SANTHARA

"Dying with Equanimity"

Episode 01
"DECLARATION"

A Decision, Spoken Aloud

written by
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Approx. 60 minutes

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For producer consideration.

EPISODE NOTE

SERIES NOTE — FOR PRODUCERS / READERS

SANTHARA is a five-hour limited series about a dying poet who undertakes the Jain vow of releasing the body — fasting into death with equanimity — to cross back to the wife he lost. His children have five weeks to make peace with the manner of his leaving.

Santhara (sallekhana / samadhi-marana) is distinguished, in Jain understanding, from suicide: it is undertaken only when death is already certain and the body can no longer serve as an instrument of dharma. Passions are thinned. The end is met awake, without weapons, without poison, without the scream of despair.

Tone: Life of Pi × Terrence Malick — a surreal, melodramatic elegy rooted in Punjab, Partition, the diaspora, and the poem. Visual registers braid across the season: Petrol Dusk (present), Marble & Gold (Radha / temple), Neon Mantra (dissolution), Sepia Exodus (1947).

Season spine: 01 Declaration · 02 Forgiveness · 03 The Muse · 04 Dissolution · 05 Release.

This pilot is the first of the six ritual movements: DECLARATION. It plants the garden frame, the empty chair, the kite, the fracture between Snehit and Sannah, the first spiral, and the road to the vow.

CAST (PILOT) RAM CHUGH — 74, the poet SNEHIT CHUGH — 34, the son SANNAH CHUGH — 26, the daughter MAYA — 32, Snehit's wife, pregnant RADHA — in memory; the gravity of the story YOUNG RAM — 10, Partition GRANDMOTHER / FATHER — 1947 DR. ELLIS — cardiologist

FADE IN:

EXT. CENTRAL COAST — DAWN — ESTABLISHING

Pacific light. Cliffs. Gulls. A world that does not know it is about to host a vow.

The camera finds, far inland, the grid of Santa Maria — fields, water towers, the ordinary earth of diaspora lives.

RAM (V.O.)
There are two ways through a life.
The way of nature — graceful, cruel, unthinking as grass.
And the way of grace — which is nature after it has learned a name for love.

A single crow crosses the frame. Black on gold.

RAM (V.O.)
I have lived mostly as grass.
She made me try the other way.

EXT. THE GARDEN — CHUGH HOUSE — SANTA MARIA — DAWN

Petrol dusk before the petrol. Ash-blue light. A lower-middle-class California yard going soft at the edges — chipped stucco wall, a hose coiled like a sleeping snake, a plastic chair bleached by years of sun.

A TAMARIND TREE. In its upper branches, a broken kite — paper torn, bamboo spars like thin bones, string still wound around a limb as if memory refused to fall.

Beneath the tree: RAM CHUGH (74). Thin, luminous, undefeated. White kurta. Bare feet in dew. One hand pressed lightly to his chest — not clutching. Listening. As if the heart were a room with someone still inside it.

He breathes. Counts. The camera holds as if it, too, were learning how.

His lips move. Almost prayer. Almost poem.

RAM (V.O.)
(a whisper — intimate — as if spoken into the ear of God, or of a wife long gone)
Mother... Father... Where do You live?

Wind in the tamarind. A single leaf detaches and falls without hurry. Somewhere a freeway hushes like a distant ocean.

RAM (V.O.)
I have looked for You in temples. In hospitals. In the space between two people eating dinner without speaking.

He almost smiles.

RAM (V.O.)
I have looked for You in her face.

His free hand goes to his shirt pocket. Inside: the edge of a photograph. He does not take it out. Not yet. The knowing of it is enough to steady him.

A bird calls once. Stops.

CLOSE ON: Ram's eyes — cataracts of ordinary age, and something brighter behind them.

RAM (V.O.)
Death is not something that happens later.
It is happening now. In this breath. In the one after.
If I am awake for it — both life and death are here.

He closes his eyes.

The sound of the garden FALLS AWAY —

EXT. LEIAH — PUNJAB, BRITISH INDIA — 1947 — DAY (SEPIA EXODUS)

— and the color of the world changes.

Bleached khaki. Dust. Newsreel-adjacent. The color of a memory the whole family has spent eighty years trying not to look at directly.

A bazaar a mile and a half long. Red-brick compounds. Kerosene lamps waiting for dusk. Goats. Bicycle bells. The ordinary eternity of a place that does not know it is already ending.

YOUNG RAM (10) runs beneath a different tree — full green, alive — flying a kite the color of mustard flower.

His GRANDMOTHER watches from a doorway, sari the color of earth after rain. Down the lane: a small temple. Saturday light. The kind of light that believes it will return.

GRANDMOTHER
(Punjabi, gentle; subtitled)
Don't look away from it, beta.
When the string is in your hand,
you are also in the sky.

Young Ram laughs — a sound the series will almost never hear again. The kite climbs. The string bites his palm. He holds tighter.

Somewhere far off: a sound like thunder that is not weather.

Young Ram looks toward it. Grandmother's face changes — a cloud crossing the sun of her.

GRANDMOTHER
Come inside.

But he stays one more second with the kite. As children do. As the world ends.

EXT. THE GARDEN — PRESENT — CONTINUOUS

Ram's eyes open. A tremor through the left side of his chest — brief, instructive, almost polite. He steadies himself on the tamarind trunk. Bark under his palm like old scripture.

Above him: the broken kite. Same tree. Different century. Same looking up.

RAM (V.O.)
I was a child when the world taught me what leaving looks like.
Now the body is teaching me again.

He takes the photograph from his pocket at last.

INSERT — PHOTOGRAPH: RADHA, mid-thirties, not posed for beauty — caught in it. Looking at the photographer (him) as if he were both joke and temple. Marble-and-gold warmth even in a faded print.

Ram presses the photo to his lips. Not romance. Recognition.

RAM (V.O.)
Radha.
You were the reason the rented house was worth the rent.

From the house: a light clicks on. Life beginning its ordinary machinery.

