



The Rise of Hastinapur

Sharath Komarraju

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For the story of the Great War is also the story of the women...

Amba lives for revenge, but circumstances and men conspire against her. Will her daughter bring her the only salvation she seeks?

Kunti stakes all to free her brother Vasudev and his wife Devaki. Yet it is the groom choosing ceremony that will define her life.

Gandhari too has come of age, and is faced with a difficult choice: she must marry the blind prince of Hastinapur if she is to save her kingdom from the certain ruin it faces due to Hastinapur's deceit.

In the background, Bhishma pulls the strings, making alliances and marriages, devising new strategies, ever increasing the might of Hastinapur.

This is the Mahabharata like you've never seen it before.

The Rise of Hastinapur Details

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From Reader Review The Rise of Hastinapur for online ebook

Nivedita (thebooklovingnerd) says

The second book of the Hastinapur duology, The Rise of Hastinapur, concentrates on the second and the third generation of the Kuru clan, mainly the Queens. This book revolves around Amba who was wronged by Bhishma's actions and whose daughter eventually led to Bhishma's death; Gandhari, the queen of Gandhar, who was later married to Dritarashtra, the grandson of King Shantanu and Queen Satyawati; and Kunti, the princess of Shurasena, who tries her best to save her brother Vasudev, who was abducted by his wife, Devaki's brother Kamsa.

Sharath Komarraju does it again. His inexplicable manner of writing does everything to attract the readers and keep the readers stuck with the story. His way of writing has a sense of reality, which makes us live the incidents, and not just read them. His ability to connect events and create a story out of them is clearly visible in The Rise of Hastinapur, and this makes me want to read more from his works.

While the stories, individually, didn't appeal to me due to abrupt endings and unanswered questions, eventually, the book ended with Ganga wrapping everything up beautifully answering most of the questions. The epilogue by Ganga, changed everything. Questions were answered, confusions were subsided and things became clearer.

But, that being said, there were quite some things which left me frustrated. Throughout the book, I was disappointed with the storyline being uneventful, despite the powerful writing. I had expectations from a plot line, but it just ended up bland, especially the part which deals with Kunti. It was too out of part, and confusing. I expected a lot of action, but what I got was mistrust and misogyny.

In my personal opinion, the characters in this book were a bit more dramatic than the previous one. To start with Amba, what happened to her, was tragic. And to some point, I do blame Bhishma, but at the same time I blame Salva and Vichitraveerya equally for what happened. When she got a chance to live beyond the problems in her life, she didn't do that, instead chose the road of vengeance, which was a big a put off about her character. Similarly, Kunti's character, albeit good, was lacking sense. Where I expected her to break all bounds to rescue her brother, she just trusted words from some Brahmin, who was trying so hard to sleep with her. This disappointed me way more than any other part. Gandhari's part in the story might be the only part, where I found myself hooked. I loved Gandhari's character, and felt so bad for her by the end of her part. The characters were a bit complicated in this one, which was why I couldn't understand most of their actions.

Despite the shortfalls, the writing does its charms. Even when I was thinking of giving up, the writing grabbed my attention, and I could not put it down anymore. Moreover, just like in the first book, the book changes the way you see the events of Mahabharata, and that is exactly why this book was written.

If you've read and liked the first one, you are sure to like the second one. Even if you didn't like it, it is worth reading it. It is always good to have a proper ending to a story, which this book does beautifully.

Rahul Vishnoi says

Sharath's writing is mature and unhurried. Set at a faster pace than its predecessor, Rise of Hastinapur tells the story of Pritha and Gandhari, etching their needs and wants, their failure and their journey towards the inevitable. Even though you consider them mythological, they have never been painted with such nuances

and detailed character. Looking forward to the next in the installment.

Soniya Kulkarni says

Over the years, there have been many interpretations of the great Indian epic “Mahabharata” that have been available to the public. As is the case with most stories of such a large scale, with a legendary battle at its center, most versions of the tale almost entirely focus on the trails and travails of the male protagonists. The female characters of the narrative almost often get sidelined or have a mere passing reference. Over the years, there have been some accounts of this tale written from a female perspective. Both “Yajnaseni” by Pratibha Ray or “The Palace of Illusions” by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni present the Mahabharata from Draupadi’s point of view, who although undoubtedly is the most pivotal female character in the story is by no means the only important female character.

