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# PRITHVI VALLABH



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(or THE STORY OF MUNJA AND MRINALVATI)

Munja, popularly known as Prithvi Vallabh, ruled Malva (modern Madhya Pradesh) and large parts of Gujarat from A. D. 974 to 997. Accounts of his story are to be found in the few verses available today, of a poem, MUNJARASA, in Gujarati.

Munja was a great ruler. An able statesman, scholar and poet of considerable repute, he was brave, handsome and noble, with an infinite capacity to enjoy life. He was loved by his subjects. This is the story of his ill-fated romance with the stern and austere Princess Mrinalvati, sister of the King of Telengana.

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Our Next Title

## THE PAUPER PRINCE

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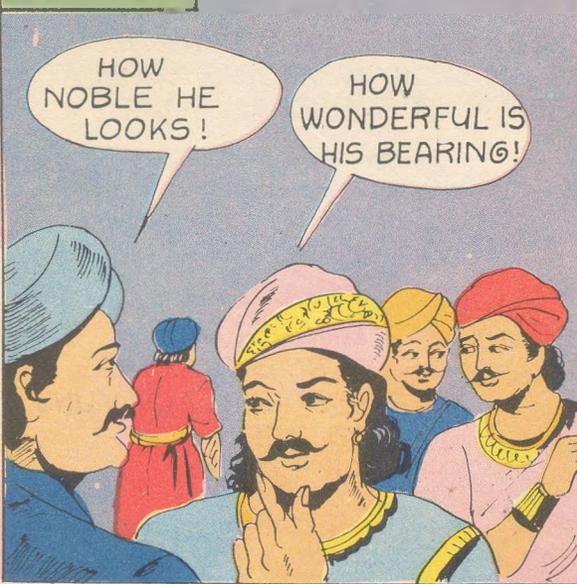
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# PRITHVI VALLABH

**I**N MANYAKHET (TELENGANA), THERE WAS GREAT REJOICING. THE INVINCIBLE EMPEROR OF AVANTI (MALVA), MUNJ, HAD AT LAST BEEN DEFEATED BY THE TELENGANA KING, TAILAP. WATCHING THE VICTORY PROCESSION FROM THE PALACE WINDOWS WAS MRINALVATI, TAILAP'S ELDER SISTER AND THE REAL POWER BEHIND THE TELENGANA THRONE.



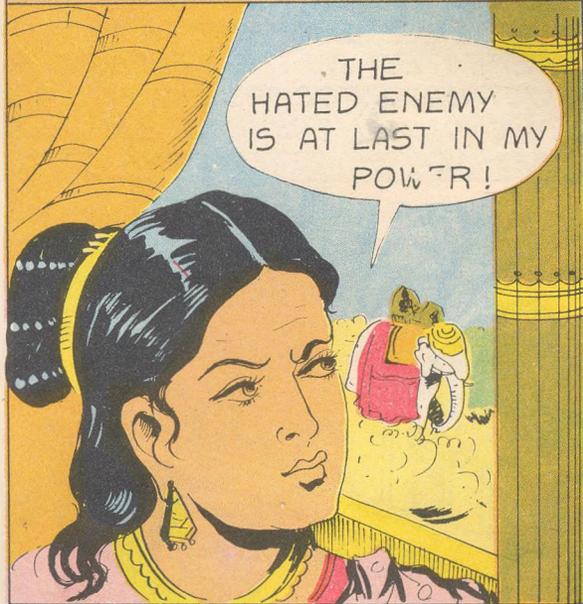
MUNJ WAS POPULARLY KNOWN AS PRITHVI VALLABH THE FAVOURED OF THE EARTH. HE WAS TALL AND BROAD SHOULDERED, HANDSOME AND NOBLE. ALL EYES WERE UPON HIM AS WALKED, PROUD AND STRAIGHT.



HOW NOBLE HE LOOKS!

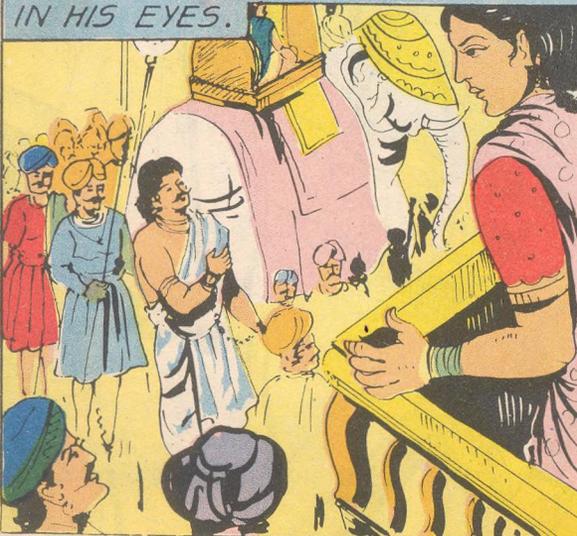
HOW WONDERFUL IS HIS BEARING!

MRINALVATI WAS WIDOWED AND MIDDLE-AGED. LONG YEARS OF AUSTERITY HAD LINED HER ATTRACTIVE FACE. HER ONE AMBITION HAD BEEN TO DEFEAT MUNJ.



THE HATED ENEMY IS AT LAST IN MY POWER!

AS THE PROCESSION WOUND ALONG, PRITHVI VALLABH STOPPED UNDER THE PALACE WINDOW AND GLANCED UP AT MRINALVATI. A SERENE SMILE PLAYED ABOUT HIS LIPS AND THERE WAS A MERRY TWINKLE IN HIS EYES.



MRINALVATI STOOD TRANSFIXED BY HIS GAZE AS THOUGH SHE WAS HYPNOTISED.

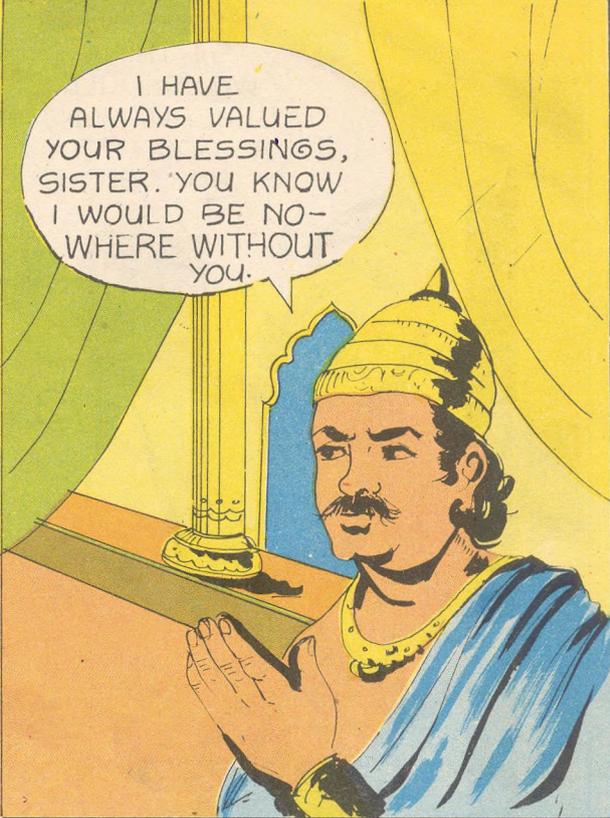


WHAT EFFRONTERY! WHY DOES HE STARE AT ME LIKE THIS?

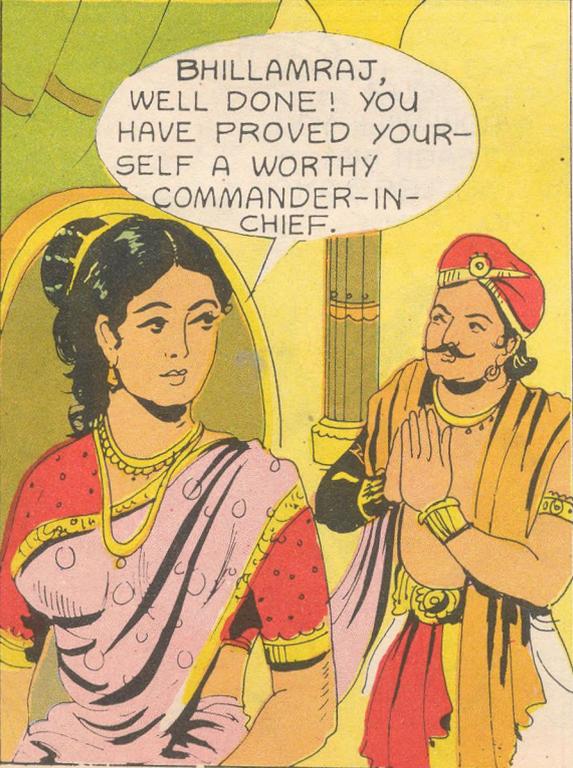
IN THE PALACE-



MAY YOU  
LIVE LONG,  
TILL AP! MAY  
EVERY EFFORT OF  
YOURS BE CROWNED  
WITH VICTORY!



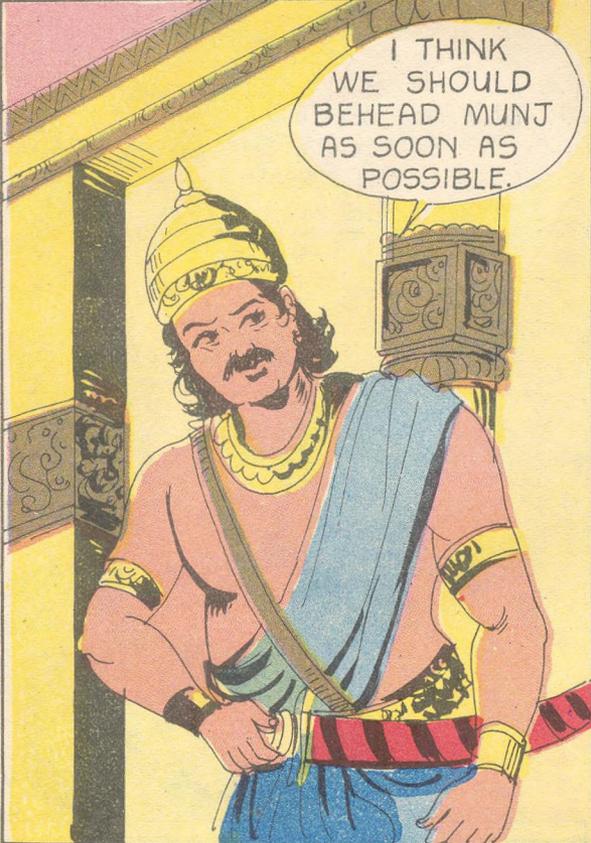
I HAVE  
ALWAYS VALUED  
YOUR BLESSINGS,  
SISTER. YOU KNOW  
I WOULD BE NO-  
WHERE WITHOUT  
YOU.



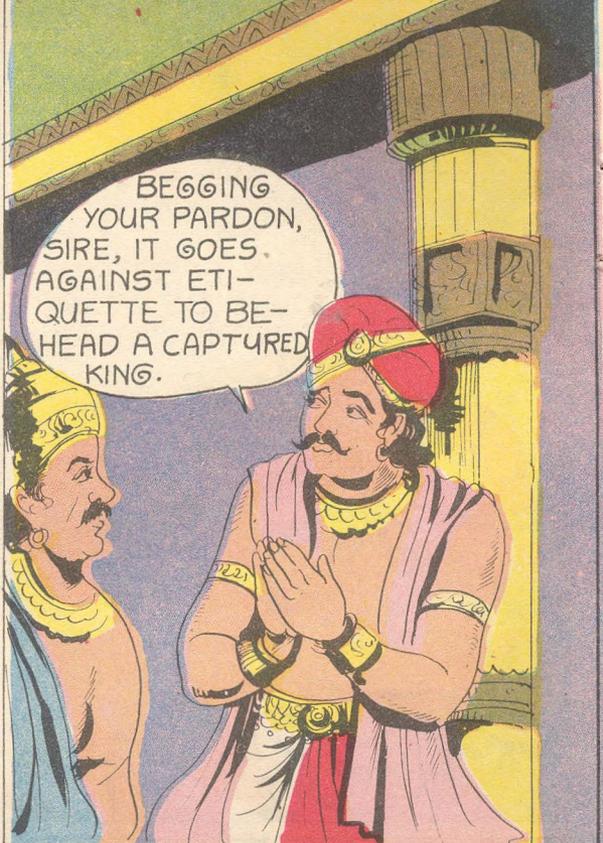
BHILLAMRAJ,  
WELL DONE! YOU  
HAVE PROVED YOUR-  
SELF A WORTHY  
COMMANDER-IN-  
CHIEF.



