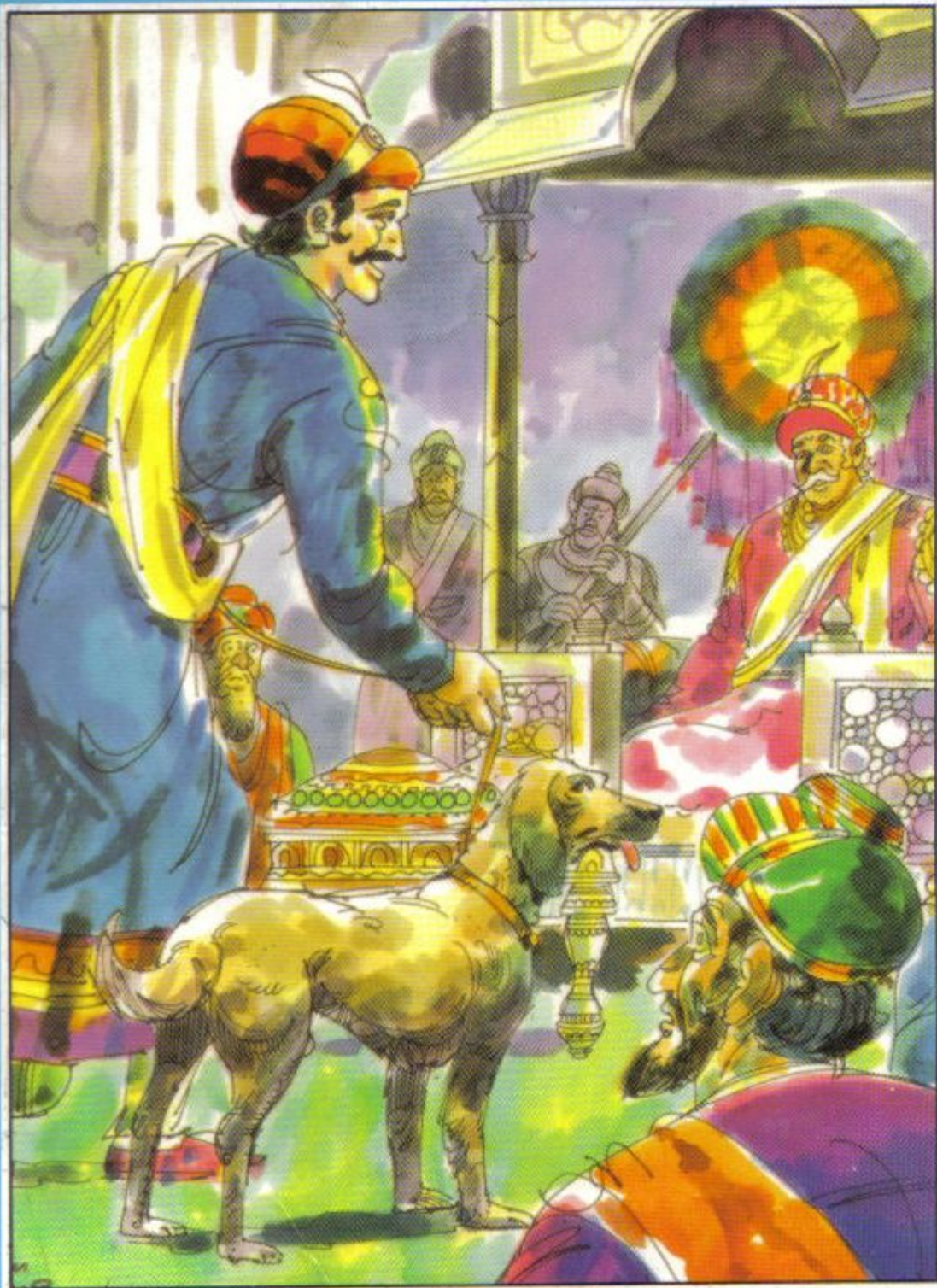


The Inimitable Birbal



PANDIT GANGARAM

BIRBAL HAD GAINED THE REPUTATION OF BEING A SKILFUL SOLVER OF PROBLEMS. ONE DAY, A BRAHMIN CALLED GANGARAM CAME TO HIM.

BIRBAL SAHIB, I HAVE A PROBLEM WHICH ONLY YOU CAN SOLVE.

WHAT IS IT?

I AM A BRAHMIN BY BIRTH. MY FOREFATHERS WERE GREAT SANSKRIT SCHOLARS. EVERYONE CALLED THEM PANDITS.

YES, I REMEMBER YOUR FATHER.

I HAVE NEITHER MUCH LEARNING NOR WEALTH.

DO YOU WANT ME TO HELP YOU GET WORK?

NO, I AM CONTENTED WITH MY LIFE. BUT I HAVE JUST ONE WISH. I WANT PEOPLE TO ADDRESS ME AS PANDIT.

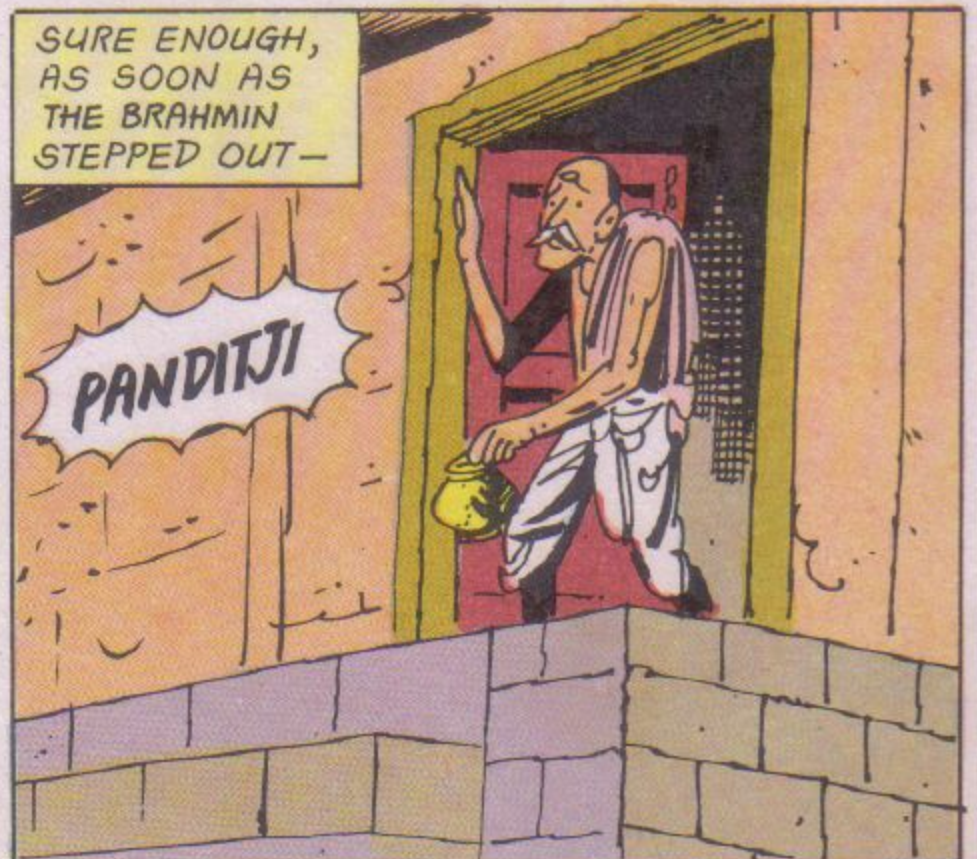
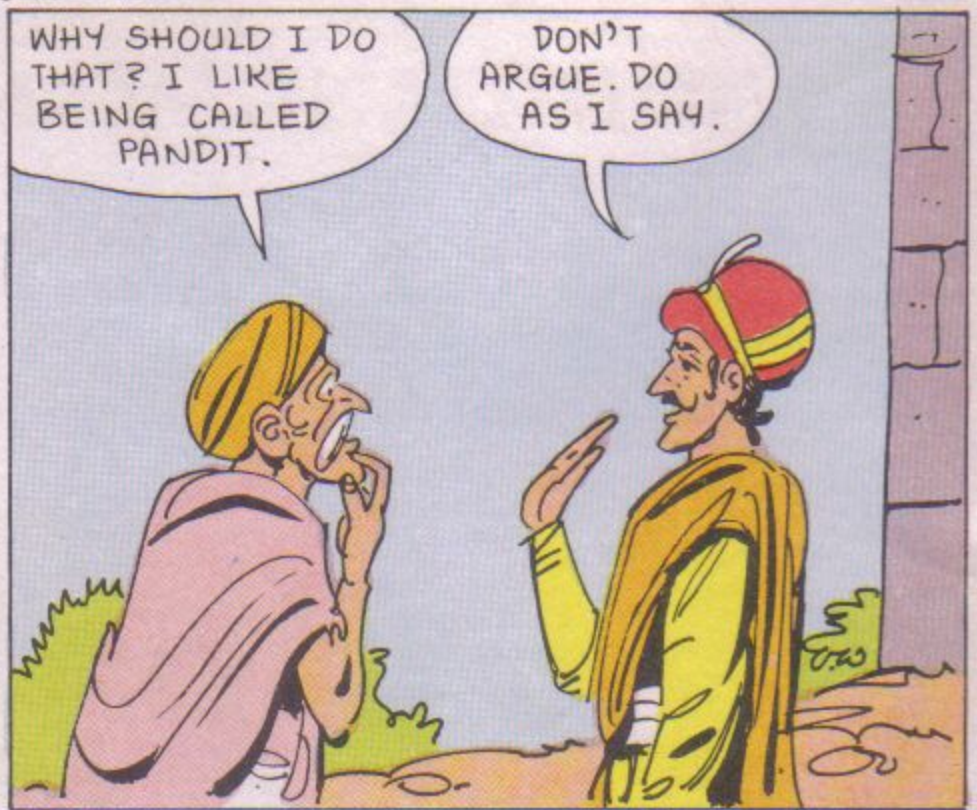
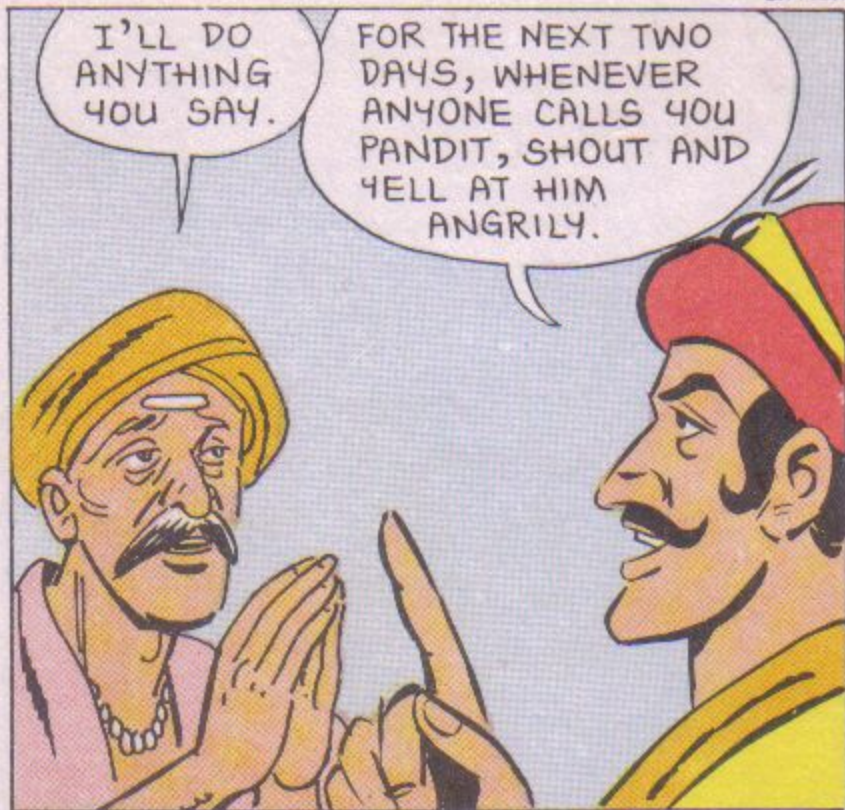
IS THAT ALL? YOU ONLY WANT TO BE CALLED PANDIT?