RAM
(soft, to the photo, to the tree, to whoever is listening)
Today I will tell them.

CUT TO:

INT. CHUGH HOUSE — KITCHEN — MORNING

Lower-middle-class and aged. Chipping paint. A dusty ceiling fan turning like a slow thought. Over the arch to the living room: a tapestry of SHIVA as Nataraja — the dance of dissolution and becoming, gold thread dulled by years of cooking smoke.

Family photographs on every surface that will hold them. Younger Ram. Radha beside him — bright, exact, the gravity every other person in this house still orbits.

THE DINING TABLE visible through the arch. Four chairs. One seat remains empty. Has remained empty for years. No one puts mail there. No one drapes a jacket. The emptiness is a practice.

MAYA (32) — Snehit's wife — moves through the kitchen with the careful grace of early pregnancy. Hand occasionally finding the belly, as if checking that the future is still scheduled.

She sets water to boil. Cardamom. The soft ritual of tea for a man who still believes mornings can be kind.

MAYA
(calling)
Baba? Tea.

No answer yet. She glances at the empty chair. Almost speaks to it. Doesn't.

INT. RAM'S BEDROOM — DAWN — BEFORE THE HOUSE WAKES

Ram reads by window light. We glimpse lines — not as lecture, as lifeline:

INSERT — TEXT (fragment):
"Sallekhana is the thinning of the passions and the body...
not from despair, but from the calm knowledge that the instrument is complete."

He writes in the margin of his notebook:

NOT FROM DESPAIR.

Then, under it:

FROM LOVE THAT HAS OUTGROWN THE BODY'S HOURS.

He looks at Radha's photograph.

RAM
(soft)
I am not coming early.

I am coming on time.
The doctor said a season. A
season is a door. I am choosing
how to walk through it.

SNEHIT CHUGH (34) enters already half in his day — phone, keys, the posture of a man who chose salary and schedule because chaos killed his mother and nearly killed his father. Love arrives in him as logistics.

SNEHIT
Did he take his pills?

MAYA
He will.

SNEHIT
That's not what I asked.

Maya looks at him — not unkind. Tired of being the translator between men.

MAYA
Your sister lands at eleven. Try
to be a person when she gets
here.

SNEHIT
I am a person. I'm a person with
a spreadsheet and a father who
thinks metaphors are medicine.

He kisses her temple. Means it. Leaves toward the garden door.

EXT. THE GARDEN — CONTINUOUS

Snehit finds Ram still under the tree, photo now returned to pocket, face arranged into fatherhood.

SNEHIT
You're going to be late.

RAM
For what?

SNEHIT
The appointment you pretend is routine.

RAM
I pretend nothing. I simply refuse to arrive early to bad news. It makes the news arrogant.

Snehit almost laughs. Stops himself. Offers his arm. Ram takes it — not because he needs it yet. Because the taking is a kindness to the son.

INT. SNEHIT'S CAR — DRIVING — DAY

Petrol dusk palette even in morning: desaturated teal and ash. California scrub. Power lines. Strip malls that all learned the same face.

Snehit drives. Ram watches the world go by as if memorizing it for a test he has already passed.

SNEHIT
Maya's next scan is Thursday. They might tell us the sex.

RAM
The child already knows the sex. You are the ones in suspense.

SNEHIT
I want you there. At the scan. At the birth. At the stupid birthday parties with cake that tastes like sugar and air.

Ram looks at him. Love so dense it has its own gravity.

RAM
I want that too. Wanting is not the same as being able.

SNEHIT
Don't start.

RAM

I have not started. I am only refusing to lie in a moving vehicle. That seems to me a modest ethics.

Silence. The turn signal. A Spanish radio station briefly from a neighboring car at a light — life continuing in other languages.

SNEHIT
Mom would make you fight.

RAM
Your mother would make me finish my work.
Then she would make me come home.

Snehit's hands tighten on the wheel. He does not ask what "home" means when the body is the last country left.

INT. CARDIOLOGY OFFICE — SANTA MARIA — DAY

Fluorescent honesty. Laminated cross-sections of the human heart. A plastic model on the desk — chambers open, unembarrassed, a house with the walls removed.

Ram sits very straight. Snehit beside him. An empty third chair waiting.

DR. ELLIS (50s) turns a monitor. We do not need the full jargon. The image is enough: a heart working like a tired animal that still loves its work.

DR. ELLIS
The ejection fraction continues to fall, Mr. Chugh. Progressive cardiomyopathy. We've optimized meds. We've talked devices. We've talked trials.

SNEHIT
So we talk them again. We talk them until one of them works.

Dr. Ellis glances at Snehit — familiar with the family member who negotiates with death as if death were a contractor.

DR. ELLIS

With optimal management... a season. Maybe two if we're lucky and careful. There are ways to stretch the runway.

Ram looks at the plastic heart. Then at his son. Then at the window — California light, indifferent and beautiful, falling on a parking lot.

RAM
And if I do not wish to stretch it?

The silence rearranges the room. Even the plastic heart seems to listen.

SNEHIT
Baba—

DR. ELLIS
(careful, professional)
That's a conversation for palliative care. For family. For values. My job is to offer you time.

RAM
Time is not the same as life, Doctor.
A longer runway is still a runway. Eventually the plane must do something braver than taxi.

Snehit stares at him as if he has spoken in a forbidden tense.

DR. ELLIS
I can refer you to—

RAM
I understand. Thank you for your clarity. It is a gift when people do not decorate the end.

He stands. The smallest wince — left side, brief. Snehit is up with him, hand hovering, not quite touching, the choreography of sons who still think they can catch fathers.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR — MOMENTS LATER

The long perspective of a hallway. Footsteps out of sync. A gurney passes in the opposite direction — someone else's emergency, already mythic.

SNEHIT
A season is not a death sentence. It's a plan. We make a plan. We always make a plan.

RAM
You make plans. I make poems. Between us we almost cover the human condition.

SNEHIT
Don't be charming. Charming is how you escape.

RAM
No, beta. Charming is how I stay without screaming.