I HAVE HEARD  
THE TALES OF  
YOUR VALOUR IN  
THE CAPTURE  
OF MUNJ.



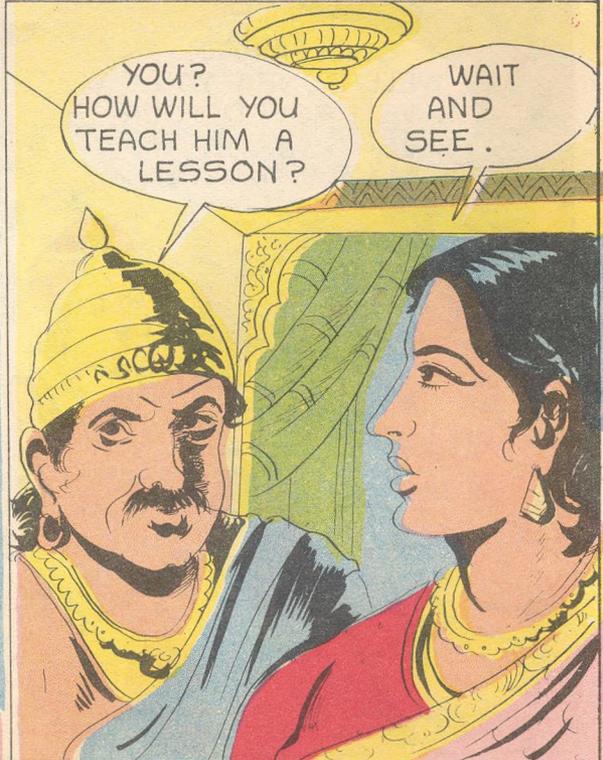
I THINK WE SHOULD BEHEAD MUNJ AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.



BEGGING YOUR PARDON, SIRE, IT GOES AGAINST ETIQUETTE TO BEHEAD A CAPTURED KING.



YES, WE MUST NOT BE HASTY, TAILAP. WE MUST TORTURE HIM TILL HE BEGS FOR MERCY. THAT WILL BE A FIT PUNISHMENT FOR MUNJ. I SHALL PERSONALLY TEACH HIM A GOOD LESSON.



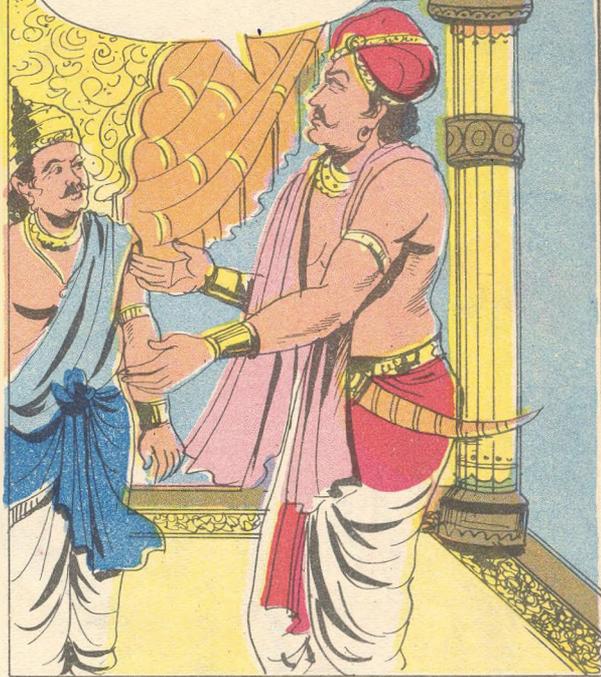
YOU? HOW WILL YOU TEACH HIM A LESSON?

WAIT AND SEE.

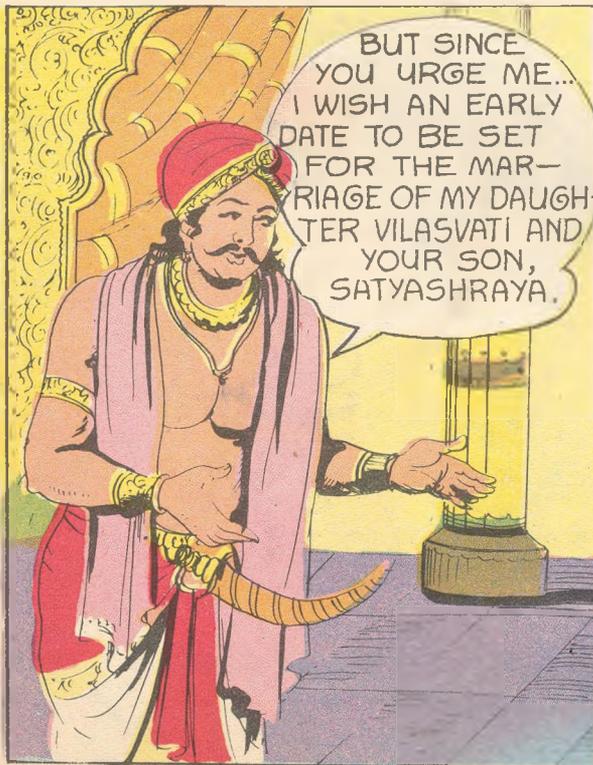
NOW  
ASK OF ME A  
FAVOUR, BHILLAM.  
I SHALL GRANT IT  
FOR I AM WELL  
PLEASSED WITH  
YOU.



YOUR BLESS-  
INGS ARE ENOUGH  
FOR ME, YOUR  
MAJESTY.

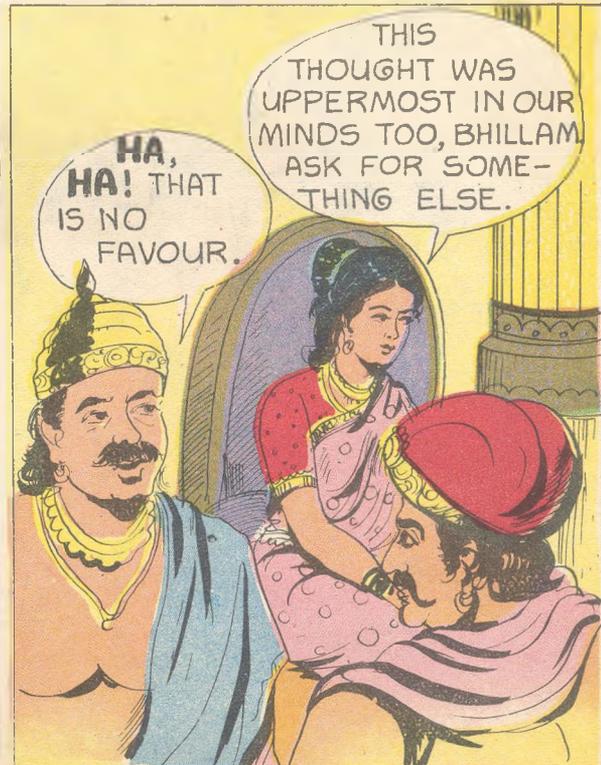


BUT SINCE  
YOU URGE ME...  
I WISH AN EARLY  
DATE TO BE SET  
FOR THE MAR-  
RIAGE OF MY DAUGH-  
TER VILASVATI AND  
YOUR SON,  
SATYASHRAYA.

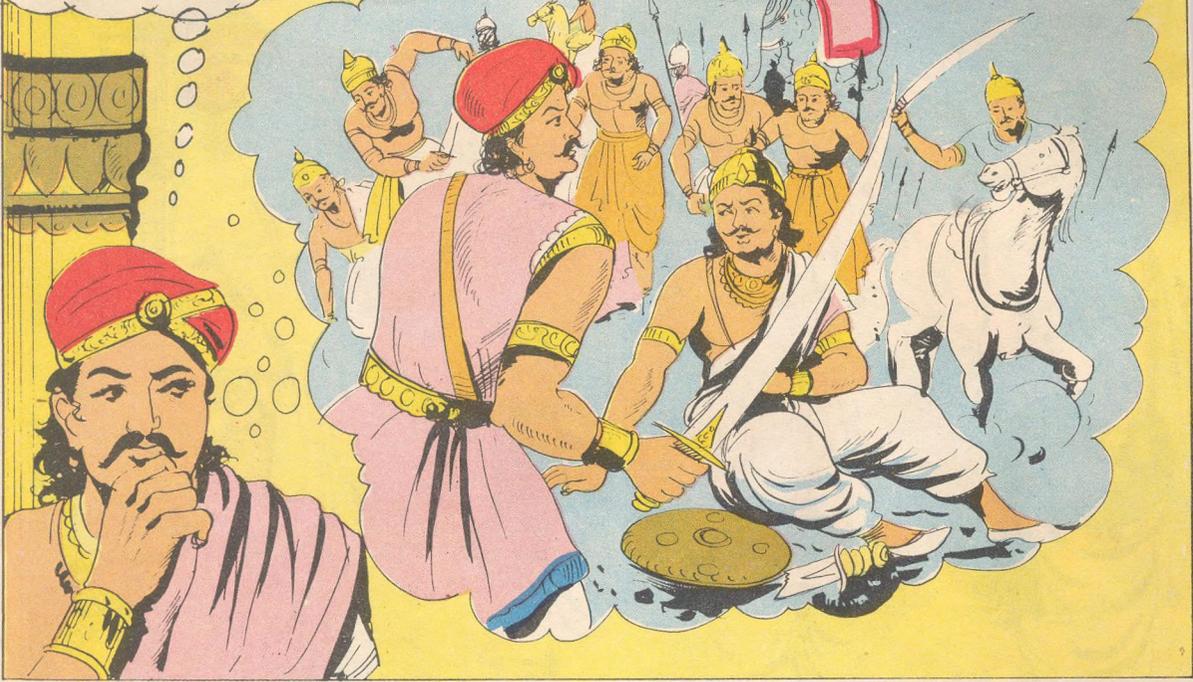


HA,  
HA! THAT  
IS NO  
FAVOUR.

THIS  
THOUGHT WAS  
UPPERMOST IN OUR  
MINDS TOO, BHILLAM.  
ASK FOR SOME-  
THING ELSE.



ON THE BATTLE-  
FIELD, WHEN I  
HAD PINNED  
DOWN MUNJ...