The destiny of great men is invariably influenced by the women in their lives, whether they will admit this freely or not. There are many wonderful women in the Mahabharata—strong women, brave women, fierce women, who at some point in their lives, as mothers, lovers, wives and queens have determined the course of this tale through their actions. Sharath Komarraju’s “Rise of Hastinapur” focusses on a critical incident in the personal history of three women of the Mahabharata—Amba, Gandhari and Pritha (Kunti), which had far reaching effects.

It is a curious thing, to read a book written exclusively from the point of view of women by a male author. It’s not an enviable position to be in, to be the writer of such a book. There is always the danger of portraying your female characters as victims of their men as well as surroundings, conversely in a deliberate attempt to not do so, there is the peril of going overboard with an overt display of constant strength and resilience, that is utterly unrealistic and wholly one dimensional. Sharath does neither of this in Rise of Hastinapur. In each story, to a large extent, he more or less achieves a balance—while each woman is strong, fierce and distinct in her own way, she is by no means free of self-doubt, anxiety and despair.

It is refreshing to find as a reader, especially as a female reader, women characters that are celebrated for their humanity, a humanity which is rich with both strengths and weaknesses. I stress upon the physiological, as while there is an underlying premise that moves each story forward in the novel, Rise of Hastinapur is in essence a character study.

The book follows a non-linear format. It is divided into three sections, each section is independent of the other, and can stand on its own as a novella. The first section is dedicated to the story of Amba, and her journey after she is wronged by Bhishma. The second story is of Pritha’s journey to the magical land of Mathura to rescue her cousin Vasudeva and his pregnant wife Devaki from the clutches of the evil king Kansa. The third story chronicles a young Gandhari’s desperate bid to save her once prosperous kingdom from Hastinapur’s growing hold. In each story the central protagonist goes through a pivotal journey, which going forward impacts all their actions and with the destiny of the greatest kingdom in mythical India.

“Rise of Hastinapur” is the second book in the series, and follows the format of the first book, “Winds of Hastinapur”. You do not need to be familiar with the first book to follow “Rise of Hastinapur”, its non-linear structure makes it a standalone entity and can be enjoyed all on its own.

As people and sometimes as readers we have often wondered why people, or characters are the way they are. What was that one critical point in their personal history, which inadvertently shaped their lives? In “Rise of Hastinapur” presents a firsthand account of that life-changing occasion in the lives of each of its protagonists. The book switches between first person and third person point of view to separate the person from the action.

In the third person account, the reader gets an overview of the situation, while in the first person account how the character thinks and feels about the situation. I'm not entirely sure if this worked for me completely, while it perhaps broke the monotony of having to read the entire book in one voice, it was jarring to switch point of views after spending time with one for an extended period of time.

For a mythological novel, there is very little actual magic that we come across in the book. While there is magic at the periphery, it is mostly excluded from the heart of the novel. It is not used as a means to solve problems. The novel adapts this tone for most of the book, except during one sections of Pritha's journey. Ironically, this is the weakest part of the novel in my opinion. In these chapters, some magical objects make an appearance that become critical for Pritha to find in order to achieve her goal. The author tries to give these objects a scientific spin, and the overall outcome is dissatisfying. In the end as a reader you question the importance of the objects in Pritha's quest. I feel that the novel would have just as easily worked without the infusion of magic. In this particular situation, the writer could have perhaps created a more realistic conflict, which does not shift so dramatically away from the overall tone of the book.

Irrespective of one's interest in mythology, I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who is interested in psychology, and genuinely enjoys a well-crafted character study. I am of the belief that with enough time, we often forget situations, at least the details become hazy, but we rarely forget people. People, both good and bad stay with us. If like me, you are fascinated with people then I would encourage you to pick up a copy of "Rise of Hastinapur".

They say men are from Mars and women are from Venus, and perhaps this time around the author did take a trip to another planet and back.

