

KRISHNA—THE UPHOLDER OF GOVARDHANA

SHUKADEVA, WHO WAS NARRATING THE STORY OF KRISHNA TO PAREEKSHIT, SAID —

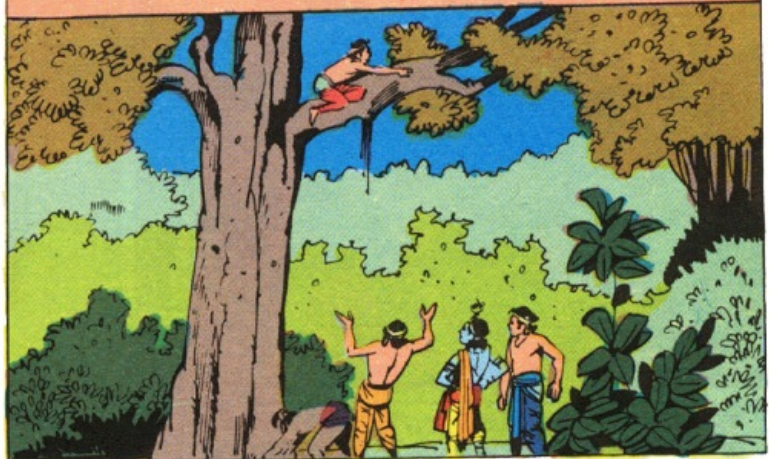


WHEN THE COWHERD BOYS RETURNED HOME AND RELATED THE EXPLOITS OF KRISHNA AND BALARAMA TO THE PEOPLE OF VRINDAVANA, THEY WERE STRUCK WITH WONDER. THEY BEGAN TO BELIEVE THAT TWO DIVINE BEINGS HAD BEEN BORN IN THEIR MIDST.

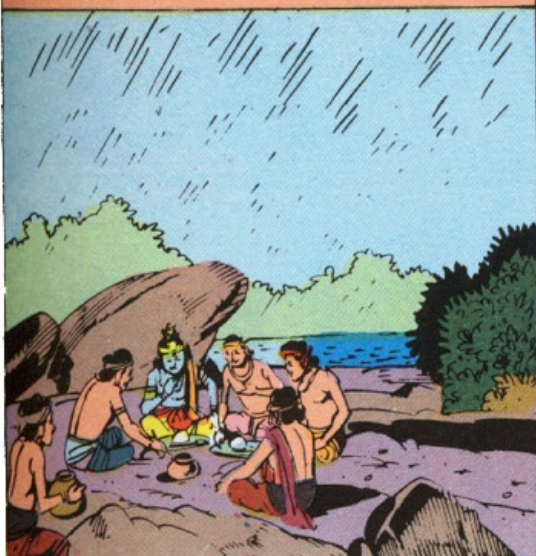
"THEN THE RAINY SEASON SET IN. THE EARTH, SCORCHED BY THE SUMMER HEAT, WAS BLANKETED WITH LUSH GREEN GRASS.



"THE FOREST TREES, LADEN WITH BLACK-BERRIES, SEEMED TO BECKON KRISHNA AND HIS MATES.



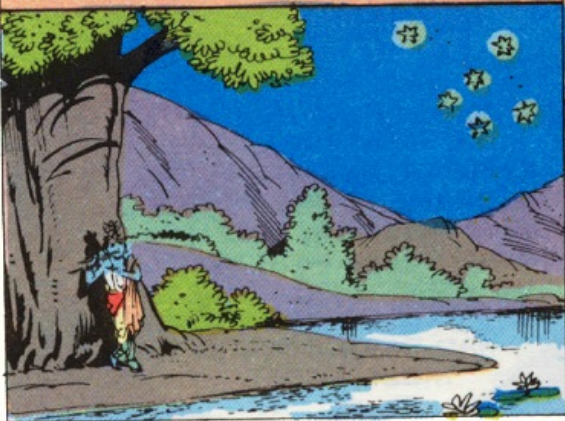
"ON SOME DAYS THEY WOULD SIT ON A ROCK AND EAT THEIR FOOD, ENJOYING THE PITTER-PATTER OF THE RAIN.



"BUT WHEN THE SHOWERS BECAME HEAVY, THEY WOULD RUN TO THE SHELTER OF A CAVE, OR HIDE IN THE HOLLOW OF A TREE, TO ESCAPE THEIR FURY.



THE CLOUDS DISPERSED AND THE STORMY WINDS BECAME QUIET. NOW IT WAS AUTUMN. THE STARS SHONE BRIGHTLY IN THE CLOUDLESS SKIES.



"WHEN THE GOPIKAS OF VRINDAVANA HEARD THE SWEET SOUND OF KRISHNA'S MELODIOUS FLUTE THEY WOULD STOP ALL WORK AND LISTEN.



OH THAT KRISHNA! HOW ENCHANTING HE IS WITH THE PEACOCK FEATHER IN HIS CURLS, YELLOW FLOWERS IN HIS EARS, THE GOLDEN CLOTH DRAPED OVER HIS DARK FORM, AND THE GARLAND OF FRAGRANT FLOWERS AROUND HIS NECK.

WHEN HE PLAYS HIS FLUTE, EVEN THE BEASTS OF THE JUNGLE STOP TO HEAR HIM.

WHY TALK OF THE BIRDS AND THE BEASTS. EVEN THE STREAMS AND RIVERS SEEM TO RESPOND TO THE MELODY OF KRISHNA'S FLUTE.

LEAVE ALONE THE EARTH, EVEN THE CLOUDS IN THE SKY SEEM TO BE EAGER TO PROTECT KRISHNA. THE TINY RAIN DROPS ARE LIKE LITTLE WHITE FLOWER OFFERINGS MADE TO OUR KRISHNA.



"WHEN WINTER SET IN, THE MAIDENS OF VRAJA OBSERVED THEIR CUSTOMARY PRAYERS TO THE GODDESS DURGA.



"SINGING AND CHATting, THEY WOULD GO TOGETHER TO BATHE IN THE YAMUNA AT DAY-BREAK, MAKE A CLAY IMAGE OF THE GODDESS ON THE BANK, AND PRAY TO IT.



"ONE DAY, THEY WERE SPLASHING ABOUT IN THE WATER."

LOOK, OUR CLOTHES HAVE VANISHED.

STRANGE. WE HAD LEFT THEM ON THE BANK THERE.



"JUST THEN THEY SAW KRISHNA SITTING ASTRIDE THE BRANCH OF A KADAMBA TREE NEAR BY."

HA! HA!
HA!

COME AND COLLECT YOUR BELONGINGS.

THAT'S NOT FAIR, KRISHNA. DON'T TORMENT US SO.



COME, KRISHNA, WE KNOW YOU ARE NANDA'S DARLING SON. ALL THE PEOPLE OF VRAJA DOTE ON YOU. WE TOO ARE EVER WILLING TO DO YOUR BIDDING.

IN THAT CASE, YOU MUST COME HERE, BOW TO ME, AND TAKE YOUR BELONGINGS.

SHUKADEVA SAID TO PAREEKSHIT—

KRISHNA WAS TRYING TO TEST THE DEVOTION OF THE GOPIKAS FOR HIM. HE TEASED AND TAUNTED THEM, LAUGHED AT THEIR PLIGHT, MADE THEM ACT LIKE PUPPETS AT HIS MERCY. YET THEY WERE NOT ANNOYED WITH HIM.



"AFTER THEY HAD COLLECTED THEIR CLOTHES FROM KRISHNA, HE SAID—

MAY YOUR DESIRES BE ALL FULFILLED. NOW RETURN TO YOUR HOMES, DEAR MAIDENS, AND AWAIT THE MOONLIT NIGHTS OF AUTUMN.



"ONE DAY WHEN KRISHNA AND THE COWHERDS WERE GRAZING THEIR COWS, HE SAID —

BEHOLD THESE TREES. THEY BEAR THE SEVERE SUN, THE LASHING WIND AND RAIN, AND YET PROTECT US. LEAVES AND FLOWERS, BARK AND WOOD, SAP AND GUM, FUEL AND FRUITS. MANY ARE THE GIFTS THE TREES BESTOW ON US. BLESSED ARE THE PEOPLE WHO GIVE GENEROUSLY TO OTHERS LIKE THESE TREES.

"HUNGRY AND THIRSTY, THE BOYS APPROACHED THE RIVER BANK.

KRISHNA, WE HAVE QUENCHED OUR THIRST WITH THE RIVER WATER. BUT I AM FEELING VERY HUNGRY.

ME TOO. KRISHNA, BALARAMA, YOU MUST THINK OF A WAY TO SATISFY OUR HUNGER.

"KRISHNA SAID —

A LITTLE DISTANCE FROM HERE, THERE IS A GROUP OF BRAHMANAS PERFORMING A YAJNA. TELL THEM THAT KRISHNA AND BALARAMA HAVE SENT YOU, AND THEY WILL SURELY GIVE YOU SOME FOOD.

WE'VE BEEN SENT BY KRISHNA AND BALARAMA. DO GIVE US SOME FOOD, O BRAHMANAS!

"BUT THE BRAHMANAS IGNORED THE BOYS AND CONTINUED THEIR YAJNA.

"SADLY, THE COWHERD BOYS RETURNED TO KRISHNA.

WHAT HAPPENED? DIDN'T THE BRAHMANAS GIVE YOU ANY FOOD?

THEY SAID NEITHER YES NOR NO. WE FELT DISAPPOINTED.

"KRISHNA SAID WITH A LAUGH —

JUST BECAUSE YOU ARE UNSUCCESSFUL ONCE, YOU MUST NOT STOP TRYING. GO AND MEET THEIR WIVES THIS TIME. THEY ARE DEVOTED TO ME AND WILL CERTAINLY GIVE YOU FOOD.

"OBEDIENTLY THE COWHERDS WENT BACK AND REQUESTED THE WIVES OF THE BRAHMANAS.

KRISHNA AND BALARAMA HAVE SENT US TO YOU. THEY ARE HUNGRY AND HAVE REQUESTED YOU FOR SOME FOOD.

"JUST THE MENTION OF KRISHNA'S NAME WAS ENOUGH.

FOR KRISHNA! SURELY WE WILL DO ANYTHING TO HAVE A GLIMPSE OF HIM.

FOR SO LONG WE HAVE HEARD OF HIS PRAISE. THOUGH WE HAVE NEVER SEEN HIM, HE HAS BECOME VERY DEAR TO US.



"LIKE RIVERS RUSHING TO MEET THE SEA, THE WOMEN EAGERLY HURRIED TO MEET KRISHNA. THEY CARRIED VESSELS FILLED WITH DELICIOUS FOOD THEY HAD COOKED FOR THE YAJNA BEING PERFORMED BY THEIR HUSBANDS.



"WHEN THEY BEHELD KRISHNA, SHINING BRIGHTLY IN HIS BEAUTIFUL GOLDEN GARMENTS, THE CURLY LOCKS AROUND HIS SMILING, DUSKY FACE, THEY WERE DELIGHTED AT THE SIGHT.



"WITH A PLAYFUL SMILE, KRISHNA SAID—

WELCOME, DEAR LADIES. I KNOW YOUR DEVOTION FOR ME HAS DRAWN YOU HERE. YOUR LOVE FOR ME IS INDEED PURE AND SELFLESS.



BUT NOW THAT YOU HAVE MET ME, YOU MUST RETURN TO YOUR HOMES. YOUR PRESENCE IS NECESSARY TO COMPLETE THE YAJNA BEING PERFORMED BY YOUR HUSBANDS.