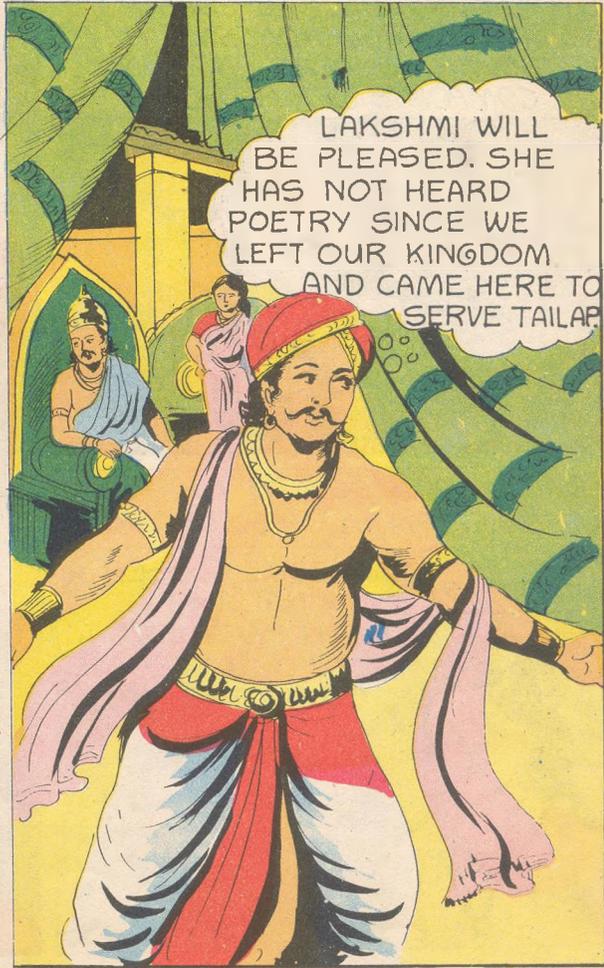
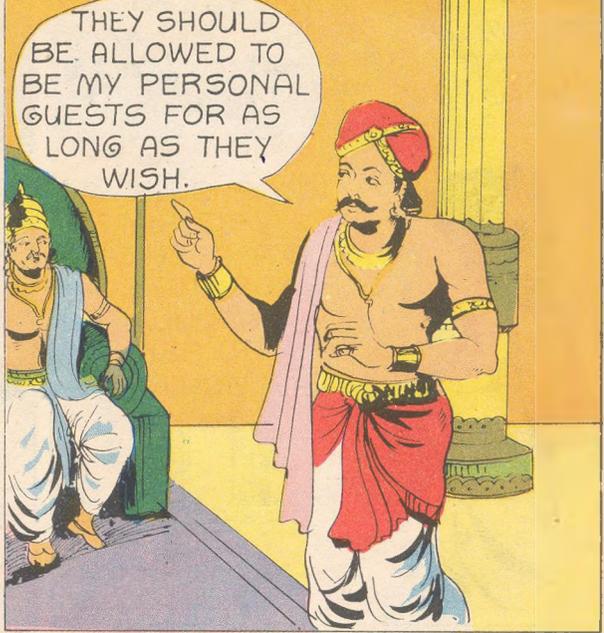
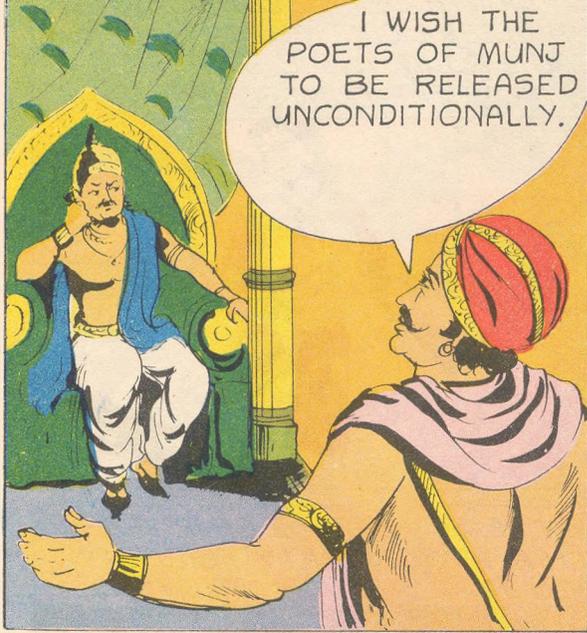


DO  
WHAT YOU  
LIKE WITH  
ME BUT BE  
KIND TO MY  
POETS.  
TREAT THEM  
WITH  
CONSIDER-  
TION.



HOW  
NOBLE HE  
IS EVEN  
IN  
DEFEAT!





MRINALVATI HAD NEVER CONSIDERED VISITING A PRISONER IN HIS CELL, NO MATTER HOW HIGH HIS STATUS. BUT THAT DAY...



HER MOUTH SET SEVERELY, CLAD IN AUSTERE CLOTHES, TILTING HER HEAD PROUDLY, SHE MARCHED TOWARDS THE DUNGEONS.



WHEN HE SAW HER, HE GAVE HER SUCH A WONDERFULLY FRIENDLY SMILE THAT SHE WAS STUNNED!

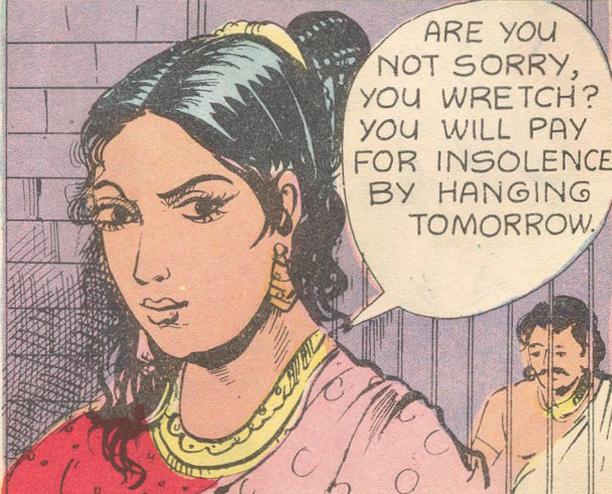


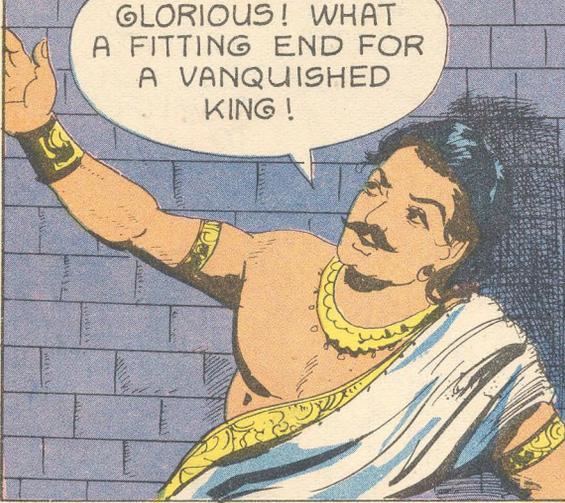
IN THE DUNGEON, SHE FOUND MUNJ RECLINING NONCHALANTLY, AS THOUGH HE WERE ENJOYING THE COMFORTS OF A PALACE.



SHE TURNED AWAY HER FACE ANGRILY—

MRINALVATI STOOD AS THOUGH MESMERISED TILL HIS SOFT VOICE BROKE INTO HER THOUGHTS.



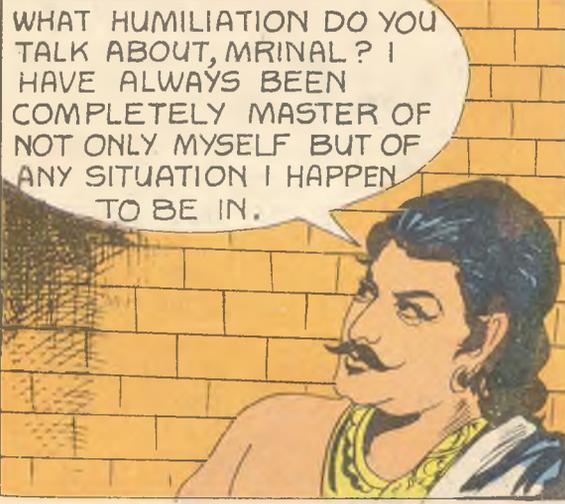
A man with a mustache, wearing a white dhoti and a yellow and blue shawl, is speaking. He has a gold necklace and armlets.

GLORIOUS! WHAT A FITTING END FOR A VANQUISHED KING!

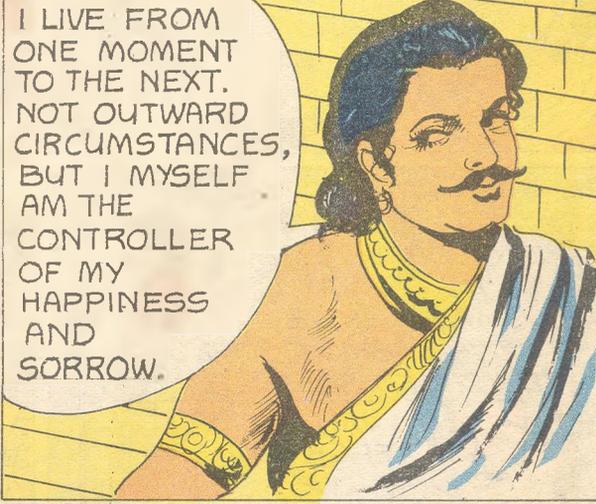
MRINALVATI STAMPED HER FEET ANGRILY.

A woman in a pink and red sari with gold jewelry is speaking. In the background, a man in a white dhoti is visible.

HOW CAN YOU BE SO COOL IN THE FACE OF HUMILIATION AND INSULT? HAVE YOU NO DECENCY LEFT?!

A man with a mustache, wearing a white dhoti and a yellow and blue shawl, is speaking.

WHAT HUMILIATION DO YOU TALK ABOUT, MRINAL? I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN COMPLETELY MASTER OF NOT ONLY MYSELF BUT OF ANY SITUATION I HAPPEN TO BE IN.

A man with a mustache, wearing a white dhoti and a yellow and blue shawl, is speaking.

I LIVE FROM ONE MOMENT TO THE NEXT. NOT OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT I MYSELF AM THE CONTROLLER OF MY HAPPINESS AND SORROW.

A man with a mustache, wearing a white dhoti and a yellow and blue shawl, is speaking. A woman in a pink sari is visible in the background.

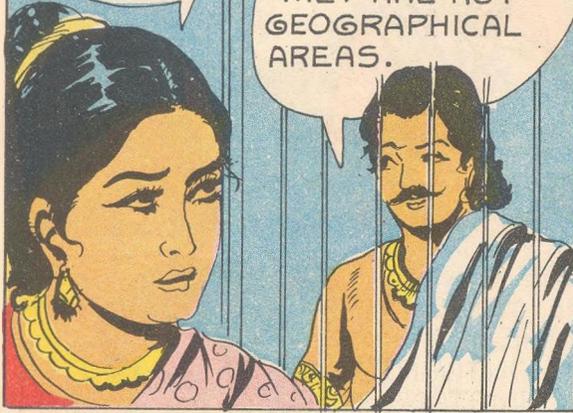
THAT IS WHY I AM CALLED PRITHVI VALLABH THE FAVOURED OF THE EARTH! AND TILL I HAVE THIS ABILITY TO EXTRACT JOY FROM THE WORLD AT WILL, I SHALL REMAIN SO!

HE STOOD UP, TALL AND PROUD. HIS PRESENCE SEEMED TO FILL THE WHOLE PRISON. MRINALVATI HAD NEVER ENCOUNTERED SO POWERFUL A PERSONALITY. SHE FELT WEAK AND CONFUSED.

OUTWARDLY, SHE REGAINED HER COMPOSURE.

YOU WILL SUFFER IN HELL FOR YOU MISDEEDS.

HEAVEN AND HELL ARE OF ONE'S OWN MAKING, MRINAL. THEY ARE NOT GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS.



I DO NOT WANT TO HEAR ANOTHER WORD OF INSOLENCE FROM YOU, MUNJ!

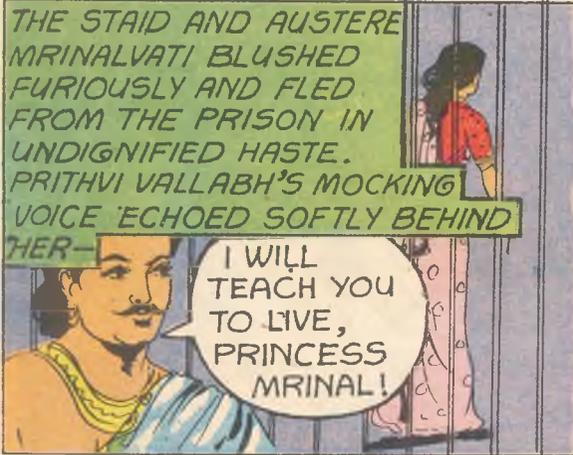
YOU WILL NOT ONLY HEAR ME, YOU WILL COME TO LOVE ME TOO!



BACK IN THE PALACE, SHE TRIED TO THINK OF A WAY TO PUNISH MUNJ

THE STAID AND AUSTERE MRINALVATI BLUSHED FURIOUSLY AND FLED FROM THE PRISON IN UNDIGNIFIED HASTE. PRITHVI VALLABH'S MOCKING VOICE ECHOED SOFTLY BEHIND HER—

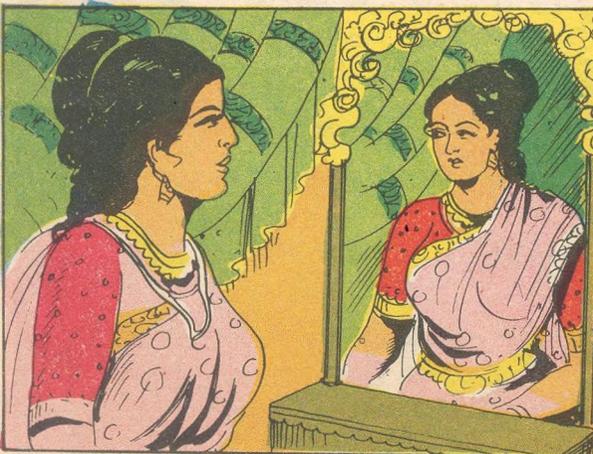
I WILL TEACH YOU TO LIVE, PRINCESS MRINAL!