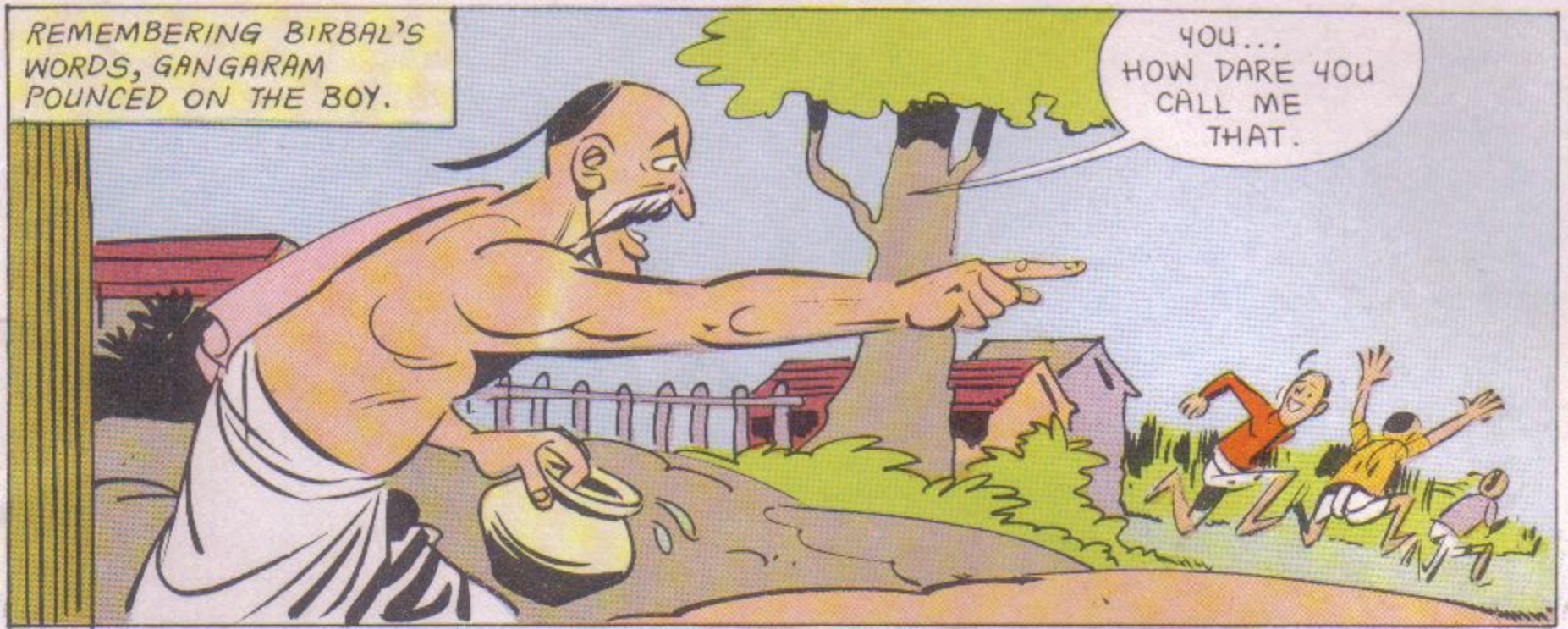
YES. I KNOW IT IS DIFFICULT. BUT NO TASK IS DIFFICULT FOR YOU.

I CAN DO IT IN JUST TWO DAYS.

YOU MEAN EVERYONE WILL BEGIN TO CALL ME PANDIT IN JUST TWO DAYS?

WELL, MAYBE THREE. BUT YOU MUST FOLLOW MY INSTRUCTIONS.





REMEMBERING BIRBAL'S WORDS, GANGARAM POUNCED ON THE BOY.

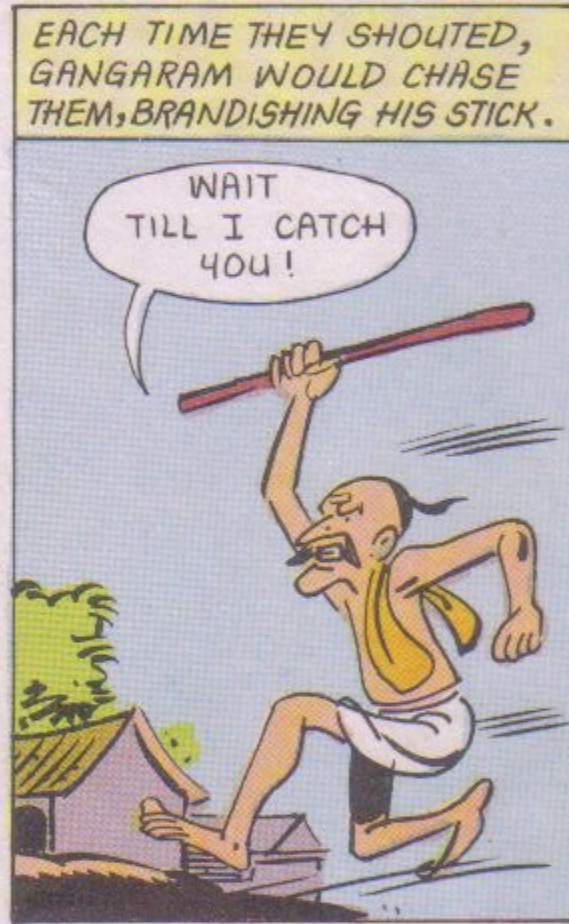
YOU... HOW DARE YOU CALL ME THAT.



NOW THE OTHER BOYS TOOK UP THE CUE.

PANDITJI!

OHH PANDITJI!



EACH TIME THEY SHOUTED, GANGARAM WOULD CHASE THEM, BRANDISHING HIS STICK.

WAIT TILL I CATCH YOU!

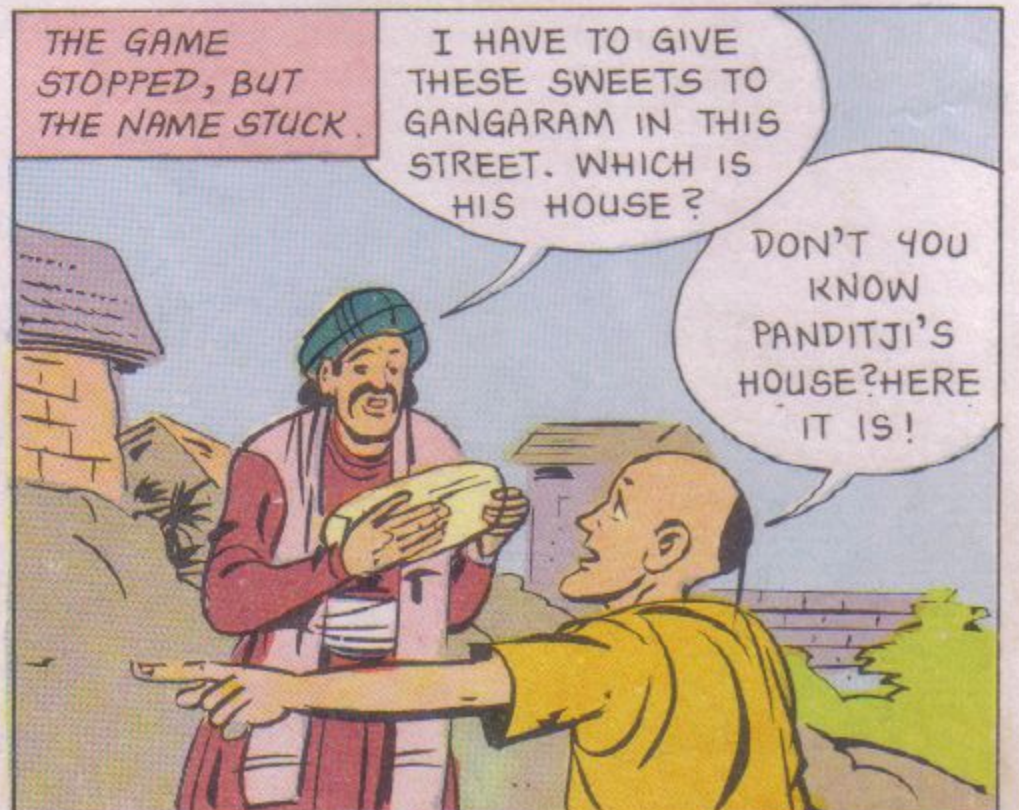


IT BECAME A POPULAR PASTIME IN BARA CHOWK.

YOU WANT TO HAVE SOME FUN? JUST CALL THAT MAN 'PANDITJI'?



SOON, HOWEVER, THEY TIRED OF THE GAME BECAUSE GANGARAM STOPPED ABUSING THEM.



THE GAME STOPPED, BUT THE NAME STUCK.

I HAVE TO GIVE THESE SWEETS TO GANGARAM IN THIS STREET. WHICH IS HIS HOUSE?

DON'T YOU KNOW PANDITJI'S HOUSE? HERE IT IS!

AND CURRY OF COURSE

ONE DAY AKBAR CALLED FOR BIRBAL.



JUST THEN, A COURTIER INTERRUPTED WITH AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR THE EMPEROR, AND THE CONVERSATION REMAINED UNFINISHED. NEXT DAY IN THE DURBAR, AKBAR WANTED TO TEST BIRBAL'S MEMORY. HE TURNED TO HIM -



BIRBAL REALISED THAT AKBAR WAS REFERRING TO THE CONVERSATION OF THE PREVIOUS DAY. PROMPTLY HE SAID -



AKBAR WAS IMMENSELY PLEASED.

WAH! BIRBAL. YOU ARE INDEED GREAT. HERE! TAKE THIS PEARL NECKLACE.

THE COURTIER'S PRESENT WERE PERPLEXED.

WHY, THE KING MUST REALLY BE FOND OF CURRY. HE GAVE BIRBAL A PRESENT JUST FOR MENTIONING THE WORD CURRY.

AFTER THE COURT HAD DISPERSED, THEY GOT TOGETHER FOR DISCUSSIONS.

WE MUST BRING THE BEST CURRY FOR THE EMPEROR TOMORROW.

YES, LOTS OF IT.

SURELY HE WILL REWARD US TOO.

THE NEXT DAY THEY ARRIVED IN THE DURBAR WITH THEIR SERVANTS CARRYING HUGE URNS OF CURRY ON THEIR HEADS.

WHAT'S ALL THIS? WHAT ARE THESE MEN CARRYING TO THE COURT?

WE HAVE BROUGHT CURRY FOR YOU, JAHANPANA. WE KNOW NOW HOW MUCH YOU LIKE IT.