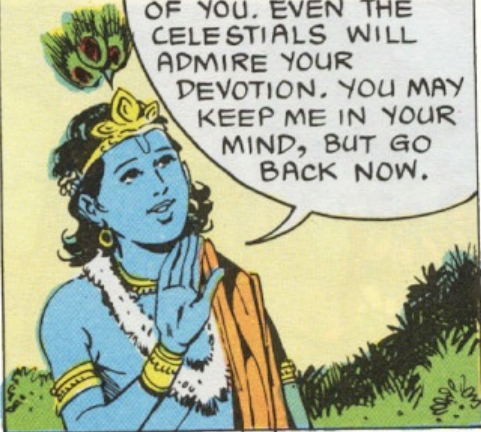
"THE WOMEN REPLIED—

DON'T SEND US AWAY. WE HAVE COME TO YOU, ABANDONING EVERYTHING. OUR FAMILIES MAY NOT ACCEPT US NOW. YOU ARE OUR ONLY HOPE.



"KRISHNA GENTLY REASSURED THEM.

REST ASSURED, NO ONE WILL TALK ILL OF YOU. EVEN THE CELESTIALS WILL ADMIRE YOUR DEVOTION. YOU MAY KEEP ME IN YOUR MIND, BUT GO BACK NOW.



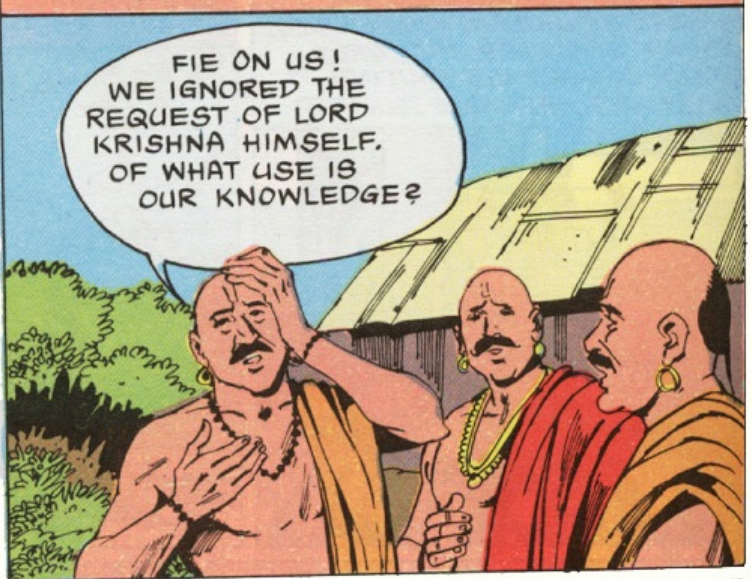
"INDEED WHEN THEIR WIVES RETURNED TO THE SACRIFICIAL HALL, THE BRAHMANAS ACCEPTED THEIR RETURN WITHOUT ANY COMMENT AND PROCEEDED TO COMPLETE THE YAJNA.



"WHILE KRISHNA AND HIS COMPANIONS HAPPILY FEASTED ON THE FOOD BROUGHT BY THE WIVES OF THE BRAHMANAS...



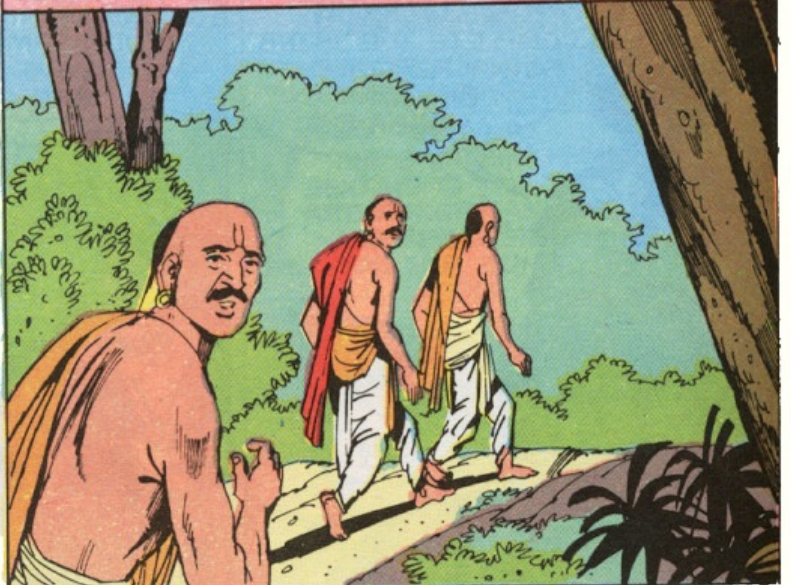
"...THE BRAHMANAS, WHO HAD IGNORED KRISHNA'S REQUEST, WERE FILLED WITH REMORSE.



AND LOOK AT THE DEVOTION OF OUR WIVES FOR THE LORD. THESE WOMEN HAVE NEITHER LEARNT THE VEDAS NOR UNDERGONE PENANCE. YET THEY HAVE UTTER FAITH IN LORD KRISHNA. HOW LUCKY WE ARE TO HAVE SUCH WIVES.



"OVERCOME WITH SHAME AND REPENTANCE, THE BRAHMANAS LONGED TO MEET KRISHNA AND BALARAMA, BUT FEAR OF KAMSA HELD THEM BACK.



"IN VRINDAVANA, KRISHNA NOTICED ALL THE COWHERDS WERE BUSY PREPARING FOR SOME YAJNA. APPROACHING HIS FATHER, HE ASKED—



FATHER, WHAT CELEBRATION ARE YOU ALL BUSY PREPARING FOR?

WHAT IS THE MERIT OF THIS YAJNA? WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE? WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WHO WILL PERFORM IT? DO TELL ME, FATHER.

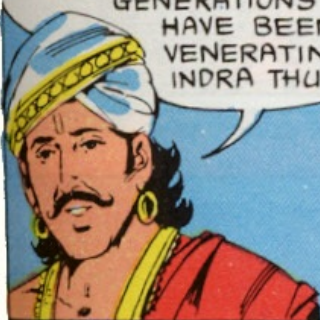


"NANDA SAID—



LORD INDRA IS THE GOD OF THE RAIN CLOUDS. HE IS THE ONE WHO SHOWERS THE LIFE-GIVING RAIN ON US. WE PERFORM YAJNAS TO PLEASE HIM.

WHY, EVEN THE MATERIALS USED FOR THE YAJNA ARE PRODUCED BECAUSE OF THE RAIN. FOR SEVERAL GENERATIONS WE HAVE BEEN VENERATING INDRA THUS.



"KRISHNA REPLIED—

A LIVING BEING IS BORN AND DIES ACCORDING TO HIS KARMA. JOY AND SORROW, FEAR AND PROSPERITY ARE ALL AN OUTCOME OF KARMA. WHY THEN DO WE NEED INDRA?



A MAN SHOULD WORSHIP WHATEVER HE LIVES BY. FOR VAISHYAS LIKE US, FOUR TYPES OF LIVELIHOOD ARE POSSIBLE—AGRICULTURE, TRADE, CATTLE-REARING AND MONEY-LENDING.



WE ARE FOREST DWELLERS. FOR LONG, OUR PEOPLE HAVE TENDED CATTLE. THESE FORESTS AND MOUNTAINS ARE OUR HOMES. LET US THEREFORE WORSHIP OUR COWS, AND OUR MOUNTAINS.



ALL THESE THINGS THAT HAVE BEEN COLLECTED FOR INDRA'S YAJNA, LET THEM BE USED FOR THE OTHER SACRIFICE.



SUMMON WELL-VERSED BRAHMANAS TO CONDUCT THE SACRIFICE. LET A SUMPTUOUS FEAST BE PREPARED. WE WILL MAKE AN OFFERING TO THIS MOUNTAIN HERE.



THEN BEDECKING OURSELVES IN FINE GARMENTS AND JEWELS, WE WILL GO ROUND THE COWS, THE BRAHMANAS AND MOUNT GOVARDHANA. THIS IS MY OPINION, FATHER. SUCH A SACRIFICE WILL PLEASE ME IMMENSELY.



"NANDA AND THE OTHER COWHERDS WERE CONVINCED.



WE WILL
DO AS YOU
SAY,
KRISHNA.

YES, LET'S
START THE
PREPARATIONS.

"BRAHMANAS LIGHTED THE HOLY FIRE
AND RECITED THE SACRED MANTRAS.



"THE COWHERDS PRESENTED
THE BRAHMANAS WITH GIFTS.



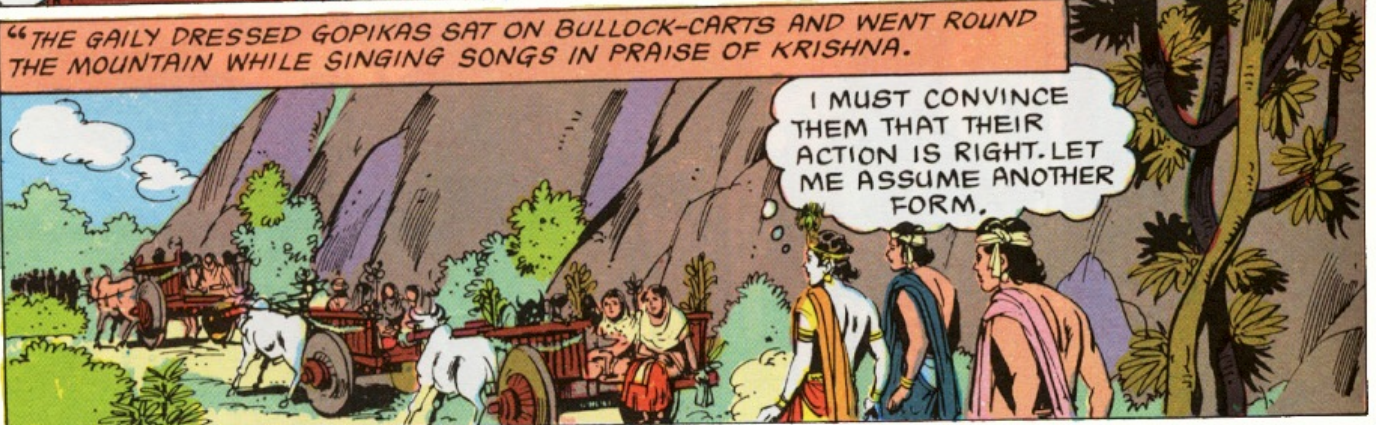
"THE COWS WERE OFFERED TENDER
LUSH GRASS. VARIOUS OFFERINGS
WERE ALSO PLACED BEFORE
MOUNT GOVARDHANA.



"WITH NANDA LEADING THE WAY, THE COWHERDS
WENT ROUND GOVARDHANA.



"THE GAILY DRESSED GOPIKAS SAT ON BULLOCK-CARTS AND WENT ROUND
THE MOUNTAIN WHILE SINGING SONGS IN PRAISE OF KRISHNA.



I MUST CONVINCE
THEM THAT THEIR
ACTION IS RIGHT. LET
ME ASSUME ANOTHER
FORM.

"KRISHNA APPEARED IN THE GUISE OF AN ENORMOUS BEING ON THE TOP OF MOUNT GOVARDHANA.

