

SANTHARA

Dying with Equanimity

SERIES BIBLE

written by TAN

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Limited Series · 5 × ~60'

Written by Tan

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Pilot Draft Package — Confidential

I. LOGLINE

SERIES LOGLINE

A dying poet undertakes the ancient Jain vow of Santhara — fasting into death with equanimity — believing it will carry him back to the wife he lost. His children have five weeks to make peace with the manner of his leaving, while a century of unsaid history rises through him: Partition, marriage, inheritance, and the love that outlives the body.

THEMATIC LOGLINE

What do we do with a body that has finished its work, and a love that hasn't?

PILOT LOGLINE (Ep 01 — Declaration)

Given a season to live, Ram Chugh refuses the medicated undoing and declares Santhara at the family table — fracturing his son, steadying his daughter, and opening the first spiral of memory that will unmake and remake them all.

II. SERIES THESIS

SANTHARA is not a story about dying.

It is a story about the courage it takes to leave with your eyes open — and about the people left in the room who have to watch.

It is also a story about inherited silence: what Partition did to one child in 1947, and how the survival of that night echoes through a diaspora family that never spoke of it. The vow in the present forces the past to speak. The past forces the family to decide what love is allowed to cost.

Central dramatic engine:

FAITH (the soul's demand for a clean leaving)

vs.

FAMILY (the heart's refusal to grant it)

Neither side is villain. The tragedy — and the grace — is that both are right.

Philosophical engine (Malick):

Nature vs. Grace — restated in diasporic and Jain terms.

Nature: history, the body, the border, the failing heart, the grass that grows without asking.

Grace: equanimity, forgiveness, the discipline of looking, love that becomes a practice rather than a possession.

Jain theological engine (researched, dramatized — never lectured):

Sallekhana / Santhara / samadhi-marana is the thinning of passions (kashaya) and body (kaya) when death is already certain and the body can no longer serve dharma. It is distinguished from suicide by intention (no passion, no weapon, no despair), method (gradual withdrawal), and community (spoken, witnessed, reversible until the end). The series honors this distinction while letting secular characters contest it honestly.

Dramatic irony the audience holds:

We know Ram is dying. We do not know if the vow will "work" as reunion — and the show never answers with CGI heaven. Reunion, if it comes, is formal, ambiguous, and earned in the language of image and breath.

III. FORMAT, TONE, COMPARABLES

FORMAT

5 episodes × ~60 minutes

One limited run · self-contained · no season 2 required

Prestige drama · literary · surreal · intimate scale with two or three production swings

TONE

A surreal, melodramatic elegy — heavy, luminous, unafraid of silence.

Reverent where it can be; hallucinatory when the self dissolves.

The camera is a soul, not a tourist.

COMPARABLE MATRIX

- The Tree of Life (Malick) — VO as prayer; nature/grace; memory as cosmology
- True Detective S1 — motif architecture; time braid; philosophical dread as plot
- The Leftovers — grief as weather; the sacred treated seriously without irony
- Breaking Bad — plant/payoff discipline; moral inversion; "cold open as thesis"
- The Sea Inside / Wit — death with dignity as dramatic argument
- Station Eleven / Chernobyl (limited) — chapter architecture; event as spiritual crucible
- Life of Pi — faith as survival story; visual miracle that might be metaphor

VOICE RULES (NON-NEGOTIABLE)

1. VO is never exposition. VO is the unconscious speaking to God, wife, or soul.
2. Doctrine enters only when a character must explain themselves to someone they love.
3. Silence is a scene partner. Hold.
4. No sarcasm as armor in Ram's mouth. His humor is tender, old, exact.
5. Snehit's anger is love with nowhere to put its hands.
6. Sannah's art is theology she doesn't call theology.
7. Every episode ends on an image that redefines a previous image (kite, chair, string, photo, road).

IV. WORLD & VISUAL GRAMMAR

THREE WORLDS / FOUR PALETTES

1. PETROL DUSK — Present (Timelines A/B)

Desaturated teal and ash. The Chugh house, the car, Santa Maria.