Through "Rise of Hastinapur" the author gives us a glimpse into the minds of three legendary women, and helps us see past the myth and catch sight of the person.

Archana says

It's not just a retelling of a epic which still has airtime but a different story altogether. The women, not just the obvious power players but even the ones I didn't know much about, add very interesting layers to the age old story of greed corrupting mankind.

Arjun Shetty says

I started reading Sharath's Rise of Hastinapur with great anticipation as the concept of re-telling a well-known epic like the Mahabharata (which is primarily male dominated) from the point of view of female protagonists seemed interesting. What intrigued me further is that it is not told from the point of view of the main female protagonist Draupadi. There have been many works that dealt with Draupadi's point of view. But, this book deals with the view of female characters that are usually side-lined in most of the retellings of the epic.

The book is split into three parts, each dealing with the characters Amba, Pritha (Kunti) and Gandhari. Each part can be read independently and each is kind of a novella in itself.

Amba works towards ways to avenge her insult at the hands of Bhishma. Pritha attempts to rescue her brother and sister-in-law who have been imprisoned by Kamsa the ruthless and powerful ruler of Mathura. Gandhari attempts to save and resurrect the old glory of Gandhar which is under threat due to Bhishma's unparalleled skills in shrewd statesmanship, politics and battle strategy.

A theme that repeats in all three parts is how these separate events build up towards the Great War (Battle of Kurukshetra) and how these events shape the characters' motivations in the tale that is about to unfold.

One thing I have begun to love about Sharath's books is the way the various details and seemingly unconnected pieces fall in together into one cohesive story towards the end of the book. The underlying thread through these three independent events is the celibate prince Bhishma, the foremost warrior of his age. These tales on how Bhishma's decisions based on his values and ambitions lead to his and Hastinapur's eventual downfall make for engrossing reading!

Samdisha Malhotra says

What Sharath Kumarraju writes is exceptional. He has this way of writing a twisted mythology which will keep you intrigued throughout the book. Not once I felt that this book should now end. I was rather sad when I was about to reach the finish line. If you have an inclination towards mythology his books are a must read. The story is the same, the plot is the same, but still there is something else he offers each time, which makes his writing different. I strongly recommend this book and its prequel. A must have in your collection.

Tarang Sinha says

3.5 stars.

It's about three significant women characters of Mahabharata - Amba, Pritha aka Kunti and Gandhari - three women who are important pillars of this epic mythological fiction, Mahabharata.

First section is about Amba. And, it's my favourite. It's intriguing, bold and skillfully sketched section.

Overall, The Rise of Hastinapur was an unusual, bold and interesting read. If you like reading mythology, you should read this book. You won't be disappointed.

Read the full review on my blog: <http://tarangsinha.blogspot.in/2016/1...>

Deepon Bose says

Reading The rise of Hastinapur was drudging. It's as if the pages were made of lead, they were so hard to turn. The pace is sluggish and the philosophy is unstimulating. The book, although aimed at being women-centric, has no strong, intelligent or independent female character. They are all made up to be gullible

maidens who are but putty in the hands of conniving men. Women, who need a man to guide or to fall back on; and all of them are promiscuous.

And what is up with 'North-Country'? North of where? Gandhar, was located where currently we have Afghanistan and Pakistan, why is that not west-country? Why is Hastinapur, not the foremost kingdom in the 'Country'!? The author, it seems, shares the ignorance of many of our countrymen who divide the country between north and South. Not planning to read Sharath Komarraju anytime soon.

Veena Soujanya says

"No matter which thread you pick up and which winding path you follow, your journey will end on the battlefield in Kurukshetra."

The Rise Of Hastinapur, the second book in the Hastinapur series, presents the circumstances which led to the choices made by the young Amba, Kunti, and Gandhari.

After being rejected by the three men, the love of her life Salva, the King she was supposed to married to Vichitraveerya and the man who won her in the swayamvar the mighty Bhishma, Amba reaches out to sage Parashurama to help her in getting her revenge. When the sage guides her towards the path of divinity and makes her a Priestess, Amba thought she almost forgave Bhishma. But when comes to her a chance of retribution, she realizes that the flame of vengeance in her heart has never been withered. Amba decides to give birth to a daughter, Shikandi. An act which decided the death of the Champion of the Hastinapur's throne.

