutations. Vimal asked—



Who are you?
And from where
have you come?

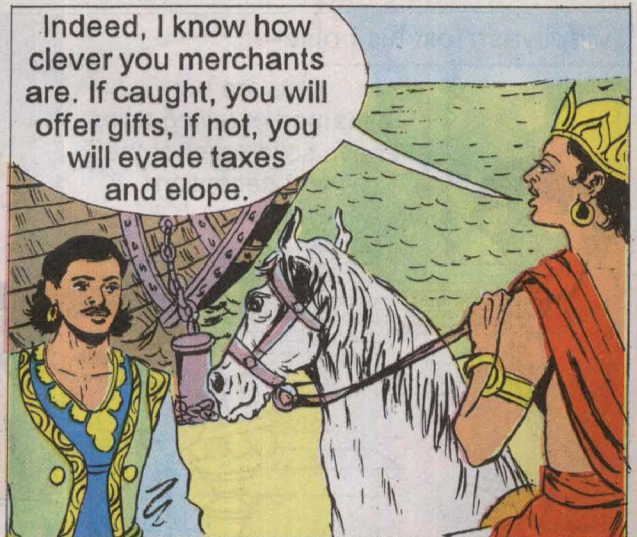
Sire, I am Amar
Kumar of Champapuri.
I had gone to Simhal island
on business. I am on my
way home. I took this
opportunity offer my
respects to you.



Vimal—

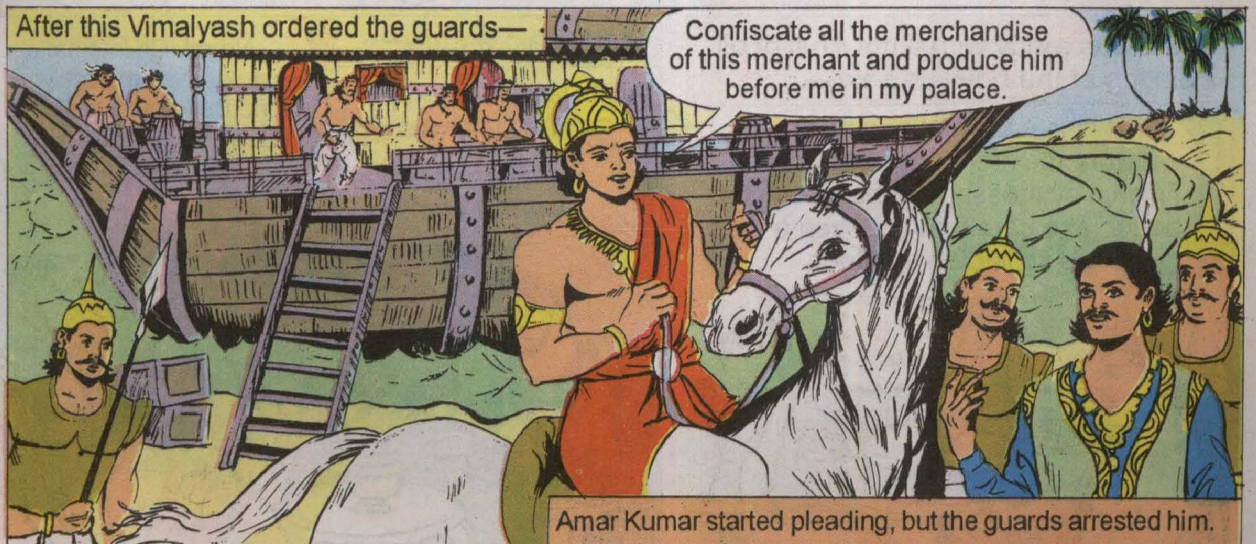
You have not
yet paid the state
levies?

Sire, I was
preparing to visit
your court with
gifts when you
arrived.



Indeed, I know how
clever you merchants
are. If caught, you will
offer gifts, if not, you
will evade taxes
and elope.

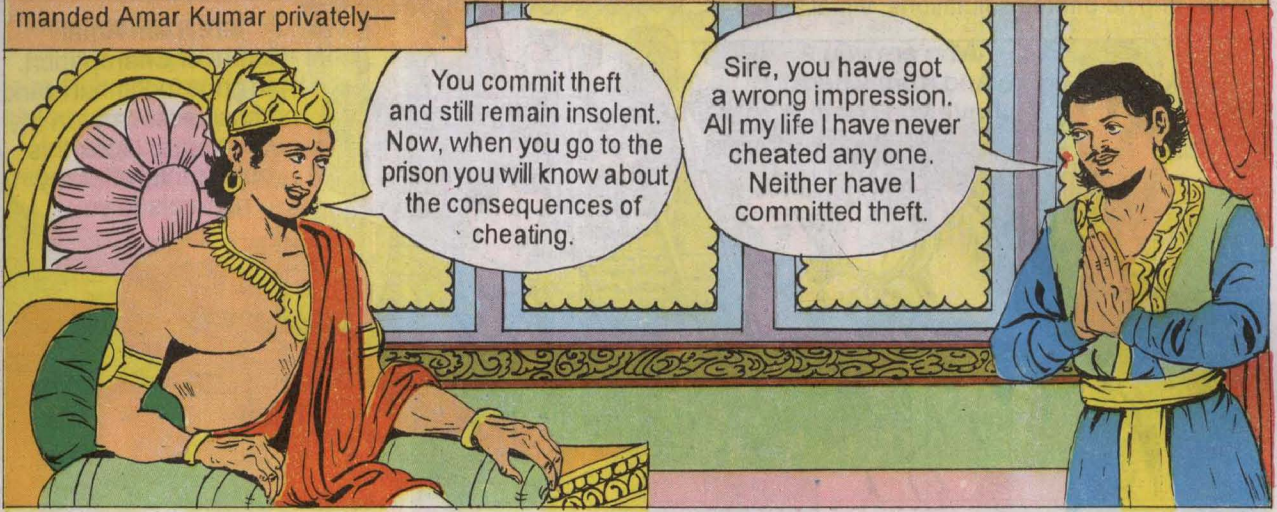
After this Vimalyash ordered the guards—



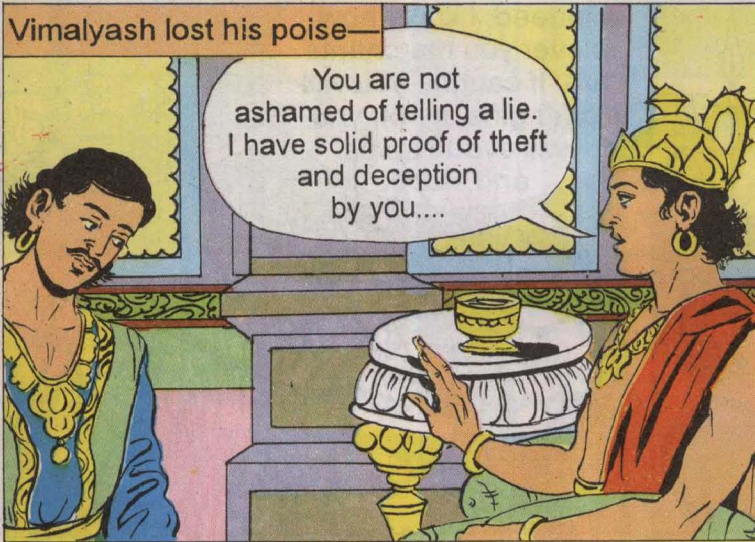
Confiscate all the merchandise
of this merchant and produce him
before me in my palace.