AKBAR UNDERSTOOD AT ONCE —

YOU FOOLS! WHAT BIRBAL SAID YESTERDAY WAS IN ANOTHER CONTEXT. AS A PUNISHMENT FOR YOUR STUPIDITY I WILL MAKE YOU EAT ALL THIS CURRY JUST NOW.

FORGIVE US! WE WILL NOT ACT IN HASTE NEXT TIME.

BIRBAL HAD A GOOD LAUGH.

THE ONLY ROOSTER

AKBAR LOVED TO PLAY HARMLESS TRICKS ON BIRBAL—



THE NEXT DAY AT THE COURT, HE SENT BIRBAL ON AN ERRAND. ADDRESSING THE REST OF THE COURTIER, AKBAR SAID —



QUEER IDEAS HIS MAJESTY HAS.

BETTER HUMOUR HIM AND DO AS HE SAYS.

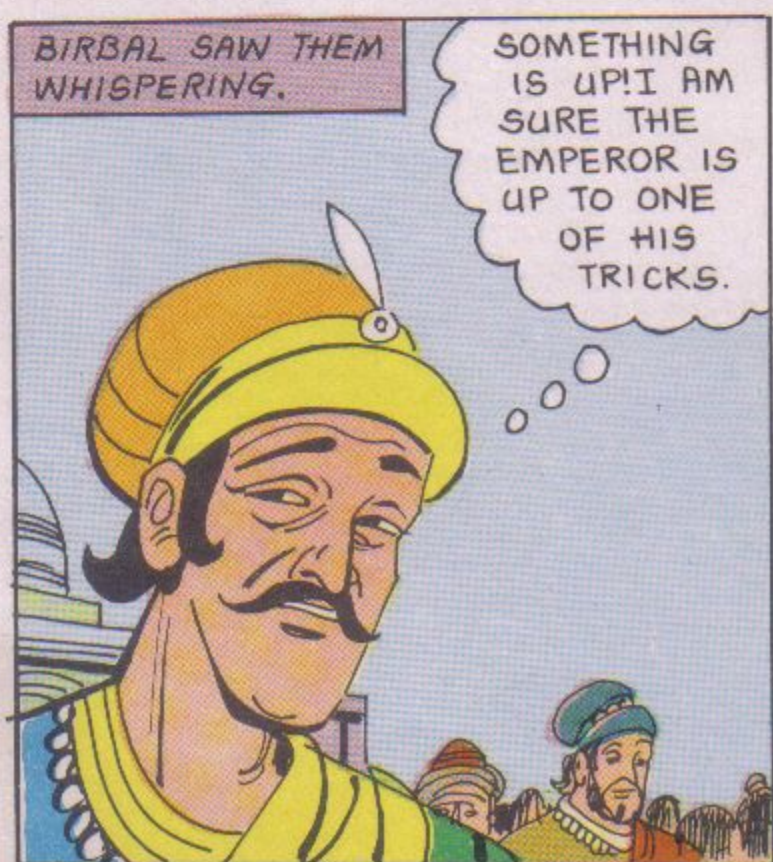
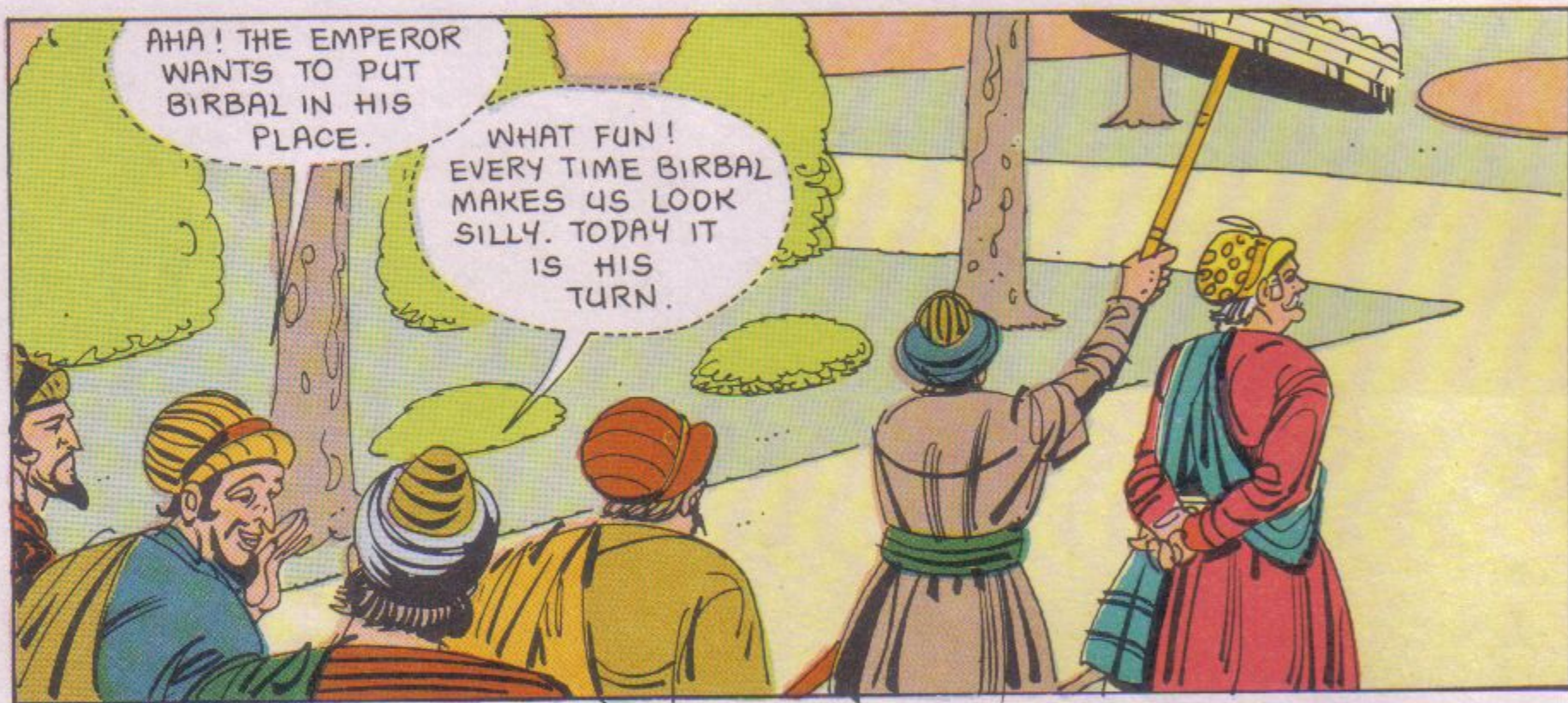
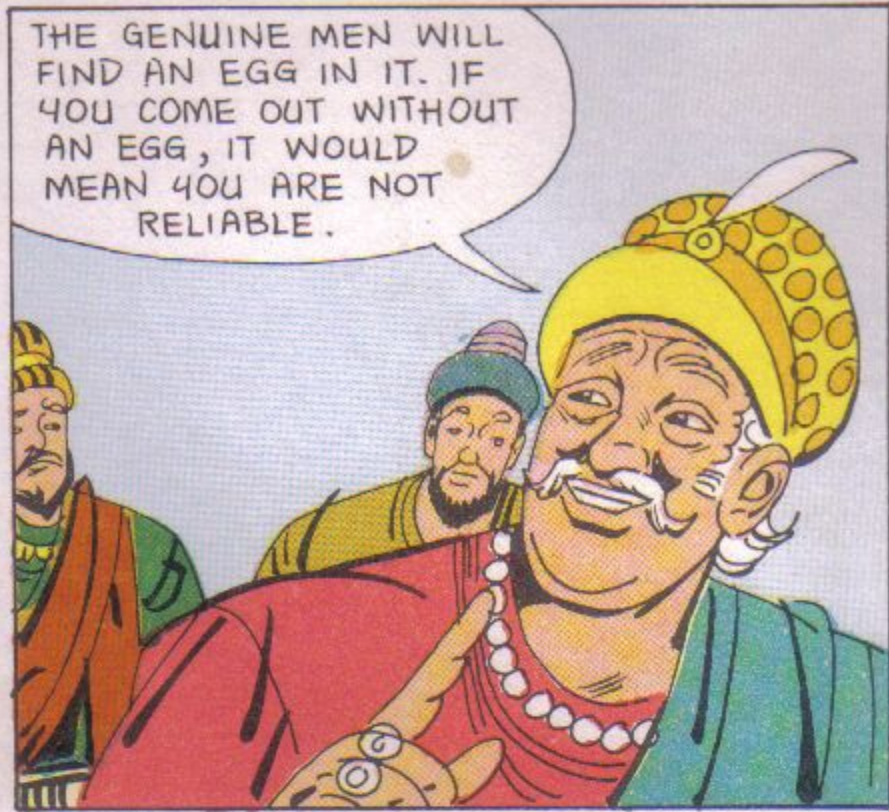
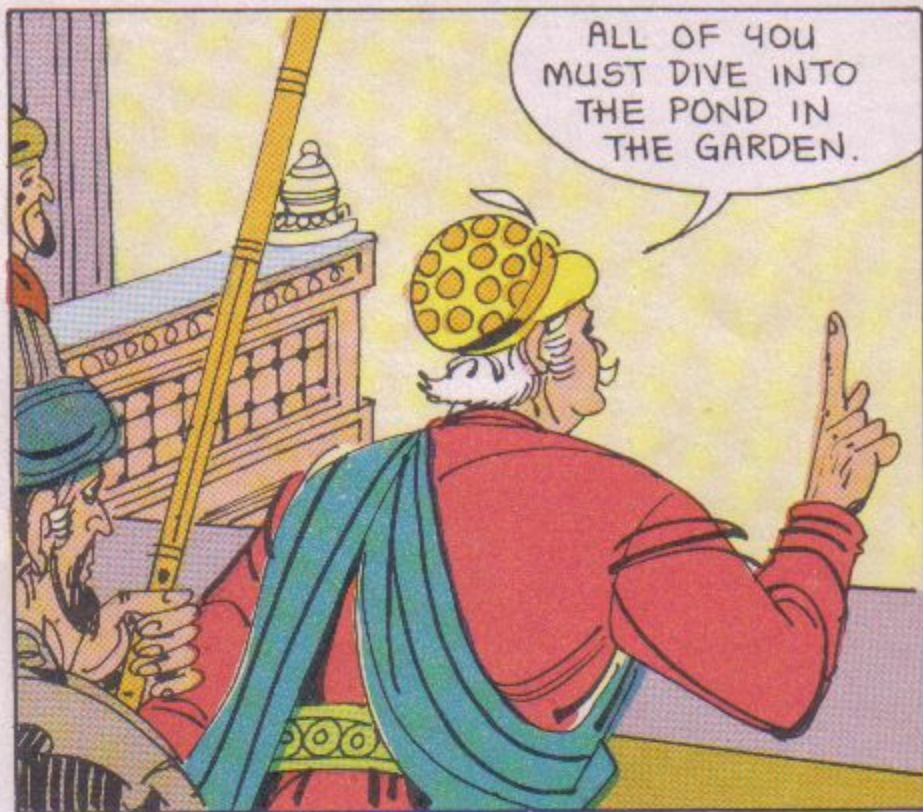
MUST BE A NEW GAME HE HAS THOUGHT OF.