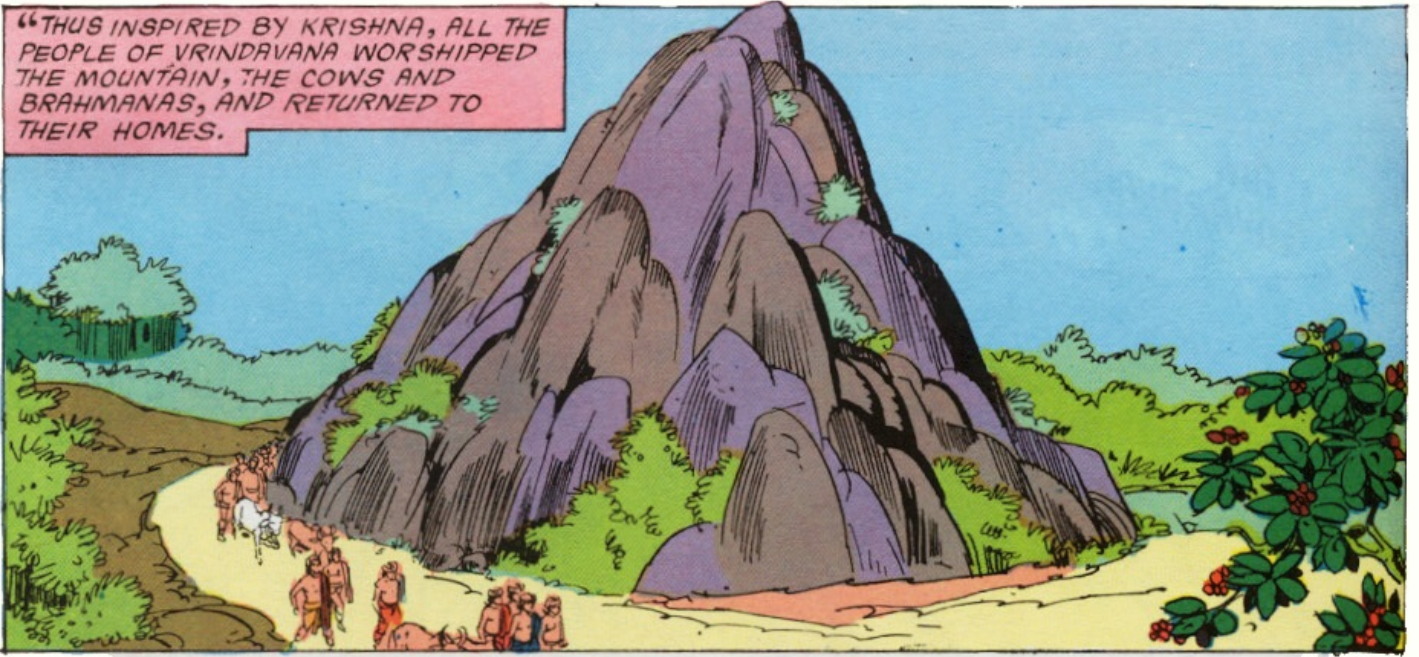
I AM
GOVARDHANA

"BEFORE THEIR VERY EYES, THE GIGANTIC FORM BEGAN TO GOBBLE UP THE OFFERINGS MADE TO IT. FEIGNING SURPRISE, KRISHNA SAID —

HOW
WONDERFUL!
BEHOLD HOW
THE MOUNTAIN
HAS GRACED
US WITH HIS
PRESENCE.

HE CAN ASSUME
ANY FORM. HE CAN
DESTROY ANY ONE WHO
DISRESPECTS HIM. FOR
THE WELFARE OF OUR
CATTLE AND OURSELVES,
LET US BOW BEFORE
HIM.

"THUS INSPIRED BY KRISHNA, ALL THE PEOPLE OF VRINDAVANA WORSHIPPED THE MOUNTAIN, THE COWS AND BRAHMANAS, AND RETURNED TO THEIR HOMES."



"NOW THAT HIS WORSHIP HAD BEEN DISCONTINUED, INDRA WAS VERY ANGRY."

HOW DARE THEY DO THIS TO ME, THE LORD OF THE THREE WORLDS!



"HE SUMMONED THE DESTRUCTIVE MASSES OF CLOUDS CALLED SAMVARTAKA."

BEHOLD THE ARROGANCE OF THESE COWHERDS. THEY ARE INTOXICATED WITH THEIR WEALTH.



ON THE WORD OF KRISHNA, THE PEOPLE OF VRAJA HAVE INSULTED ME AND FAILED TO PAY ME HOMAGE.



THAT IGNORANT, VAIN AND TALKATIVE KRISHNA THINKS HE IS VERY WISE. HE HAS ENCOURAGED THE PEOPLE OF VRINDAVANA TO DEFEY ME. I COMMAND YOU TO DESTROY THEIR VANITY.

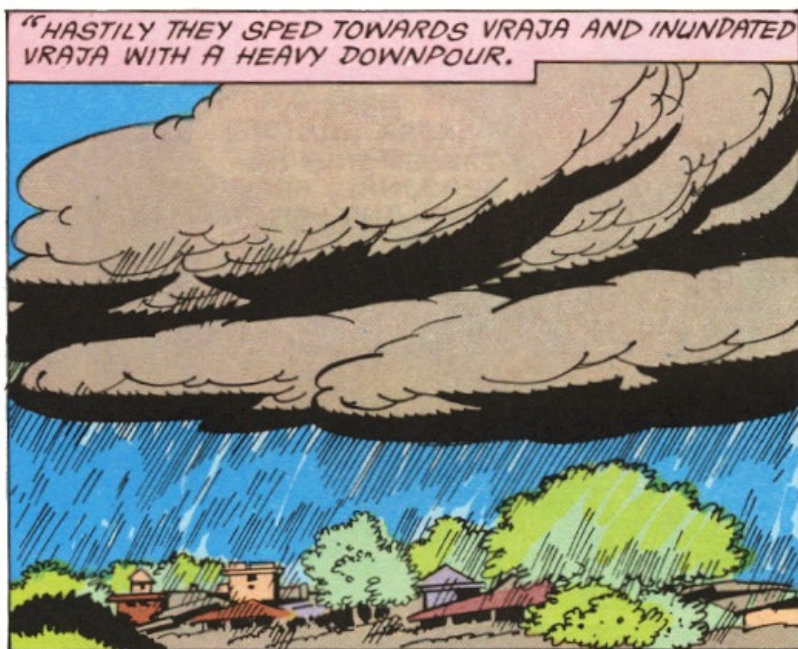


ATTACK THEM! KILL THEIR CATTLE! I WILL FOLLOW YOU WITH MY ARMY OF ELEPHANTS, WITH AIRAVATA LEADING THE WAY.





"WITH THESE WORDS, INDRA RELEASED THE CLOUDS."

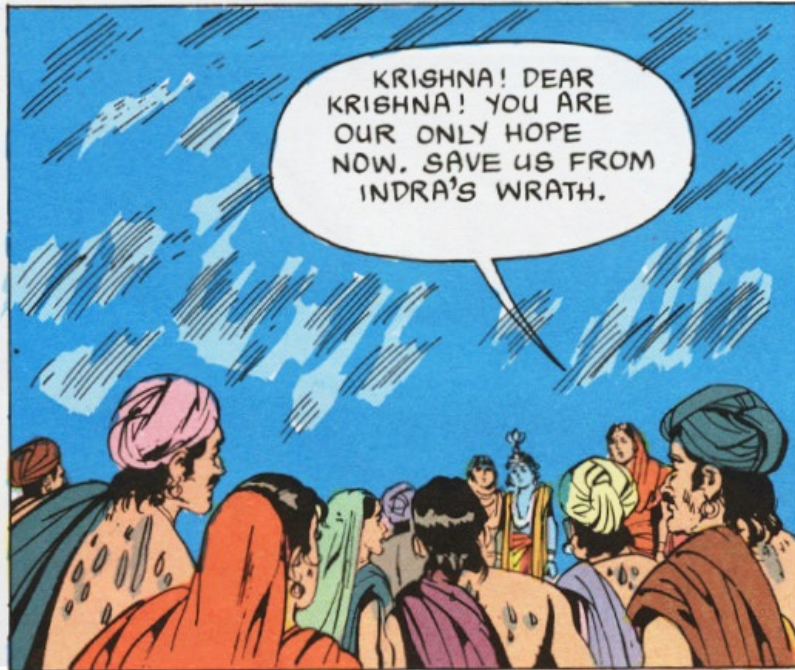


"HASTILY THEY SPED TOWARDS VRAJA AND INUNDATED VRAJA WITH A HEAVY DOWNPOUR."

"LIGHTNING APPEARED IN AWESOME STREAKS WITH CRASHES OF THUNDER. A MIGHTY GALE BLEW ACROSS THE LAND, HURLING HAILSTONES IN ITS WAKE. HUGE COLUMNS OF WATER RAINED DOWN ON VRAJA, FLOODING IT COMPLETELY."



"FRIGHTENED BY THE DELUGE, SHIVERING AND DRENCHED BY THE RAIN, THE GOPAS AND GOPIKAS RAN TO KRISHNA FOR HELP."



KRISHNA! DEAR KRISHNA! YOU ARE OUR ONLY HOPE NOW. SAVE US FROM INDRA'S WRATH.

"SEEING THEIR PLIGHT, KRISHNA THOUGHT—

SURELY,
INDRA HAS
CAUSED THIS UN-
SEASONAL, HEAVY
RAIN AND HAILSTORM
BECAUSE WE DID
NOT WORSHIP
HIM.



BUT I WILL GIVE
HIM A FITTING REPLY.
THIS BEHAVIOUR
DOESN'T BEFIT A DEVA
LIKE HIM. I MUST CRUSH
HIS PRIDE FOR HIS OWN
GOOD. I MUST SAVE
MY PEOPLE.

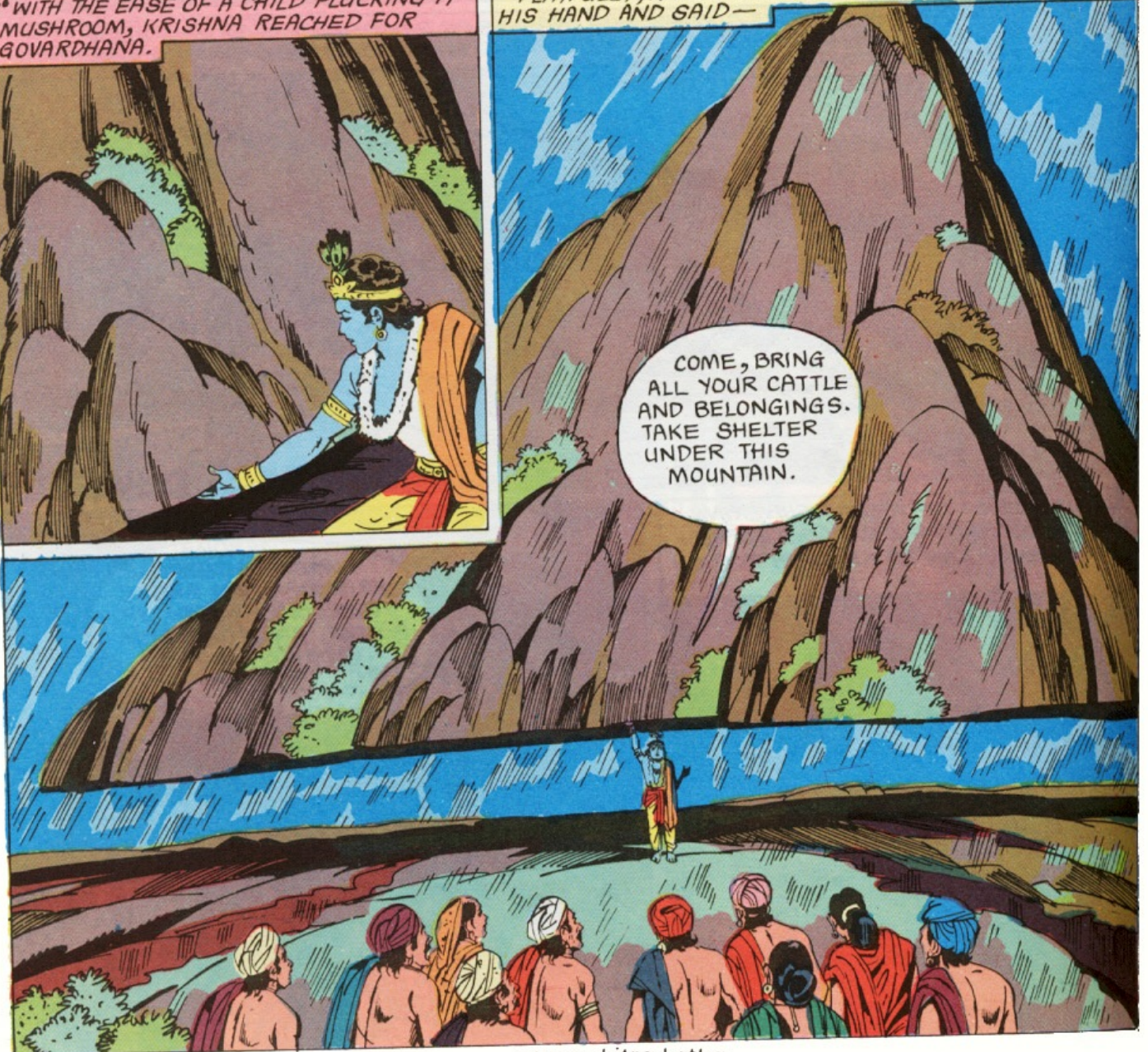


"WITH THE EASE OF A CHILD PLUCKING A
MUSHROOM, KRISHNA REACHED FOR
GOVARDHANA.