Kunti raged with anger when her brother Vasudev and his new bride Devaki were imprisoned by Devaki's brother Kamsa after hearing a prophecy which predicted his death in the hands of his own sister's son. Unable to convince her foster father Kuntibhoj to wage a war against the grand city Mathura, Kunti takes help from the sage Durvasa to release her brother and his wife from prison. In the process, she realizes that she has been lied to and cheated by the celestial God Surya himself to achieve his personal goal. Helpless in her attraction towards the Sun God, Kunti gets seduced by him and promises Lord Surya to give up their son and marry the future King of the mighty Hastinapur, so that she can guide the Celestials born as her sons. A choice which made the exceptionally valiant warrior brothers stand against each other.

Gandhari despised Bhishm when he plundered the golden city of Gandhar of its gold by cheat. Standing by her adamant resolution she rejects Bhishm's proposal of her marriage with the blind King Dhritarashtra. Powerless to go against him and Hastinapur, which once was Gandhar's vassal state and now the strongest city in North, she decides to make Gandhar self-sufficient to produce its goods and stop the trade from Hastinapur. With her cunning brother Shakuni and a few courtiers on her side, Gandhari makes a deal with the people of Meru and declares a war against Hastinapur. When they lose miserably the royal family realizes that it has been a strategy of Bhishm all along to bring Gandhar down. With no other option left Gandhari decides to marry the blind King to secure her brother's future and take revenge. A decision which led to the downfall of the powerful Kingdom ever.

Intertwined with facts and fiction, Sharat's 'The Rise Of Hastinapur' is a different take on the women of Mahabharat whose lives are decided by the decisions taken by one man who dedicated his life to the throne of Hastinapur is worth exploring.

Nivethitha says

I started this book at a relative's house and started flipping through. Being a mythology junkie I then bought the kindle version. I fully expected it to be a Meluha-like series that would be a guilty pleasure read and the first half almost did read like that. But then some 1/3 in to the book the plot really thickens and the author has done some creative meandering to say the least. By the end of it I was glad my early bias was proved wrong. This is a fun read especially from the point of view of three lesser talked about women in Mahabharata and how the winds of change in their lives contribute to the eventual downfall of Hastinapur. Light, fun read.

Uday Kanth says

THE RISE OF HASTINAPUR

As someone who never really had an inclination towards mythology, Sharath Komaraju's Hastinapur series came as a pleasant surprise in my reading journey. It is Mahabharata told from the point of view of some of the leading ladies of the tale. Which is interesting, because women are most of the times relegated to the sidelines when it comes to these large-scale epics. It's always about the might and magic, who wins and who loses. But there are other people too, the ones who watch everything silently, the ones who become victims of the whims of men, either harboring vengeance or looking for redemption. These are the women of the Mahabharata and Sharath brings their stories to the forefront like never before.

This book covers three women – Amba, Pritha (Kunti), and Gandhari. Each of their stories are unique in their own way. But what I loved immensely about the book is the humane aspect of it. I don't know if Mahabharata was ever told at such a deeply personal level. The characters feel alive and real, their state of mind authentic to the time period the story is set in. You empathize with their plight, even when you're not really sure how their predicament could be solved. The solution, when arrives in the story, is equally surprising and Sharath does pull off a couple of neat twists right under your feet. Now I'm not a master at Mahabharata or anything, but I know that he tweaked the original story a bit (but of course, who are we kidding, this epic must have seen millions of tweaks by now) which actually makes the proceedings more intriguing because you're never really sure what to expect. And the final chapter does tie up all the narratives, nicely setting up the sequel. You can see all of the pieces falling into place for the big events of the Mahabharata to begin.

Sharath also impresses with his prose again, the language and dialogues have that old-world charm to them. Compare that to the modern-ish banter of the Shiva Trilogy and you'll know what I mean. The author also relies on sensory detail to make a point. A lingering sound or smell is effectively used a couple of times, which I thought was pretty neat. The dialogs were clever and sharp, and the narrative breaks into first-person from time-to-time taking us closer to the characters.