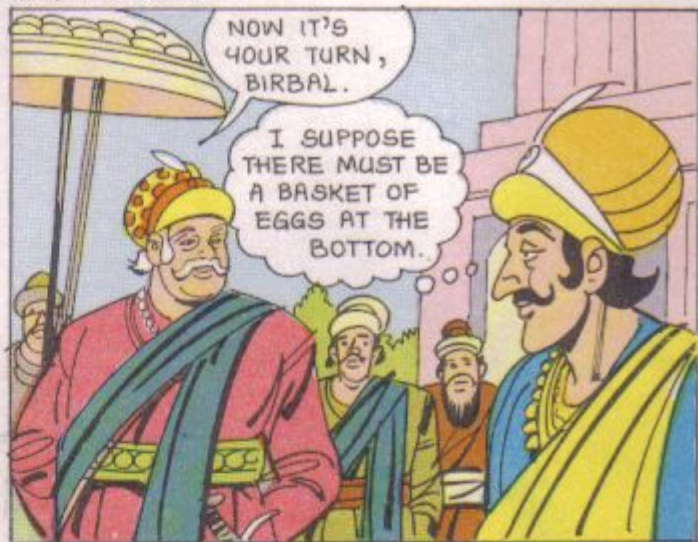


BUT WHEN BIRBAL RETURNED TO THE COURT, THEY UNDERSTOOD.

BIRBAL, YESTERDAY I HAD A STRANGE DREAM. FROM IT I GOT AN EXCELLENT IDEA FOR TESTING THE ABILITIES OF THE MEN OF MY COURT.





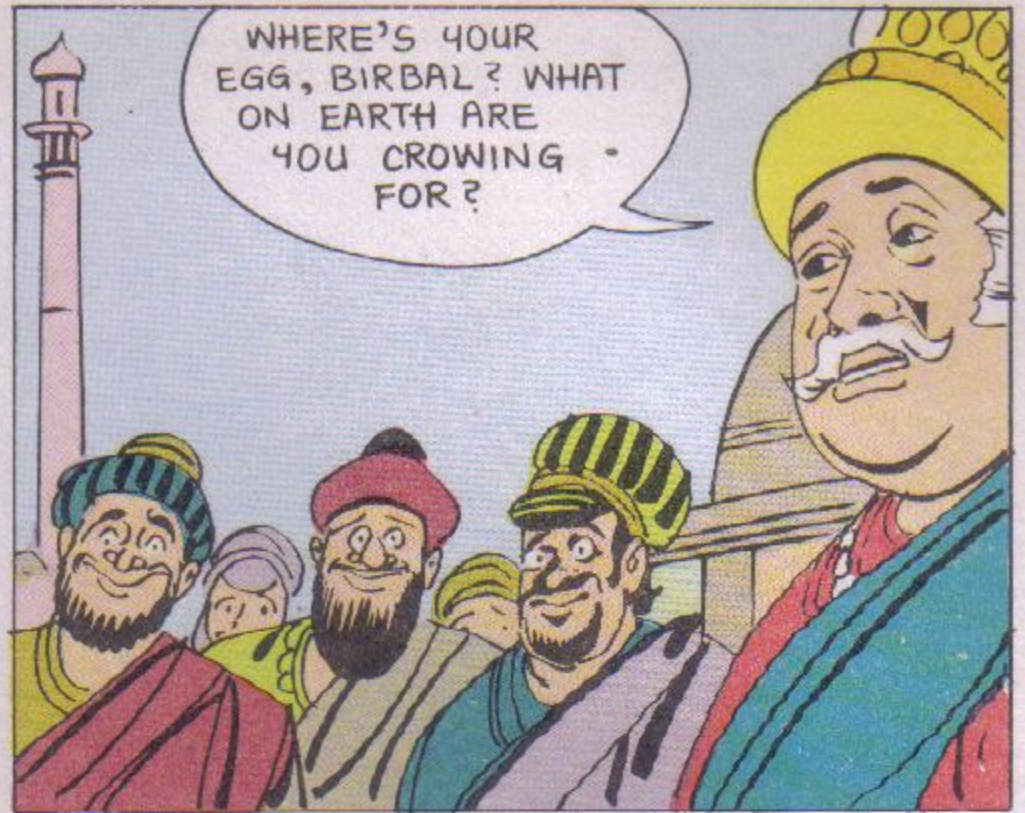


AFTER SHAKING THE WATER OFF HIS BODY, HE STOOD UP.

COCK-A-DOODLE DOO!
COCK-A-DOODLE DOO!



WHERE'S YOUR EGG, BIRBAL? WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU CROWING FOR?

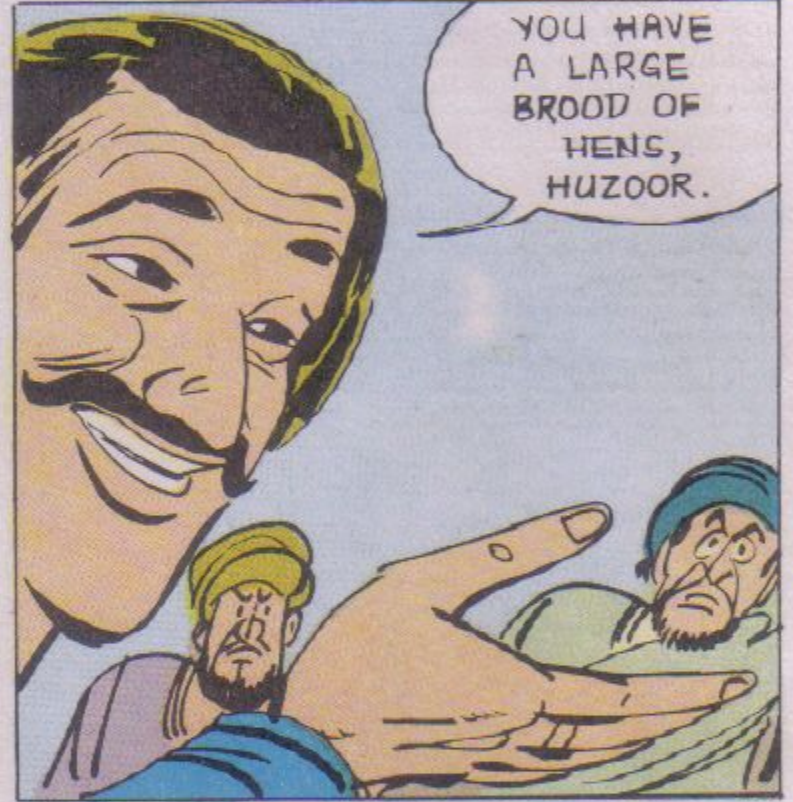


BIRBAL REPLIED —

SURELY YOU KNOW THAT ONLY HENS LAY EGGS, NOT COCKS.



YOU HAVE A LARGE BROOD OF HENS, HUZOOR.



BUT I AM THE ONLY ROOSTER!



THE COURTIERS FELT VERY EMBARRASSED.

HA HA! TRULY BIRBAL, YOU ARE REALLY ONE OF A KIND!



PARTING OF FRIENDS

ONE DAY, WHILE BIRBAL WAS AWAY ON A MISSION, EMPEROR AKBAR CALLED HIS COURTIER'S TOGETHER.

I AM A LITTLE WORRIED ABOUT PRINCE SALIM.

WHY HUZOOR?

HE'S A FINE BOY.

AND SO HANDSOME TOO.



AKBAR INTERRUPTED —

YES, I KNOW HE IS A GOOD BOY, BUT OF LATE, HE HAS FALLEN INTO BAD COMPANY.



OH, YOU MEAN THAT BOY, YASIN?

YES, THAT FELLOW IS NO GOOD.



SALIM HAD LEARNT THE ROYAL DUTIES SO WELL.



I WAS REALLY PROUD OF HIM. BUT NOW ALL HE DOES IS LAZE ABOUT ALL DAY, PLAY CARDS, AND GO FOR SHIKAR.

YES, THAT'S TRUE. BUT HUZOOR, IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEPARATE A 16-YEAR-OLD FROM HIS FRIEND.



THAT IS WHY I AM CONSULTING YOU. AFTER ALL, AS THE PRINCE, HIS FUTURE IS YOUR CONCERN TOO.

WE WILL TRY TO FIND A WAY.

BUT A WHOLE MONTH PASSED. NO ONE COULD THINK OF A PLAN TO CORRECT THE PRINCE.

HUZOOR, SEND YASIN AWAY TO ANOTHER PLACE.

NO, THAT WILL ONLY TURN SALIM AGAINST ME.

WHY NOT TELL SALIM WHAT YOU THINK OF YASIN?

NO, MIRZA, THAT MIGHT MAKE SALIM MORE FOND OF HIM.

WHEN BIRBAL RETURNED FROM HIS TRAVELS, AKBAR TURNED TO HIM FOR HELP.

YOU WANT TO SEPARATE THE TWO YOUNG MEN. WHY, GIVE ME JUST TWO DAYS.

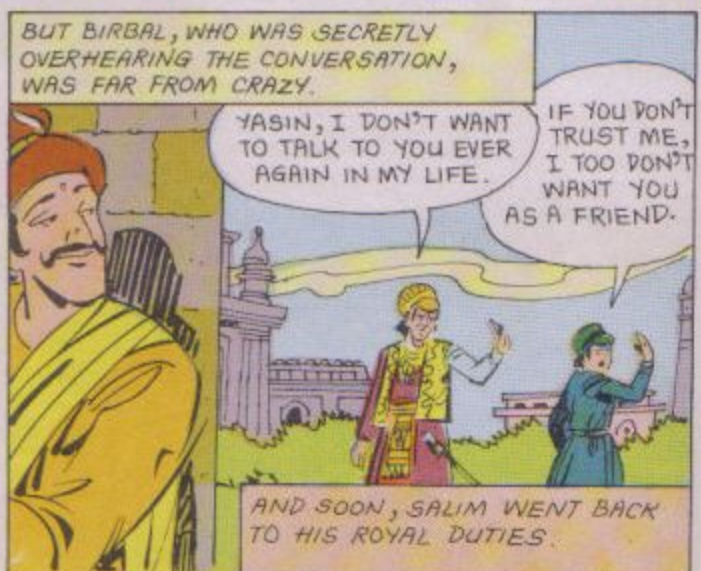
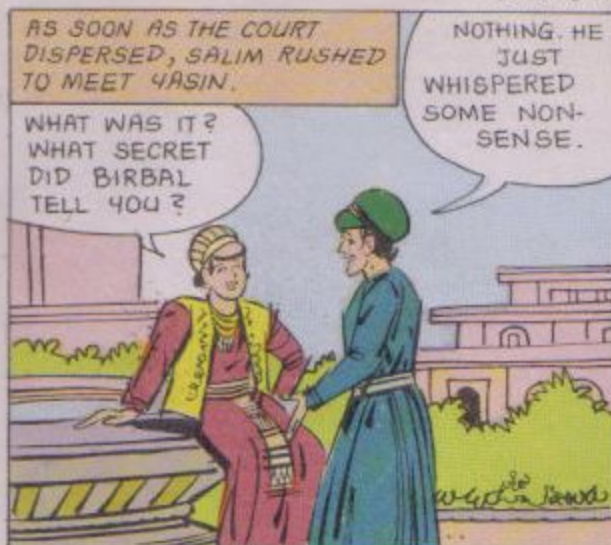
NEXT DAY, AT COURT, BIRBAL CALLED YASIN —

BZZZZ!