I KNOW! HE MUST BE PUT IN A WOODEN CAGE LIKE A LOW ANIMAL AND RIDICULED BEFORE THE PUBLIC. THAT IS SURE TO BREAK HIS PRIDE.



THIS DECISION MADE MRINAL FEEL BETTER. SHE CAUGHT SIGHT OF HER FLUSHED FACE IN A MIRROR AND ATTRIBUTED IT TO HER SENSE OF TRIUMPH. RESOLUTELY, SHE DECIDED TO IGNORE THE FAST PACE OF HER HEARTBEATS WHICH HAD QUICKENED AT THE MERE THOUGHT OF MUNJ!



INSPITE OF HER DECISION,  
MRINALVATI COULD NOT SLEEP  
THAT NIGHT.

THIS HAS NEVER  
HAPPENED BEFORE.  
WHAT STRANGENESS  
HAS OVERCOME  
ME?



SHE TRIED TO MEDITATE BUT HER  
MIND'S EYE CONTINUED TO  
CONJURE UP THE SMILING FACE  
OF MUNJ.



AT LAST, THE PINK DAWN BROKE  
OVER THE HORIZON.



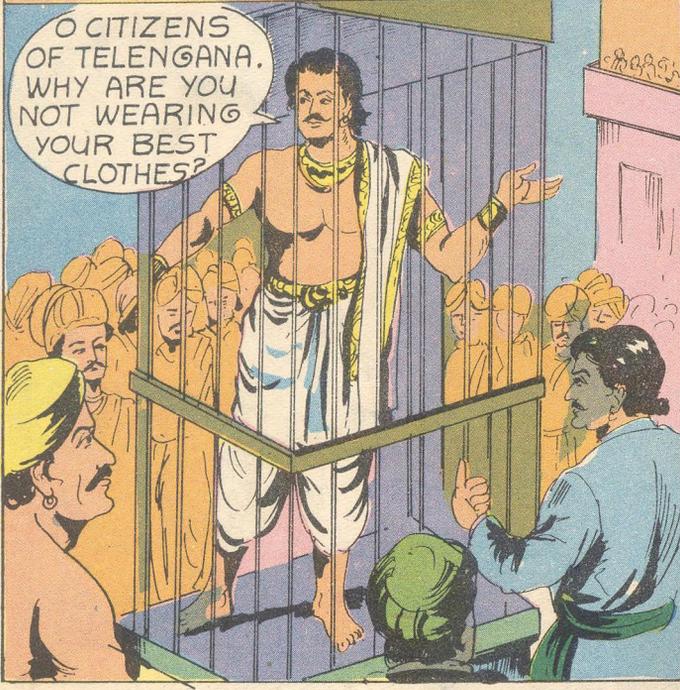
I CAN'T  
WAIT TO SEE  
MUNJ'S FACE. HE  
WILL SURELY  
SUFFER TODAY.

FROM HER BALCONY SHE WATCHED  
THE CROWDS COLLECTING IN THE  
MARKET SQUARE.

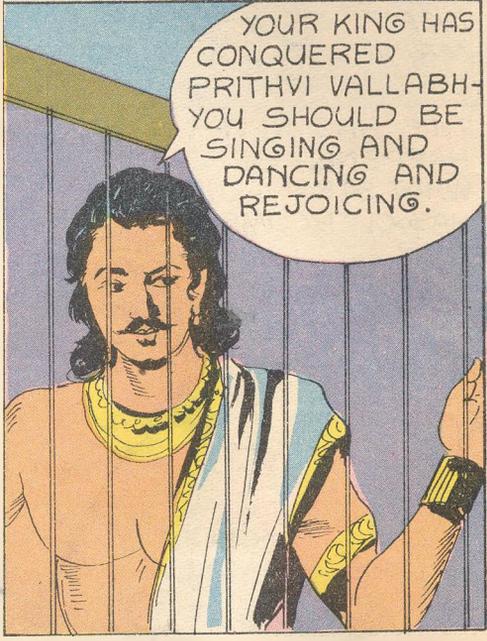


WHAT JOY  
THERE WILL BE  
TO SEE HIM  
PUBLICLY  
HUMILIATED!

THE CAGE WAS BROUGHT IN. THE CROWD GAZED AT THE MAGNIFICENT, TOWERING PERSONALITY OF MUNJ WITH AWE AND WONDER.



O CITIZENS OF TELENGANA. WHY ARE YOU NOT WEARING YOUR BEST CLOTHES?



YOUR KING HAS CONQUERED PRITHVI VALLABH- YOU SHOULD BE SINGING AND DANCING AND REJOICING.



NOW TELL ME. CAN YOU SING?

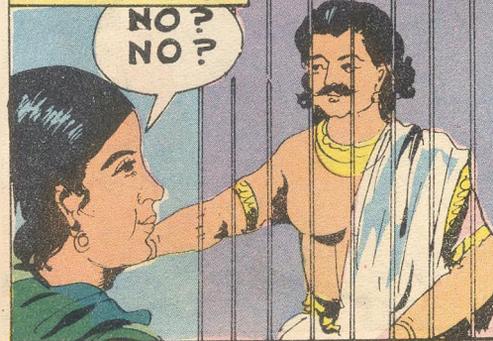
HE BECKONED A SMALL GIRL TO HIM.



COME CLOSER, LITTLE ONE.



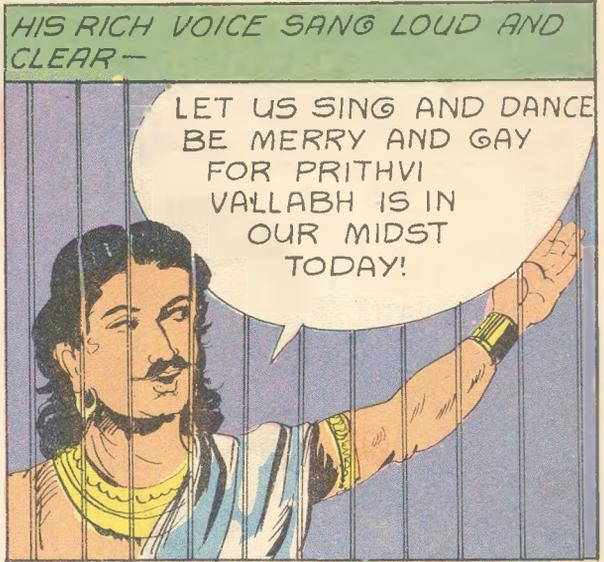
THE GIRL SHOOK HER HEAD TO SAY NO.



NO? NO?



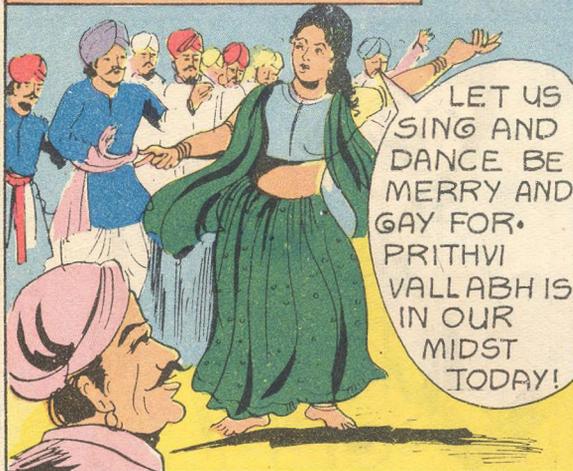
THAT IS A SHAME. I WILL TEACH YOU. COME NOW, SING AFTER ME.



HIS RICH VOICE SANG LOUD AND CLEAR—

LET US SING AND DANCE BE MERRY AND GAY FOR PRITHVI VALLABH IS IN OUR MIDST TODAY!

THE GIRL REPEATED AFTER HIM—



LET US SING AND DANCE BE MERRY AND GAY FOR PRITHVI VALLABH IS IN OUR MIDST TODAY!

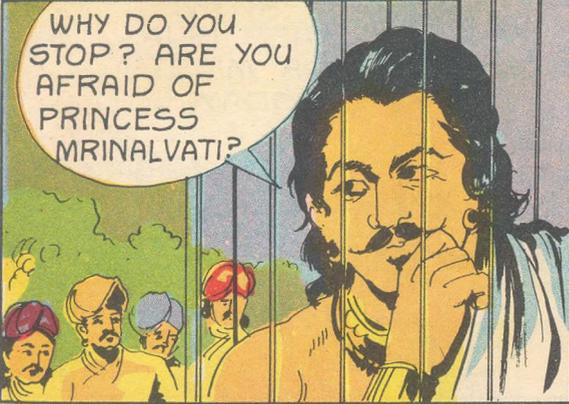


COME ON, JOIN IN, ALL OF YOU.



WITHIN A FEW MOMENTS, THE WHOLE CROWD WAS CHORUSING MUNJ'S SONG.

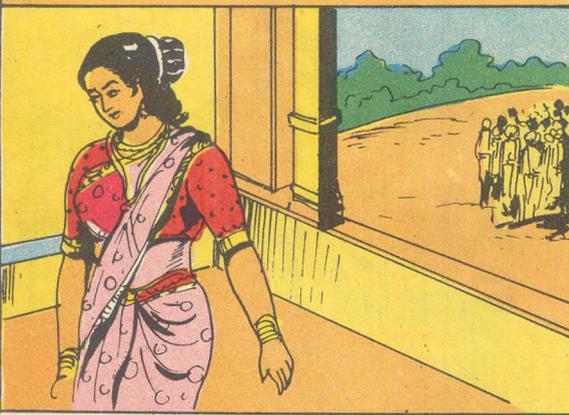
JUST THEN, SOME OF THEM CAUGHT MRINALVATI'S STERN DISAPPROVING GAZE FROM THE PALACE BALCONY. THE MERRY-MAKING CAME TO AN ABRUPT STOP.



DO NOT BE AFRAID OF HER. WE WILL TEACH HER ALSO TO LIVE AND REJOICE. WE WILL TEACH HER TO SING AND DANCE AND CELEBRATE THE JOY OF LIFE!



MRINALVATI FLUSHED AT HIS WORDS. SHE TURNED AWAY ABRUPTLY AND WENT INTO THE PALACE.



MUNJ LOOKED UP AT HER RETREATING FIGURE AND LAUGHED SOFTLY.



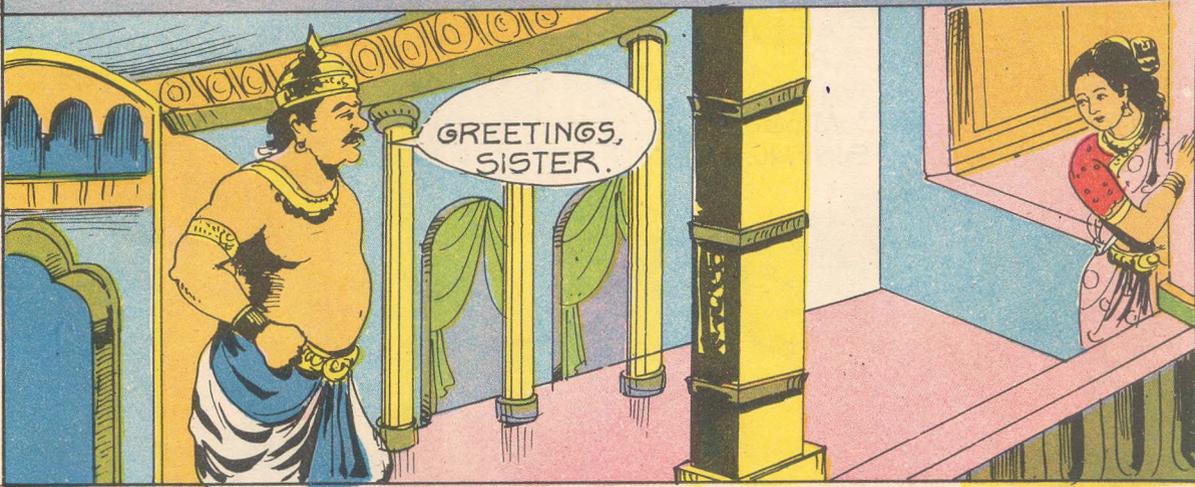
HIS SPIRIT OF JOY AND HAPPINESS WAS INFECTIOUS. SOON THE MARKET SQUARE WAS FILLED WITH SINGING VOICES THAT HAD NOT KNOWN SONG FOR MANY LONG YEARS.