Amar Kumar started pleading, but the guards arrested him.

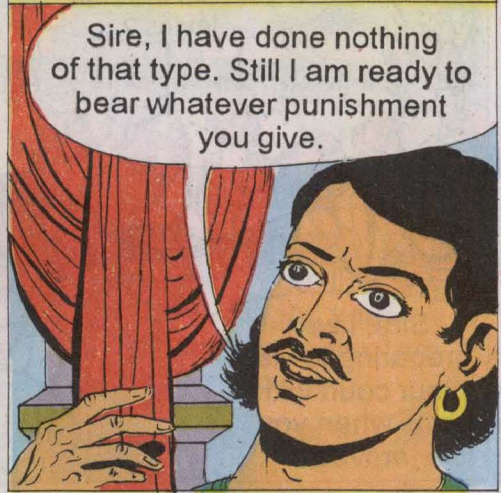
In the evening, Amar Kumar was produced before Vimalyash. Sending away the guards, Vimalyash reprimanded Amar Kumar privately—



Vimalyash lost his poise—



Amar Kumar thought—



Vimal was ready with a bowl full of oil. Pointing at the bowl he said—



Vimal said angrily—

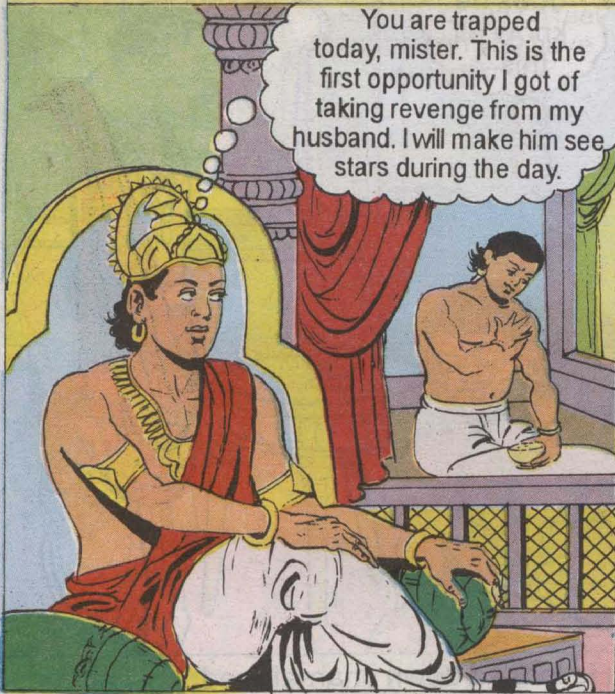
What a strange punishment.

Sire, I shall abide by what you say.

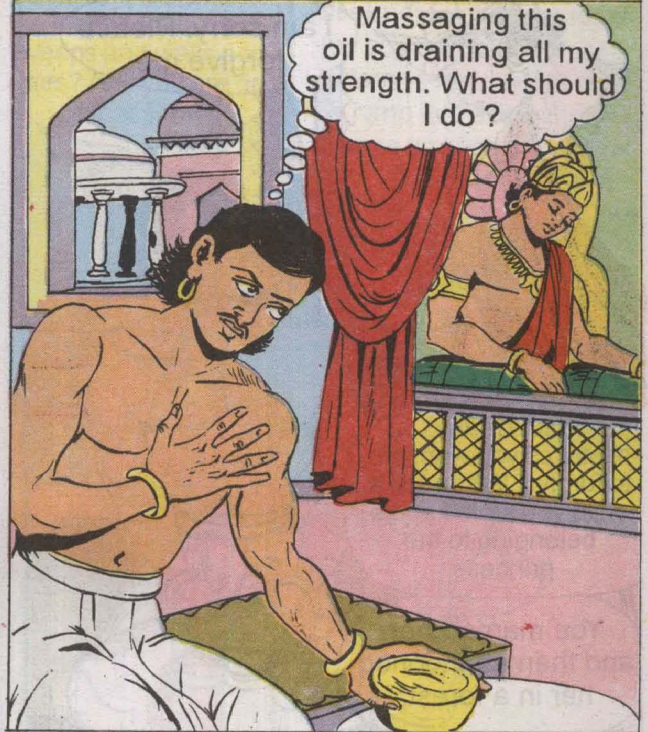
Alright. Go into the next room and start your work. Beware, if you try to cheat, you will rot in the jail all your life.



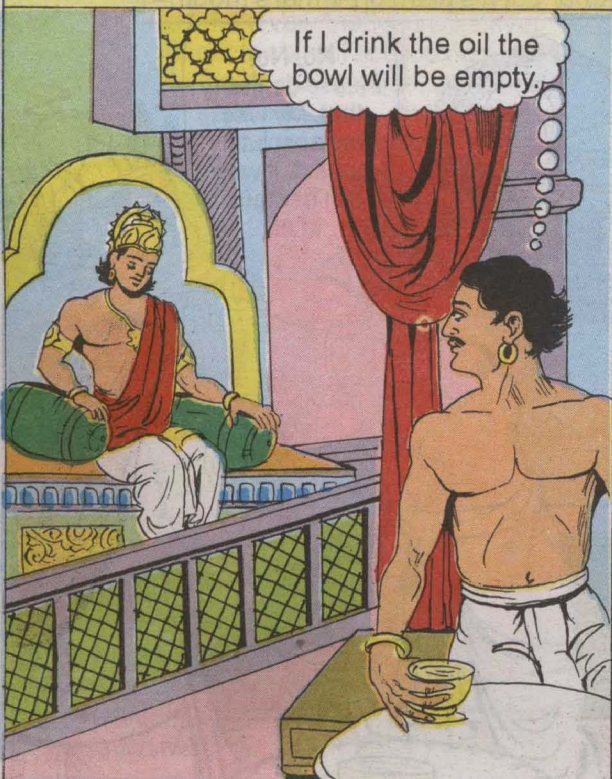
Amar Kumar went into the room and started applying the oil on his body. Vimal also reclined on an easy chair and observed. He thought—