"PLAYFULLY, KRISHNA LIFTED IT UP ON THE PALM OF
HIS HAND AND SAID—

COME, BRING
ALL YOUR CATTLE
AND BELONGINGS.
TAKE SHELTER
UNDER THIS
MOUNTAIN.

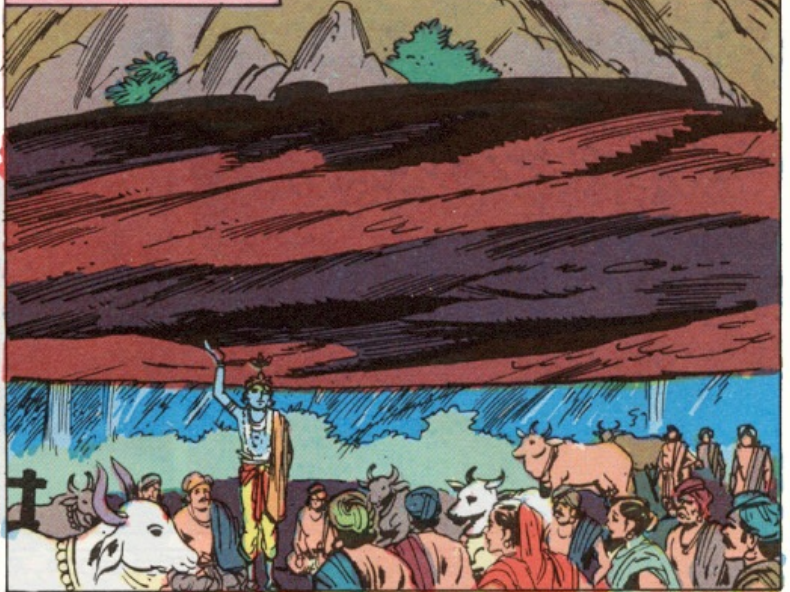




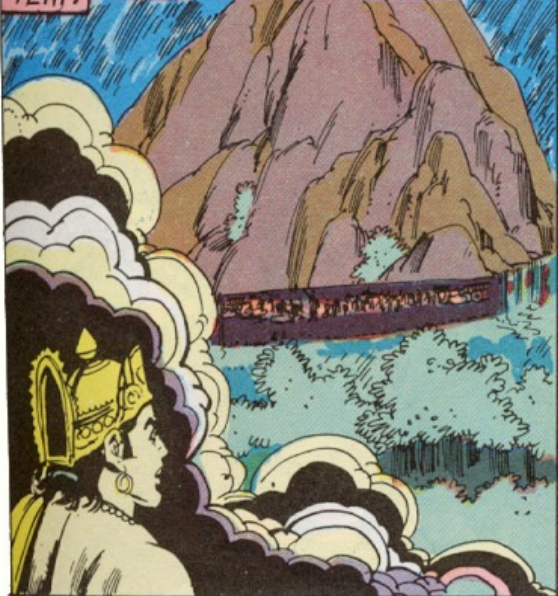
"THUS REASSURED, THE PEOPLE OF VRAJA
HURRIEDLY GATHERED THEIR CATTLE, CARTS
AND OTHER BELONGINGS, AND TOOK
SHELTER UNDER THE MOUNTAIN.



"FOR SEVEN LONG DAYS AND NIGHTS KRISHNA CARRIED
ALOFT THE MOUNT GOVARDHANA, WITHOUT HAVING
FOOD AND DRINK.



"INDRA WAS AMAZED TO SEE KRISHNA'S
FEAT.



"ALL HIS PRIDE VANISHED.
HE BADE THE CLOUDS TO
STOP THEIR DOWNPOUR.



"KRISHNA SAW THAT THE RAIN AND THUNDER HAD STOPPED AND THE SUN WAS SHINING AGAIN.



GO OUT, MY DEAR FOLKS! THE STORM HAS BLOWN OVER, THE FLOOD WATER TOO HAS RECEDED.

"SLOWLY, PEOPLE BEGAN TO EMERGE WITH THEIR BELONGINGS.



"WHEN THE LAST PERSON WAS SAFELY OUT, KRISHNA CAREFULLY PUT THE MOUNTAIN BACK IN ITS PLACE.



"FILLED WITH GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION, THE PEOPLE OF VRAJA RUSHED TO THANK KRISHNA.

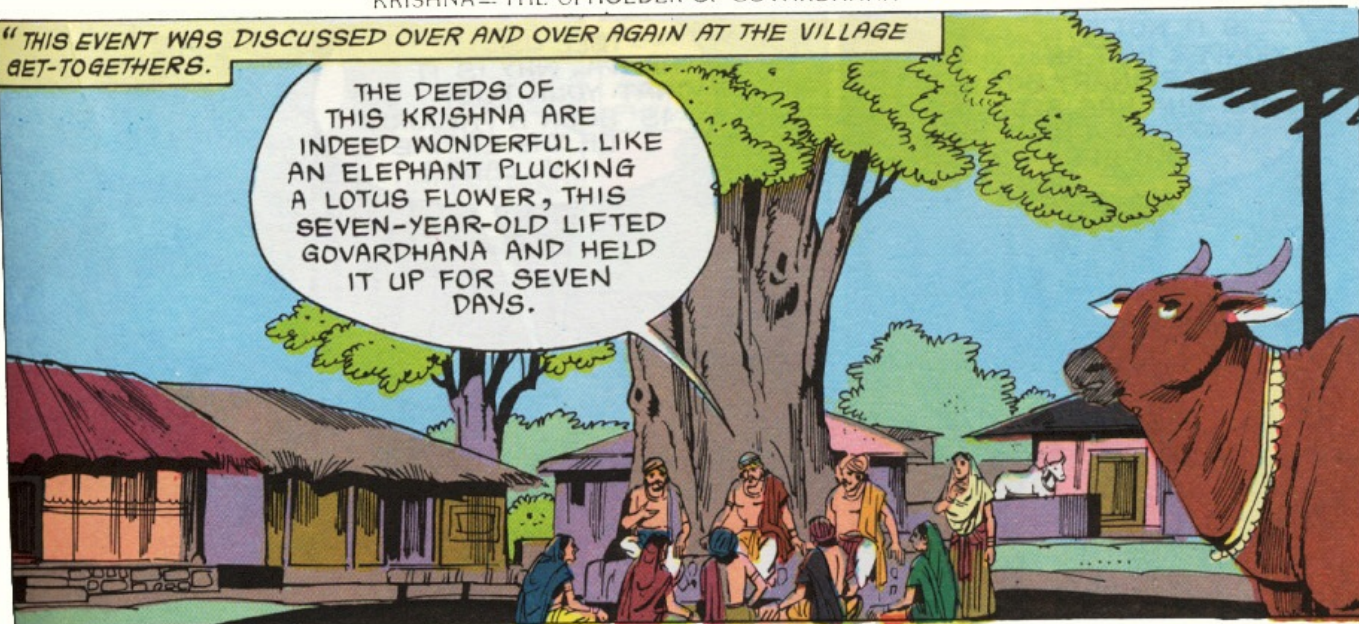


"YASHODA, ROHINI AND NANDA HUGGED KRISHNA.



"THIS EVENT WAS DISCUSSED OVER AND OVER AGAIN AT THE VILLAGE GET-TOGETHERS."

THE DEEDS OF THIS KRISHNA ARE INDEED WONDERFUL. LIKE AN ELEPHANT PLUCKING A LOTUS FLOWER, THIS SEVEN-YEAR-OLD LIFTED GOVARDHANA AND HELD IT UP FOR SEVEN DAYS.



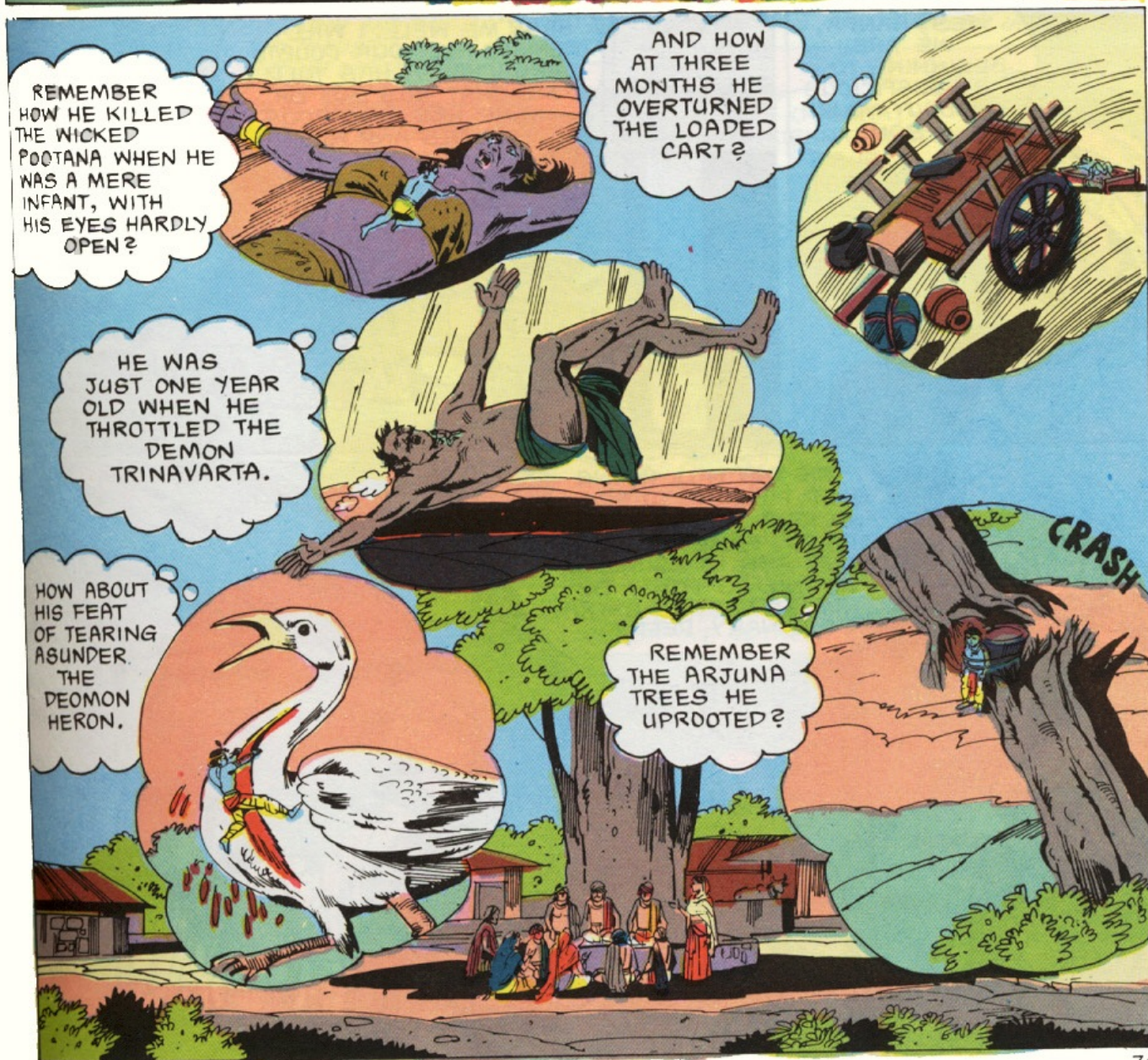
REMEMBER HOW HE KILLED THE WICKED POOTANA WHEN HE WAS A MERE INFANT, WITH HIS EYES HARDLY OPEN?

