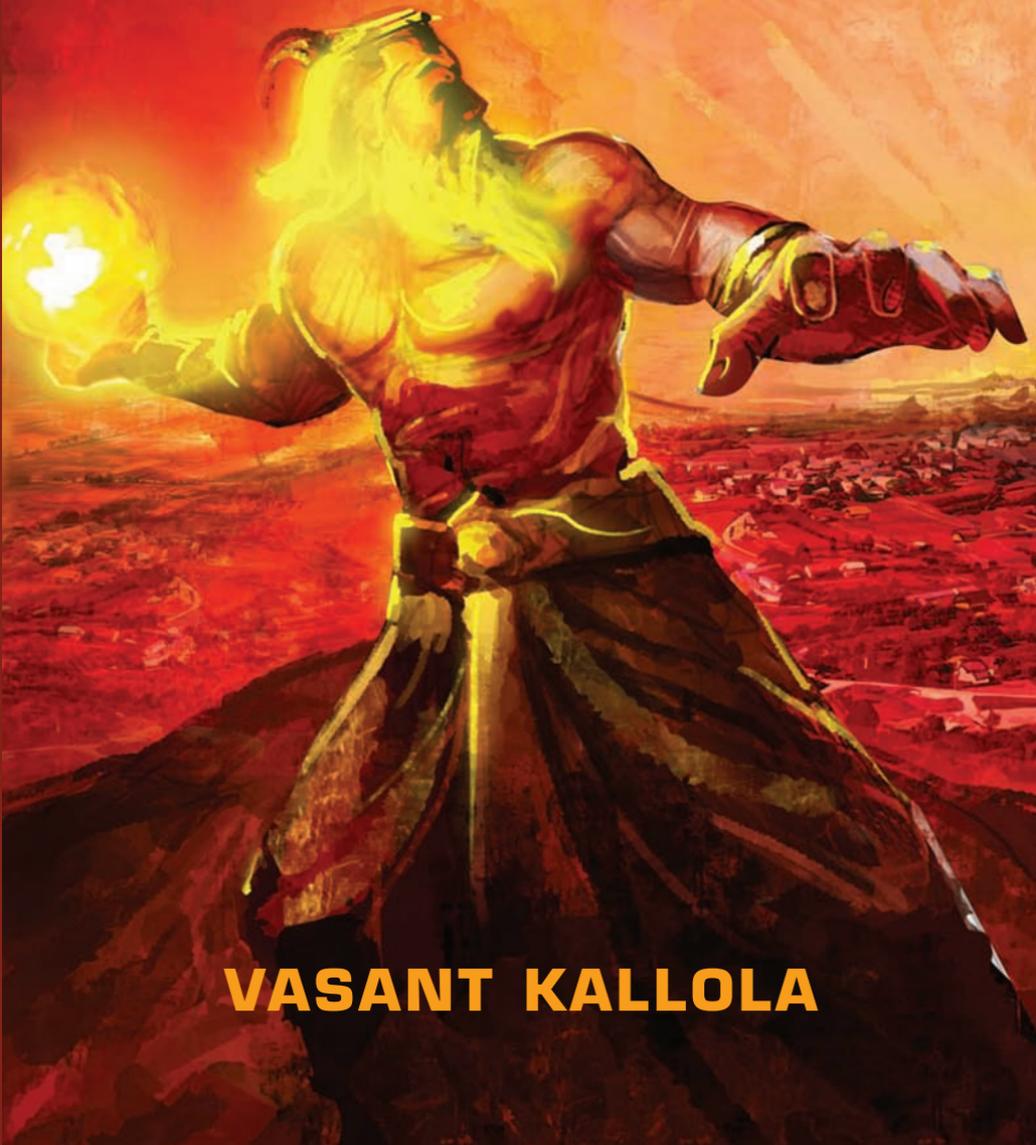


CHIRANJIVI

The Beginning...



VASANT KALLOLA

Note from the Author

Dear reader,

I am thankful to you all for liking and appreciating my last work, a novel, titled, *It's Okay To Fail, My Son*. Due to your love and affection, the book has become a national bestseller, having featured among the five highest-selling books on the e-commerce website Flipkart (as per a survey carried out by *The Economic Times* and Flipkart in the metro cities of Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru. The results of the survey were published in *The Economic Times* on 10 April, 2016).