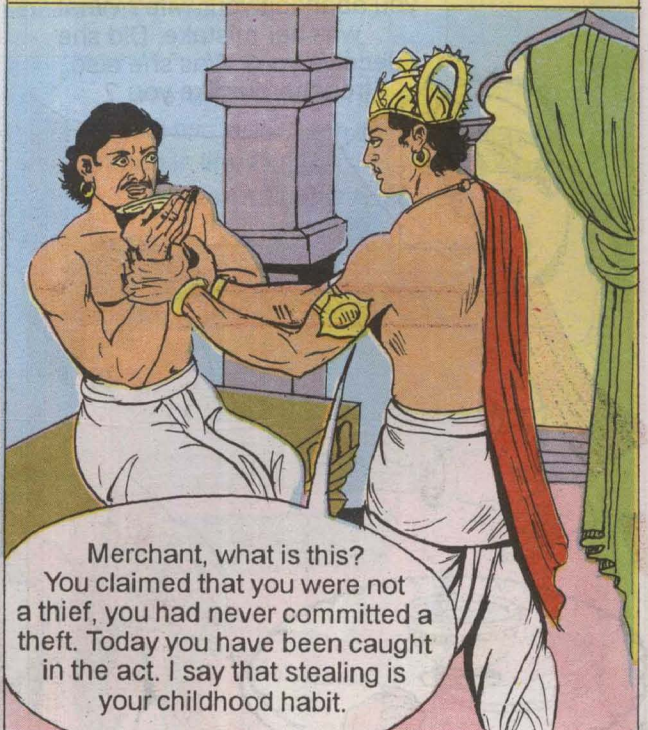
This way almost a quarter of the night was spent. The level of the oil in the bowl hardly reduced. Amar thought—



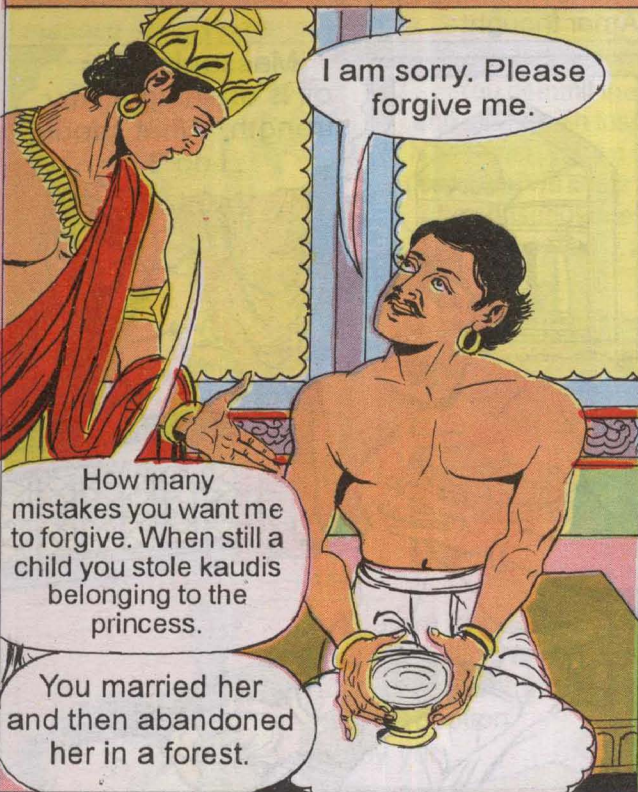
Then he saw that Vimal was drowsing. He thought—



Amar lifted the bowl to his lips. Vimal got up and caught his hand.



Amar was stunned. He uttered falteringly—

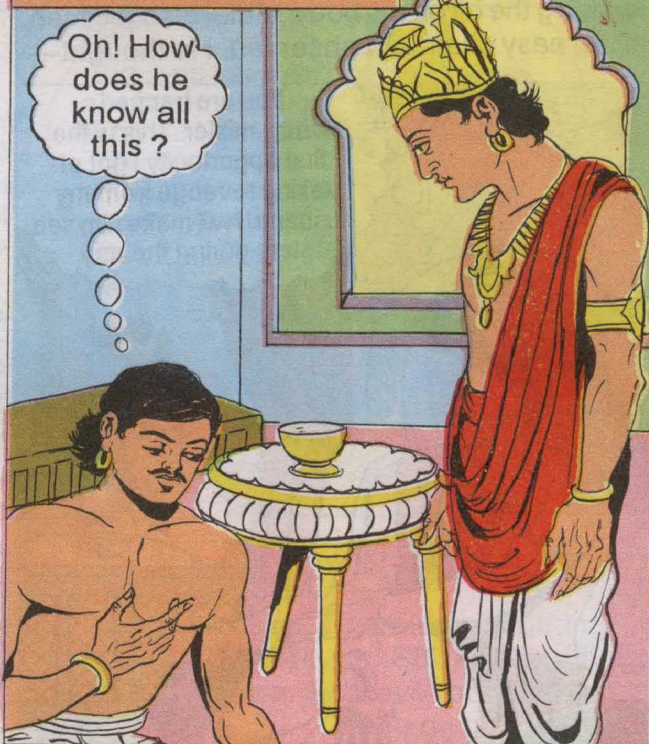


I am sorry. Please forgive me.

How many mistakes you want me to forgive. When still a child you stole kaudis belonging to the princess.

You married her and then abandoned her in a forest.

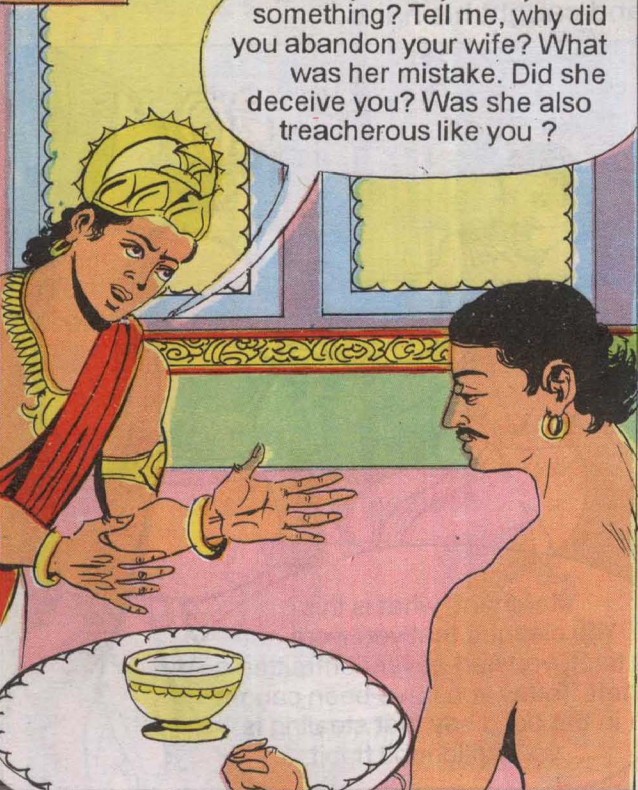
This benumbed Amar.