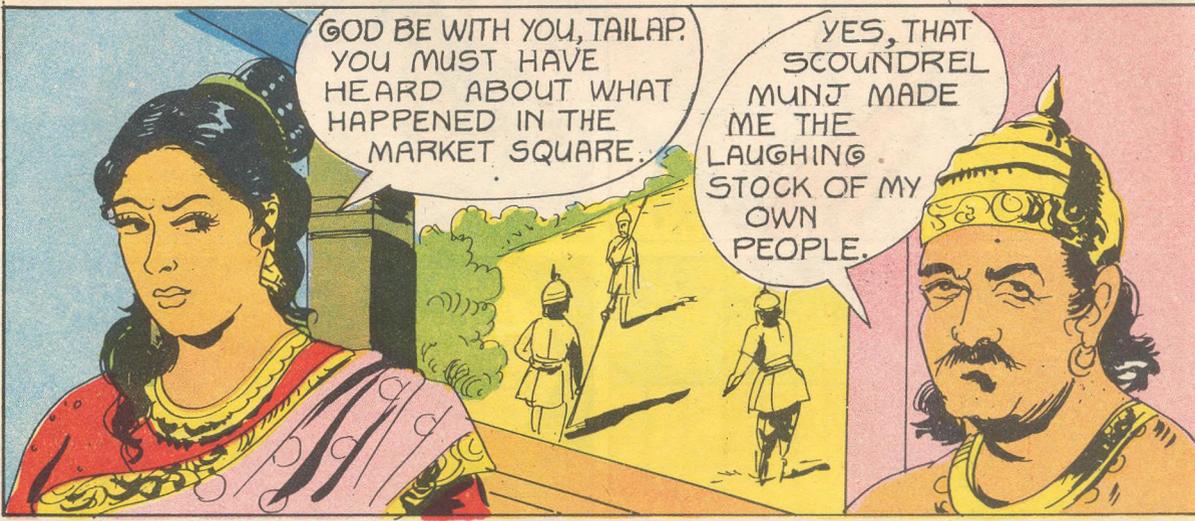
BUT THEIR MERRIMENT WAS SHORT-LIVED. TAILAP'S SOLDIERS SOON DISPERSED THEM. MUNJ SMILED AS HIS CAGE WAS WHEELED AWAY. MRINAL HAD LOST EVEN THIS ROUND TO HIM!



IN THE PALACE, TAILAP CAME TO VISIT HIS SISTER, WHO STOOD AT A WINDOW, BROODING OVER THE MORNING'S EVENTS.



GREETINGS, SISTER.



GOD BE WITH YOU, TAILAP. YOU MUST HAVE HEARD ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED IN THE MARKET SQUARE.

YES, THAT SCOUNDREL MUNJ MADE ME THE LAUGHING STOCK OF MY OWN PEOPLE.



I HAVE SWORN REVENGE. TOMORROW HE SHALL SUFFER THE SUPREME HUMILIATION OF WASHING MY FEET IN COURT.



YES, TAILAP. WE MUST SOMEHOW BREAK HIS SPIRIT.

LATE THAT NIGHT:-

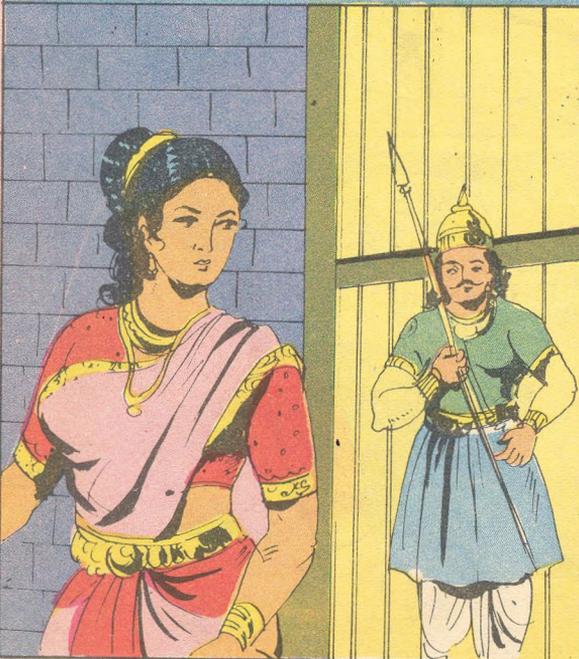
LET ME  
GO AND SEE  
HOW I CAN SAVE  
HIS MISGUIDED,  
SINFUL SOUL.



THE GUARDS WERE ASTONISHED TO SEE MRINALVATI AT THAT HOUR. THEY PITIED MUNJ FOR HAVING SO DETERMINED AN ADVERSARY AND QUICKLY OPENED THE DOORS FOR HER.



SHE ENTERED MUNJ'S CELL AND GESTURED TO THE GUARDS TO WITHDRAW.

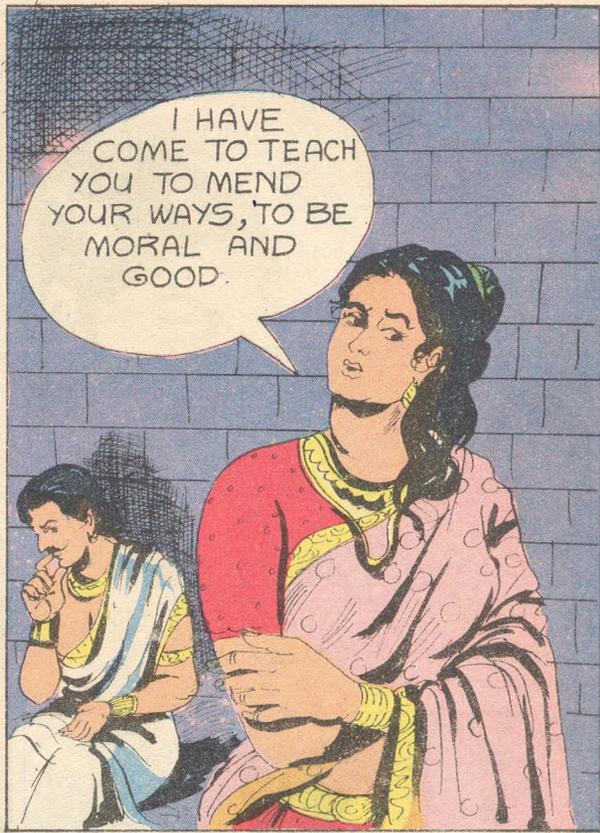


COME MY  
DEAR, I HAVE  
BEEN EXPECTING  
YOU FOR A LONG  
TIME NOW.





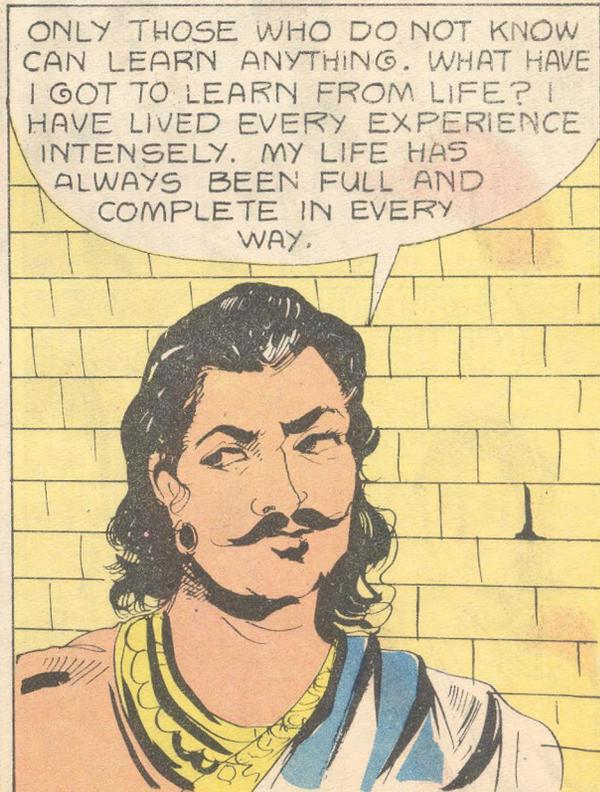
WHAT  
AUDACITY!  
WAITING FOR ME  
INDEED! I HAVE  
NOT COME TO  
SOCIALISE WITH  
YOU...



I HAVE  
COME TO TEACH  
YOU TO MEND  
YOUR WAYS, TO BE  
MORAL AND  
GOOD.



TEACH ME...  
O, HA, HA, HA!  
MRINAL, HOW  
CAN ANYONE  
TEACH ME  
ANYTHING?



ONLY THOSE WHO DO NOT KNOW  
CAN LEARN ANYTHING. WHAT HAVE  
I GOT TO LEARN FROM LIFE? I  
HAVE LIVED EVERY EXPERIENCE  
INTENSELY. MY LIFE HAS  
ALWAYS BEEN FULL AND  
COMPLETE IN EVERY  
WAY.

WHAT INDEED CAN YOU TEACH ME? YOU WHO HAVE NEVER KNOWN JOY AND BEAUTY, WHO HAVE NEVER LOVED ANYONE, NEVER BEEN LOVED.



THEN HIS VOICE BECAME SOFT AND GENTLE.



COME AND SIT BY MY SIDE, MRINAL. AND LEARN A THING OR TWO FROM ME.

MRINAL WAS OUTRAGED. SHE TURNED FURIOUSLY AND SLAPPED HIS FACE.



BUT MUNT CAUGHT HER WRIST AND KISSED IT AFFECTIONATELY.



WRETCHED MAN, LET GO MY HAND AT ONCE! GUARDS COME HERE.

THERE WAS NOT A SOUND FROM MUNT AS THE GUARDS OVERPOWERED HIM AND BRANDED HIS ARM. THE ACRID SMELL OF BURNING FLESH FILLED THE CELL TILL MRINAL WAS FORCED TO CALL OUT-



BRAND THE HAND OF THIS SINNER. HE HAS DARED TO TOUCH ME!



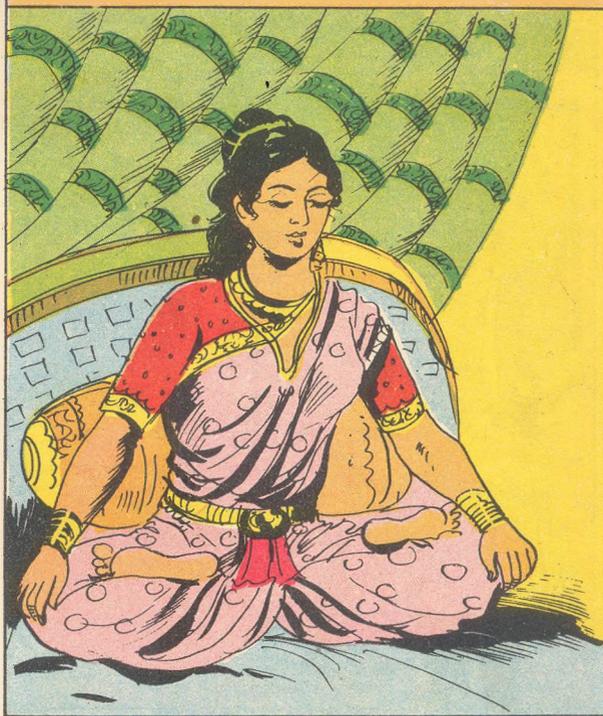
STOP, STOP! THAT IS ENOUGH!

BACK IN HER PRIVATE ROOMS, MRINAL WAS CONFUSED AND AGITATED.

I SHOULDN'T HAVE DONE THAT! BUT WHY NOT? AFTER ALL, HE IS OUR ENEMY. O WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ME? WHY DOES MY HEART BEAT SO CRAZILY?



SHE TRIED TO STILL THE TURBULENCE IN HER MIND BY SITTING IN MEDITATION.



BUT MUNJ'S HANDSOME SMILING FACE FLOATED BEFORE HER MIND'S EYE.