ALOUD HE SAID —

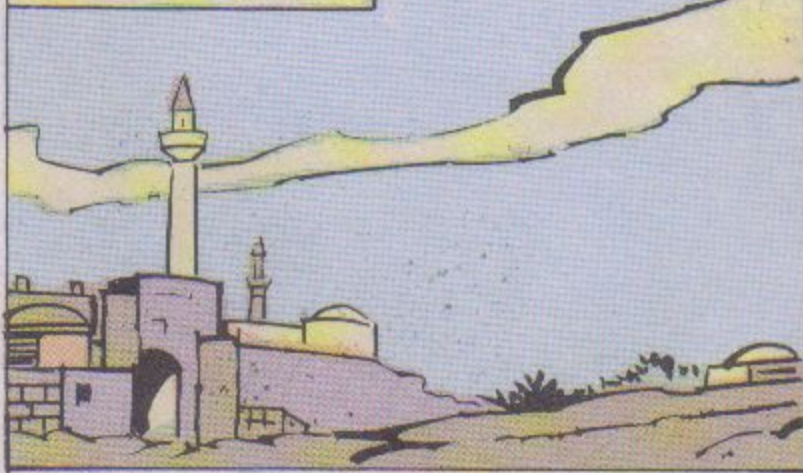
NOW, DON'T BREATHE A WORD OF THIS TO ANYONE.

BIRBAL MUST BE GOING CRAZY. HE JUST SAID, "JUST ONE SEED IN EVERY MANGO!"



THE PHASES OF THE MOON

ONCE AKBAR SENT BIRBAL TO KABUL ON A SECRET ROYAL MISSION.



BIRBAL TRIED TO MINGLE WITH THE LOCAL CROWD, BUT—

I SUSPECT THAT MAN!
HE DOESN'T LOOK
LIKE AN ORDINARY
PERSON.

YES, THOUGH
HE POSES TO BE
ONE OF US, HE IS
OBVIOUSLY AN
OUTSIDER.



WHY, HE
MUST BE
A SPY.

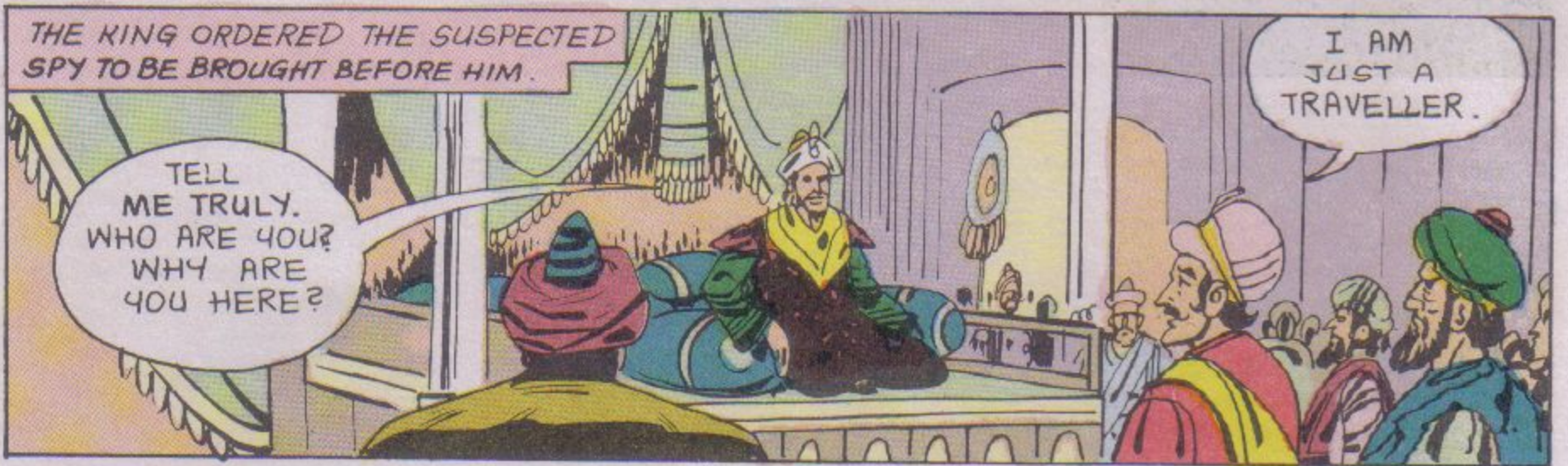
LET'S
REPORT HIM
TO OUR
KING.



THE KING ORDERED THE SUSPECTED SPY TO BE BROUGHT BEFORE HIM.

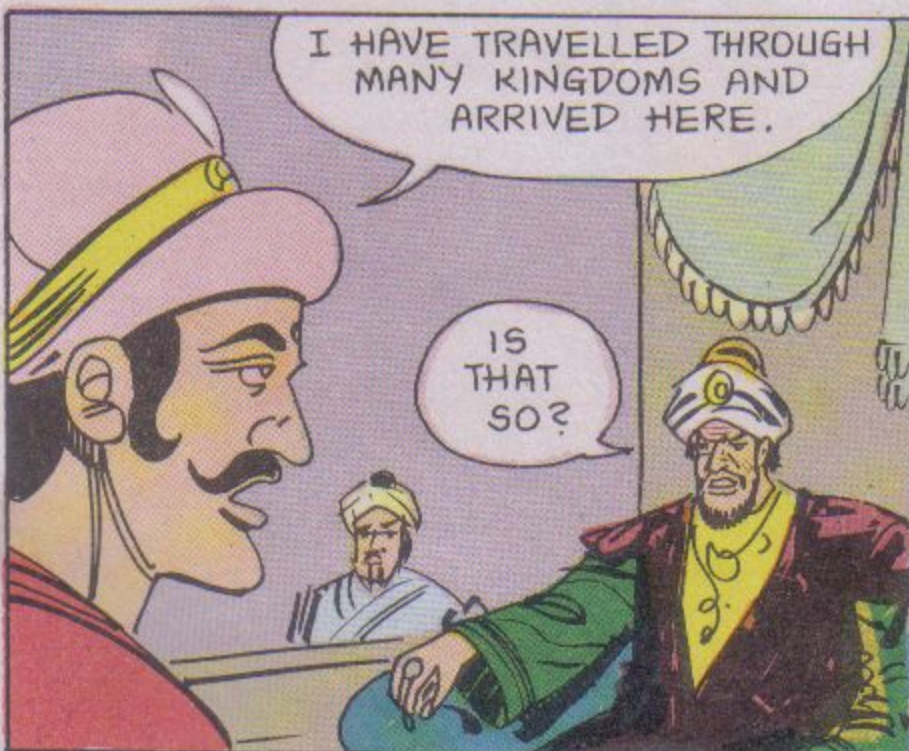
TELL
ME TRULY.
WHO ARE YOU?
WHY ARE
YOU HERE?

I AM
JUST A
TRAVELLER.



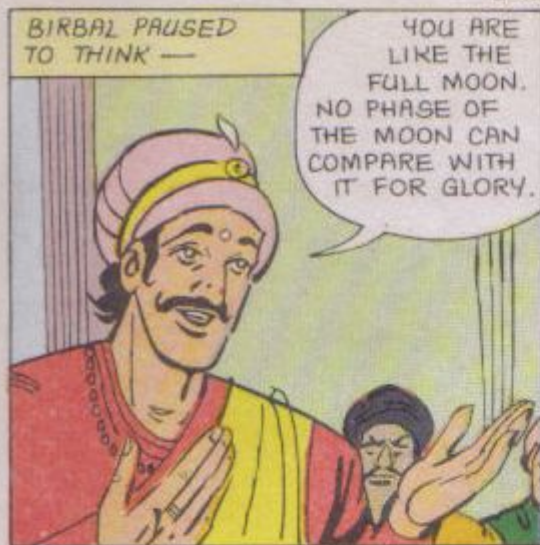
I HAVE TRAVELLED THROUGH
MANY KINGDOMS AND
ARRIVED HERE.

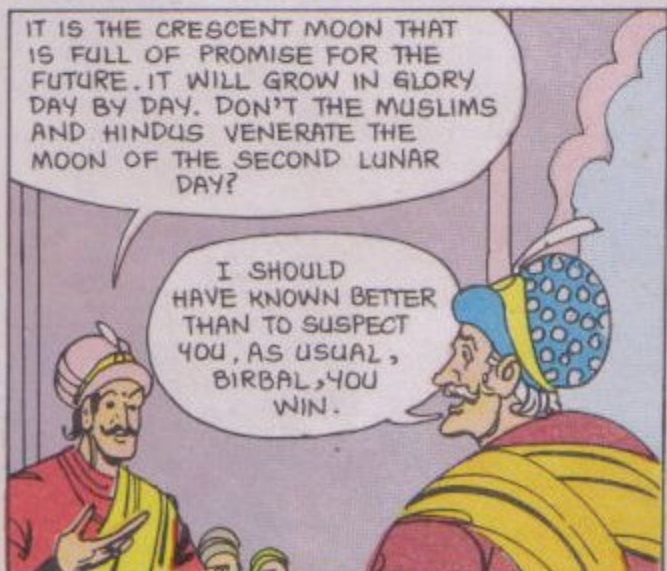
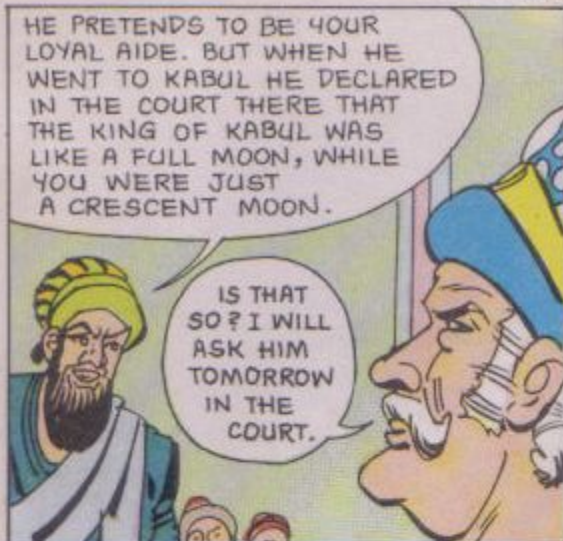
IS
THAT
SO?



WELL, SINCE YOU
HAVE TRAVELLED
SO MUCH AND
SEEN SO MUCH
OF THE WORLD,
TELL ME, WHAT DO
YOU THINK OF
MY RULE?







VALUE OF WASTE

ONE DAY IN THE COURT—

SEE THIS EXCELLENT VASE!

NO, IT'S A LITTLE CHIPPED. NEVER SHOW ME ANYTHING BROKEN.

BIRBAL INTERVENED —

WHY, HUZOOR?

SURELY, BIRBAL, YOU KNOW THAT ANYTHING THAT IS BROKEN, CRUSHED OR ROTTEN IS OF NO USE TO ANYONE.

SOMETIMES MAYBE, BUT THAT IS NOT ALWAYS TRUE.

PROVE IT TO ME, BIRBAL.

THE JUICE WE GET FROM SUGARCANE BY BREAKING AND CRUSHING GIVES SUGAR, JAGGERY AND DELICIOUS SWEETS, FIT TO BE A DIVINE OFFERING.

THE COTTON POD BURSTS FORTH TO YIELD THE COTTON STRING. CLOTHES MADE FROM ITS SPINNING AND WEAVING ARE FIT FOR EVEN A KING.

