

INDIA'S EPIC STORIES TRADITION ENHANCED

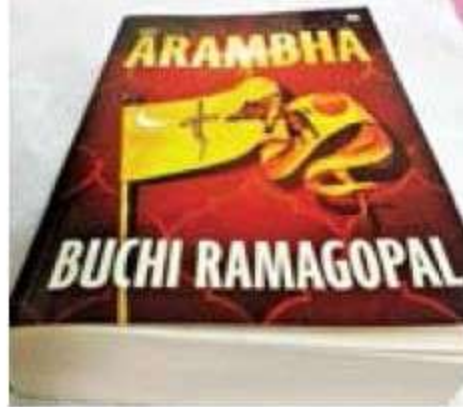
PADMA RAMNATH

Buchi Ramagopal makes his transition from careers in academics, and banking to creative writing with *Arambha*, a promising beginning in creative writing.

The four-part first book, based on the narrative of how the Vijayanagaram kingdom claimed its high place in India's hoary history is a praiseworthy effort. Ramagopal joins that elite list of Indian writers who seamlessly create fiction in English, borrowing significantly from our history, mythology, epics and culture, like Ashwin Sanghi, Kavitha Kane, Amish Tripathi, Anand Neelakantan, Chitra Banerji Divakaruni among a long list of authors who have popularised India's rich epic story tradition.

The book takes you through the conquest of Kampili by Muhammad Bin Tughlak in the battle of Fort Hosadurg in 1327. Harihara (Hakka) Raya and his brother Bukka Raya are the central protagonists, taken prisoner by the Sultan's army. For Ramagopal, the devil is in the details, and his research devil is very thorough as he unfolds the tale of these two brothers who ultimately blossom as the founders of the Vijayanagar Kingdom, which marks the rise of the Deccan as a seat of power, underpinned by

Book Review



**Arambha – By
Buchi Ramagopal.
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Collins
518 Pages.
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remarkable architecture, political sagacity and the triumph of the vanquished over the conquerors.

Reading this book, raises an oft asked question - why did India fall prey to conquests from the Afghans, Turks, Mughals and the British when many such kingdoms and warriors could have fended off outsiders?

Hakka and Bukka are portrayed almost as twins in their courage and tenacity but the differences are not to be missed...the older brother always ready to motivate and inspire his troops as well as the conquerors. The author is particular to flesh out Hakka as a man who does everything by the book, including caring for his horse as a commander must care for his mount and his men. Bukka is the big picture

strategist who thinks two steps ahead, to anticipate and plan for contingencies, study his opponents and build plans to exploit their weakness.

The novel has its female anchors too in Valli, Bukka's Queen, ever tending to consolidate the family solidarity and Malaa, Hakka's consort, making up for her lack of self confidence by her haughty attitude and sense of entitlement. Sangama, mother of Hakka and Bukka does an ephemeral balancing act for the brothers and her brood. She proudly proclaims that her sons are the first military commanders in the history of the subcontinent to build a kingdom that stretched from coast to coast. The brothers carve out a brand new capital city, Vijayanagara (the city of victory) on the southern banks of the Tungabhadra and Hakka's elevation as Chakravarthi coincides with this event.

The final part of the book, *Anukrama: Succession*, appears a tad too overwhelming, chronicling the succession to the throne after Hakka and Bukka. The Samarajya lasted till 1646. The book is not a racy read, but it is painstakingly chiselled and structured like the temples at Hampi, in Dravidian style yet unique with features that are known distinctively as Vijayanagara architecture.