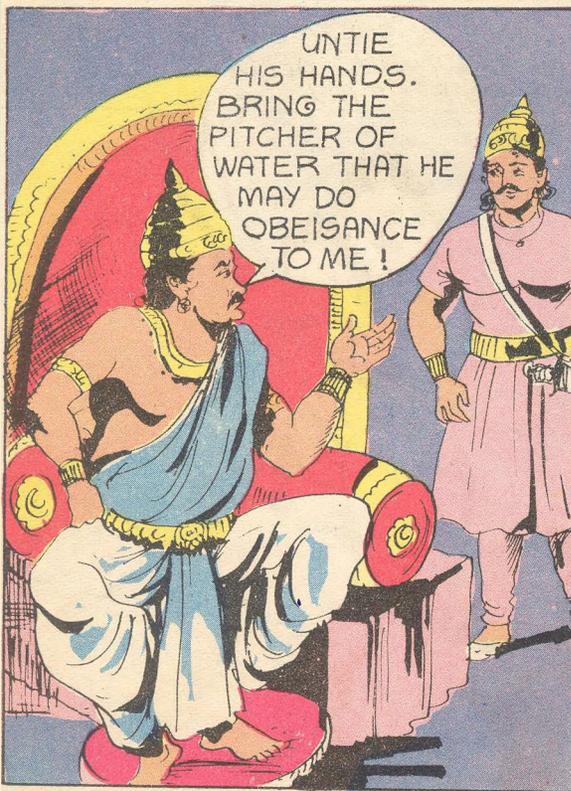
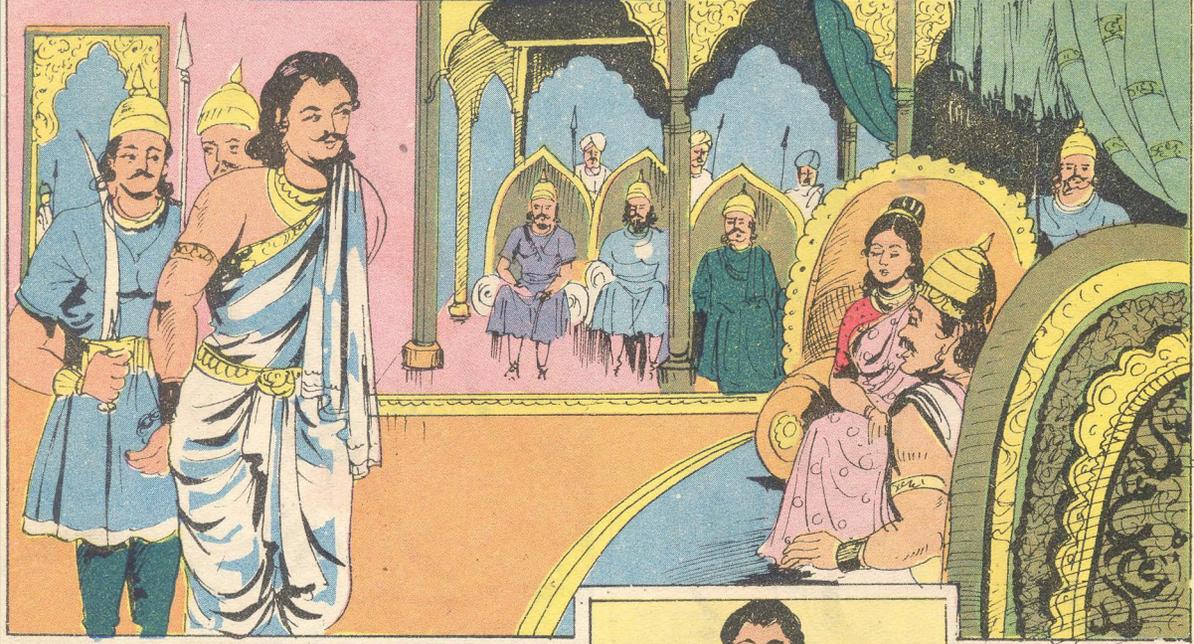
MRINAL, BRING SOME BALM WHEN YOU COME TOMORROW!



FINALLY, IN SHEER EXHAUSTION, SHE LAY DOWN AND YIELDED TO HER DREAMS OF MUNJ.



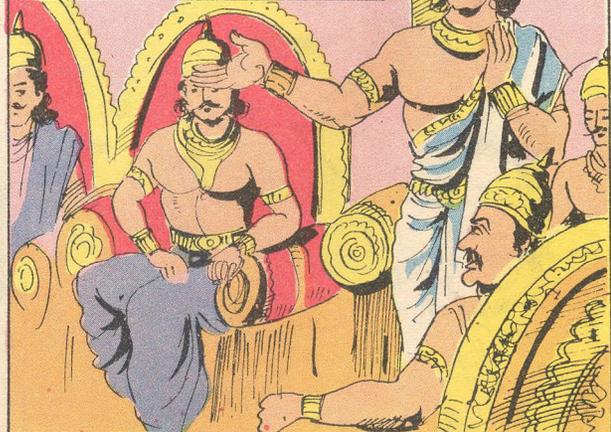
NEXT MORNING, TAILAP ORDERED A SPECIAL CEREMONY IN COURT-THE CONQUERED TO WASH THE FEET OF THE CONQUEROR AS A GESTURE OF ACCEPTING HIS SUPREMACY. THIS RITUAL WOULD ENABLE HIM TO BE FREE AND RETAIN HIS KINGDOM AS WELL. REFUSAL TO DO SO WOULD MEAN SURE DEATH. PRITHVI VALLABH, NOBLE AND UNYIELDING, WAS BROUGHT INTO COURT, HIS HANDS TIED BEHIND HIS BACK.



UNTIE HIS HANDS. BRING THE PITCHER OF WATER THAT HE MAY DO OBEISANCE TO ME!



PRITHVI VALLABH STRETCHED OUT HIS HANDS LAZILY. SHOW ME THE HOLY FEET OF LORD SHIVA, BY WASHING WHICH I MAY GAIN MERIT.



GUARDS,  
SEIZE HIM!  
BRING HIM TO  
HIS KNEES!



MUNJT RESISTED THE GUARDS FOR AS LONG  
AS HE COULD.

YOURS IS A VAINFUL HOPE,  
TAILAP. I WILL NEVER  
WASH THE FEET OF  
A MAN WHO HAS  
WASHED MINE  
SEVERAL TIMES!

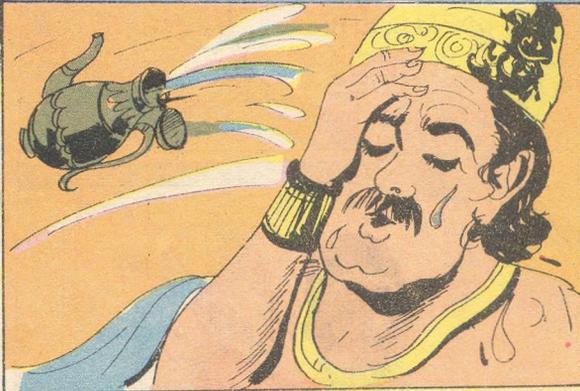


HEAD DOWN, LIKE A BULL, MUNJT  
CHARGED TOWARDS THE MAN  
HOLDING THE JAR OF WATER.

THE ACTION  
TOOK THE  
GUARDS BY  
SURPRISE  
AND THEY  
LOST  
THEIR  
HOLD ON  
HIM.

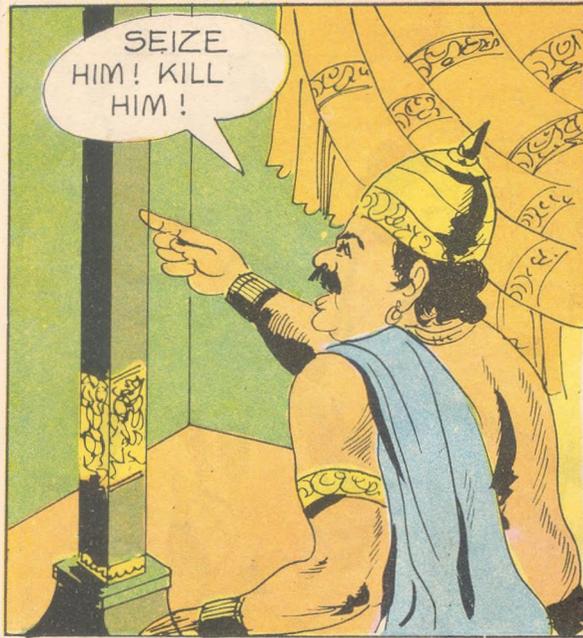


THE JAR FLEW OUT OF HIS HANDS  
AND ITS WATER DRENCHED TAILAP  
FROM HEAD TO TOE!



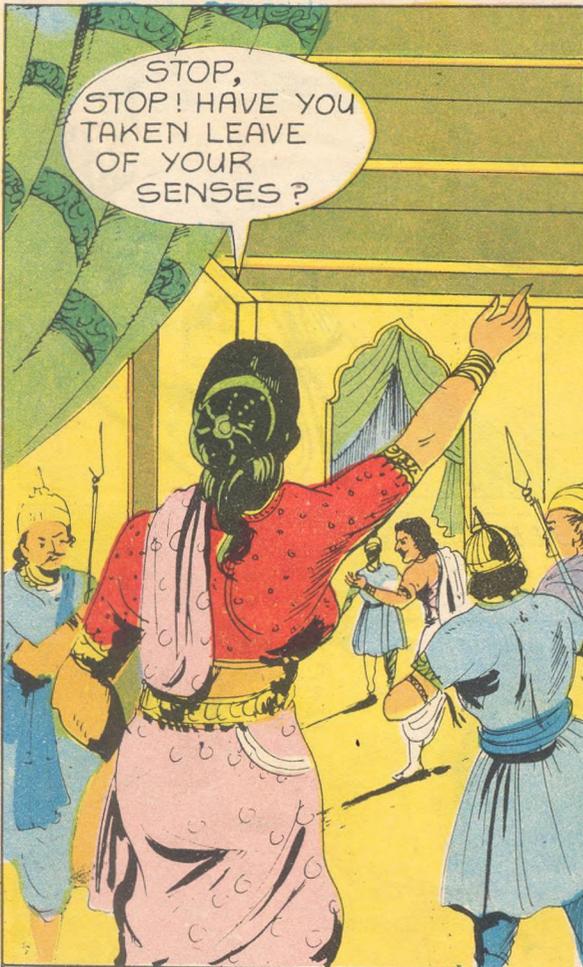
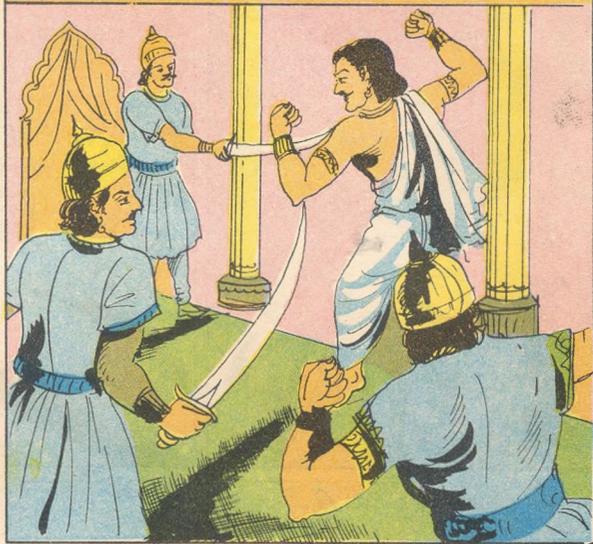
THE WHOLE COURT WAS SHOCKED INTO SILENCE.  
ONLY MUNJT THREW BACK HIS HEAD AND LAUGHED  
HEARTILY, WHILE TAILAP SHOOK AND SPLUTTERED.



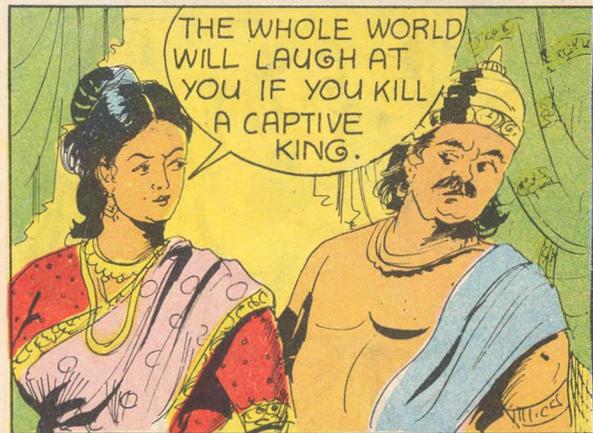


SEIZE HIM! KILL HIM!  
KILL HIM!

TAILAP'S SOLDIERS RUSHED UPON MUNT WITH DRAWN SWORDS.



STOP, STOP! HAVE YOU TAKEN LEAVE OF YOUR SENSES?