They walk. A child's drawing on a pediatric wall — stick figures, a sun with too many rays. Ram looks at it too long.

RAM (V.O.)
When I was ten the sun had too many rays also. Then the border taught the sky to be simple.

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT — DAY

Heat off asphalt. Ram pauses at Snehit's car — then looks across at his own old sedan, driven here earlier, carefully kept. A man who once painted damaged vehicles in Bombay and still notices every scratch the way a priest notices a tear in the veil.

He rests his hands on the warm roof.

RAM
(quiet)

Your mother used to say the body
is a rented house.
One day the landlord comes.
The question is whether you smash
the furniture on the way out...
or sweep the floor and leave the
key in the bowl.

SNEHIT
You're not leaving. You're sick.
Sick people get treatment.

RAM
Sick people also get honest.
Today I choose honest. Treatment
we can discuss after your sister
lands and we sit at the table
like a family that still knows
how.

He opens the door. Gets in. Ends the conversation by sitting inside it — an old poet's parliamentary procedure.

INT. SANNAH'S STUDIO — LOS ANGELES — EARLIER THAT MORNING

Paint-smeared and warm — the one room in the story lit like it hasn't given up. Morning through industrial windows. A large canvas turned FACE TO THE WALL. She will not let anyone see it until it's finished. We know before she does what it's a portrait of.

Sannah tapes a photo of Ram and Radha to the easel edge — not to copy. To remember the temperature of a marriage.

She texts her brother, deletes, packs the portfolio tube. Touches the hidden canvas once, like a forehead.

SANNAH
(to the canvas, soft)
Hold the light for me. I'll be
back with more of him.

She leaves. The canvas stays. Waiting. Like everyone else in this family.

CUT TO:

INT. LAX / MONTAGE — DAY

SANNAH CHUGH (26) — paint under her nails, LA light still on her clothes, the one person in the bloodline whose rooms still look like they haven't given up.

She moves through the airport with a carry-on and a portfolio tube. Stops at a window. Watches a plane lift — bodies agreeing, for a moment, to trust air.

On her phone: a text from Snehit — "Appt done. Come straight. Don't fill up on airport garbage."

A second text — "He said weird shit. Be ready."

Sannah types: "I'm always ready for him." Deletes it. Types: "On my way." Sends.

INSERT — her sketchbook, opened briefly: studies of hands, of an old man's neck, of a woman turning away. The beginning of a portrait she has not admitted is a portrait.

EXT. CHUGH HOUSE — AFTERNOON

Snehit's car and Ram's sedan in the drive. Sannah's rideshare pulls up. She steps out. Looks at the house she left for art school and keeps returning to like a refrain.

The tamarind. The kite. She sees it every time and every time it hurts in a new conjugation.

Ram is already at the door. Arms open. She goes into them. For a moment she is seven again and the pyre has not yet happened and the world is only the smell of his kurta.

SANNAH
You got thinner.

RAM
You got more yourself. It suits you.

SNEHIT
(from inside)
Dal's ready. Wash the airport off your hands.

INT. CHUGH HOUSE — LIVING ROOM / DINING — CONTINUOUS

Sannah sets down her bag. From it: a rolled canvas she does not unroll. She leans it against the wall like a secret the house will eventually force open.

Maya hugs her carefully around the belly.

MAYA
He kicks when people raise their voices. So we're all speaking like librarians.

SANNAH
Since when does my brother raise his voice?

SNEHIT
Since Dad decided the cardiologist was a philosopher.

Ram stands at the threshold of the dining room, looking at the empty chair as if it were a person who might speak first.

RAM
Call everyone to the table.

SNEHIT
It's three in the afternoon.

RAM
Even so. Some news does not understand the clock.

They gather. Steam from the dal. The ceiling fan's soft chop of air. Photographs watching. Shiva dancing above the ordinary crisis of a family.

Ram folds his hands. Not Christian grace. Something older. A gathering of attention. A samayika of the dining room.

RAM
I am going to undertake Santhara.

The word lands like a glass set down too hard on a stone counter.

Maya freezes mid-reach for the ladle. Sannah goes very still — not shocked so much as recognized, as if a painting she had been making in secret just walked into the room and sat down. Snehit stares as if his father has spoken in a language he outlawed in 2007.

SNEHIT
No.

RAM
It is not a request.

SNEHIT
It's a fantasy. You're scared, and you're dressing it up in grandfather stories so we can't argue without looking uncultured—

RAM
Santhara is not suicide.

A beat. He has said the sentence the whole pilot has been walking toward.

RAM
Suicide is passion. Poison. A weapon turned inward. A scream with nowhere to go.
Santhara is when the body can no longer serve as an instrument of dharma — and death is already certain — and you meet it awake.
You thin the passions. Then the food. Then the water.
You leave with your eyes open.

He looks at each of them. Especially the empty chair.

RAM
I will go to her.

There it is. The real sentence under the doctrine. Love wearing the mask of ritual — or ritual wearing the mask of love. The series will live in that ambiguity.

SNEHIT
(standing; anger because anger is the only door he has left unlocked)

Mom is dead. She's been dead nineteen years. You don't get to leave us to chase a ghost. You don't get to make me fifteen again, watching you disappear into a notebook while the rest of us learned how to buy milk.

SANNAH
(quiet)
She's not a ghost to him.

SNEHIT
Don't you dare take his side already—

SANNAH
I'm not taking a side. I'm listening. You should try it. It's what people do when they love someone more than they love being right.

SNEHIT
Listening is a side when someone is talking about starving himself in our house while my child learns to hear through water.

Maya's hand finds Snehit's sleeve. He shakes it off without looking — then immediately regrets it, fingers twitching back, not quite arriving.

RAM
I was fifteen years a husband after the pyre. I raised you. I painted cars in Bombay until my lungs knew every chemical by its first name. I wrote poems because silence was worse — and silence, after her, was a country with no border you could cross back from.

He breathes. The left side complains. He continues anyway.

RAM
I am not abandoning you. I am finishing.