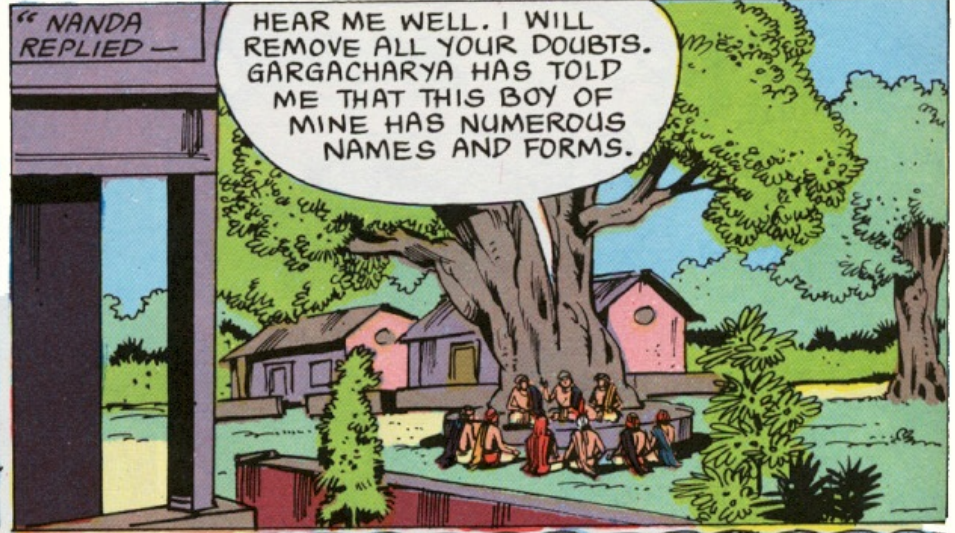
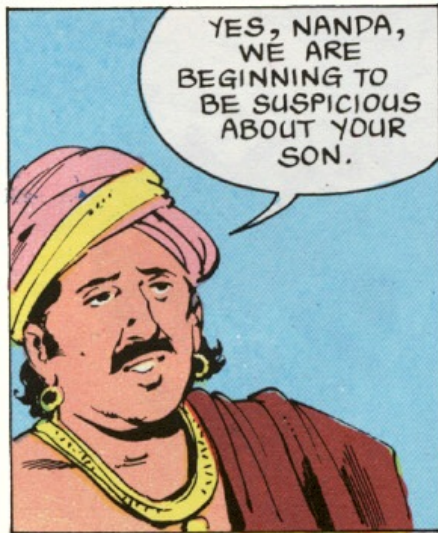
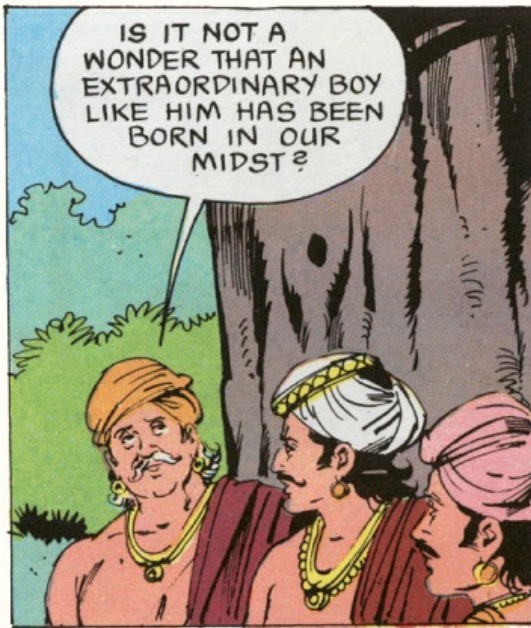
AND HOW AT THREE MONTHS HE OVERTURNED THE LOADED CART?

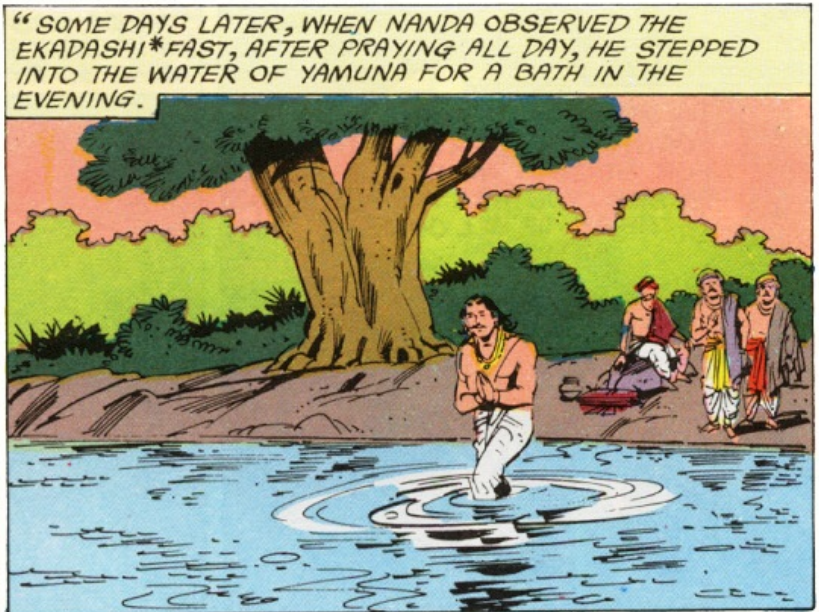
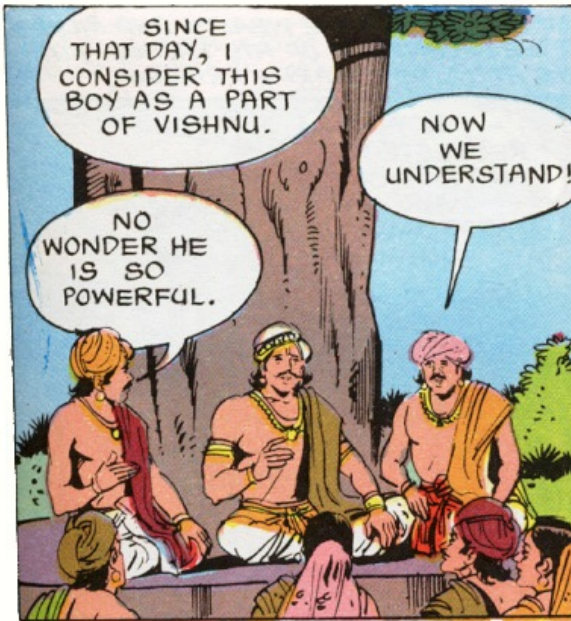
HE WAS JUST ONE YEAR OLD WHEN HE THROTTLED THE DEMON TRINAVARTA.

HOW ABOUT HIS FEAT OF TEARING ASUNDER THE DEMON HERON.

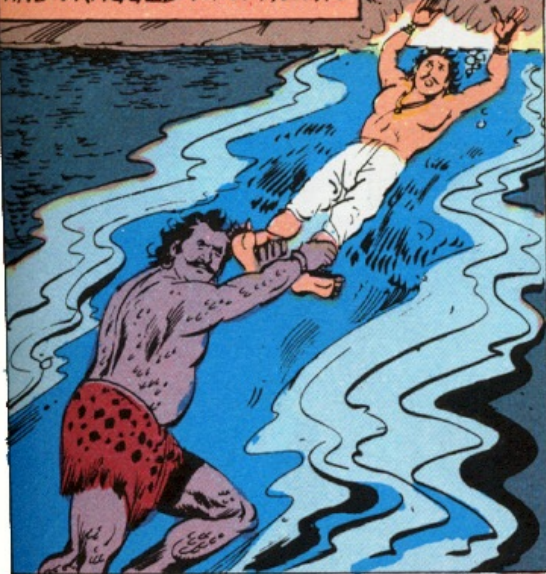
REMEMBER THE ARJUNA TREES HE UPROOTED?







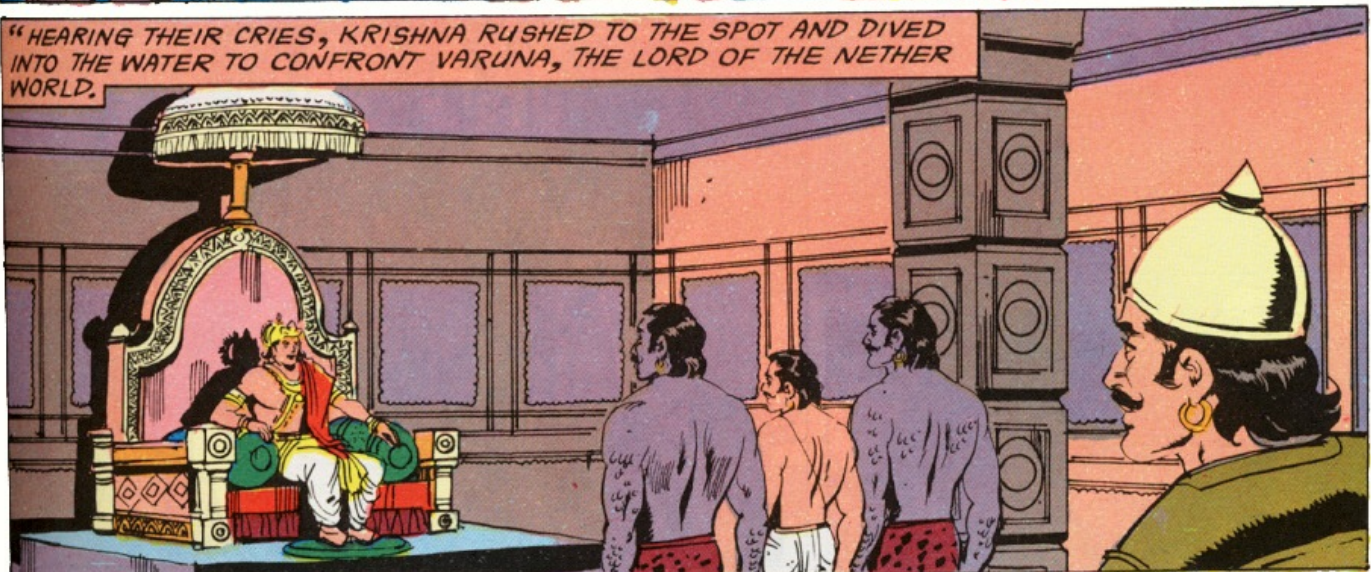
"THE TIME BETWEEN SUNDOWN AND DAY-BREAK WAS CONSIDERED INAUSPICIOUS SINCE THE DEMONS WERE AT LARGE THEN. ONE OF THEM CAUGHT HOLD OF NANDA AND DRAGGED HIM AWAY."



"WHEN THE COWHERDS SAW HIM DISAPPEAR UNDERWATER, THEY CRIED OUT."