So should you read this book? I would definitely say yes. If you love Indian mythology, then this fresh perspective will only add more firewood to the fire. Even otherwise, I feel that this is a great place to start one's journey in mythology. Just so you know, this is the second book of the series and I highly recommend the first one 'Winds of Hastinapur' as well.

Aravind M (Honest reviews and promoter) says

I would suggest this book to any one who is a ardent reader on myth stories, This is a fine read and the tone of the book has your attention from chapter 1. Sharath's debut in the series, 'Winds of Hastinapur' fascinates you how it all began, but this one is more dark and subtle in its story line and many of them think that Mahabharatha was a feud between two families. Amba's heart wrenching position in the society when all of them abandoned her, or the sordid affairs of vichitra virya are not told in all the retellings. Gandhari's wanton disregard for her brother or how the Gandhara kingdom was mowed out of existence was all the finer things told in this book.

Every retelling of Mahabharatha titillates me in a way where there are several instances which could have led to the war.

- 1) It starts off with the beginning where Vasishata's cow is stolen and all the Vasus get cursed. Is this the beginning.
- 2) Shantanu's desire to marry Satyawati wherein he could have dropped the idea and exercised his kingly duties. Was this an attempt by Sage vysaa to deliberately start the proceedings for the war.
- 3) Bhisma's terrible oath where he could have still under various pretenses made his life not miserable.
- 4) Gandhari and her not so loyal husband Dhritarastra could have envisioned(No pun intended) the events leading to the war.

All this and more fascinates and makes the reader to think 'what if' this hasnt occurred, would the outcome be different?

I have enjoyed all readings of Mahabharatha and this one as well has led me to understand few underlying themes and still raise questions which are not asked earlier.. Go for this book without any inkling where this ride will take you.

Soumyabrata Sarkar says

Having spellbound and dumbfounded by the magic, which the author had cast into his creative writing of 354 pages, all I can think of, is to read "WINDS" and "RISE", once again.

I took time to finish this novel, as often I found myself amidst the illustrious composition conjuring itself upon my eyes, pausing myself, to stop and ponder, what if . . . it really happened this way?

Just like the characters in the previous part, POV characters from this one too were wronged or tricked by men, may it be their own or otherwise. Yet, with all their shortcomings and sufferings we are sucked into their respective thread of lives, aiming with them, to create their own identities, and unfolding the continuity of the grand saga of a great war.

If WINDS was the 'foundation', then RISE may be termed as the 'load-bearing structure' to support the epic that the author is penning down, with great poise, detailed into minute carvings.

It goes slow. Yes! Unlike most of the other fictions of the Great War that wraps up the stories of the ancestors of the Kauravs and their childhood in one "ADIPARVA", and shoots to the DICE and WAR part, this series takes its time to build its characters, lets you spend your time into their inner thoughts and way of lives. It is not the common brawl of the cousins that you witness here. It's still far from there, where we all see the valor and vanity, brags and betrayals of the men in the kuru-kshetra.

As Ganga resumes her narration from the first book, and laments of what she could have changed, and did not, it evokes a strong sense of loss that continues with the memoirs of Amba, Pritha and Gandhari, that are stitched in-between the three units of this novel.

The plight of the women are almost the same, full of guilt and flashes from their pasts with their ambitions, that they hoped to achieve, yet could not due to their misgivings. Sometimes it seems, they were wronged or failed by the men they surround themselves with : Amba by her father, her lover, her captor, her paramour, and even by the man who provided her the last refuge; Pritha by her father and her seducer; Gandhari by perhaps all men she trusted. You feel the loss, betrayed, the rage running in their veins, for the sufferings they endured at different hands, finally forging their own paths and treading for themselves; one a priestess and the other two of becoming a queen – one to build an empire, the other to destroy the same.

On retrospect, among the three, Pritha seems the luckiest. Though she was betrayed too, she gained much from it. With the promise of setting her brother free, which was her main aim, she also got promise of a bright future into a household that could make her a queen.