SNEHIT
You want equanimity? Here's mine: I am calm enough to say you are wrong.
Wrong for Maya. Wrong for the kid. Wrong for the sister who still needs a father more than she needs a myth.
Wrong for the man who taught me that surviving was the point.

RAM
Surviving was the point when survival was the miracle.
Now the miracle would be a clean leaving.
Do not confuse the two eras of a life.

MAYA
(quiet, unexpected steel)
I lost my father to a stroke that took three years and all of his dignity first.
If Baba wants to meet the end awake — I don't have to like it to respect that he is not choosing the long humiliation.
I am allowed to hold both: don't go... and I see you.

Snehit looks at his wife as if she has switched sides in a war he thought was simple.

SNEHIT
You're pregnant and you're romanticizing death.

MAYA
I'm pregnant and I'm refusing to romanticize suffering.
There's a difference. Ask your sister. She paints it for a living.

SNEHIT
Finishing is what cowards call it when they don't want to fight.

Ram flinches — not from insult. From recognition. He has heard this voice before. In himself. On a border. In a truck. Don't look back.

RAM
I have been fighting since 1947. I am tired of fighting the wrong war.

He stands. The room holds its breath the way a temple holds incense.

RAM
Michchhami dukkadam (mich-CHAH-mee dook-KAH-dum).

Sannah's eyes fill. She knows the phrase — may all the wrong I have done you be fruitless; I ask forgiveness; I forgive.

RAM
I ask your pardon. For the years I was half here. For the nights I spoke only to her photograph. For making you children of a wound that was never your fault. And I forgive you — already — for not understanding. Understanding is not a prerequisite for love. If it were, no child would survive the first year.

He leaves the table. The empty chair remains. The dal cools. A photograph of Radha seems, by a trick of the fan's rotation, to watch him go.

Snehit sits back down as if pushed. Puts his face in his hands.

MAYA
(soft)
Your father just said goodbye in a language we don't speak.

Sannah looks at the rolled canvas against the wall. Then at her brother. Then at the empty chair.

SANNAH

Then we learn the language.
Or we fail him in two dialects at once.

CUT TO:

INT. RAM'S BEDROOM — LATE AFTERNOON

Small room. Single bed. A low table with a brass diya, unlit. Books in Hindi and English — Tagore, a worn translation of the Tattvartha Sutra, notebooks swollen with loose pages, a Bombay bus ticket used as a bookmark twenty years ago and never forgiven.

Ram sits on the edge of the bed. Photograph of Radha against the lamp. He opens a notebook. Writes one line. We see it:

WHAT REMAINS IS LOVE.

Then, beneath it, slower, as if the hand must convince the heart:

TO EAT IN THE DARKNESS OF EACH OTHER'S LIVES FOR ETERNITY.

After a moment:

AFTER ALL — WHAT IS THE STORY?

A knock. Soft.

SANNAH (O.S.)
Baba?

RAM
Come.

INT. RAM'S BEDROOM — CONTINUOUS

Sannah enters. Sits on the floor without being asked — daughter who never needed a chair to be near him. Paint still ghosted into her cuticles.

Long silence. The good kind. The kind Malick would hold until the audience remembers their own dead.

SANNAH

I was seven.
At the pyre. I remember almost nothing.
Except your hand.
How hot it was. How it didn't shake. I hated that it didn't shake. I needed you to be breakable so I could be a child.

Ram's eyes close. Open. Wet.

SANNAH
I understand wanting to go to her.
I paint because I can't stand how things disappear. You... you want to disappear on purpose. Toward something.

RAM
Toward someone.

SANNAH
Is there a difference?

RAM
In the end, beta — no.
Someone is how the Infinite learned to have a face.
The Jains say the soul is a lamp.
I say the lamp wants a window to sit in. She was my window.

Sannah laughs once, wet. Rests her head against his knee like a child and a grown woman at once.

SANNAH
Snehit won't forgive you.

RAM
He doesn't have to. Forgiveness is not a contract. It is a room he can enter when he is ready.
Even if I am not in it.
Especially then.

She takes his hand. The camera holds on the hands — age spots, paint flecks, the same blood, the same border crossing written in the veins.

SANNAH
When I was little you sang me a lullaby about a kite.

RAM
The kite that thought it was a bird until the string reminded it of love.

SANNAH
Sing it.

He does. Soft. Half-remembered. Punjabi and English braided. Not a performance. A rope thrown across years.

EXT. THE GARDEN — DUSK

Snehit smokes — a habit he quit, revived like a bad friend who knows the garage code. Maya stands a few feet away, sweater over the belly, California evening cooling fast.

MAYA
He's not doing this to hurt you.

SNEHIT
I was fifteen. She died. He went into his poems like a cave. I learned how to make money because money doesn't leave the room when you cry. Money sits there and lets you hate it. That's more honest than God.

MAYA
And now?

SNEHIT
Now he wants me to sit here and watch him erase himself. With a Sanskrit name for it so I look cruel if I say stop.

MAYA
What if the Sanskrit name is the only way he can stand to do it without screaming?

What if the ritual is the last kindness he's offering you — a shape to put the horror in?

Snehit looks at the tamarind. At the broken kite. Smoke leaves his mouth like a failed prayer.

SNEHIT
I used to think that kite was waiting for me to climb up and free it.
Now I think it's the only honest thing in this yard.
Stuck. Torn. Still trying to look like flight.

MAYA
Then be his string for a while.
Not his cage.

He looks at her belly.

SNEHIT
What do I tell our kid? That Grandpa chose the sky over us?

MAYA
You tell our kid that Grandpa loved so hard the body became too small for it.
And that you stayed. That staying is also a vow.

INT. CHUGH HOUSE — HALLWAY — NIGHT

The house settles. Fan. Refrigerator. Distant freeway. A clock that still ticks as if time were not on trial.

Ram cannot sleep. He walks the hallway. Stops at a closed door — what was once the marital bedroom, now storage and ghosts and monsoon-smell cardboard.

He opens it.