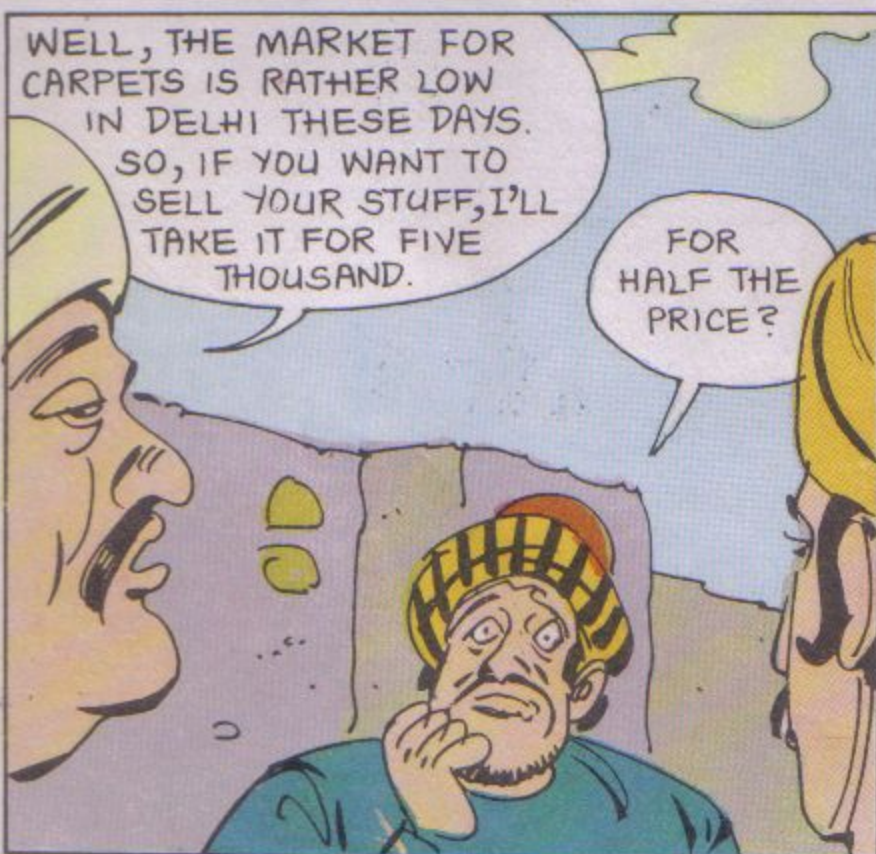
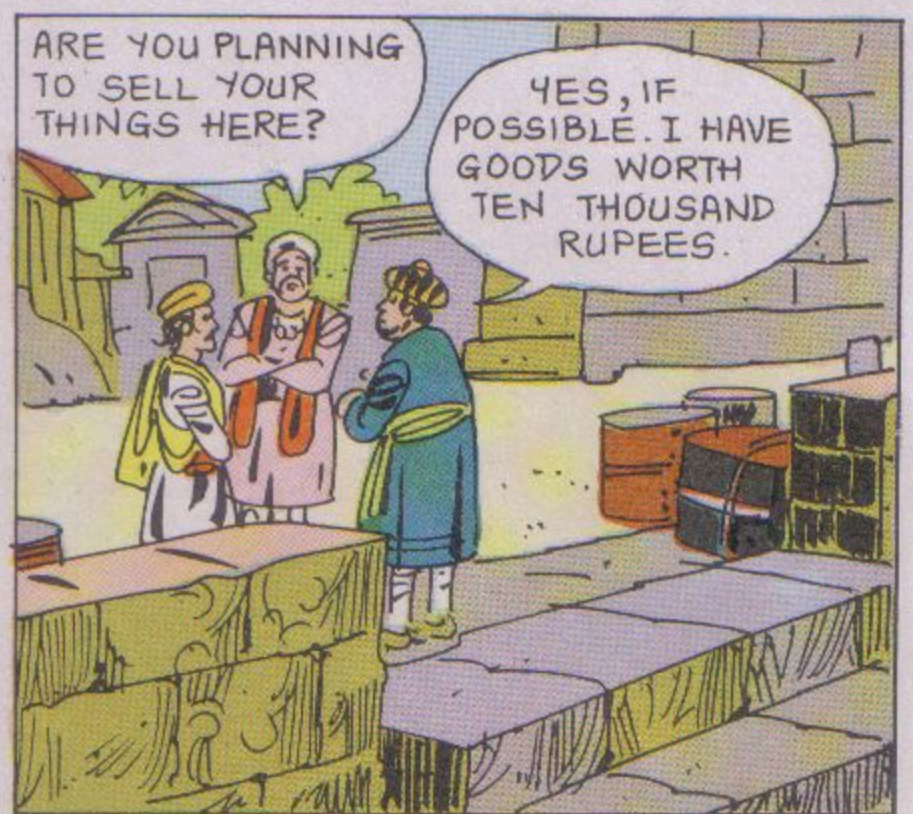
THE ROTTEN DECAYING RAGS, OLD JUTE AND OTHER WASTES YIELD PAPER FOR THE SACRED QURAN AS WELL AS OUR PURANAS.

INDEED THAT'S TRUE, BIRBAL. EVERYTHING HAS ITS USE, EVEN THE BROKEN, CRUSHED AND ROTTEN STUFF.

THE TRUE OWNER

ONE DAY AKBAR, BIRBAL AND THE OTHER COURTIER'S WERE IN THE DIWAN-I-AM. SUDDENLY —





THE TRADER NOW TURNED TO HIS MUNIM WHO WAS IN REALITY BIRBAL IN DISGUISE.

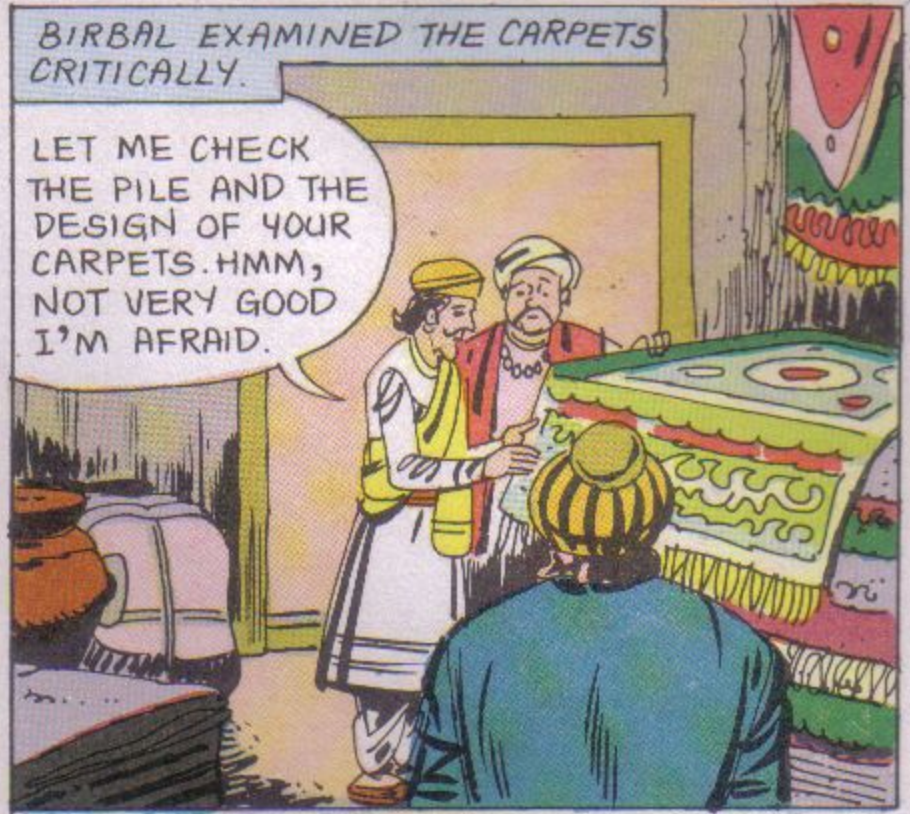
MUNIMJI, JUST CHECK THE GOODS FOR THEIR WORTH.

SHOW US SOME SAMPLES.



BIRBAL EXAMINED THE CARPETS CRITICALLY.

LET ME CHECK THE PILE AND THE DESIGN OF YOUR CARPETS. HMM, NOT VERY GOOD I'M AFRAID.



EVEN FIVE THOUSAND IS TOO MUCH FOR THESE INFERIOR QUALITY CARPETS.

YES, YOU ARE RIGHT. WE SHOULDN'T PAY MORE THAN THREE THOUSAND.



WELL, IF THAT'S THE MAXIMUM YOU ARE READY TO PAY, I'LL HAVE TO ACCEPT IT.

AGREED. WE'LL COME TOMORROW TO COLLECT THE GOODS AND PAY THE MONEY.



NOW THE TWO WENT TO THE INN WHERE THE TRADER WAS STAYING.

I HEARD YOU HAVE BROUGHT GOODS WORTH 10,000 FOR SALE.

THEY ARE THE FINEST OF CARPETS.



WELL, THE DEMAND FOR CARPETS IS RATHER LOW. WILL YOU SELL FOR FIVE THOUSAND?

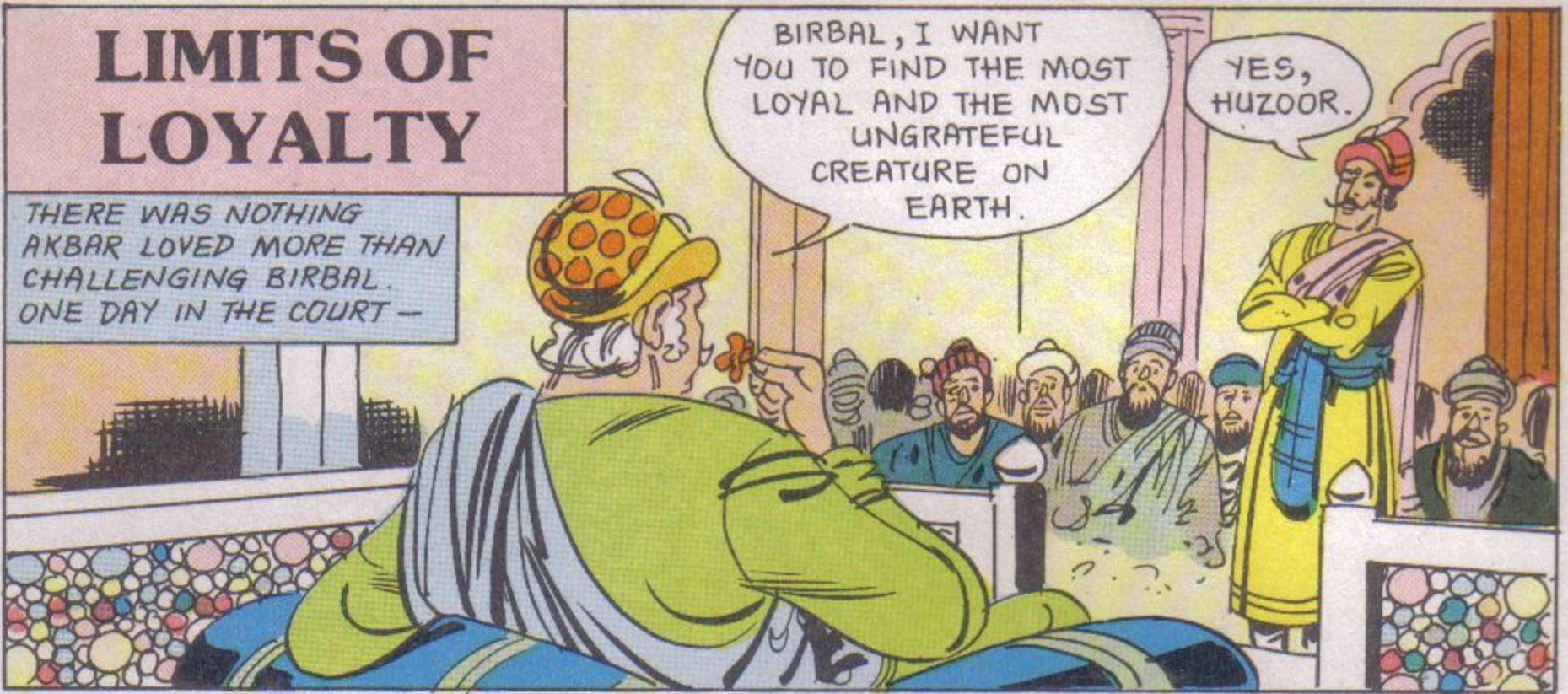
WHAAAT?!