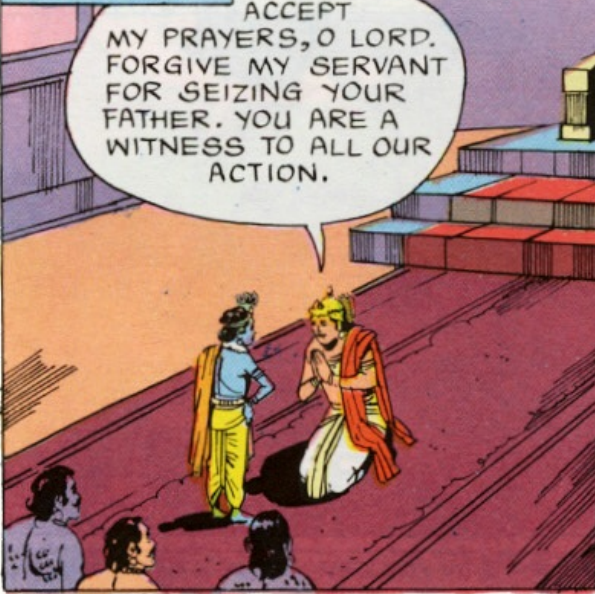


"HEARING THEIR CRIES, KRISHNA RUSHED TO THE SPOT AND DIVED INTO THE WATER TO CONFRONT VARUNA, THE LORD OF THE NETHER WORLD."



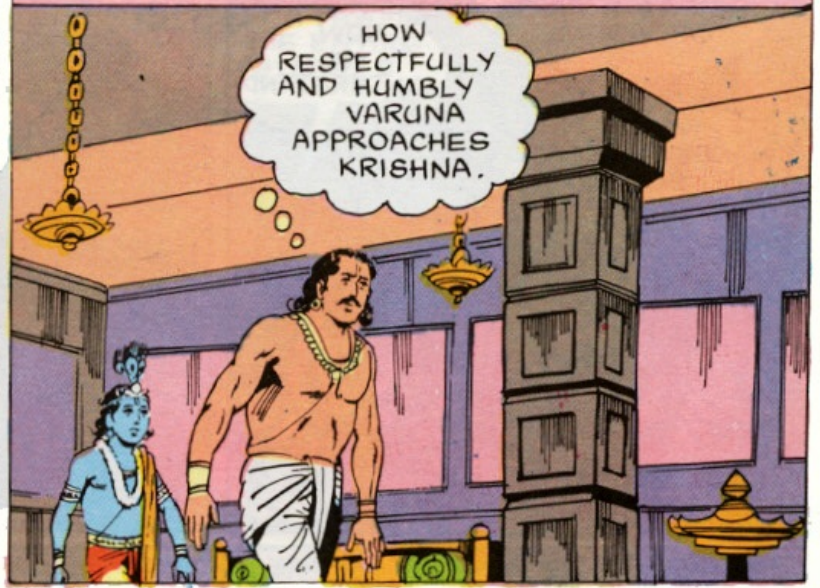
"FILLED WITH AWE AND JOY AT THE SIGHT OF KRISHNA, VARUNA BOWED DOWN TO WORSHIP HIM.

ACCEPT MY PRAYERS, O LORD. FORGIVE MY SERVANT FOR SEIZING YOUR FATHER. YOU ARE A WITNESS TO ALL OUR ACTION.



"NANDA WAS AMAZED TO SEE THE WEALTH AND RICHES OF VARUNA AND THE SPLENDOR OF HIS PALACE. BUT MORE SO BY HIS ATTITUDE TOWARDS KRISHNA.

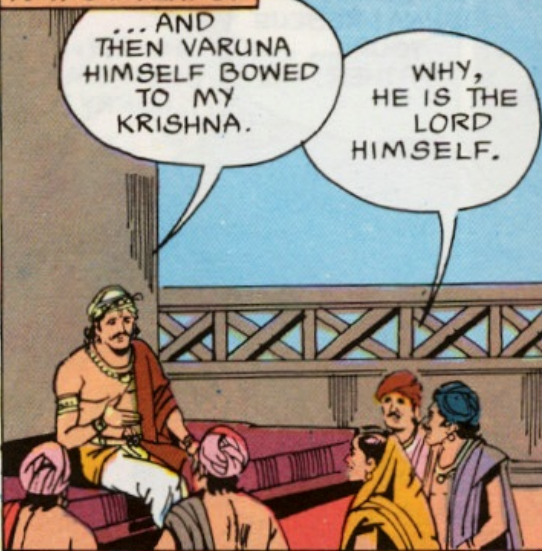
HOW RESPECTFULLY AND HUMBLY VARUNA APPROACHES KRISHNA.



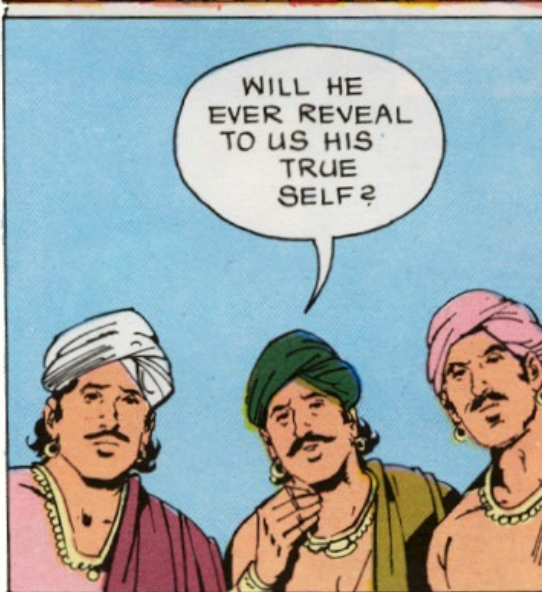
"WHEN KRISHNA RETURNED WITH NANDA TO VRAJA, HE RELATED THE EVENTS TO HIS FRIENDS.

... AND THEN VARUNA HIMSELF BOWED TO MY KRISHNA.

WHY, HE IS THE LORD HIMSELF.



WILL HE EVER REVEAL TO US HIS TRUE SELF?



"KRISHNA LEARNT WHAT WAS IN THEIR MINDS, AND SOON REVEALED TO THEM HIS INFINITE FORM. THEY WERE FILLED WITH ECSTASY AT THE SIGHT.



"ON A FULL MOON NIGHT IN AUTUMN, KRISHNA PLAYED AN ENCHANTING TUNE ON HIS FLUTE."



"IN THE STILL OF THE NIGHT, THE LILTING MELODY REACHED THE EARS OF THE GOPIKAS."



"CASTING ASIDE THEIR PATIENCE, FEAR, AND EMBARRASSMENT, THE GOPIKAS RAN OUT OF THEIR HOMES."



"DRAWN BY THE SPELL OF KRISHNA'S FLUTE, THEY HURRIED TO THE RIVER BANK, THEIR LONG EARRINGS DANGLING AS IF KEEPING RHYTHM WITH THEIR PACE."



"EVEN THE GOPIKAS WHO WERE IN THE MIDST OF THEIR HOUSEHOLD CHORES LEFT THEIR WORK UNFINISHED AND RAN OUT."



"ONE LEFT HOME AS THE MILK WAS BOILING ON THE FIRE."



"ANOTHER WHO WAS ADORNING HERSELF RUSHED OUT WITH HER TRESSES FLYING AND KAJAL* SMEARED.



"EVEN WHEN THE ELDERS IN THEIR FAMILIES TRIED TO RESTRAIN THEM, THEY PAID NO HEED, AND RAN OUT.



"THOSE WHO WERE FORCEFULLY CONFINED AT HOME, CLOSED THEIR EYES AND MEDITATED ON KRISHNA AND FELT A DEEP SENSE OF BLISS.



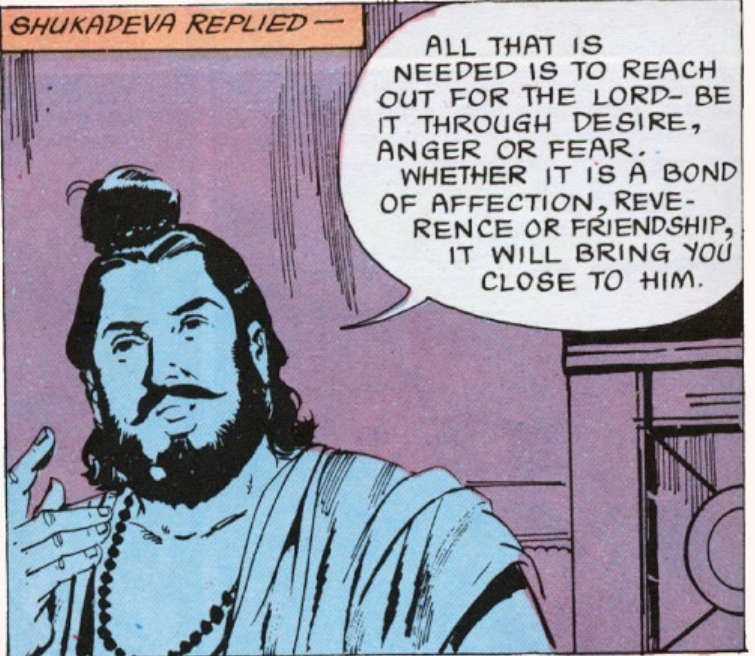
PAREEKSHIT INTERRUPTED THE NARRATION —

BUT THE DEVOTION OF THE GOPIKAS WAS NOT DIVINE; IT WAS EARTHLY LOVE.



SHUKADEVA REPLIED —

ALL THAT IS NEEDED IS TO REACH OUT FOR THE LORD— BE IT THROUGH DESIRE, ANGER OR FEAR. WHETHER IT IS A BOND OF AFFECTION, REVERENCE OR FRIENDSHIP, IT WILL BRING YOU CLOSE TO HIM.



"WHEN KRISHNA SAW THE GOPIKAS GATHERED AROUND HIM, HE SAID WITH A DISARMING SMILE —

WELCOME ! WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE AT THIS TIME OF THE NIGHT ? WHAT CAN I DO TO PLEASE YOU ?





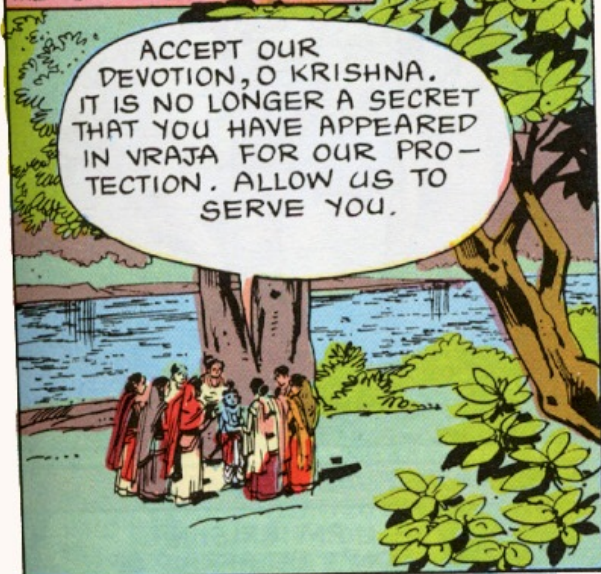
THE FOREST TREES, LADEN WITH FLOWERS, ARE INDEED ENCHANTING IN THE MELLOW LIGHT OF THE FULL MOON. THE COOL BREEZE, CARESSING THE WAVES, IS SOOTHING TOO. BUT DO NOT LINGER HERE. YOUR HUSBANDS AWAIT YOU. GO BACK TO YOUR HOMES.

"THE GOPIKAS WERE DISAPPOINTED WITH HIS WORDS. WITH THEIR HEADS CAST DOWN, THEY BIT THEIR LIPS TO CONTROL THEIR TEARS."



"IN VOICES CHOKED WITH EMOTION, THEY SAID TO KRISHNA —

ACCEPT OUR DEVOTION, O KRISHNA. IT IS NO LONGER A SECRET THAT YOU HAVE APPEARED IN VRAJA FOR OUR PROTECTION. ALLOW US TO SERVE YOU.



"WITH A SMILE, KRISHNA AGREED. ON THE WIDE EXPANSE OF SILVERY SANDS NEAR THE YAMUNA, KRISHNA BEGAN TO SPORT WITH THE GOPIKAS."