Now, I am extremely pleased to present my new work, a novel, titled, *Chiranjivi*. Set in the aftermath of the war of Mahabharata at Kurukshetra, *Chiranjivi* picks up the threads of the story a thousand years after the war, sometime around 3100 BCE.

This story, a work of fiction, reflects my belief in the immense power of the resolve of a man against seemingly invincible odds. It covers the struggles and journey of an ordinary man, Govind, who saves millions of lives when a very powerful sage decides to annihilate the earth. The sage is so powerful that normal human beings cannot even touch him. If that is so, what will the outcome be? Will Govind allow the sage to succeed in his malicious intentions? How will he stop the sage from carrying out one of the most dreaded actions in the history of mankind?

To suit the content of my new story, I am experimenting with its presentation. Usually, the story is presented in a narrative format – the author describes the story, incidents and emotions of the characters as if she or he witnessed the events then, and is now describing them to the readers for their consumption. In other words, it is a scene-by-scene account of what happened then.

I am presenting to you my new story in the format of an experience – the reader will feel as if they are present throughout the story. The reader experience is going to be similar to watching a film, where the viewer feels as if they are part of the scenes on screen. I am sure my new format of storytelling will enhance readers' experience of 'living the story'.

Each scene includes details such as Indoors or Outdoors, the time of the day or night, and the location, at the beginning. This is likely to make your experience of reading quick, crisp and enjoyable.

I am sure you will enjoy this novel. Please share with me your reviews, comments and suggestions. You can reach me through my email ID – vkallola@gmail.com – and I will be glad to receive your inputs and encouragement. That will be the next step of the development of our relationship, my reader friend!

Vasant Kallola

(FADE IN)

OUTDOORS – NOON – ON A MOUNTAINTOP

The gasps of a man can be heard as he appears to be climbing up the mountain. The views here are beautiful – the nearby mountains, a lake, a forest – but he is in no mood to look at any of them. Troubled, he sits on a rock on top of the mountain.

He looks like a sage, with his long, milk-white beard, and his white hair tied into a very large bun. He wears a white turban. His big red eyes are filled with anger and pain. From his overall appearance, you would think he is around eighty years old, but when you look at his body and frame, you are forced to rethink his age. He is well-built – big, strong shoulders, long arms and muscular biceps, a slim waist and rock-solid legs. His body is like that of a superhero out of a comic book!

Once again, a cry of pain escapes his lips. With trembling hands, he slowly removes his turban, revealing a wound on his forehead. As the wound is uncovered, blood and pus start flowing down from it. He uses the turban to wipe and staunch the flow, but is unsuccessful. The turban soon turns red.

Flies begin to gather around and settle on the wound; he waves them away, but they soon come back. This goes on for some time and he seems to be getting tired.

Suddenly, he remembers something and looks to his left. An earthen vessel is half-filled with some white matter; he takes the matter and puts it on his wound. A sigh of relief, in the form of a feeble smile, appears on his face. But the white matter covers only half the wound. He puts his hand in the vessel again, but it is empty! Once again, the flies come back. He loses his cool; very

angry now, he takes the vessel in one hand, waves the other hand in the air as if to kill the flies, gets up roaring, and throws the earthen vessel into the air.

‘Krishna!’ – the roar echoes in the valley. Oh! He doesn’t look like an ordinary man. His strong body is ramrod straight on a frame around 9 feet tall; very unusual in today’s time!

OUTDOORS

The earthen vessel spins in the air as it falls and hits the rocks below. It’s broken into many pieces of different sizes.

OUTDOORS

The man on top of the mountain is very angry, and in deep pain. Tears are flowing down his cheeks now. The half-covered wound oozes blood and pus. His face is full of pain, and his tears get lost in his beard. He closes his eyes, murmuring, ‘Krishna’.

(FLASHBACK IN)

OUTDOORS – BATTLEFIELD

Wavering images appear in front of the sage’s eyes. There is a war between two powerful clans. Thousands of soldiers are fighting this great war. Fighters of different ages are riding on different things; while most of the soldiers are on foot, hundreds of them are on horses, elephants and chariots.