Oh! How does he know all this?

He looked down shamefaced.

Vimal—



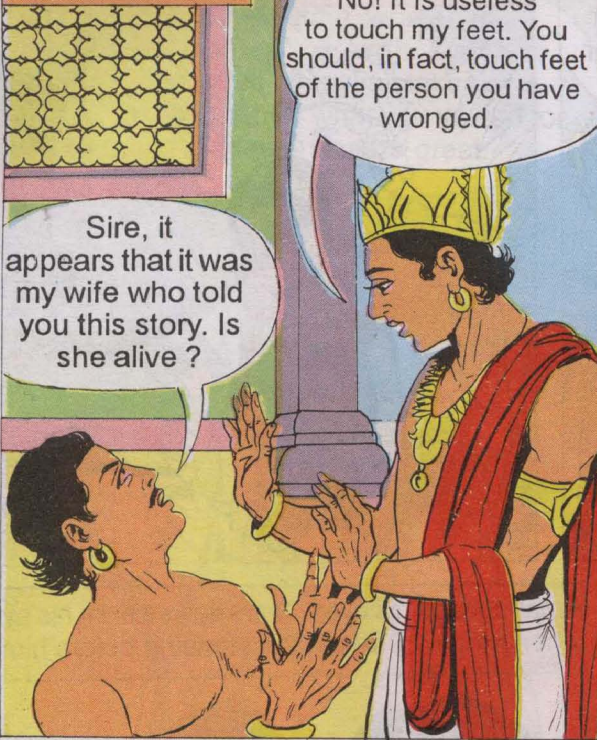
Why don't you say something? Tell me, why did you abandon your wife? What was her mistake. Did she deceive you? Was she also treacherous like you?

Amar put his palm on Vimal's mouth—



No! No! Please don't say that. My wife was absolutely honest. It was not her fault at all.

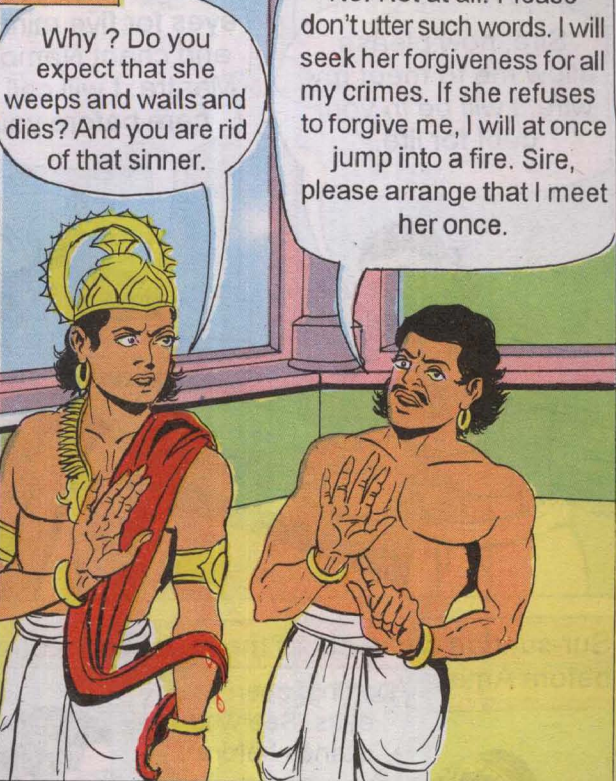
Then Amar tried to touch Vimal's feet. Vimal stepped back.



No! It is useless to touch my feet. You should, in fact, touch feet of the person you have wronged.

Sire, it appears that it was my wife who told you this story. Is she alive?

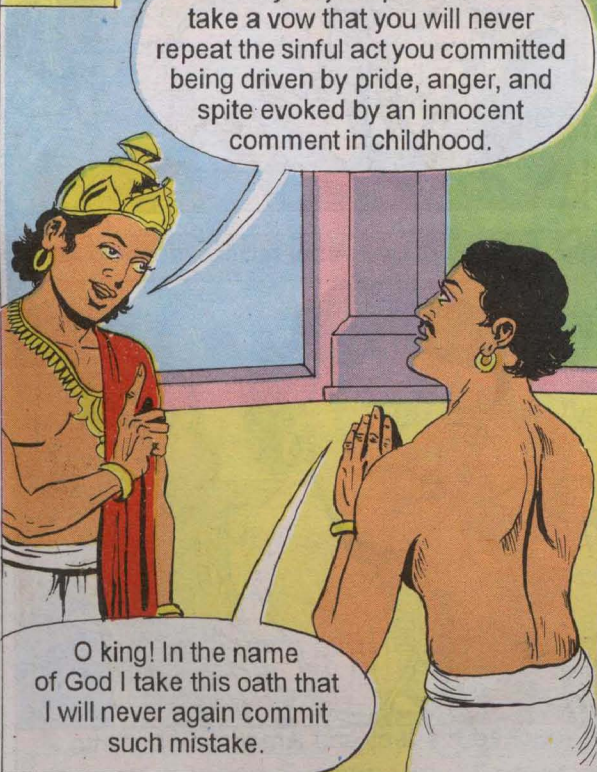
Vimal—



Why? Do you expect that she weeps and wails and dies? And you are rid of that sinner.

No! Not at all. Please don't utter such words. I will seek her forgiveness for all my crimes. If she refuses to forgive me, I will at once jump into a fire. Sire, please arrange that I meet her once.