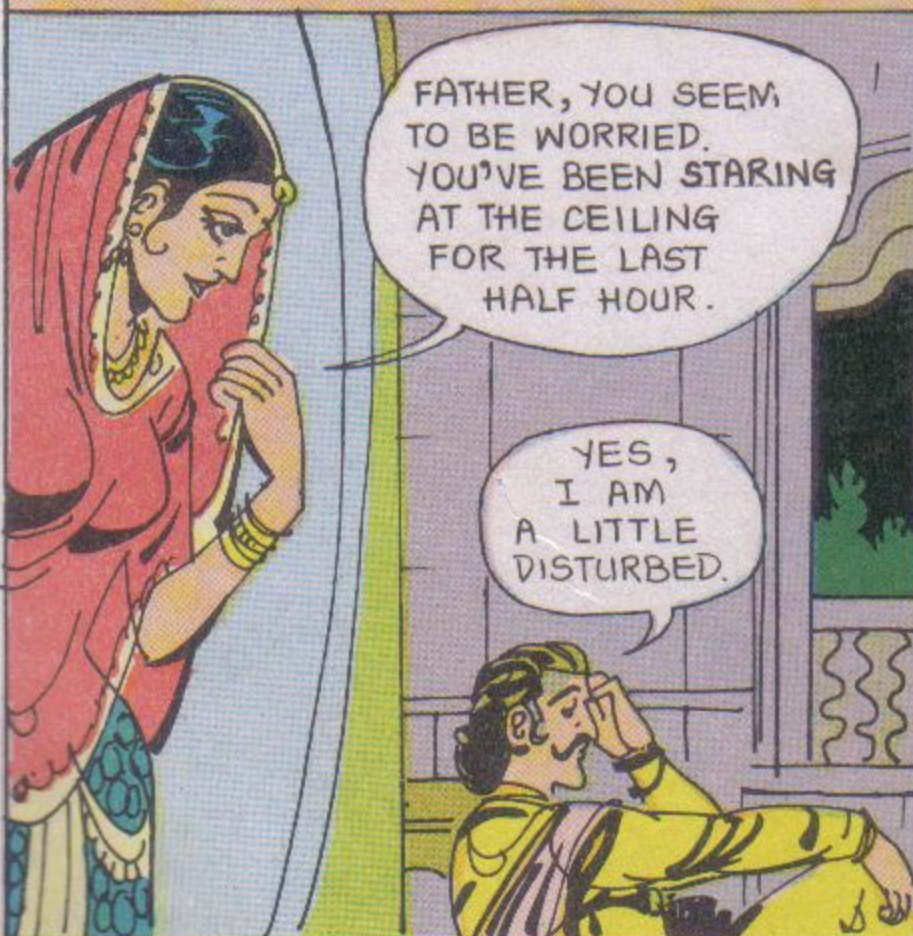


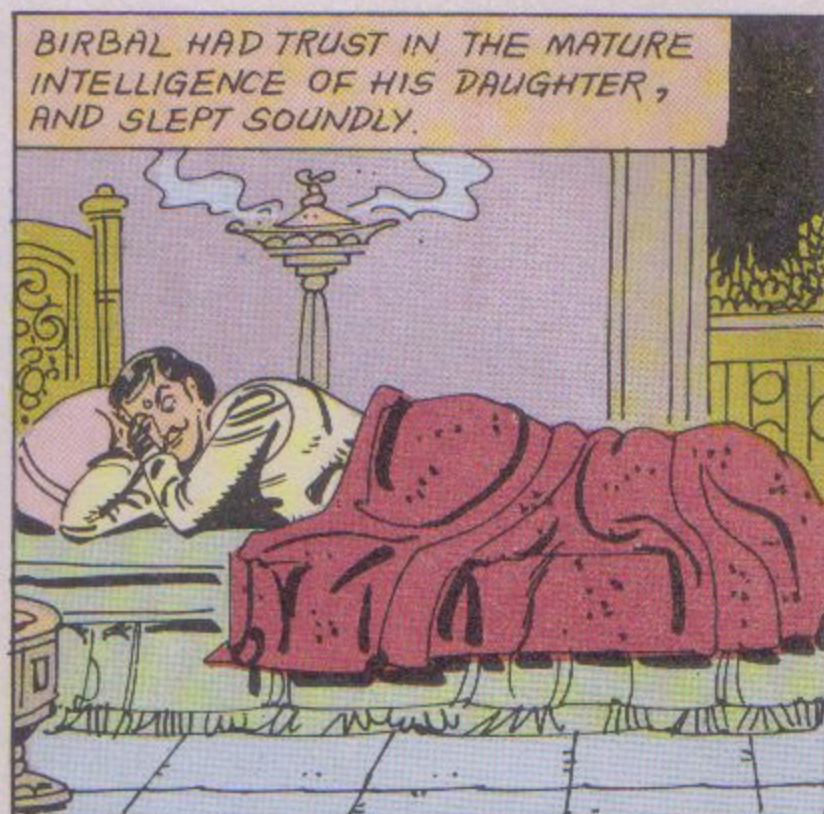
LIMITS OF LOYALTY

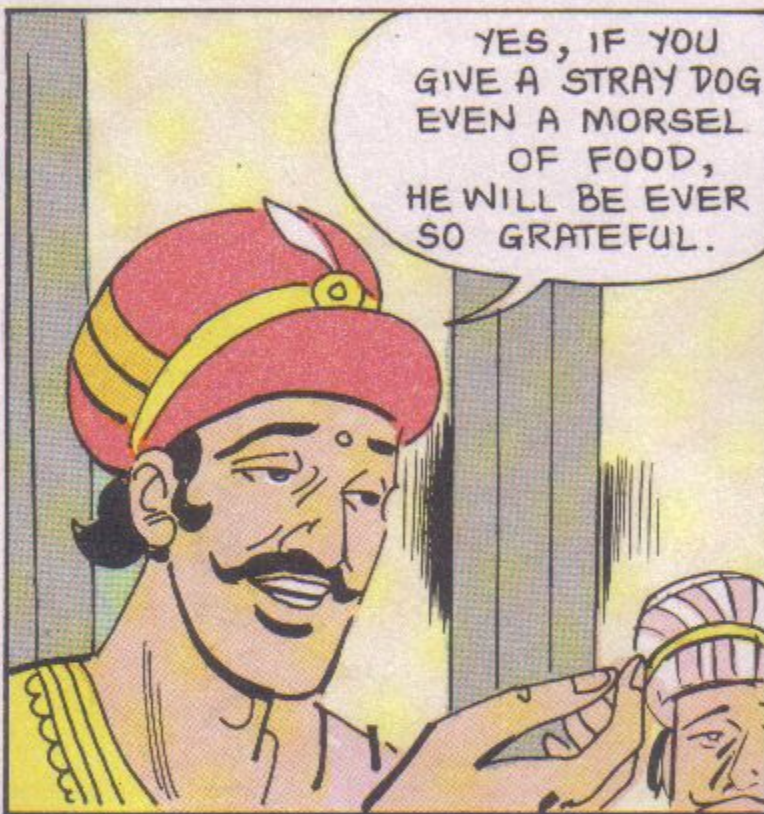
THERE WAS NOTHING AKBAR LOVED MORE THAN CHALLENGING BIRBAL. ONE DAY IN THE COURT —



BIRBAL AGREED TO DO AS ASKED. BUT ON GOING HOME, HIS DAUGHTER SAID —



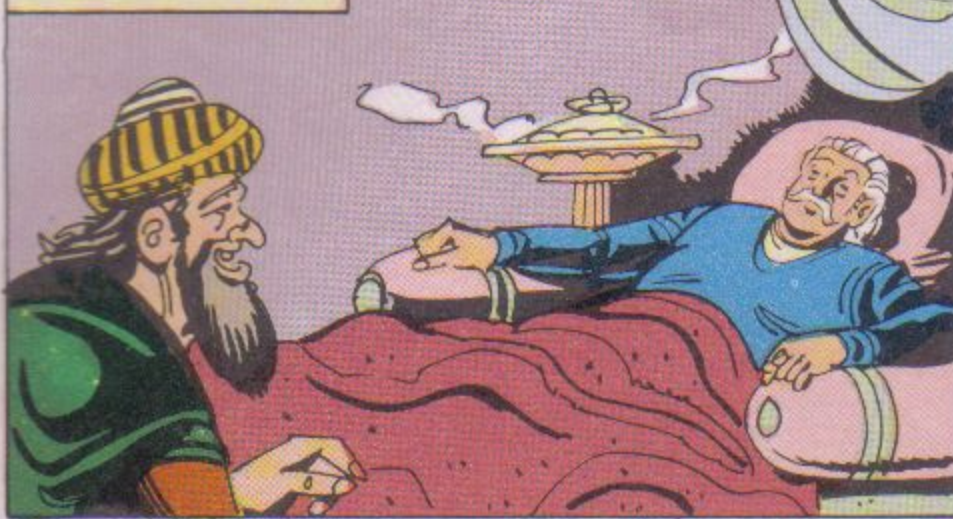






AND OFF IT FLEW

AKBAR WAS FOND OF STORIES. HE COULD NOT SLEEP UNLESS HE LISTENED TO A NEW TALE EVERY NIGHT.



ONE BY ONE, HIS COURTIERS WOULD BE SUMMONED.

HURRY UP, ASIM. TODAY IT IS YOUR TURN TO TELL A STORY.

AH YES! AND THE KING DOESN'T WANT TO HEAR THE GOOD OLD STORIES. WE MUST TELL NEW TALES TO HIS MAJESTY.



ONE EVENING, IT WAS BIRBAL'S TURN. BIRBAL WOULD SPIN A LONG YARN. EACH TIME HE PAUSED FOR BREATH—

AND THEN?

ALL HE HAS TO SAY IS 'AND THEN?' IT'S MY POOR JAW THAT GETS WEARY TALKING.