Two soldiers are in a fight; one swings a sword at the other, who defends himself successfully and retaliates. The attacking warrior is not able to defend himself. The sword cuts through his chest and a fountain of blood gushes out, mixing with the pool of blood already on the ground.

An old warrior is fighting with great valour. He seems to be invincible, fighting many soldiers and killing almost all of them.

The sun sets in the west. Some warriors are sitting in a camp.

A voice in the background says, '*Bhagwan* (oh God)! He is invincible. We tried very hard, but could not tame his valour. If this goes on, we will be finished.'

A handsome man with a sweet smile says, 'You need to divert from your usual path, dear! You will never be able to defeat him in a straight fight.'

OUTDOORS – BATTLEFIELD

A huge man kills an elephant. News of the death reaches the brave old warrior; he gets disheartened and lays down his weapons. He sits in a meditative posture with his eyes closed in the middle of the battlefield. A young warrior in red clothes charges towards him and beheads him.

(FLASHBACK OUT)

OUTDOORS – THE MOUNTAIN TOP

Tears roll down from the eyes of the sage, who is still seated with his eyes closed. He utters, 'Oh! My dear father.'

(FLASHBACK IN)

OUTDOORS – BATTLEFIELD

Wavering images of two huge warriors, one wearing red clothes and the other yellow, fighting with maces, appear in front of the sage's eyes. Some people are standing by, perhaps supervising the fight. Suddenly, the warrior wearing yellow clothes is hit on the thigh and he falls down, crying loudly in pain. The others walk away, leaving the mortally wounded warrior at the mercy of his destiny.

The wounded warrior's heart-rending cries of pain echo in the vicinity.

OUTDOORS – MIDNIGHT – THE BATTLEFIELD

The injured warrior is lying unconscious. He is woken up by three people who have come to meet him. The warrior says, 'I will not get salvation till I avenge my defeat.' He pauses and adds, 'My soul is in tremendous pain, Ashu, my dear friend.'

Ashu, the leader, is a tall warrior with a muscular body and strong arms. He is a handsome man with bright eyes, a lustrous face and a shining forehead. From his yellow clothing, similar to that of the wounded warrior, one can deduce that he is from the same warring side. He replies, 'My friend! Please tell me what I should do to free you from this pain. Can I offer you my body? I am indebted to you for all the love and respect you have showered on a poor Brahmin teacher's son.'

The wounded warrior demands something that depresses Ashu. He leaves.

OUTDOORS – NIGHT-TIME – BATTLE CAMP

Ashu is hiding in the bushes near the camp. Cheerful laughter can be heard from the camp. There seems to be some sort of celebration. Ashu gets angry and clenches his fist, as if he has reached a decision.

INDOORS – NIGHT-TIME – INSIDE THE CAMP

Ashu is holding a sword stained with the blood of the deceased. He has killed all those who were sleeping inside the camp.

OUTDOORS – DAY- TIME – A SAGE'S ASHRAM (HERMITAGE)

Ashu is hiding in some bushes. Seeing some people approach his hideout, he plucks a blade of a grass from the ground. He closes his eyes and murmurs something.

Ashu is now holding a very bright weapon in his hand, and people are running helter-skelter for fear of the destruction it can cause. Some people are requesting Ashu to give up the idea of using the weapon, but he does not relent.

OUTDOORS – DAY- TIME – THE ASHRAM

A commanding voice booms, ‘Don’t use that weapon; it can annihilate the earth and kill all beings. Please revoke the weapon.’

OUTDOORS – DAY-TIME – THE ASHRAM

Six men are running towards Ashu, who is holding the bright weapon. As a last resort, Ashu releases the weapon against the six men. In retaliation, one man among the approaching six also invokes a similar weapon, and aims it at Ashu.

A voice speaks, ‘Two Brahmashirsha Astras from opposite sides? Their head-on collision could lead to the total annihilation of the earth. *Guruvar* (teacher), please do something to stop it.’

The sage, who also seems to be the head of the ashram, speaks to both warriors. ‘Both of you must withdraw your weapons. They are not to be used under any circumstances.’