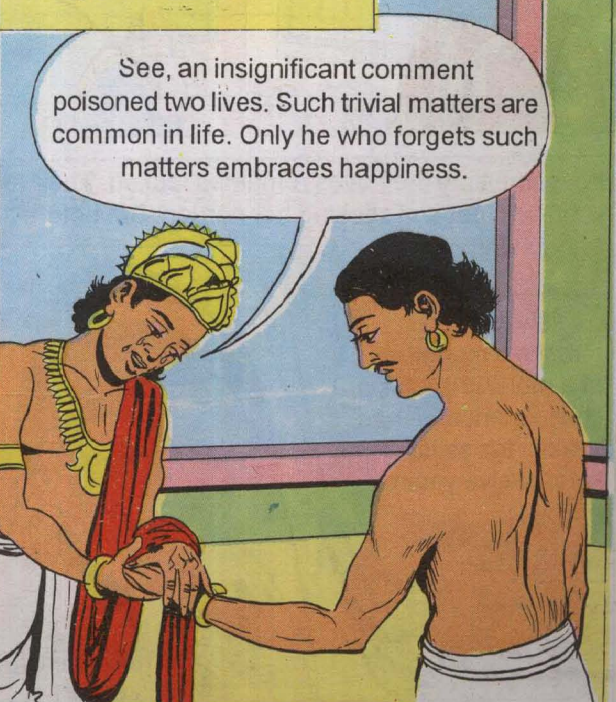
Vimal—



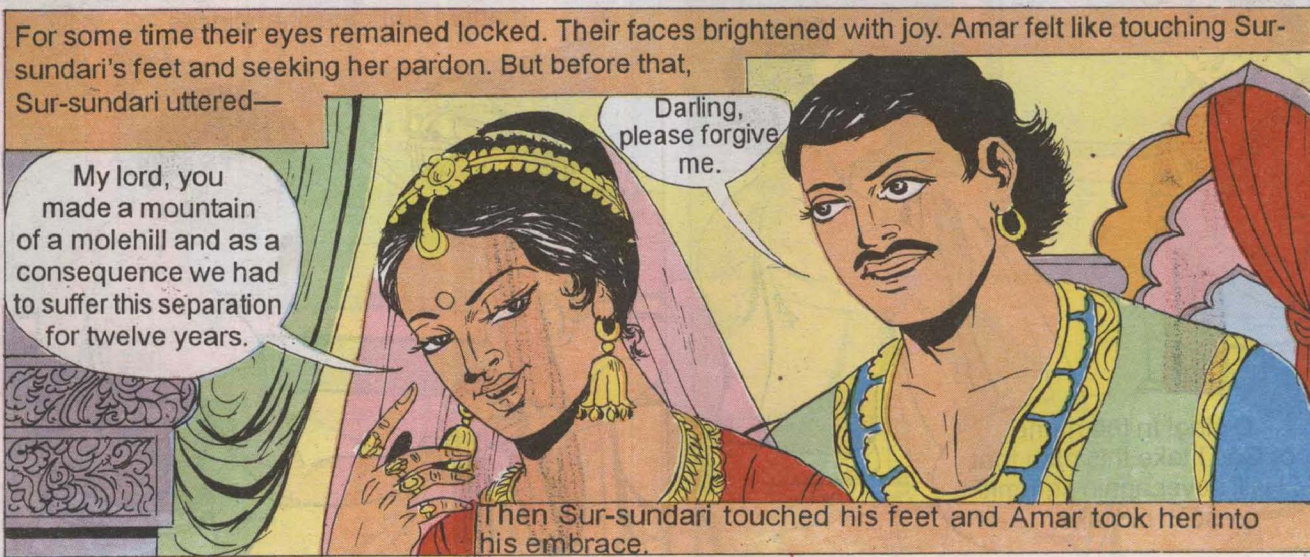
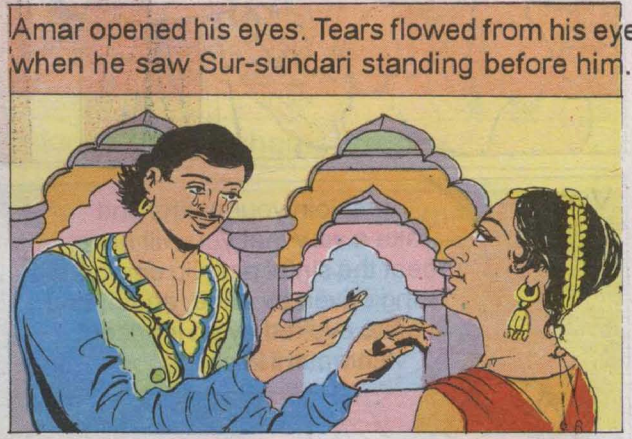
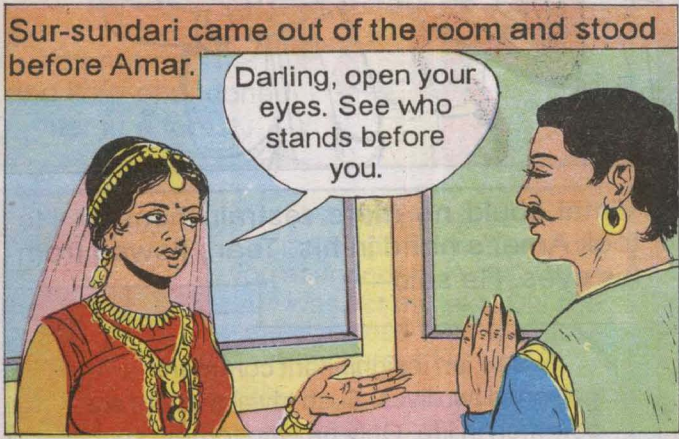
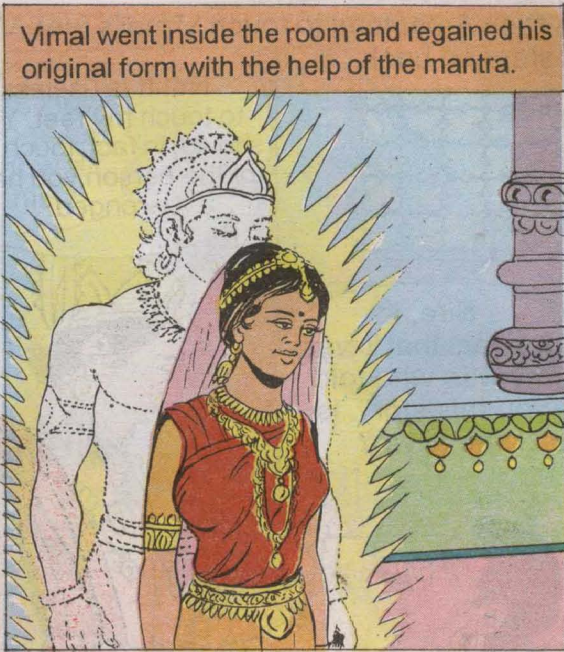
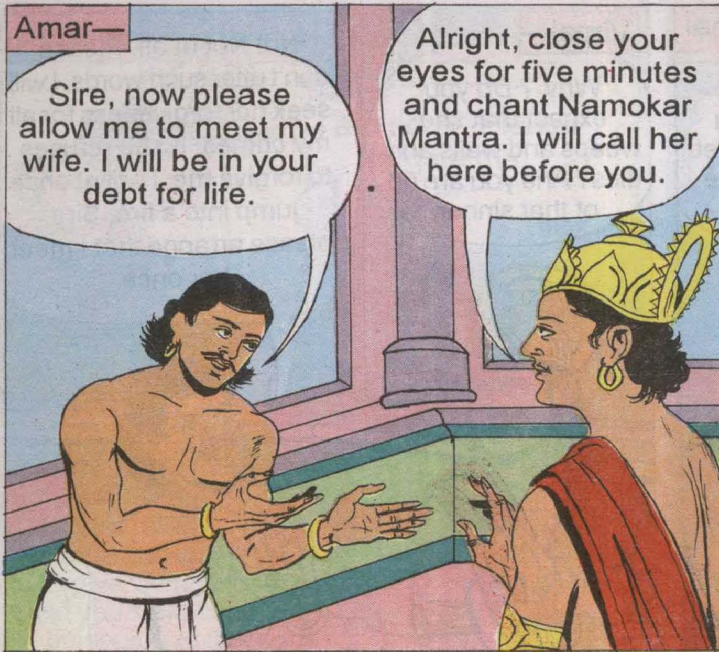
First join your palms and take a vow that you will never repeat the sinful act you committed being driven by pride, anger, and spite evoked by an innocent comment in childhood.