INT. MARITAL BEDROOM — YEARS EARLIER — NIGHT (MARBLE & GOLD)

Warmth. Radiance. Nostalgia already half-sainted. The palette of everything Radha touched.

RADHA (then 40s) sits on the bed combing out her hair. Oil. Patience. Ram (then 50s) watches from the doorway with the hunger of a man who still can't believe his luck and the fear of a man who knows luck is a temporary visa.

RADHA
Don't write a poem about this.

RAM
Too late.

RADHA
Then write it true. Not pretty. Pretty is for people who haven't crossed a border.

RAM
You are the only true thing I know.

RADHA
(smiling, sharp)
Liar. You know the border. You know the truck. You know what you didn't look at.
One day you'll have to look. Even if looking kills you.
Especially then.

He comes and sits. She puts his hand on her heart. Beat. Beat. The original meter.

RADHA
If I go first — don't follow me as a coward.
Follow me as a man who finished his work.
Raise them. Make the house less hungry. Forgive your father for the truck. Forgive yourself for surviving.
Then come.
I will be very annoyed if you arrive early with unfinished dishes in the sink of your life.

He laughs into her hair. She holds him like a country.

RADHA
And Ram — when you come...
come with your eyes open.
I want to be seen. Even there.

INT. SMALL WEDDING COURTYARD — INDIA — DECADES AGO — DAY (MARBLE & GOLD)

Arranged. Nervous. Marigold. A younger RAM in a stiff jacket, refugee still written in his shoulders. RADHA lifts the veil not as surrender — as inspection.

Their eyes meet. Something unplanned enters the plan.

RADHA
(low, only for him)
You look like someone who has already lost a country.
Don't lose this one by being brave in the wrong direction.

RAM
I don't know how to be a husband.

RADHA
Then be a witness. To me. To yourself. To whatever God is doing when no one is watching.
Marriage is just two people agreeing not to look away.

He laughs. She does not. Then she does. The future opens like a door with light behind it.

PRIEST (O.S.)
(in progress, ceremonial)
...in the presence of fire...

Fire. Hands. Soot. A vermillion mark. The camera finds their joined hands — the same hands we have seen old and paint-flecked and dying.

RAM (V.O.)
I did not become a poet because I was gifted.

I became a poet because she required a language equal to her face.

INT. STORAGE ROOM / OLD BEDROOM — PRESENT — NIGHT

Empty bedframe. Boxes. A folded sari in plastic. A bottle of hair oil, sealed, absurd. Ram standing in the doorway of absence.

RAM (V.O.)
I am trying, my love.
The work was always you. The rest was noise I made to survive the waiting.
The children are the work too. I know. I know.
Forgive me for how long it took to hold both truths without dropping one.

He turns off the light. Stands in the dark until the dark becomes a kind of answer.

EXT. CHUGH HOUSE — STREET — NIGHT

Snehit walks the block. Suburban California quiet — sprinklers, a TV laugh track through a window, a dog that cannot decide if it is angry.

He calls a number. Voicemail.

SNEHIT
(into phone, controlled then not)
Dr. Ellis — it's Snehit Chugh. I need the list. Devices. Trials. Whatever keeps a stubborn man alive long enough for his grandchild to ruin his shirt.
I'll pay cash. I'll pay in pride. Just — send it.

He hangs up. Stares at the sky. No neon yet. Ordinary night. He almost envies people with ordinary nights.

SNEHIT
(to the sky, to his mother, to no one)
I can't watch another fire.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM — NINETEEN YEARS AGO — NIGHT

Young Snehit (15) sits under vending-machine light. A paper cup of water he will not drink. Down the hall: the room where his mother is leaving.

Ram comes out. Face ruined. Opens his arms. Snehit does not enter them.

SNEHIT (15)
Did you write a poem already?

RAM
(broken)
No.

SNEHIT (15)
Good. Don't. If you make it beautiful I'll never forgive you.

He walks away. Ram stands holding air.

Present-day SNEHIT, on the street, flinches as if the memory hit him from behind.

INT. SANNAH'S CHILDHOOD ROOM / MAKESHIFT STUDIO — NIGHT

She has claimed the old room. Drop cloth. Travel paints. The rolled canvas now stretched on a cheap easel.

We see only the EDGE of the painting: the suggestion of an old man's shoulder, light like marble and gold trying to enter petrol dusk. A woman's hand, perhaps, at the edge of frame — or is it smoke?

Sannah paints. Cries without sound. Paints. The discipline of grief that becomes form.

On the floor: a sketchbook open to a child's drawing — stick figures, a woman with long hair, a man, two kids. "MAMA" in a seven-year-old's letters. Beside it, in adult hand, a note: "She was the light. He is the looking."

Sannah turns the sketchbook face down. Keeps working. Outside her window: the tamarind's dark mass. The kite invisible. Known.

INT. KITCHEN — MORNING

Maya cooks porridge. Sannah makes tea the way Ram likes it — cardamom, not too sweet. Snehit enters in a shirt too formal for a Sunday, armor mistaken for clothing.

SNEHIT
I called Auntie Sharda in Artesia. She said Santhara is for munis. Saints. People who already left the world. Not for men who still yell at the news and steal extra mango pickle.

RAM
(at the table, calm)
Sallekhan■ is for householders also. When old age or incurable disease makes the body unfit for the practice of dharma.
The texts are clear.
Ratnakaranda. The teachers. The courts in India argued until the soul grew bored of waiting.
The soul does not wait for the Supreme Court.

SNEHIT
This is California. There is hospice. There is morphine. There is a way to die that doesn't turn your children into witnesses of a ritual hunger strike for a woman in a photograph.

RAM
Morphine closes the eyes.
I have closed my eyes enough for one life.

On the truck they said don't look. At the pyre I looked until looking became a kind of blindness. Now I will look until looking becomes light.

Snehit slams a palm on the counter. The teaspoons jump. Maya flinches; then steadies her belly with both hands as if to say to the child: not you, never you.

SNEHIT
I have a child coming. He will not meet a grandfather who chose to vanish for a philosophy.