Sufferings of Amba takes a toll, who was betrayed at every turn where she hoped she could take shelter, yet finding none. Only at the bosom of the Goddess did get her a few years of peace and yet, with the turn of her fate, once again she leads herself to a path of violence, right where she started. All her penance and peace lost under the weight of vengeance and rage that she petted away, unfulfilled desires booming out at last. A women who lost, gained and yet again gave in to hatred.

Gandhari's loss shakes you the most, because she had the most to lose. The kingdom of Gandhar, its gold and army, its pride and people, its wealth : all gone into the grasp of a vassal, taken under treachery and falsehood, her men butchered and laid to rags.

Joining all the threads of these three ladies is the river maiden Ganga and her son Devavrata, devising ways to achieve their own goals that pitted them against each other.

The novel also introduces side characters, like known faces of Devaki, Shakuni, Dhruapad, Salva, Kuber, Kamsa, Vasudev Parashurama and unknown ones in the subjects and people of Gandhara, Pancahala, Mathura and Kuntibhoj, and small glimpses of their respective lives. Common folk, forest-dwellers, craftsmen, priests, farmers, miners, we get different characters of varied hues, though under the lenses of our three heroines.

I must say I missed Satyavati(Kali) this time, though she makes her appearance in the flashbacks of Amba. The science or mystics of the meru people are still under the wraps in this novel too, as it was before, except some brilliant flashes laid out in the middle story. We are left to see their results, yet how they work are still not disclosed in this part, keeping the lid closed for future parts to open them, perhaps? For me, the story went uneven in some parts of Pritha. It felt a bit rushed and I saw less of her father in the later portion. After he handed over her daughter to Sage Durvasa, there is hardly any reference to him, unlikely for a dotting father that the first portion let me believe. The veil-part also seemed a bit far-fetched, as veil-system came after the advent of Islam. Though for the sake of the story, it can be ignored. I would like to add that a map of the regions and places may help the books better, as is the genre nowadays, following the path of LOTR.

The conversations and wordings of the characters falls in line, ranging from royalty to common-folk, be it their way of respecting each other, or anger, or just common talk, it feels smooth and the way it ought to happen at that time. Description of sex from the viewpoint of women, whether casual or ritual, may raise some eyebrows, but it felt fine with mine, as women in the times of Pritha and Gandhari were said to be more independent than the time of Draupadi. Though they were shown as baggage and burden to their respective male members of the family, they took their own decision most of the times and rebelled if faced with opposition, which was common. They raised questions, as would Draupadi, down the line would do and would be chided, unlike her predecessors, who were not. Let's see what the future of this series holds. The

author has taken enough creative liberties and excelled at them.

Thanks to the author, for convincing me of pre-ordering this part, which also fetched 5 more ebooks that I am yet to touch. I am really looking forward to the rest of this beautiful etched calligraphy-like series that paints, not rushes into action like other sagas of the epic, and lets you a grandeur journey of the lives and times of Mahabharata. Thank you dear author for letting us into the lives and times of these women, spanning over generations, and telling their tales, which sounds common, as if nothing has changed since then.

Deepthi Shenoy says

Unlike the first book, the book cover of the 2nd book in the series was quite intriguing urging me to begin reading this almost as soon as I received it! (No, I don't judge any book by its cover, but comparatively, this book cover was much much better than the first one)...With the earlier book being about the 2 wives of King Shantanu, this next book, The Rise of Hastinapur, focuses on the next generation of Queens associated with the kingdom.

