

EMPEROR SAMPRATI

Patliputra today celebrates the victory of Emperor Ashoka. In a large hall the emperor sits on a high throne. On two sides sit his ministers, state-priest, commander-in-chief, other dignitaries and thousands of citizens. A messenger enters with a letter in a golden tray —



The Emperor instructed his secretary to write a letter and retired to his palace.

After sometime the secretary brought the letter. The Emperor read it and added a line—



Then he put his seal on the letter.

It was meal-time. Leaving the letter the emperor left for the dining room. Queen Tishyarakshita looked around and found herself alone. She took a needle and with the collyrium from her eyelids put a black dot on the emperor's message.*



She put the letter back and went to the dining room.

* Kunal was the son of Emperor Ashoka's deceased senior queen. On her death-bed, the emperor had promised her that Kunal will be his successor. Tishyarakshita and other queens wanted to kill Kunal. Aware of this, the emperor shifted Kunal, away from Patliputra, to Avanti for security reasons.

After sometime the emperor sent his letter with the messenger. When at Avanti the minister read the letter he was taken aback. Kunal inquired —



The minister composed himself and read the letter —



Kunal said —



Kunal took hot iron needles in his hands and pierced his own eyes.



It became the talk of the town —



A few days later a messenger came to Emperor Ashoka with the news —



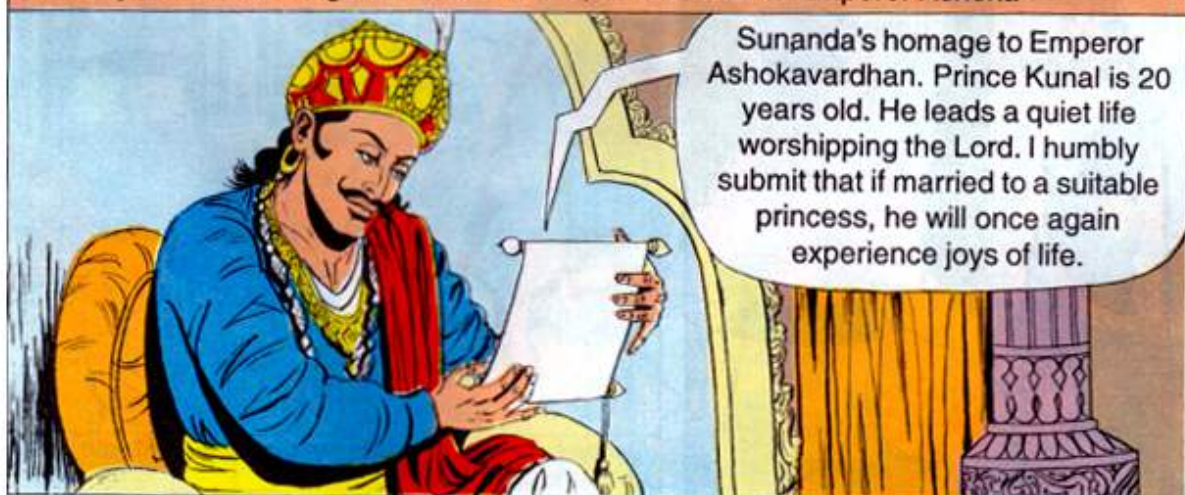
The Emperor was shocked when the messenger showed him the letter —



In Avanti blind Kunal grew up under loving care of governess Sunanda. In the isolation imposed by blindness he made Taanpura* his companion. When alone he would play Taanpura and sing devotional songs.



One day Sunanda, the governess of Kunal, sent a letter to Emperor Ashoka —



A Sitar-like musical instrument.