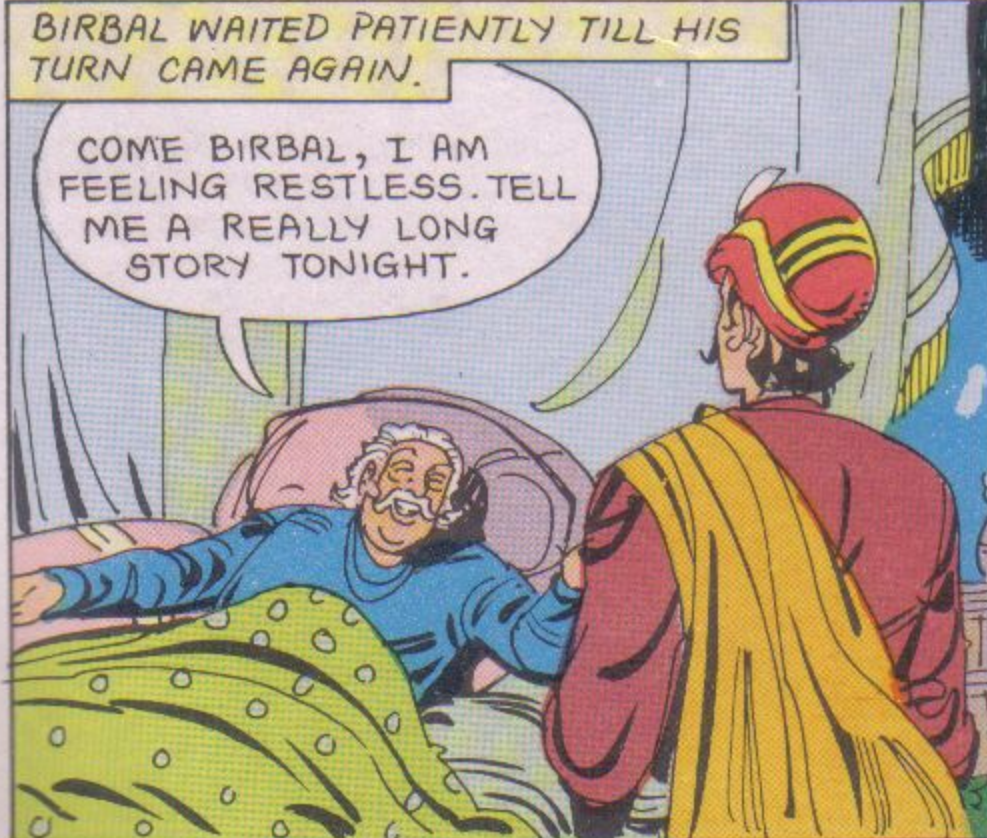


I MUST CURE HIM OF THIS HABIT OF HIS. HOW CAN WE FIND END-LESS NEW STORIES EVERY DAY?



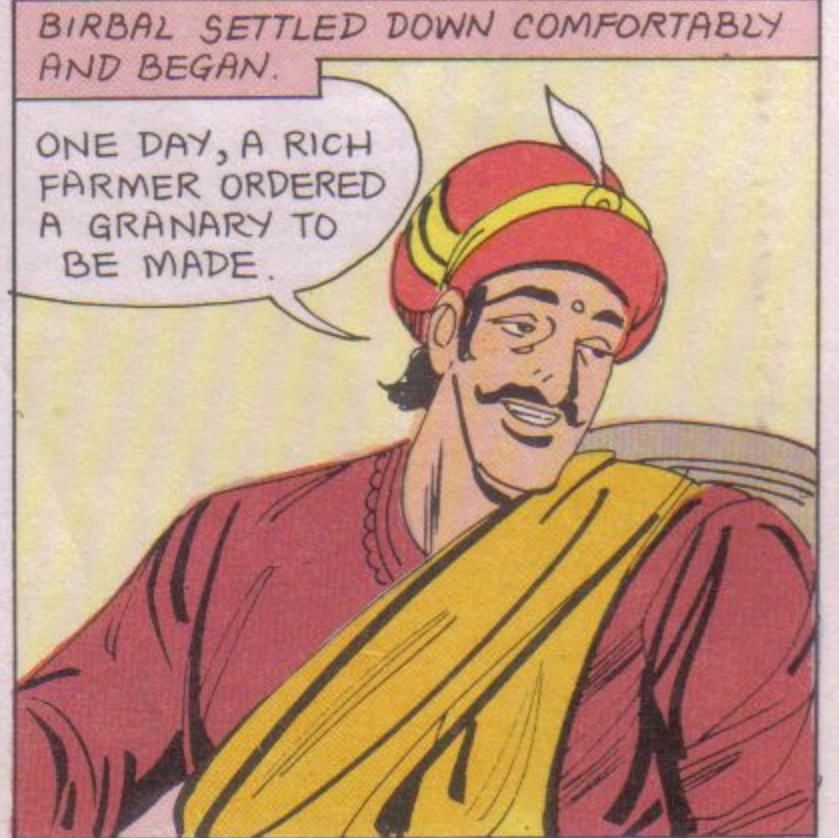
BIRBAL WAITED PATIENTLY TILL HIS TURN CAME AGAIN.

COME BIRBAL, I AM FEELING RESTLESS. TELL ME A REALLY LONG STORY TONIGHT.



BIRBAL SETTLED DOWN COMFORTABLY AND BEGAN.

ONE DAY, A RICH FARMER ORDERED A GRANARY TO BE MADE.



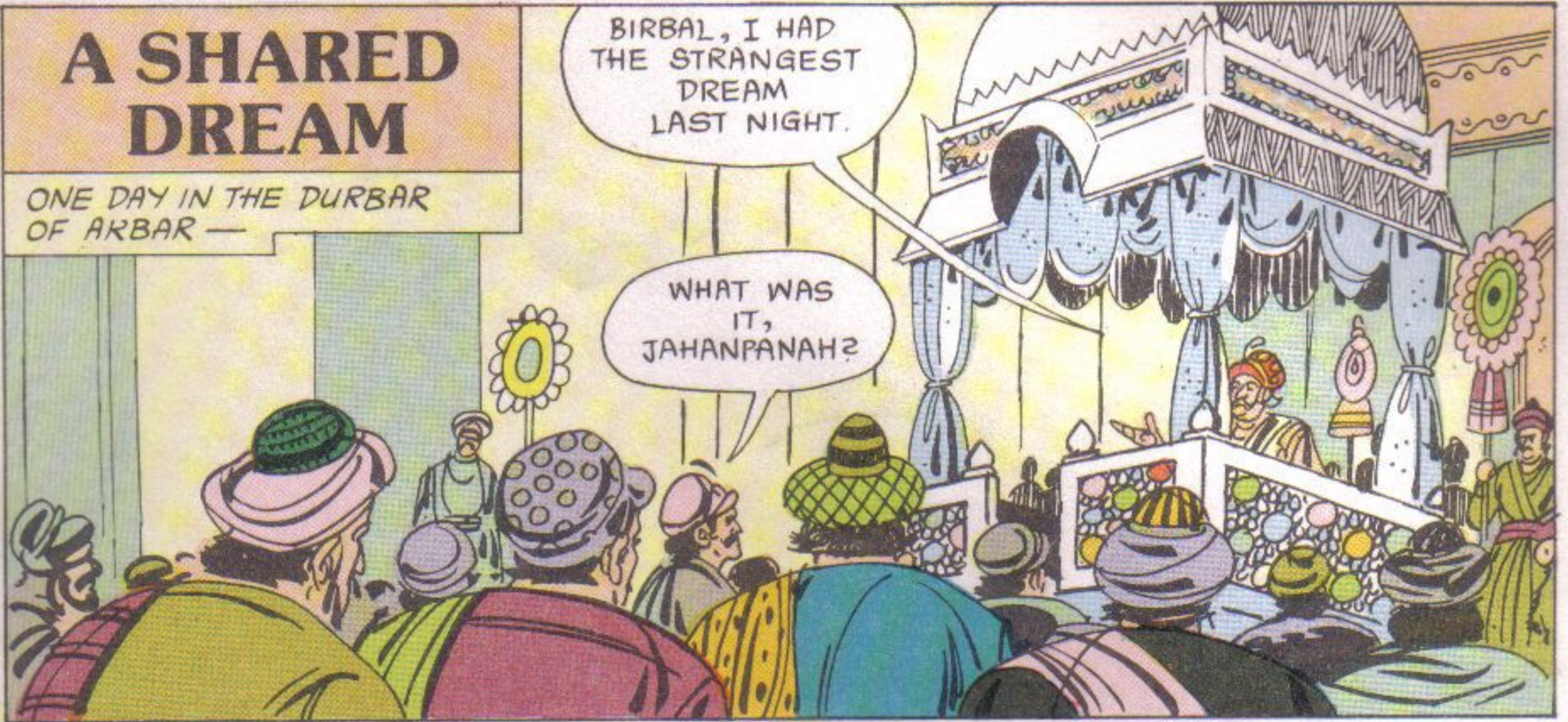


A SHARED DREAM

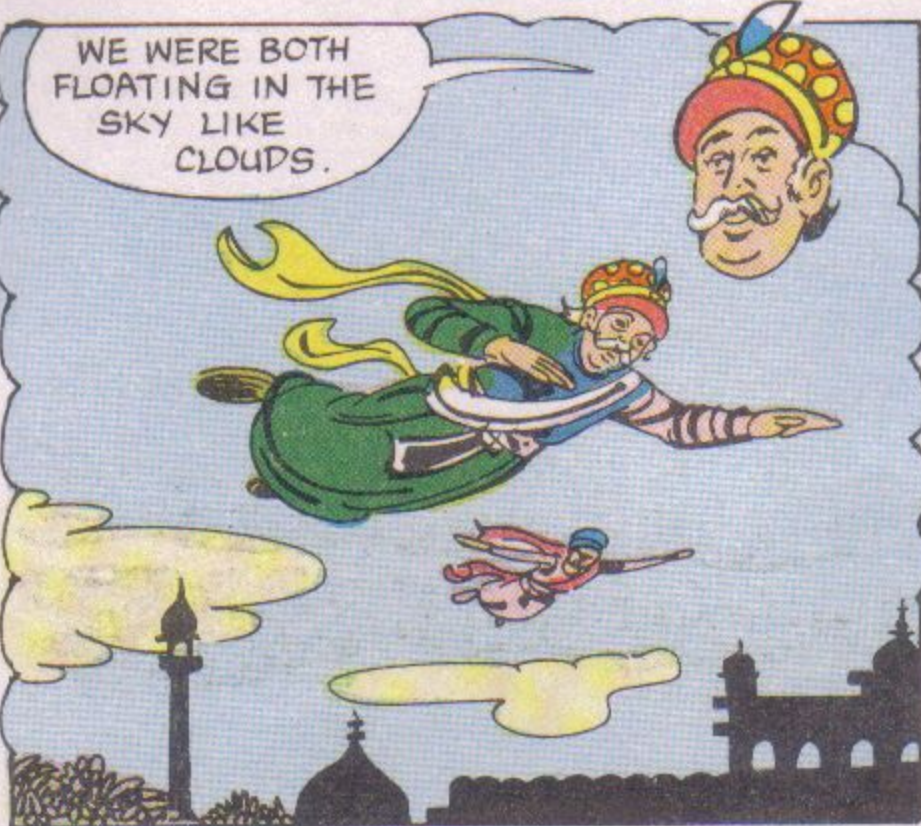
ONE DAY IN THE DURBAR OF ARBAR —

BIRBAL, I HAD THE STRANGEST DREAM LAST NIGHT.

WHAT WAS IT, JAHANPANA?



WE WERE BOTH FLOATING IN THE SKY LIKE CLOUDS.



THEN SUDDENLY WE BOTH FELL DOWN WITH A BANG.



I FELL INTO A BIG PIT FILLED WITH HONEY.



BUT YOU, BIRBAL, FELL INTO A GUTTER.

HUH!