RAM
He will meet a grandfather who chose how to leave.
That is also an inheritance.
Some children inherit silver.
Ours will inherit a story about a man who refused to die asleep.

SANNAH
What if we stop talking about legality and theology for one minute and talk about love?
He loves her. He loves us. Those two sentences are crushing him.
Santhara is how he stops the crushing without hating us for being the weight.

SNEHIT
Don't paint this, Sannah. Don't make it beautiful. Beautiful is how people get away with leaving.

SANNAH
I'm not making it beautiful. I'm refusing to make it ugly just because it hurts. There's a difference. You'd know it if you ever stood still long enough to feel anything but strategy.

SNEHIT
Strategy kept this family in a house.

SANNAH
Love kept this family a family. Barely. Don't confuse the mortgage with the marriage.

Ram looks at both his children — the fracture line of the house running exactly between them, through him, into the empty chair.

RAM (V.O.)
Why this game of life?
The mind does not budge. We have played this game many times... the outcome is always the same.
What remains, what is achieved — it is love.
To eat in the darkness of each other's lives for eternity.
After all — what is the story?

EXT. THE GARDEN — LATE MORNING

Ram stands under the tamarind with a small step-stool. Looking up at the kite. A man negotiating with a metaphor that has become embarrassingly literal.

He wants — absurdly, tenderly — to free it. Or to touch it. Or to ask it whether it still remembers the sky over Leiah.

Sannah watches from the kitchen window, dish towel in hand. Does not stop him. Some climbs a daughter cannot do for a father.

INT. LIVING ROOM — CONTINUOUS — LATE MORNING

Maya finds Sannah at the window watching Ram with the stool.

MAYA
Stop him.

SANNAH
If I stop him from a kite, he'll only climb a higher one later. Some men you redirect. Him you accompany.

MAYA
And Snehit?

SANNAH
Snehit you hold while he becomes weather.

They watch. Love as dread. Dread as love.

He climbs one step. Two. The stool wobbles on root-broken earth. His hand reaches. Fingers brush old string — dry, stubborn, a vein of the past.

The heart CLENCHES — not a metaphor. Electricity down the left arm. Breath stolen mid-thought.

The stool goes.

Ram falls hard to the ground. Shoulder, hip, the sound of a body remembering gravity and resenting the lesson. Dust rises. Settles.

He lies on his back looking at the kite. Sky wheeling. The world thins.

RAM
(barely)
Radha—

Footsteps. SANNAH's cry. SNEHIT running from the house, phone already in hand. Maya. Hands. Noise. The machinery of panic.

Ram's eyes stay open. Fixed on the kite.

And then the edges of the garden BEGIN TO LIQUEFY —

SMASH CUT TO:

THE DISSOLUTION — FIRST SPIRAL

(Endogenous release — the body begins to dream while awake)

What fasting will later open fully, the fall opens like a door kicked once.

The garden does not fade gently.

It THINS.
Color drains toward ash, then floods back wrong — teal too electric, green too wet, the kite's torn edge blazing like a nerve.

Ram's pupils widen as if night fell inside them at noon.

SOUND collapses inward: freeway becomes ocean becomes blood becomes a single held tone —
the temple's unresolved chord from a future he has not reached yet.

Then, under the tone, not from any throat in the yard:

VOICES
(layered, not "performance" — as if the body itself were remembering)
Namo Arihantanam
(NAH-mo uh-ri-hun-TAA-num)
Namo Siddhanam
(NAH-mo sid-DHAH-num)
Namo Ayariyanam
(NAH-mo ah-yah-ri-YAA-num)
Namo Uvajjhayanam
(NAH-mo oo-vuhj-jha-YAA-num)
Namo Loe Savva-sahunam
(NAH-mo lo-EH suv-vuh SAA-hoo-num)

A beat of breath after each line — five bows of sound, then silence denser than sound.

CLOSE ON: Ram's heart — not a diagram — a felt sense: the failing pump releasing chemistry the living rarely meet on purpose.
Sweat cool. Spine bright. The air tastes of metal and jasmine that is not planted here.

ROTOSCOPE edges flicker — reality briefly drawn, un-drawn, redrawn.
This is not decoration. This is the nervous system losing its monopoly on sequence.

SPIRAL 1 — TIME DOES NOT FLASH BACK. TIME ARRIVES ALL AT ONCE.

Images stack like transparencies on one light-table:

— mustard kite over Leiah, full green tree
— broken kite over Santa Maria, same angle of neck looking up
— Father's palm forcing a boy's head down
— Radha's palm on his chest in a Bombay dark
— Sannah's small hand at the pyre
— Snehit's fist on a kitchen counter yesterday

The order is not chronological.
The order is pressure: what the soul can no longer keep filed separately.

EXT. BORDER ROAD — PUNJAB — AUGUST 1947 — NIGHT (SEPIA, THEN BLEEDING NEON AT THE EDGES)

Handheld. Torchlight. Dust that enters the mouth like flour and ash.

YOUNG RAM (10) in the truck-bed crush — brass pot, elbows, prayer, heat.
Father's hand on his head.

FATHER
(urgent whisper)
Do not look back.
Looking keeps you here and here is teeth.

Young Ram looks.

Fire on the horizon. A shape on the road that used to be a person.
And — sharp as a cut — BIJI's silhouette falling behind the column, shawl-edge frayed, mouth forming his name without sound.

YOUNG RAM
Biji—!

The word becomes a ribbon of light in the Dissolution air — letters he will not speak again for eighty years.

His palm bleeds around cut kite string.
String and blood and neon braid.

YOUNG RAM (V.O.)
(child, under the old man's breath)

If I don't look, does it still
happen?
If I look, do I carry it forever?

THE DISSOLUTION — KALI AS TIME (NOT HORROR)

A figure of time-as-mother: dark, jeweled with moments, not corpses.
She does not chase him.
She turns a page that is also a rib.

No cheap scream.
Only the knowledge: every clock is a small Kali on the wall.