"SHINING BRIGHTLY, LIKE A MOON SURROUNDED BY STARS, KRISHNA SANG AND DANCED WITH THE GOPIKAS."



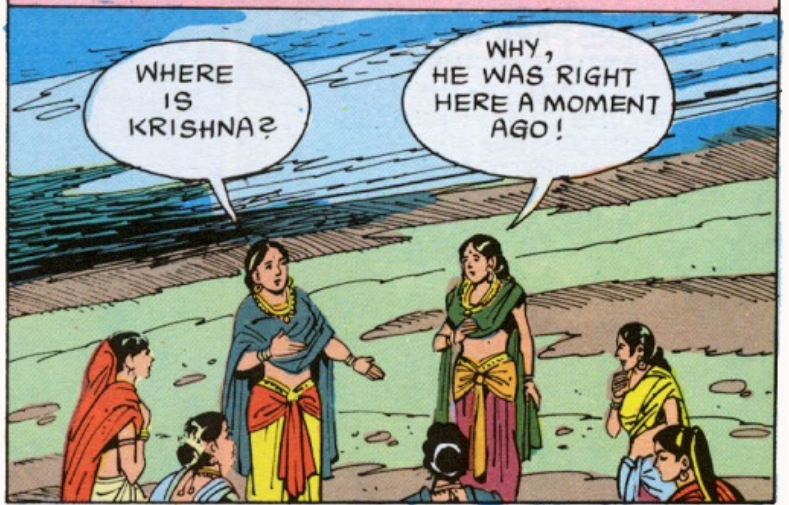
"DELIGHTED WITH HIS ATTENTIONS, EACH GOPIKA THOUGHT HERSELF TO BE THE BEST WOMAN ON EARTH."



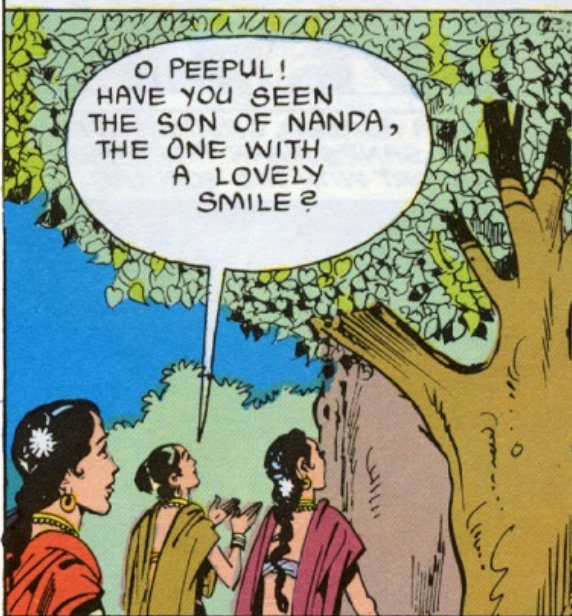
"NOTING THEIR PRIDE, KRISHNA SUDDENLY VANISHED FROM THEIR MIDST."



"WHEN THE GOPIKAS BECAME AWARE OF HIS ABSENCE, THEY WERE FILLED WITH DESPAIR AND ANXIETY."



"IN THEIR SEARCH FOR LORD KRISHNA, THEY EVEN TALKED TO THE TREES."



"THE GOPIKAS WERE SO ABSORBED IN KRISHNA THAT THEY MOMENTARILY FORGOT THEMSELVES, AND COMPLETELY IDENTIFIED WITH HIM."

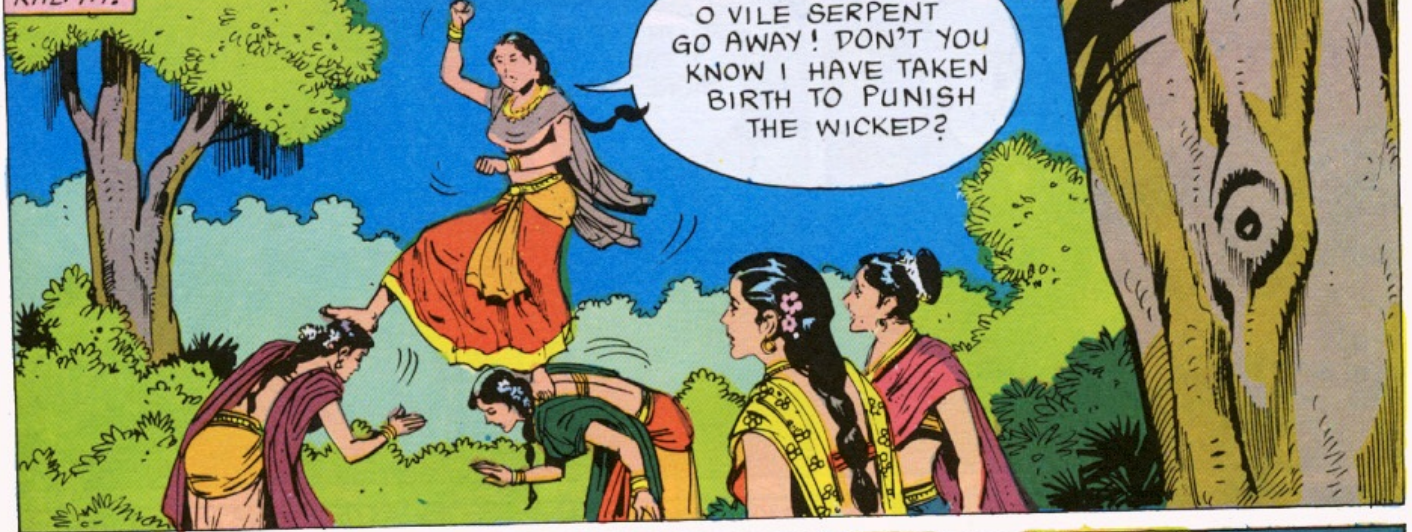


"ONE GOPIKA ENACTED THE LIFTING OF GOVARDHANA."



"ANOTHER PLAYED THE ROLE OF KRISHNA OVERPOWERING KALIYA."

O VILE SERPENT
GO AWAY! DON'T YOU
KNOW I HAVE TAKEN
BIRTH TO PUNISH
THE WICKED?



"ONE GOPIKA SAID—

I AM BABY
KRISHNA, AND YOU
ARE THE CART.
I'LL CRY AND
OVERTURN YOU
WITH MY
FEET.



"AS THEY WERE
WANDERING IN THE FORESTS
IN SEARCH OF KRISHNA—

WAIT! SEE
THESE
FOOTSTEPS.

YES,
THEY ARE
KRISHNA'S.

LET'S
FOLLOW
THEM.



BUT, LOOK,
THERE IS
ANOTHER TRACK
BESIDE.

THEY
ARE
A GIRL'S.



LET'S GO
AHEAD
AND SEE
WHO HIS
FAVOURITE
IS.

LOOK HERE!
THE MARKS
OF KRISHNA
STANDING ON
TIP-TOE. HE
MUST HAVE
BEEN PLUCKING
FLOWERS FOR
HER HERE.



"KRISHNA WANTED TO TEACH A LESSON TO THE PROUD WOMEN
AND HAD INDEED GONE AWAY WITH ONE OF THEM."



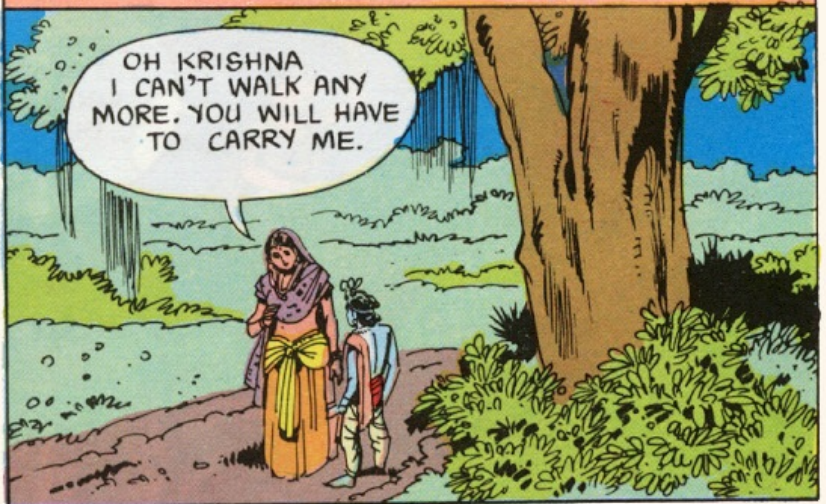
"THE GOPIKA WHO HAD ACCOMPANIED KRISHNA, WAS ELATED.

I AM INDEED THE BEST. I AM KRISHNA'S CHOSEN ONE.



"SURE OF HER SWAY OVER KRISHNA, SHE SAID—

OH KRISHNA I CAN'T WALK ANY MORE. YOU WILL HAVE TO CARRY ME.



YES, DEAR I WILL.



"AND KRISHNA DISAPPEARED. REALISING THAT IT WAS HER VANITY THAT HAD MADE HER LOSE KRISHNA, SHE WAS FILLED WITH REMORSE.

O LORD! WHERE ARE YOU? DON'T LEAVE ME.



"BY THE TIME HER COMPANIONS TOO REACHED THE SPOT, SHE HAD FALLEN IN A SWOON. WHEN REVIVED, SHE SAID—

I INSULTED HIM OUT OF VANITY, SO HE DISAPPEARED.



"THE GOPIKAS WENT FURTHER AND FURTHER IN SEARCH OF KRISHNA.

THE FOREST IS VERY DENSE BEYOND THIS.

YES, IT'S TOO DARK. LET'S GO BACK.



"THEY RETURNED TO THE BANKS OF YAMUNA AND WAITED, SINGING SONGS IN PRAISE OF KRISHNA.

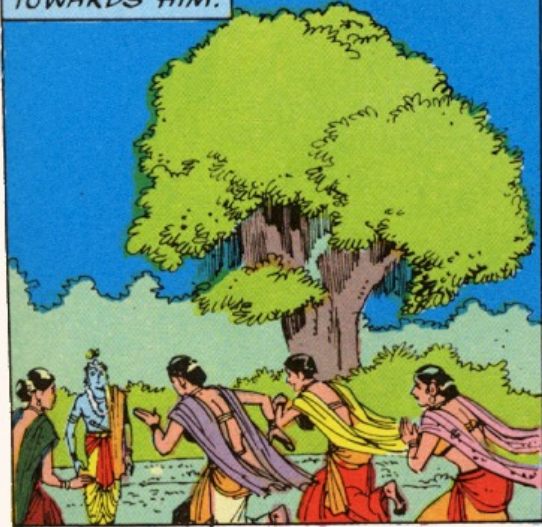
O KRISHNA, HOW WE LONG TO SEE YOU. WE BESEECH YOU TO COME BACK TO US.



"FILLED WITH ANXIETY, MANY OF THEM BURST INTO TEARS. JUST THEN —



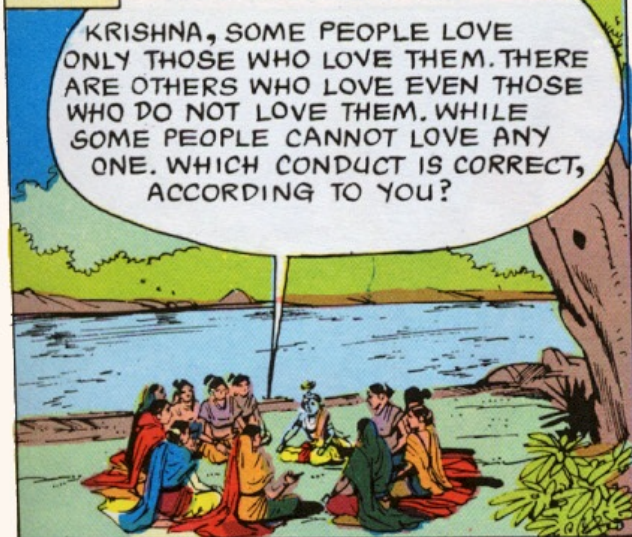
"AT THE SIGHT OF THEIR BELOVED KRISHNA, THE GOPIKAS RUSHED TOWARDS HIM.