O king! In the name of God I take this oath that I will never again commit such mistake.

Vimal could no more restrain himself. He took Amar's hand in his. Tears flowed from his eyes. He said—

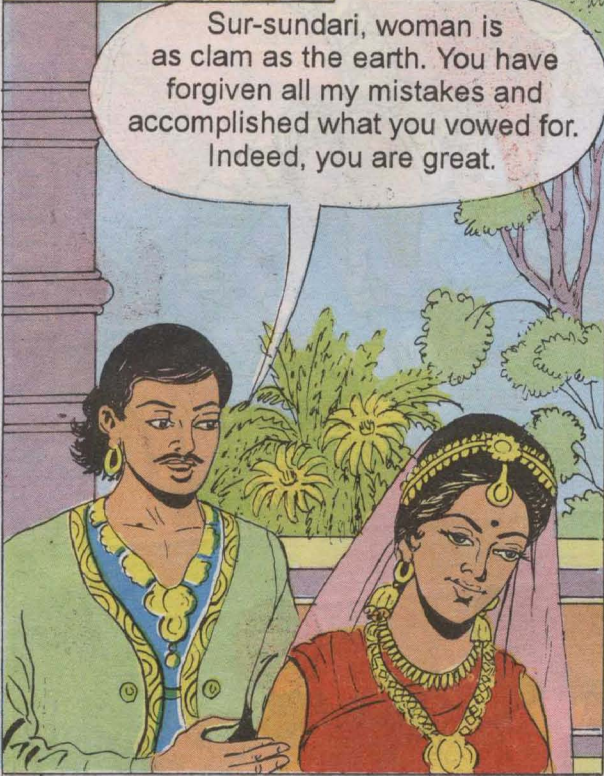


See, an insignificant comment poisoned two lives. Such trivial matters are common in life. Only he who forgets such matters embraces happiness.



Amar said—

Sur-sundari, woman is as clam as the earth. You have forgiven all my mistakes and accomplished what you vowed for. Indeed, you are great.



The night was spent in sharing their individual experiences.



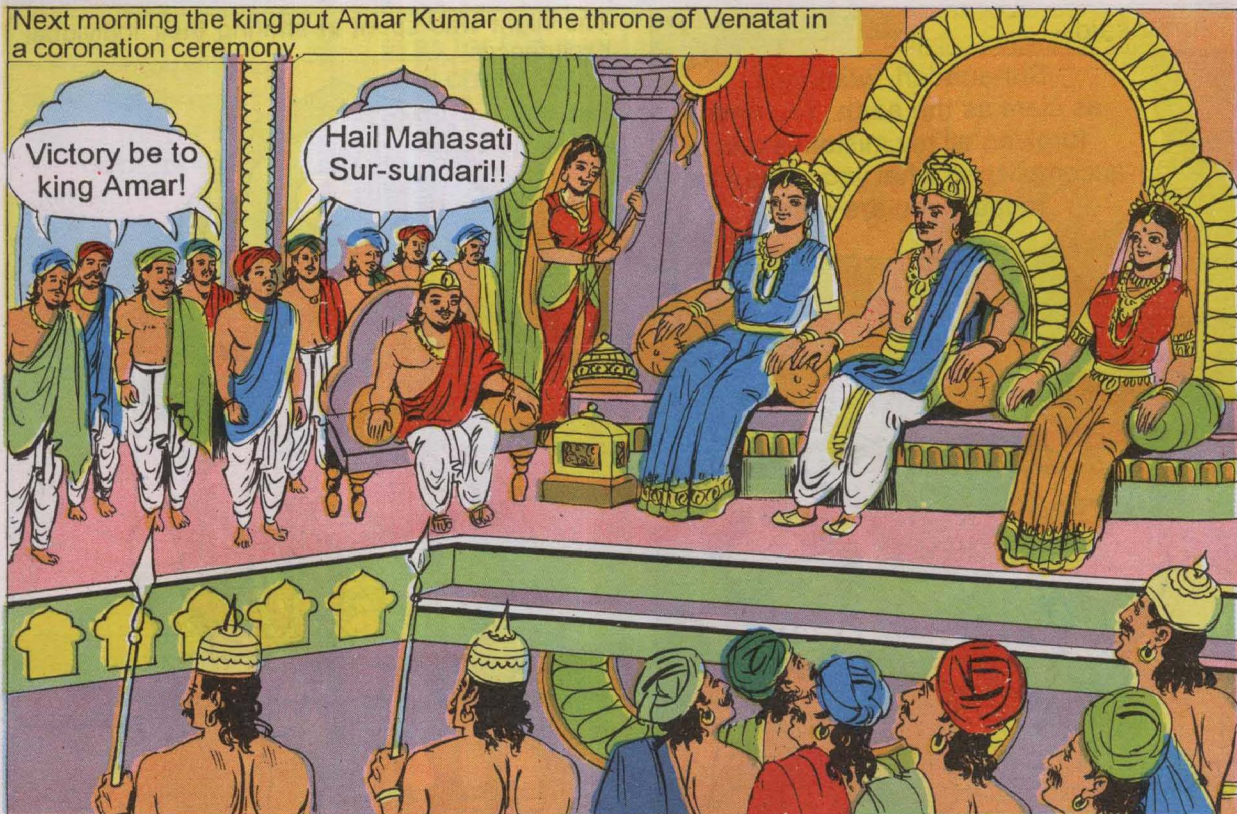
Next morning the king got the news. The king came rushing with his queen and daughter Kanakvati. when they heard the story their eyes also became wet. Princess Kanakvati said to Sur-sundari—

Sister, we are two branches of the same great tree.