THE DISSOLUTION — RADHA'S HOSPITAL / PYRE RHYME

Marble & gold draining to ash.
Radha's last breath and the truck's lurch share one sound design spike —
then quiet so deep the garden dirt can be heard under Ram's shoulder blades.

RADHA
(from the braid, exact)
Finish your work.
Then come.
Not before.

THE DISSOLUTION — THE SELF AS LAMP

Black field.
A flame without a lamp — jiva.
Around it: gold dust of clinging (karma as weather, not lecture).
Some dust sticks. Some falls away as intention steadies.

RAM (V.O.)
What is the story?
A boy on a truck. A man at a
pyre. An old poet under a tree.
The same looking.
The same love refusing to be
practical.

The spiral collapses.
Breath slams back into the present garden with the rudeness of a birth.

EXT. THE GARDEN — PRESENT — RETURN

Air. Voices. Hands.
The first spiral has only opened the seam.
The fast will tear it wider.

EXT. THE GARDEN — PRESENT — LATE AFTERNOON

Petrol dusk again. Reality with a thinness to it — as if the veil stayed slightly open and the world has not yet noticed.

Ram on the ground. Sannah cradling his head in her lap. Snehit on the phone with 911 — then canceling mid-sentence as Ram's eyes clear, kneeling, fingers on his father's pulse, crying without permission, the spreadsheet warrior ruined into a son.

SNEHIT
Stay. Please. Just — stay. I take it back. Whatever I said. Stay.

RAM
I am here.
I am also leaving.
Both can be true.
You will need both truths for the years when I am only a photograph and a bad joke you tell your child about mango pickle.

Snehit shakes his head — no theology, not now — but he does not let go of his father's wrist. His other hand finds Sannah's shoulder. For a moment the fracture closes. Not healed. Held.

SANNAH
Can you breathe with me?
Like when I was little. Like the kite song.

They breathe. Father. Daughter. Son. The tamarind above them. The kite in the branches like a stuck prayer that has outlived its petitioner.

Maya in the doorway, one hand on the sill, one on her belly — three generations of Chugh held in a single frame of fear and love. Behind her, inside, the empty chair waits in the dining room like a quiet priest.

INT. CHUGH HOUSE — LIVING ROOM — EVENING

Ram on the sofa, shoulder wrapped, dignity intact. A cup of water he sips slowly — still in the world of liquids, still before the full vow, still a householder on the near side of the threshold.

The family around him. Exhausted. Changed. The photographs seem to lean in.

RAM

EXT. BOMBAY WORKSHOP YARD — YEARS AGO — DAY (HEAT HAZE)

Younger Ram sanding a damaged car door. Paint in his hair. Radio film song. Other workers laughing.

He pauses, writes a line on a scrap of receipt paper with a grease pencil. Tucks it into his shirt — over the heart.

FOREMAN
Poet-saab, the fender is not impressed by your feelings.

RAM
The fender will be beautiful. That is also a feeling.

A younger RADHA appears at the gate with a tiffin. The yard softens. Men pretend not to stare.

RADHA
Eat. Then make the car honest. Then come home and make the poem honest. I will not kiss a man who lies to either.

Present Ram, on the sofa, almost smiles at the ceiling fan as if it were that gate.

What happened under the tree... that was the body speaking.
And something else speaking through it.
I will not pretend I understand all of it. Understanding is not required for obedience to what is obvious.

SNEHIT
It was a fall. It was oxygen. Don't turn it into a vision quest. Please. I can handle a fall. I can't handle you becoming a prophet in my living room.

RAM
Snehit. My son.
I will not ask you to agree. I will ask you to be present.
There is a difference between blessing a road and blocking it.
There is a difference between fighting me and abandoning me.
Fight if you must. Fighting is also a form of sitting with me.

Snehit stands. Walks to the Shiva tapestry. Speaks to the dance of destruction without turning — easier to address God than Dad.

SNEHIT
If you do this, I will fight you. Every day. That is how I know how to love you. I don't have poems. I have resistance. It's what you left me to work with.

RAM
Then resist. I will try to be worthy of your resistance.

Sannah wipes her face. Kneels by the sofa. Takes the hand that held hers at the pyre.

SANNAH
I can't bless it yet.
But I won't leave the room.
If the vow needs a witness who loves you without understanding you completely — I'm free. My studio can wait. The canvas already knows what it's becoming.

RAM
That is enough for today.
Today is only declaration.
Declaration is not the end. It is the door.

INT. RAM'S BEDROOM — EVENING — LATER

Sannah rebandages his shoulder. Clinical tenderness. Ram watches her face as if studying a last landscape.

RAM
When you were born I wrote a poem so bad I burned it.
Your mother said the smoke was better than the metaphors.

SANNAH
What did it say?

RAM
That you had her eyes and my stubbornness and the world's worst timing.
You arrived during a storm. The power went out. I held you in the dark and thought: this is how God works. Without an audience.
Without a guarantee.

SANNAH
I'm still not blessing it.

RAM
I know.
Blessing is not the only sacred verb.
Staying is one. Witnessing is one. Painting the truth without flattering it is one.

She finishes the bandage. Rests her forehead on his good shoulder.

SANNAH

If you see her... before... will you tell her I kept the lullaby?

RAM
She knows.
Mothers know the songs that outlive them.
It's how they keep a hand on the string.

He looks at the empty dining chair through the archway. Addresses it as much as them.

RAM
Tomorrow I will drive the coast road to the temple on the cliff.
To speak the vow before someone who knows the old words.
I will ask forgiveness of the living and the dead.
I will begin the thinning.
Not in despair. In decision.

Snehit turns. His face is ruin and devotion in equal measure — the face of a man who will spend four more episodes learning the difference between love and possession.

SNEHIT
And if I stand in the driveway?

RAM
Then I will walk.
I have walked out of a country before. I can walk out of a driveway.
But I would rather you sat in the passenger seat and hated me up close.

A beat. The ceiling fan. The photographs watching. Maya's quiet tears. Sannah's hand. The empty chair.