One of the six men, who has also invoked the Brahmashirsha Astra, withdraws the weapon, but Ashu does not. Instead of diverting the weapon to an uninhabited place, he directs it towards the womb of a pregnant woman. The woman falls, crying in pain as the child in her womb has died due to the attack.

His heinous act angers the six men. As punishment, they wish to kill Ashu, but the ashram’s head sage intervenes and says, ‘You can’t kill him; he is a Brahmin and also the son of your guru.’

A hand extends towards Ashu’s forehead and removes the gem that beautified his face.

A voice says, 'Despite stiff warnings, you have misused the power of the Brahmashirsha Astra and tried causing irrevocable damage to Mother Earth. You are hereby deprived of your gem. As long as there is life on earth, you will have no option but to wander the earth with a wound caused by the gem's removal. Your suffering will intensify, with blood and pus oozing from your wound, producing a foul smell for as long as there is life on earth.

'You will have neither any hospitality nor any support; you will have to stay in total isolation, without any contact or physical communication with mankind.'

Frightened, Ashu pleads to the powerful voice for mercy. The voice relents and says, 'Your wound will be less painful if you put fresh white butter on it.'

(FLASHBACK OUT)

OUTDOORS – MORNING – VILLAGE

The sage enters a village. His wound is causing him a lot of pain, which is visible on his face. Passers-by look at him and change their route, some out of fear, many out of dislike and disgust.

He stops a pretty lady walking on the road and asks, 'Which village is this?'

'Vrindavan,' she replies.

The sage looks down, perplexed, and then moves to a house. '*Bhiksham dehi* (please donate),' he calls out, requesting alms.

A lady comes out and seeing him, quickly goes back inside. After some time, a man comes and asks, 'What do you want?'

The sage says, 'I want some food and some butter to put on my wound.'

The man replies, 'I can give you food, but not the butter, as you are the culprit of our lord, whom we love and worship. I cannot support the enemy of my lord.'

He goes inside and gets some food, but the sage is gone.

OUTDOORS – MORNING – VILLAGE

The sage goes from door to door in the village, but every family refuses to give him butter, which is essential for relief from his unbearable pain. All this while, swarms of flies trouble him.

OUTDOORS – EVENING – IN THE VALLEY BELOW THE MOUNTAIN

The sun is getting ready to set in the west. The golden-red rays are casting long shadows on everything that comes in their way.

Govind, a young cowboy who is around 19 years old, is seen talking to his herd of cattle.

OUTDOORS – EVENING – ON THE MOUNTAINTOP

The sage is very angry with the villagers. A swarm of flies is still hovering over his wound. He tries to wave them away, but they keep coming back. Extremely irritated, he curls his fingers into a fist, closes his eyes and murmurs something. When he opens his eyes, they are dark red. He opens his fist and a powerful ray of light emerges, which burns all the flies.

OUTDOORS – EVENING – ON THE MOUNTAINTOP

The swarm of flies is converted into dead, burnt flies, fluttering their half-burnt wings. The grass on the ground gets burnt too, and turns dark brown in colour.

OUTDOORS – EVENING – ON THE MOUNTAINTOP

The sage opens his eyes; the irises are red. His face has also turned red due to anger.

He again curls his palm into a fist and murmurs with his eyes shut. He repeats the same gesture after opening his eyes. He opens his fist; a small fireball appears in front of him in the air. He moves the index finger of his right hand in a circular motion; the ball's movement is controlled by his finger!

Now, he is drawing larger circles with his finger, increasing the size of the ball. In a few seconds, the little ball becomes so large that its diameter is greater than the height of the sage. As the ball grows larger, the sound of its whirling also grows.

OUTDOORS – EVENING – COUNTRYSIDE

The sound of the whirling has become so loud that birds and other animals in the vicinity move out of their homes out of fear. They start running helter-skelter.

OUTDOORS – EVENING – IN THE VALLEY

Govind is busy playing a flute. He is seated on the branch of a tree. He gets so deeply engrossed in the mesmerizing tunes of the flute that he loses all sense of time, location and the work assigned to him. Once he starts playing the flute, with every passing moment, the cows in his herd also forget to graze and start looking in his direction.