Kanakvati hugged Sur-sundari. All present there showered flowers on these three.

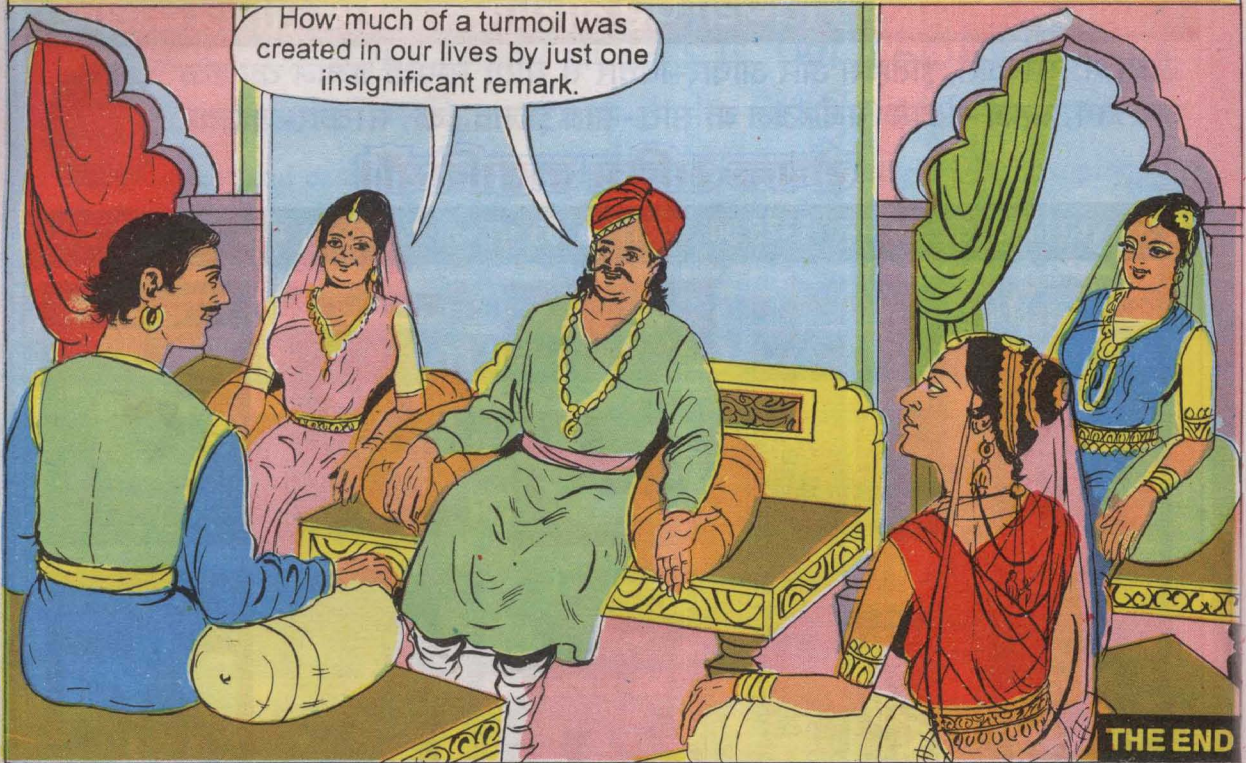
Next morning the king put Amar Kumar on the throne of Venatat in a coronation ceremony.



Spending a few days there Amar Kumar sailed with his two wives for Champapuri to meet his parents.



After reaching Champapuri when he narrated the story to his parents, they also said—



When they became old, Amar Kumar and Sur-sundari gave their kingdom to their sons and proceeded to embrace success in the spiritual field.

THE LESSON :

Sometimes even fun and hilarity hurt others and in the agitated state of mind such harsh words that pierce the heart like a thorn are forced out. Mistakes and disputes are common in life but if they are taken to heart and the resulting torridness drives one towards revenge, an all consuming fire erupts. This fire burns and tortures everyone. Sanity lies in wiping the mind of all such insignificant remarks and nurturing mutual love and faith.

Insignificant things can poison ones life. Therefore do not allow them to infest your mind. Let go what has happened and is past. The only path to lasting peace is "forgive and forget."