RAM
(softer)
I was loaded onto a truck and told not to look back.
This time I am going to look at everything.

Until looking becomes light.
Until light becomes her.
Until her becomes whatever word
God uses when God is tired of
being abstract.

INT. LIVING ROOM — NIGHT — THE DECLARATION COMPLETE

The family has gathered again — not at the table. On the floor, on the sofa, near the empty chair without sitting in it. A brass diya is lit now. Small flame. Ordinary sacred.

Ram sits with a glass of water. He raises it slightly — a toast to the last ordinary drink before the longer road.

RAM
I declare before you — my
children, my child's child not
yet born, and the woman who still
owns the fourth chair —
that I enter the first movement
of Santhara: declaration.
I am not escaping.
I am deciding.
May my passions thin. May my
loves remain without chains. May
my death, when it comes, be
awake.

He sips. Sets the glass down.

RAM
Michchhami dukkadam — again. For
the words that hurt today. For
the words still to come.

SANNAH
Tassa michchhami dukkadam.
(beat)
If I said it wrong, correct me
later. In a letter. From
wherever.

A flicker of smile from Ram. Snehit does not say the words. He nods once — which, for him, is almost liturgy.

SNEHIT

I'm still fighting you tomorrow.

RAM
I am counting on it.

EXT. THE GARDEN — NIGHT

The house windows glow. Inside, life continues in silhouette — a family moving around a decision like planets around a dense star.

Ram alone under the tamarind. Blanket on his shoulders. The broken kite invisible in the dark — but we know it's there. We will always know it's there.

He takes out Radha's photograph. Holds it to the porch light. Dew or tears on the laminate — same difference at this hour.

RAM (V.O.)
Declaration.
Not despair. A decision.
I resolve to die the way I never
got to live — without running.

He presses the photo to his chest, over the failing heart. Two rhythms: paper and blood. One already still. One learning stillness.

RAM (V.O.)
Mother. Father. Arihants.
Siddhas. Soul of my soul.
Where do You live?
I have looked in the border dust.
In the Bombay paint fumes. In the
California mornings that pretend
nothing has ever burned.
I am coming to find out.
With my eyes open.

Wind. The tamarind moves. For a moment — only a moment — paper rustles high in the branches. The kite answering. Or the past. Or a coincidence the show will treat as sacrament.

EXT. CLIFFSIDE TEMPLE — NIGHT — DREAM OR MEMORY OR FUTURE

Marble pillars twenty-five cubits high at the edge of a cliff. Cedar roofs. A waterfall behind a gazebo. Priests in orange — a circle — humming a tone that never fully resolves.

Ram stands barefoot on stone. A saint's eyes meet his — not permission as bureaucracy; permission as recognition.

SAINT
Return when you are ready.
Readiness is not eagerness.
Readiness is when the house is swept and the heart has stopped bargaining.

Ram bows. Behind the saint, for one frame, Radha stands among the pillars as if she has always been part of the architecture.

The vision releases him back to —

EXT. THE GARDEN — NIGHT — PRESENT

— the tamarind. The blanket. The photograph. Breath.

Ram closes his eyes. Opens them again. Stays. Equanimity not as numbness — as full feeling held without the lunge to escape.

Above the house: the night sky. Ordinary stars. Then — so faint we might invent it — a thread of neon mantra-violet at the edge of vision. The dissolution waiting its turn. The season's signature, previewed like a hymn hummed under breath.

The camera rises. Past the kite. Past the roof. Past Santa Maria's small grid of lights — a diaspora of windows, each with its own silence, each with its own empty chair of one kind or another.

RAM (V.O.)
What remains...
what is achieved...
it is love.

HOLD on the dark.

INT. SANNAH'S ROOM — NIGHT — PARALLEL

Sannah paints in lamplight. The portrait more visible now — Ram's face half-formed, and behind him a woman's outline in gold leaf scrapings, not yet face, already presence.

She writes on the wall in pencil, small, where only she will see:

BLESS THE ROAD — LATER.

INT. SNEHIT & MAYA'S BEDROOM — NIGHT — PARALLEL

Maya asleep. Snehit on his back, phone glow: an article — "Sallekhana is not suicide." He hates that the argument is good. Scrolls to baby registry. Scrolls back.

INT. CHUGH HOUSE — YEARS AGO — LATE AFTERNOON (MARBLE & GOLD)

RADHA teaches young SNEHIT (12) to tie a kite string. Young SANNAH (4) spins until she falls laughing. Ram watches from the doorway with a notebook he is failing to ignore.

RADHA
Not so tight. The sky needs a little mercy or the string cuts the hand that loves it.

SNEHIT (12)
If it's loose it falls.

RADHA
Then you learn to run. Love is not only grip, beta. Love is also chase.

She kisses his hair. He pretends to hate it. Does not move away.

Present Snehit, reading on his phone about Santhara, closes his eyes. The article blurs. His mother's voice remains.

On the nightstand: a ultrasound print. He puts the phone down. Places two fingers on the print as if taking a pulse.

SNEHIT
(whisper)
I'll fight him for you too.
Someone has to believe in
staying.

EXT. COAST ROAD — NIGHT — PRELAP / TEASE FOR EPISODE 02

Empty asphalt ribbon along the cliffs. Moon on water. A temple's remote light — marble suggestion in darkness.

The sound of the temple bell again — closer.

Tomorrow's road waiting.

Then, quietly, under black:

The sound of a single temple bell — distant, coastal, tomorrow.

A child's laugh from 1947 — brief as a match.

Radha's voice, almost not there:

RADHA (V.O.)
Finish.
Then come.

FADE OUT.

END OF EPISODE

SANTHARA — Episode 01: "Declaration"
A Decision, Spoken Aloud

The vow is set.

Next: EPISODE 02 — "FORGIVENESS"
The coast road; the cliffside temple; pardon asked and granted; 1947 rising in full — a boy, a truck, a kite caught in a tree.

END OF EPISODE 01

SANTHARA
Episode 01 — "Declaration"

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