Govind's music and the mood are interrupted by the increasing light and sound of the fireball. Surprised, he looks up, but cannot make out what the fireball is.

In fear, the cattle in his herd start running helter-skelter and he becomes busy controlling and directing them. The increasing light and sound of the fireball alarms Govind too, who is stuck between his concern and the call of duty.

OUTDOORS – EVENING – ON THE MOUNTAINTOP

The sage looks at the fireball, satisfied. He raises his index finger, and the ball also rises. He raises his index finger over his head and gestures as if flinging something in the direction of the village.

The ball is unleashed, as if fired from a cannon, and moves in the direction of the village at lightning speed. A wicked smile appears on the sage's face.

OUTDOORS – EVENING – IN THE VALLEY

A scared Govind and his herd are running towards the village. He is struggling to direct the terrified animals towards the village.

OUTDOORS – EVENING – IN THE VILLAGE

As Govind reaches his village, he is met by panicked people, some crying uncontrollably. He stops one of the passers-by and asks, 'Arre (hey) Damu Chacha! What has happened? Why are people running around traumatized and in pain?'

'Beta (son), don't ask. There was a shower of fire from the sky, which has engulfed the whole village in its flames. Many people have been burnt. Some have even died.'

Govind starts running towards his home. There, he finds a man who is severely burnt and seems to be in deep pain.

'Water... please, give me water.'

The flute drops from Govind's hand. Tears start welling in his eyes; he quickly goes to the kitchen and gets a glass of water.

'Baba (father), what happened? Who did this to you, Baba?'
The old man is his father.

Govind's father, in deep pain, speaks some broken words: 'I don't know, my son. I was busy cutting the grass for our cows. Suddenly, there was deafening thunder in the sky. I looked up and

saw a big ball of fire rushing towards the ground. Before I could react, it struck our village.'

Govind can't bear to see the condition of his father. He starts crying inconsolably.

'Calm down, my son. After I'm gone, you have to take care of your mother.' Suddenly, it strikes Govind: 'Mother? Where is she?'

He looks around, but cannot find her.

'Baba, I will take you to the doctor.'

'My son! I am in no position to move at all.'

'Don't worry. I will carry you to the doctor in my arms. Nothing will happen to you. I will save you, Baba,' Govind says, still crying inconsolably.

Govind, carrying the body of his father in his arms, moves out of the house and starts running towards the doctor's clinic. He is shaken by the condition of the people in the village. It appears that everyone who was present in the village when the fireball hit has been severely burnt by its ferocious flames.

The sight is horrific and painful. When he reaches the doctor's place, the whole corridor is full of villagers, many wounded and being supported by their family members. Almost everyone is hurt, but the tentacles of impending death have put every villager in the same condition – numb.

Govind puts his father on a charpoy there and rushes inside the house, which serves as a clinic for the villagers. He comes out with the doctor, who starts checking Govind's father.

A lady comes running. She is crying as well as perspiring. It appears that she has run too fast for her age and hence is about to collapse. Govind sees her and runs towards her. He grabs her before she falls to the ground. In Govind's arms, she opens her eyes, which are red and swollen due to excessive worry. She and

Govind look at the doctor who has just finished checking Govind's father. The doctor shakes his head in dejection. Govind shouts, 'Baba!'

Govind and his mother's cries of pain and agony move everyone present to tears.

OUTDOORS – DAY-TIME – ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE VILLAGE

A pyre is set up on an open ground. Govind has put his head near the feet of the man on the pyre. Around 25 people, who have come to console the grieving family, are sitting around it.

Two elders get up and go to Govind, who is still grieving. With soft hands, they nudge Govind to give up grieving and carry out the duty of a son. An unwilling Govind raises his head and moves towards the fire that has been lit for the dead.

Govind lights the pyre of his father and folds his hands, asking the Almighty God to give peace to the departed soul. People who had come to pray for the departed soul leave one after another.

INDOORS – NIGHT-TIME – INSIDE GOVIND'S HOUSE

It is a full moon night. The whole valley is bathed in silver moonlight, making it look beautiful. But there is darkness in the hearts of Govind and Saraswati, who are still trying to reconcile with the fact that their beloved father and husband is no more!