First set of chapters is all about Amba, who is escorted to Hastinapur along with her 2 younger sisters by Bheeshma, in a fair win, but without her wish nor her consent, ironically in what is supposed to be her swayamvara (groom choosing ceremony)! She is in love with another king, Salva, who doesn't make any attempt to stand up against Bheeshma when the latter provokes for a fair fight to win queens for his brothers! Blinded by the multiple eternal love proclamations professed by her lover in the past, she is inclined to take a few wrong decisions even when she is advised against it, which then decides the course of her entire life!! The hardships and shame she faces when she goes from one king to another seeking refuge, seething in anger, seeking revenge and in the end, getting nothing from anyone makes us almost cry for her plight! She later turns to a peaceful life, worshiping nature, yet for years, the fire of revenge is still there, somewhere deep inside, smoldering, waiting to erupt just like a volcano at the slightest provocation..! Her hatred towards Bheeshma is so strong, that you almost want to hate Bheeshma for her, but then you also want to knock some sense into her and help her understand that revenge is taking her nowhere!! She makes you so sad for her plight that you want to just hug her and point out that she could have just spoken her heart out to Bheeshma even before leaving her father's palace instead of suffering and considering him to be the sole reason of all hardships she faced later! She makes you shudder with her strong revenge laced emotions that even you feel her anger, but still wonder at her immaturity when she is able to let go of the injustice done by everyone else, even her lover, but just not Bheeshma... Ah, story of the scorned lover, but taking revenge on someone else altogether is brilliantly written! Personally, the chapters where she goes back to Salva with lots of hope just to face rejection is brilliant!! By the time, Amba's chapters were coming to a close, I was deeply conflicted and drained of energy!

Second set of chapters are focused on Kunti and her futile attempts to save her brother Vasudeva from his brother in law Kamsa's prison! I have always always thought of Kunti as a complex character with a lot of layers, probably with a few layers, unknown even to herself, a mysterious person with a lot of things going on in the background!! But I was in for a surprise in this book... She is portrayed as this most naïve & completely gullible character that I just kept feeling sorry for her weaknesses! I must say, that the chapters involving her, were, very easily, the least impressive chapters of this particular book! It got boring after some time... And I guess Sharath took a right decision (am not sure if it was intentional) by placing her chapter's right in the middle of the book, because if it weren't and if a reader knew her chapters led towards the end of book, a reader might just as well skip it!

The third and last set of chapters are dedicated to Gandhari and again, was I in for a surprise or what! I loved

her fiery character and felt sad for her almost the same as I felt for Amba! How as a queen she was constantly defensive of her people, was placing the safety and well being of her kingdom above anything else in her life, her tactical decisions, her one and only worry about her kingdom prospering against odds and of course against Bheeshma has been brilliantly portrayed! Her fear of leaving the kingdom under her brother Shakuni's rule when she has to get married and then how she immediately thinks if she will ever get married is subtly put and indeed very hurting to read! Easily the most positively powerful chapters of the whole book!

Throughout the book, Bheeshma's presence lingers mostly in the background, but, believe me, he is out there, making appearances now and then, working towards the rise of Hastinapur relentlessly, an efficient hard-worker with brilliant game plans, sometimes unaware that his actions for the rise of his empire, is leading to be the sole reason or one of the reasons for each of these queen's lives turning upside down!

Towards the end, you realize, how seamlessly Sharath has managed to pull this off, without tweaking the Epic in any which way, maintaining the basic essence of the ancient history that this Epic is, effectively trying to build entirely different vantage points to the Epic! In all, as I mentioned for the very first book in the series, it is definitely a very interesting read – a cannot-stop-reading kind of a book which makes you long for the next one in the series which might be out only next year – almost like how a kid in the month of June longs for the summer holidays of next year!!

Kumar Anshul says

Sharath Komarraju For those who don't know- 'The Hastinapur Series' is a retelling of Mahabharata narrated by its most important characters- The women. The first book in the series 'The winds of Hastinapur' started with the story of Ganga and Satyawati and in this book Amba, Kunti and Gandhari take charge. Just like the 1st book, this book's narration alternates between 3rd person and 1st person (narrated by the three female protagonists).

First thing first, this series is not exactly a retelling of the great epic. The author has allowed his power of imagination to seep into the original plot to create characters, circumstances and twists which don't exist in the original text. So if you are a purist who considers these kinds of works as a 'tempering of the story', you can choose to stay away.

For all others, this is an exceptionally engaging book with many 'page-turner' moments. You will get to see a new dimension of the life of Kunti (my most favorite part of the book) and I appreciate the author for the amount of thought and imagination he must have put into this part to come out with a plot like this. Amba's story, as expected, is filled with her quest for vengeance and Gandhari's need for revenge gets reflected in the last few pages.

Revealing anything more will be like giving away spoilers. If you are a Indian mythology enthusiast, go and pick up both the books of the series and you won't regret.