"LIKE AN ASCETIC WHO HAS ATTAINED SALVATION, SO DID THE GOPIKAS FEEL ENRAPTURED AT THE SIGHT OF KRISHNA.



"SPREADING THEIR VEILS FOR HIM TO SIT, THEY SURROUNDED KRISHNA AND ASKED HIM —



KRISHNA, SOME PEOPLE LOVE ONLY THOSE WHO LOVE THEM. THERE ARE OTHERS WHO LOVE EVEN THOSE WHO DO NOT LOVE THEM. WHILE SOME PEOPLE CANNOT LOVE ANY ONE. WHICH CONDUCT IS CORRECT, ACCORDING TO YOU?

THOSE WHO LOVE, EXPECTING TO BE LOVED IN RETURN, ARE SELFISH. OTHERS WHO LOVE, WITHOUT EXPECTING ANYTHING IN RETURN, ARE SELFLESS AND COMPASSIONATE. THEIR LOVE IS LIKE THAT OF THE PARENTS FOR THE CHILD.



SOME PEOPLE IN THE WORLD SEEM TO BE INCAPABLE OF LOVE. BUT MY DEAR GOPIKAS, I DO NOT BELONG TO ANY OF THESE TYPES.



IF I APPEAR AND DISAPPEAR FROM AMIDST YOU, IT IS ONLY TO TEST YOUR DEVOTION. SEE HOW DEAR I BECAME TO YOU WHEN I WENT AWAY? I AM TOUCHED BY YOUR AFFECTION.



THE GOPIKAS WERE NOW REASSURED,
AND STOOD IN A CIRCLE AROUND KRISHNA.



"KRISHNA NOW BEGAN HIS RAS-LILA. MIRACULOUSLY
THERE APPEARED ONE KRISHNA BY THE SIDE OF EACH
GOPIKA.



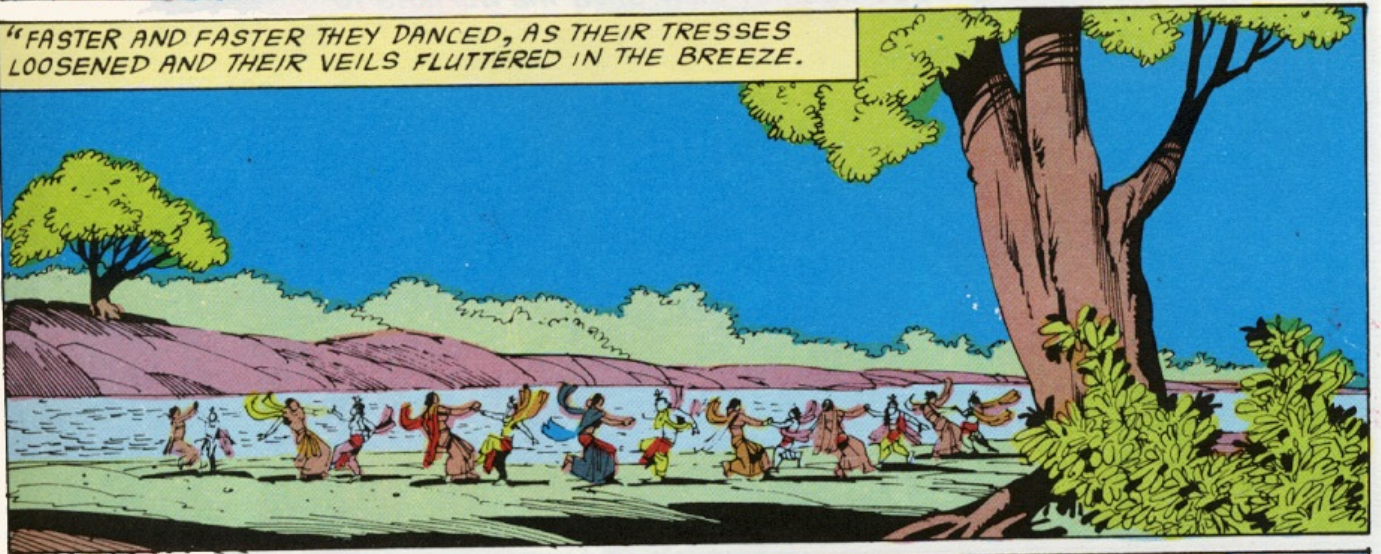
THE GOPIKAS, EACH OF THEM, WERE ELATED TO HAVE THEIR BELOVED KRISHNA DANCING
NEXT TO THEM.



"THE GENTLE TINKLE OF THEIR BANGLES, THE SOUNDS OF THE TINY BELLS ON THEIR GIRDLES, AND THE ANKLETS ON THEIR LOVELY FEET, FILLED THE AIR AND PROVIDED ACCOMPANIMENT TO THEIR LILTING SONG.



"FASTER AND FASTER THEY DANCED, AS THEIR TRESSES LOOSENEED AND THEIR VEILS FLUTTERED IN THE BREEZE.



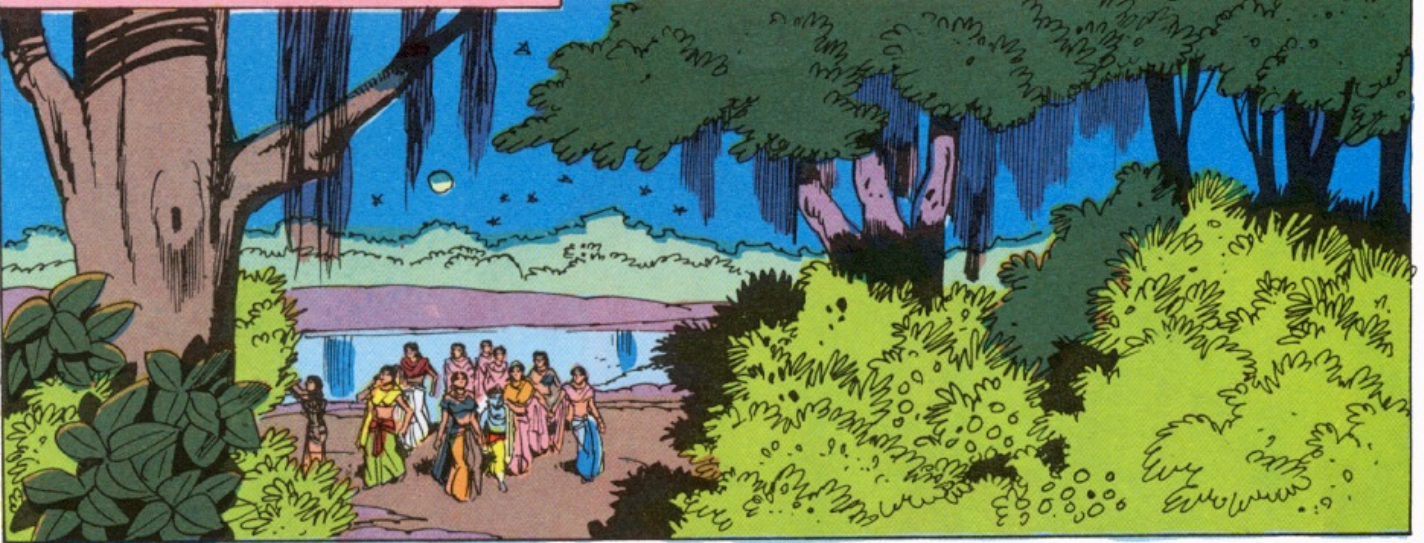
"WHEN THEY FELT EXHAUSTED WITH THE EFFORT, KRISHNA TENDERLY WIPED THE PERSPIRATION FROM THEIR FACES AND LED THEM TO THE COOLING WATER OF THE YAMUNA.



"THE DELIGHTED GOPIKAS SPORTED IN THE RIVER AND MERRILY SPLASHED WATER ON KRISHNA.



"AFTER EMERGING FROM THE RIVER, KRISHNA AND THE GOPIKAS ROAMED ABOUT IN THE GROVE NEARBY. THE SWEET SCENT OF FLOWERS AND THE GENTLE BREEZE REFRESHED THEM.

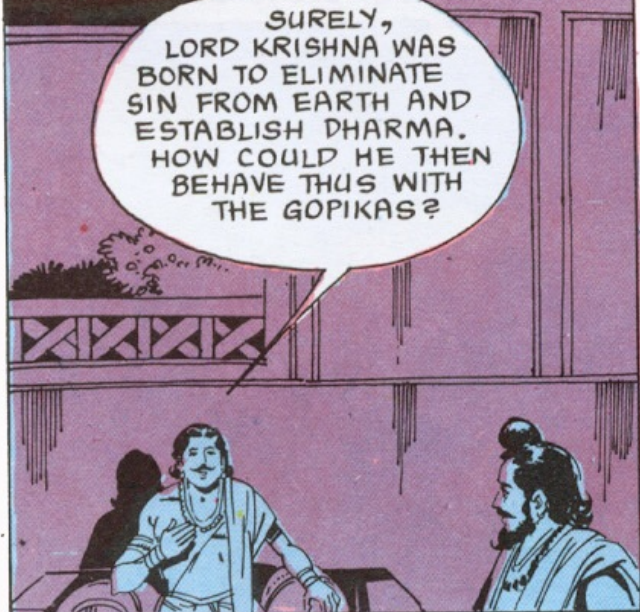


"RELUCTANT AS THEY WERE TO GO, KRISHNA THEN BADE THE GOPIKAS TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMES.



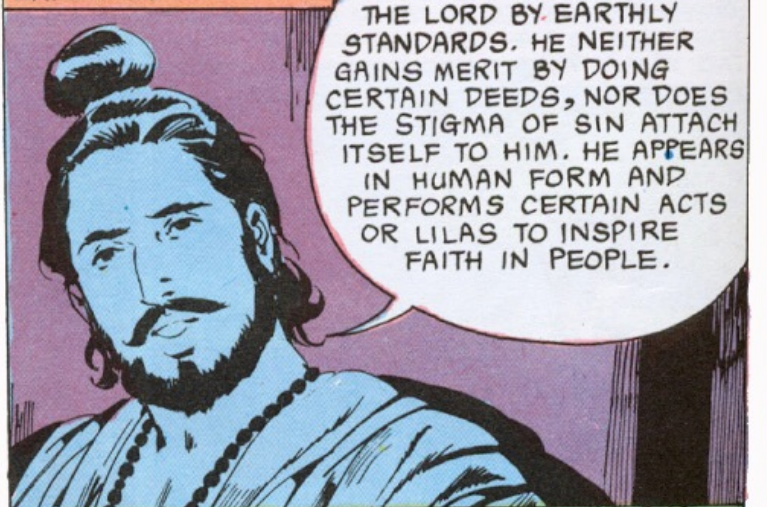
PAREEKSHIT SAID —

SURELY,
LORD KRISHNA WAS
BORN TO ELIMINATE
SIN FROM EARTH AND
ESTABLISH DHARMA.
HOW COULD HE THEN
BEHAVE THUS WITH
THE GOPIKAS?



SHUKADEVA GENTLY
EXPLAINED —

WE SHOULD NOT
JUDGE THE ACTIONS OF
THE LORD BY EARTHLY
STANDARDS. HE NEITHER
GAINS MERIT BY DOING
CERTAIN DEEDS, NOR DOES
THE STIGMA OF SIN ATTACH
ITSELF TO HIM. HE APPEARS
IN HUMAN FORM AND
PERFORMS CERTAIN ACTS
OR LILAS TO INSPIRE
FAITH IN PEOPLE.



THUS ENDS THE THIRD SESSION OF OUR
RENDERING OF THE TENTH CHAPTER OF THE
BHAGAWAT PURANA.