Govind is lying on the floor, with his head resting on Saraswati's lap. Saraswati does not show it, but she has a tough job on hand – grieving for her beloved husband, and at the same time, consoling her son.

Govind says, 'Where were you when the fireball struck our village?'

'My son, I had gone to the forest to fetch some wood.'

‘Did you see the fireball?’

‘Yes. It was big. It looked like an oval necklace moving at an amazing speed.’

Suddenly, Govind remembers something. He gets up from her lap and starts walking out.

‘Mother, don’t wait for me. I will come back in the morning.’

‘*Arre beta, ruk jaate. Subah chale jaate, kahan jaoge aisi virani raat mein* (oh my son, you should wait – go in the morning. Where will you go on such a deserted night)?’

‘No, mother, it can’t wait. Please forgive me – I am not going to obey you this time.’ Saying this, he sets out for the forest.

As he nears the forest, the sounds of animals become clearer and louder. But today, it does not matter to Govind, who is on a most urgent and important journey!

OUTDOORS – NIGHT-TIME – ACROSS THE JUNGLE

Govind is walking through the jungle. He reaches a spot near the river, and looks at the other side. The base of the mountain lies on the other bank. He jumps into the river. The water is chilly, but the fire in his heart is strong enough to withstand the chill of the water!

Now Govind is climbing the mountain. He must have walked all night.

OUTDOORS – EARLY MORNING – ON THE MOUNTAINTOP

It’s early in the morning. Most animals in the forest have returned to their homes. The chirping of the birds makes the whole environment pleasant. The sun is still hidden behind the eastern horizon, so the light is feeble; visibility is still low.

Govind has reached the peak of the mountain. On the way up,

he has picked up a thick branch of a tree. Using his strong hands, he removes the leaves and twigs from it. Now it's a strong stick. He checks the strength of the stick.

Govind reaches the mouth of a cave. He peeps into the cave; a small, hand-made torch gives off a feeble light. It is about to be extinguished. He can see a human figure lying in the corner. From the way he has arranged this inhospitable place to live in, it appears the man is intelligent. Using tree branches, he has made a charpoy on which soft grass is spread for comfort. In one corner of the cave, some clothes, mostly *dhotis* (long cloth wrapped around the waist and legs), have been spread out to dry. Some fruits are kept on a wooden tray. The design of the tray looks very different from what Govind has seen so far.

Govind thinks of waiting for him, but his footsteps alert the sleeping person. He is awake now.

Suddenly, Govind gets the urge to sneeze. He tries controlling it, but is unsuccessful. He sneezes loudly.

'Haak chhee!'

Govind is feeling embarrassed. He looks at the charpoy, but the man is not there anymore.

'Where has he gone? He was right here a second ago,' Govind thinks.

'Who are you? What are you doing here?' someone asks from behind him. Govind feels as if the questions are coming from a deep well. For the first time in his life, he is hearing such a powerful and commanding voice!

Govind remembers the sad demise of his father and the objective of his being there at such an odd hour.

'I live in Vrindavan. I have come here to solve the mystery of a fireball that struck our village and killed several people.' With

deep sadness, Govind adds, 'It burnt many houses. Many people's lives were devastated by that one fireball.'

Govind continues, 'It seems the fireball came from the mountain, somewhere nearby. Do you know what mystery is behind it?'

'Yes. I know the full story, because it was me who fired the ball at your village.' The sage pauses and adds, 'The people of your village are highly inhuman. They don't deserve to live, so I fired that devastating ball.'

Govind can't believe his ears. In a state of shock, he says, 'You fired the deadly ball. You killed my father.' He becomes hysterical and attacks the sage with the stick.

But before he can even touch the sage, his body is lifted up in the air and thrown about 5 arms (1 arm = 2 feet) away.

This is unexpected for Govind, a strong village boy. He quickly gets up and rushes towards the sage, who is standing silently, as if nothing has happened!

Once again, before he can even touch the sage, his body is lifted by some unknown but very powerful force and dumped at a distance, like someone dumping a bundle of dry straw.

The fight goes on for around ten minutes, but it is one-sided. Govind is badly beaten up; not a scratch on the sage's body. At the end, he is still standing calmly, as if nothing has happened!