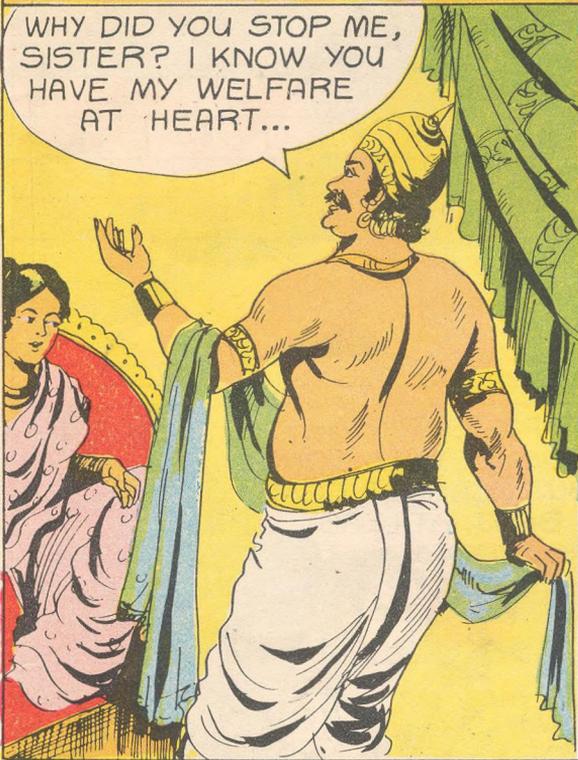
THE WHOLE WORLD WILL LAUGH AT YOU IF YOU KILL A CAPTIVE KING.



TAILAP'S FACE FELL AND HE LEFT THE COURT IN ANGER AND HUMILIATION

IN THE PALACE, TAILAP WAS SULEN.

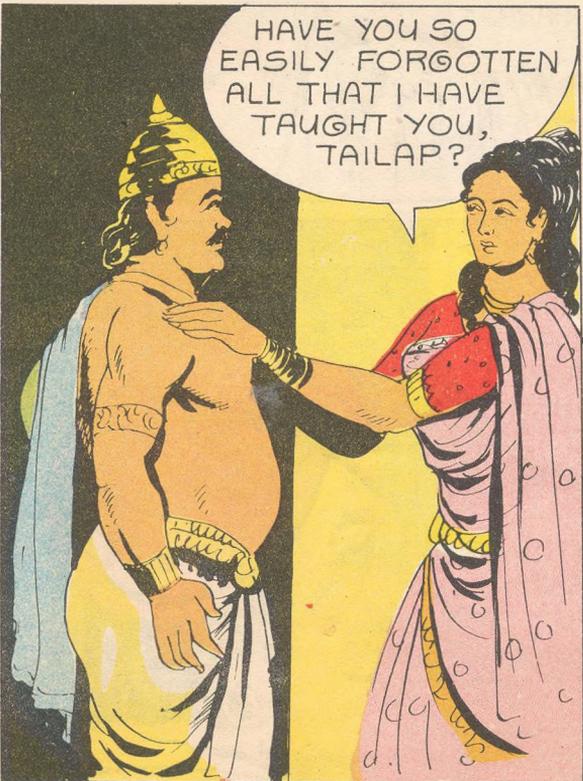
WHY DID YOU STOP ME, SISTER? I KNOW YOU HAVE MY WELFARE AT HEART...



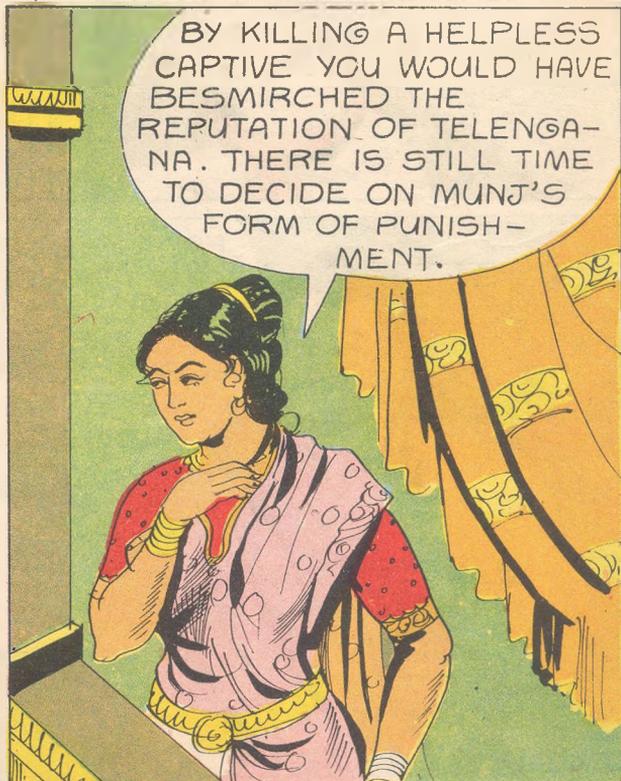
... BUT DID YOU NOT SEE HOW HE MADE A LAUGHING STOCK OF ME BEFORE MY OWN PEOPLE? MUNJ DESERVES TO DIE.



HAVE YOU SO EASILY FORGOTTEN ALL THAT I HAVE TAUGHT YOU, TAILAP?



BY KILLING A HELPLESS CAPTIVE YOU WOULD HAVE BESMIRCHED THE REPUTATION OF TELENGANA. THERE IS STILL TIME TO DECIDE ON MUNJ'S FORM OF PUNISHMENT.



BACK IN THE PRISON, MUNJ LAY DOWN ON THE COLD STONE FLOOR. SUDDENLY, HIS EYE CAUGHT THE MOVEMENT OF ONE OF THE FLAGSTONES OF THE FLOOR.



WHAT IS THAT? WHO IS IT?



MAHARAJ, COME QUICKLY. THE WIFE OF BHILLAMRAJ HAS SHOWN US A WAY TO ESCAPE!



MY POETS TO THE RESCUE! WELL DONE! BUT I CANNOT COME, BHOJ. AT LEAST NOT TODAY.

WHY NOT, MAHARAJ?



FACT IS, BHOJ, I LOVE PRINCESS MRINAL. IF YOU CAN PLAN THE ESCAPE FOR TOMORROW, I WILL BRING HER ALONG TOO.

WHATEVER YOU WISH.

THAT EVENING, AS SOON AS THE SUN HAD SET, MRINALVATI CREEPT OUT OF HER ROOM AND MADE HER WAY TOWARDS THE DUNGEONS.

HOW I LONG TO SEE HIM!



OPEN THE DOORS! THIS VILE MUNJ MUST BE TAUGHT TO BE HUMBLE.

O, HOW I MUST PRETEND!



THE GUARDS OBEYED AND THE DOORS OF THE CELL CLOSED BEHIND HER.

BE STILL, MY HEART.



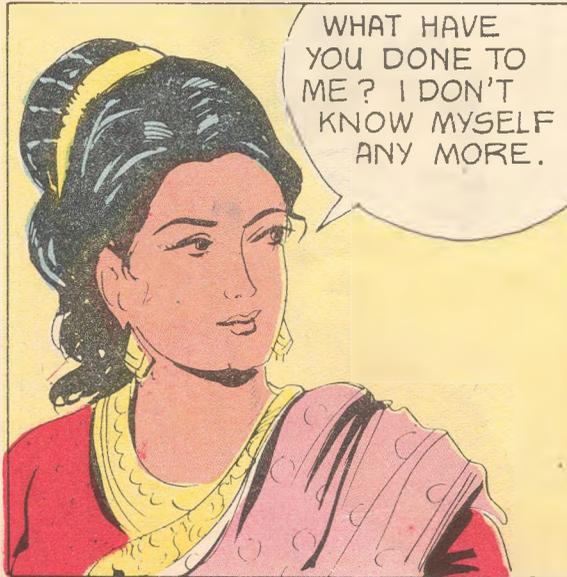
PRITHVI VALLABH WEL-COMED HER SMILINGLY.

COME, MRINAL MY BELOVED.

O MUNJ, MUNJ!



WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO ME? I DON'T KNOW MYSELF ANY MORE.



HUSH. SIT BY MY SIDE AND BE HAPPY.



THEY SAT BLISSFULLY IN EACH OTHER'S COMPANY FOR A LONG TIME.

WHAT WILL THE FUTURE HOLD FOR US, MUNJ?

THERE ARE TWO THINGS WE CAN DO. YOU COULD CONSENT TO BE MY QUEEN...



... OR YOU COULD GET RID OF YOUR BROTHER. KILL HIM.



HOW CAN I KILL TAILAP, MUNJ? I HAVE BROUGHT HIM UP LIKE A SON.



TO BE YOUR QUEEN. THERE IS NOTHING I DESIRE MORE.





THEN LISTEN CAREFULLY, MRINAL. COME HERE AT MIDNIGHT TOMORROW, READY FOR FLIGHT TO AVANTI.



BUT HOW WILL WE ESCAPE? THE GUARDS...

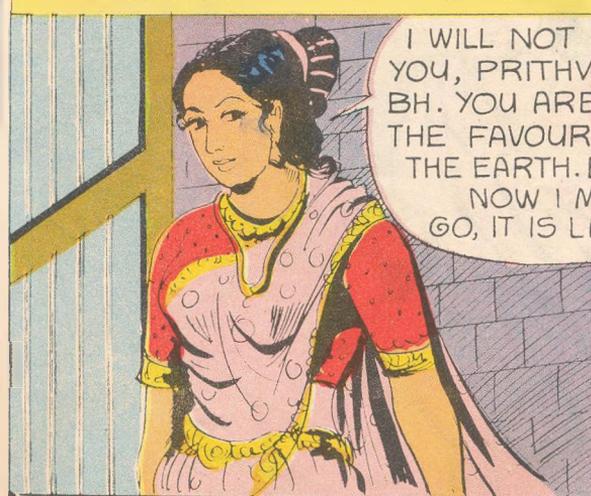


DON'T WORRY ABOUT THEM. DO YOU SEE THAT STONE THERE? UNDERNEATH IT IS A SECRET PASSAGE LEADING OUT OF THIS DUNGEON TO THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY.



NOW DON'T LOOK SO SHOCKED. MY POETS HAVE GOT IN TOUCH WITH ME AND HAVE PLANNED OUR ESCAPE.

MRINAL LOOKED AT MUNJ WORSHIPFULLY. HER EYES SHONE WITH EXCITEMENT.

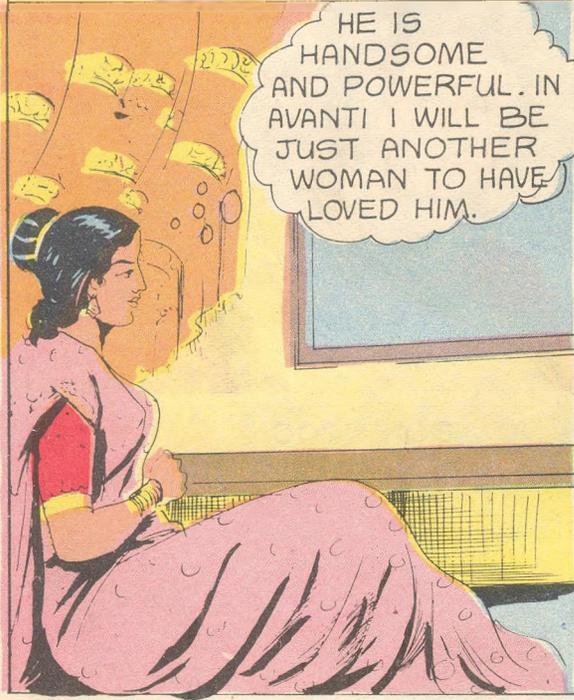


I WILL NOT FAIL YOU, PRITHVI VALLABH. YOU ARE TRULY THE FAVOURED OF THE EARTH. BUT NOW I MUST GO, IT IS LATE.



TILL TOMORROW, BELOVED PRINCESS.

BUT IN THE SANCTUARY OF HER PALACE, MRINALVATI STARTED HAVING MISGIVINGS...