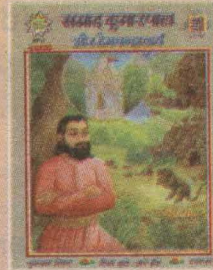
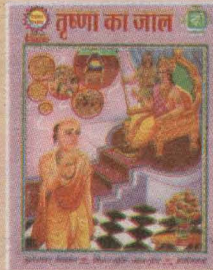
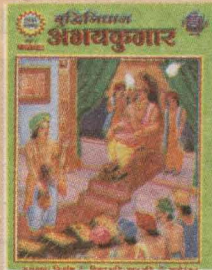
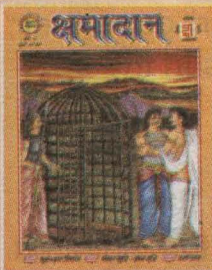
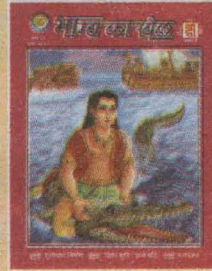
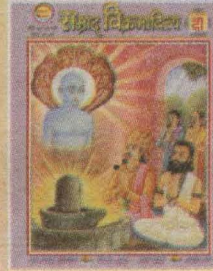
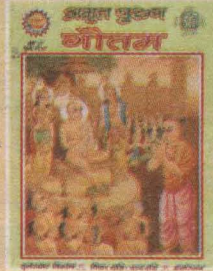
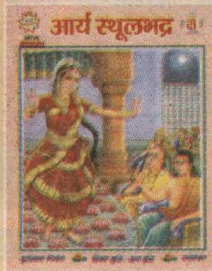
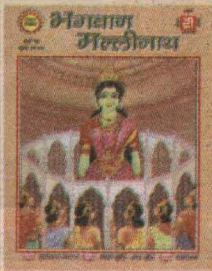
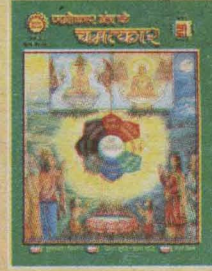
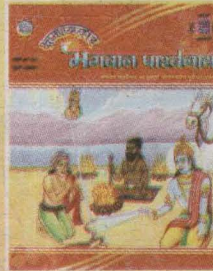
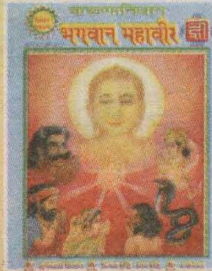
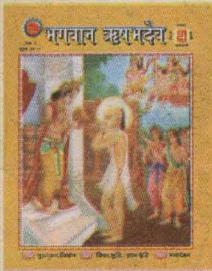
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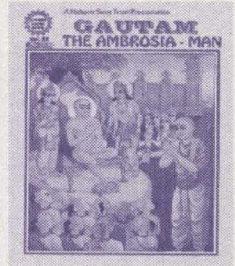
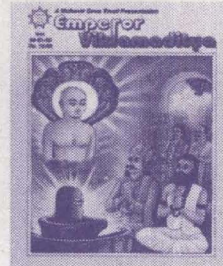
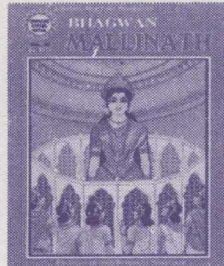
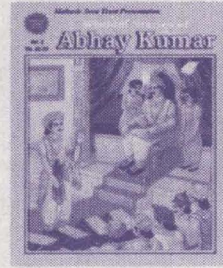
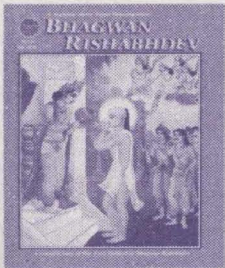
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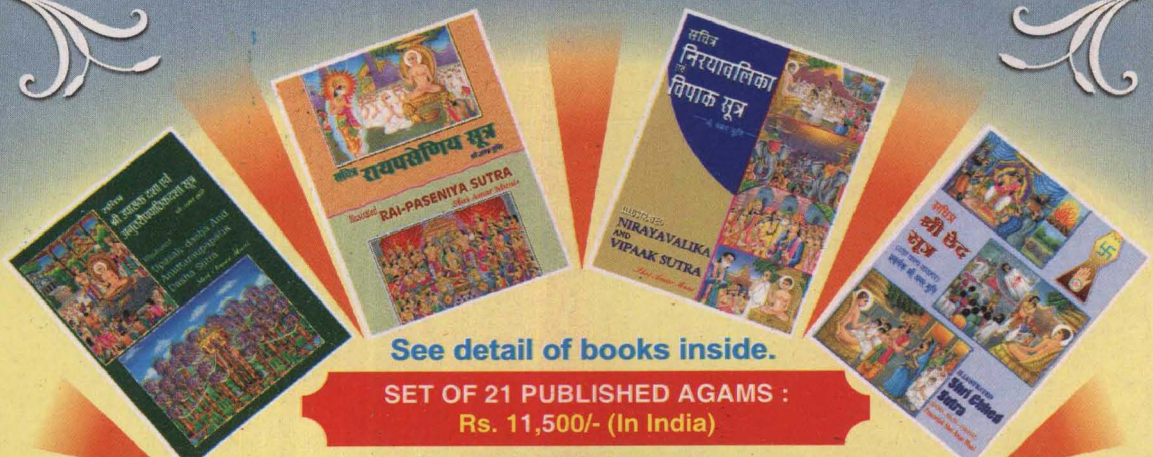
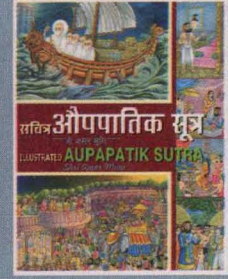
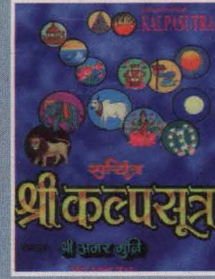
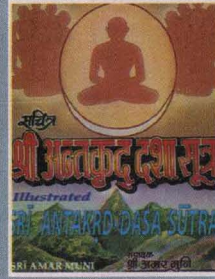
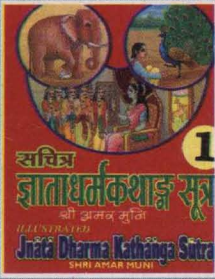
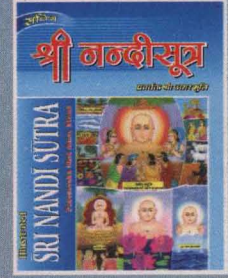
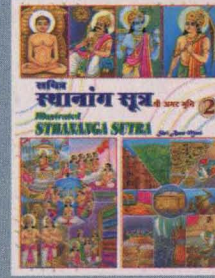
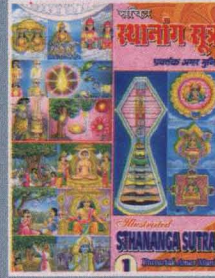
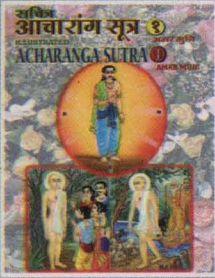
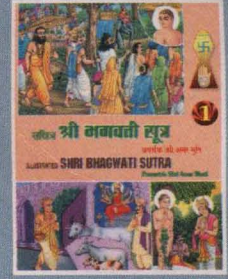
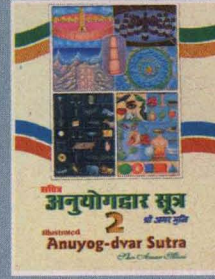
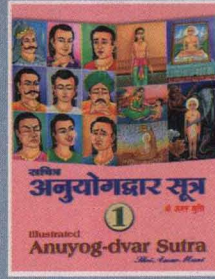
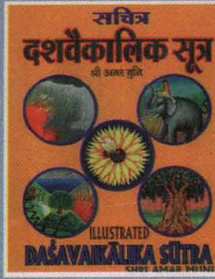
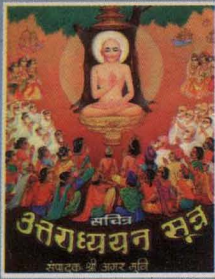
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