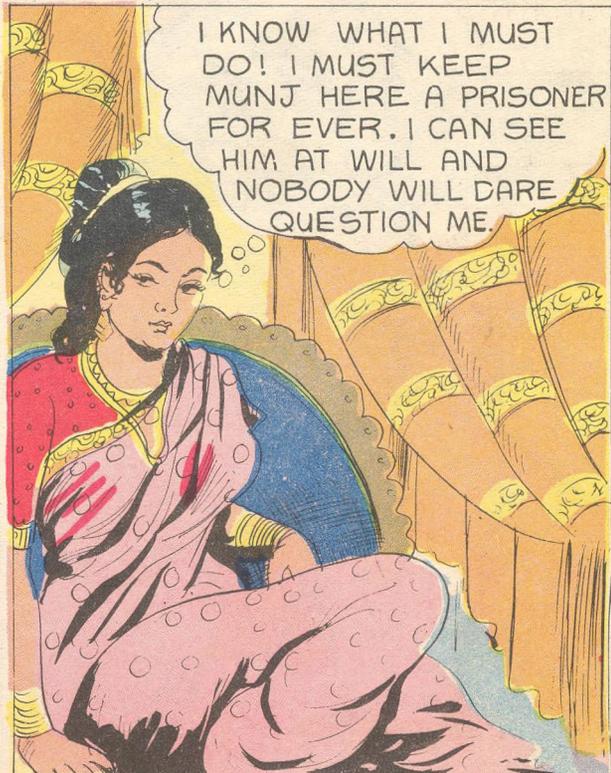
HE IS HANDSOME AND POWERFUL. IN AVANTI I WILL BE JUST ANOTHER WOMAN TO HAVE LOVED HIM.



WHAT SHOULD I DO? HOW COULD MY YEARS OF AUSTERITY AND PENANCE BE REDUCED TO NOTHING BY HIS MERE GLANCE?



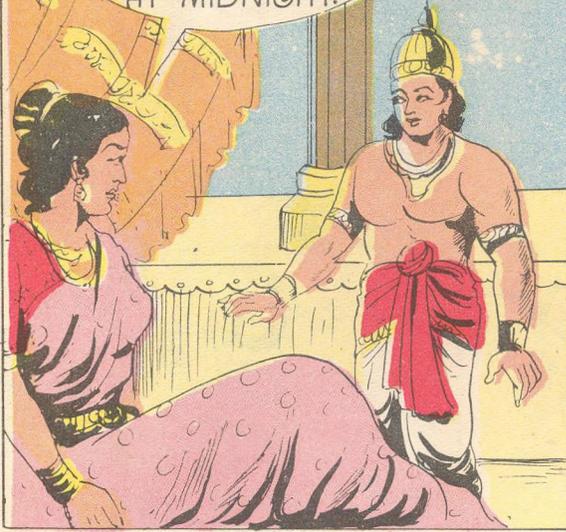
I SHOULD NEVER HAVE GOT INVOLVED WITH HIM. YET HAVING KNOWN HIM, LIFE WITHOUT HIM WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE.



I KNOW WHAT I MUST DO! I MUST KEEP MUNJ HERE A PRISONER FOR EVER. I CAN SEE HIM AT WILL AND NOBODY WILL DARE QUESTION ME.

SHE SUMMONED SATYASHRAYA,  
TAILAP'S SON TO HER.

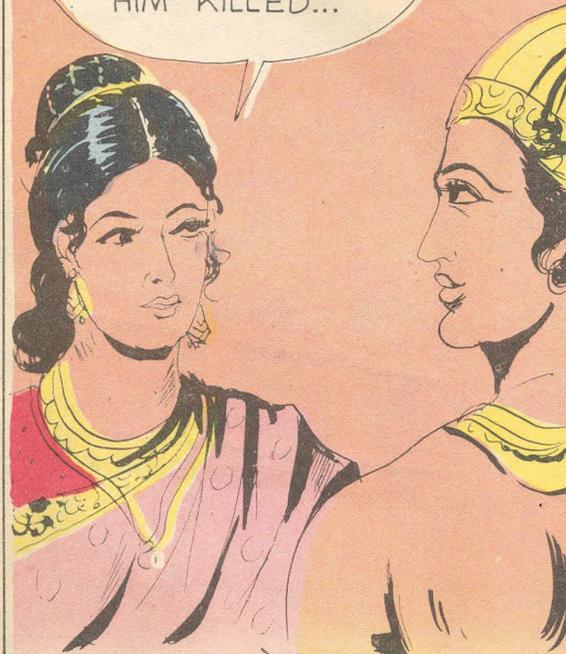
SATYASHRAYA, I  
HAVE LEARNT OF  
A PLOT TO RESCUE  
MUNJ TOMORROW  
AT MIDNIGHT.



MUNJ'S ESCAPE  
MUST BE PREVENTED,  
BUT MAKE SURE  
HE IS NOT KILLED.



ALSO, DO  
NOT LET YOUR  
FATHER KNOW ABOUT  
THIS. HE MAY ACT  
RASHLY AND HAVE  
HIM KILLED...



I WILL  
DO YOUR  
BIDDING.



... AND THAT  
I COULD  
NEVER  
BEAR !

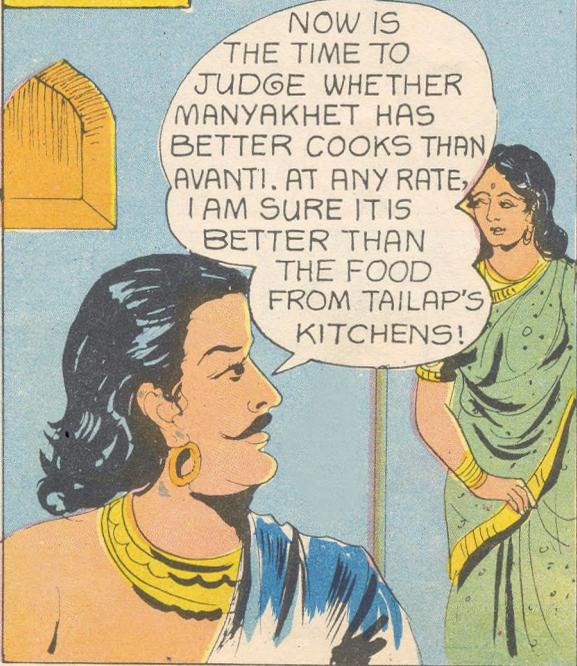


AND SO MUNJ'S BID FOR ESCAPE WAS FOILED! A FIERCE BATTLE TOOK PLACE BETWEEN SATYASHRAYA AND HIS MEN AND MUNJ'S POETS. FATE TOOK A CROOKED TURN. BHILLAM'S WIFE EXPOSED TO TAILAP, MRINAL'S LOVE FOR THE HATED ENEMY. AS A PUNISHMENT, PRITHVI VALLABH WAS MADE TO BEG FOR FOOD FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE FOR SEVEN DAYS.



COME ON MOTHER, LET ME TASTE YOUR COOKING.

HIS EASY FRIENDLINESS WON HIM INSTANT ADMIRATION AND RESPECT.



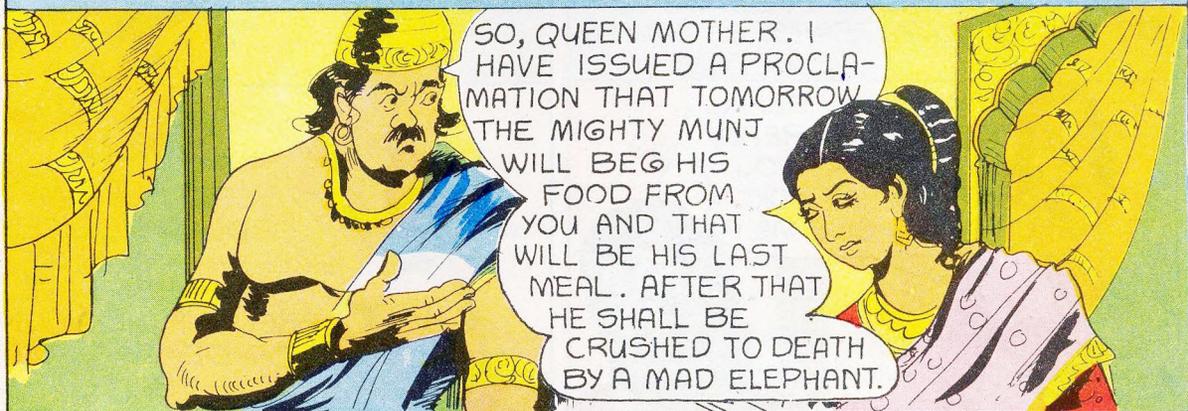
NOW IS THE TIME TO JUDGE WHETHER MANYAKHET HAS BETTER COOKS THAN AVANTI. AT ANY RATE, I AM SURE IT IS BETTER THAN THE FOOD FROM TAILAP'S KITCHENS!

HIS GROWING POPULARITY MADE TAILAP FURIOUS.



THE RASCAL! HIS TIME IS NOW UP!

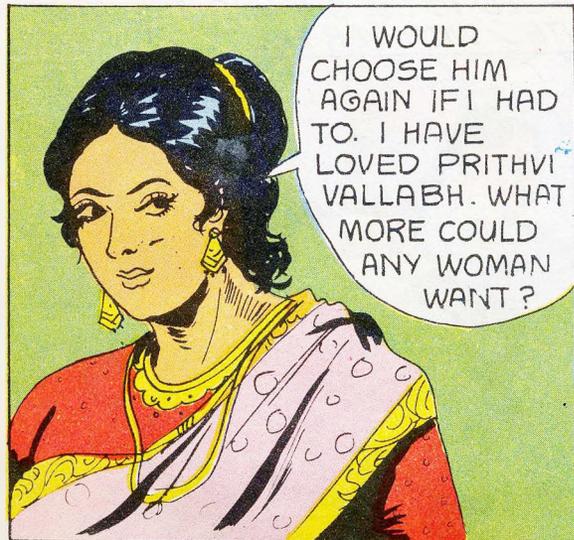
TAILAP LOST NO CHANCE TO MOCK AT MRINALVATI, WHO WAS UTTERLY SORROWFUL AND DEJECTED AT THE TURN OF EVENTS.



MRINAL KNEW SHE HAD BROUGHT DISASTER UPON HERSELF AND ON MUNJ. BUT SHE WAS PROUD OF HIM AND HER EYES FLASHED DEFIANTLY.



TAILAP CONTINUED TO TAUNT HER—



NEXT DAY, THE CROWD WATCHED WITH BATED BREATH AS MUNJ, STRAIGHT AND PROUD AS EVER, STOOD BEFORE MRINALVATI, WHOSE EYES WERE BRIMMING WITH TEARS. HE SMILED-



MRINAL FLUNG ASIDE THE BOWL OF ALMS SHE HELD AND FELL AT HIS FEET.



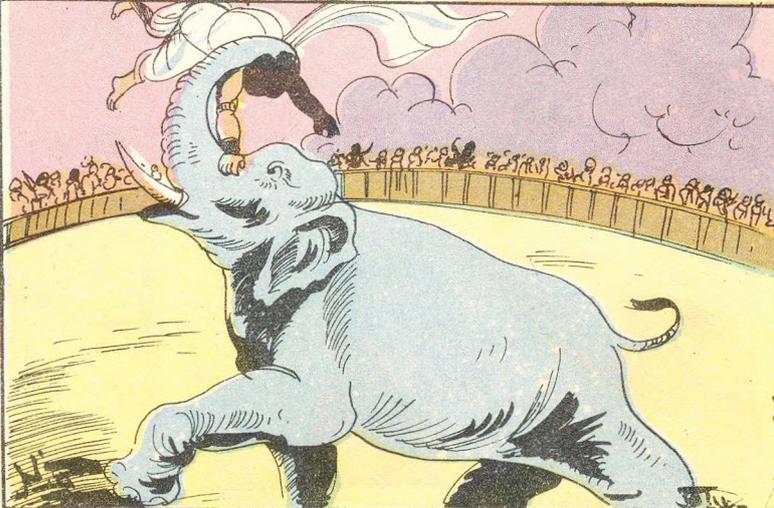
DO NOT GRIEVE, MRINAL. A MAN'S DEATH IS PLANNED THE DAY HE TAKES BIRTH. DO NOT BLAME YOURSELF. I HAVE LIVED JOYOUSLY, I WILL DIE SO, FOR I HAVE KNOWN HAPPINESS WITH YOU.



SO SAYING, HE WALKED MAJESTICALLY TOWARDS THE ELEPHANT.



THE ELEPHANT, WHO HAD BEEN FED ON DEADLY INTOXICANTS, TRUMPETED LOUDLY IN SALUTATION. THEN HE PICKED UP PRITHVI VALLABH IN HIS TRUNK AND DASHED HIM TO THE GROUND. THE SIGHT WAS MORE THAN MRINAL COULD BEAR. SHE SHRIEKED LOUDLY AND COLLAPSED TO THE GROUND, THIS TIME TO BE UNITED WITH HER BELOVED FOREVER.



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