A family home going quietly dim around a man who is leaving it.

Lens: spherical, honest, slightly underexposed. Handheld only in conflict.

2. MARBLE & GOLD — Radha & Temple (Timelines C/F, temple present)
Warm, radiant, nostalgic. Everything she touched glows half-sainted.
Temple: marble pillars ~25 cubits, cedar, waterfall behind gazebo,
priests in orange, a tone that never fully resolves.
Lens: wider, more still, light as character.

3. NEON MANTRA — Dissolution (Timeline D)
Electric teal and deep violet on black. Rotoscoped / hybrid animation.
Signature device of the series. DMT-release grammar: spirals, Kali,
mantra, memory collision. Used sparingly in 01–03; full break in 04.

4. SEPIA EXODUS — Partition 1947 (Timeline E)
Bleached khaki and dust. Newsreel-adjacent, handheld, archival grain.
The color of a memory the family spent eighty years not looking at.

PRIMARY SETS (DISCIPLINED)

- The Chugh House — Santa Maria (living room, dining with EMPTY CHAIR, Ram's room, Sannah's studio-room, garden with TAMARIND + KITE)
- The Coast Road — windshield as memory screen
- The Cliffside Temple — Ep 02, returns in 05
- Sannah's LA studio — bookends, canvas portrait
- Leiah (Punjab, British India) — bazaar, grandmother's house, temple lane
- Border road / truck — 1947
- Hospital rooms — diagnosis (01), Radha's death (memory), late episodes
- Bombay workshop (memory) — paint, class, becoming a poet by need

SOUND DESIGN BIBLE

- Freeway as artificial ocean (diaspora displacement)
- Temple tone that never resolves (until Ep 05, when it briefly does — or doesn't)
- Namokar Mantra as bone-memory, not soundtrack wallpaper
- Kite paper in wind = heartbeat motif
- Silence after "Micchami dukka[■]a[■]" always held 2–4 beats

V. THE RITUAL SPINE (SIX STEPS → FIVE EPISODES)

The outer discipline of Santhara is the season's plot engine.
Each movement forces an inner reckoning.

01 DECLARATION — Ep 01
He resolves to die and says it aloud — marking the vow apart from despair.
Not escape. Decision.
Status at end of 01: DECLARED. Family fractured. First spiral opened.
Tomorrow: temple.

02 FORGIVENESS — Ep 02
He asks pardon of everyone he has wronged; forgives every wrong done to him.
Old accounts closed — or refused.
Includes: living (Snehit, Sannah, Maya, unborn) and dead (Radha, Father, Grandmother, the unnamed of 1947).
Temple receives the intention of the vow; he is told to return when ready.

03 THE VOW + THE MUSE — Ep 03
Formal vow deepens; solid food surrendered.
Memory of Radha becomes the episode's center: arranged marriage → love story.
Snehit's resistance hardens into grief for the mother he never stopped missing.

Meditation on the Self begins (step 04 overlapping).

04 ABSTINENCE / DISSOLUTION — Ep 04

Liquids thin; water becomes the last tether.

Full Neon Mantra break: Partition horror and Radha's loss collide.

Sannah begins to help actively; Snehit breaks open.

The mind gives up its dead.

05 RELEASE — Ep 05

Final meditation. Family arrives at the same threshold.

Soul lets go of the body — if the vow held true, walks into the dark to meet the beloved. What remains is the poem — and the love it was always naming.

Note: The six classical steps are braided, not one-per-hour rigidly — because prestige TV lives in overlap. The audience feels the ritual as weather and law.

VI. SIX TIMELINES (THE BRAID)

A — THE GARDEN

Present frame. Ram under tamarind, kite above, breath by breath.

Returns every episode as "home base" and spiritual measuring stick.

B — THE DIAGNOSIS / PRESENT PLOT

Failing heart, family table, coast road, temple, abstinence, vigil.

C — RADHA

Marriage, children, hospital, pyre, the unfinished conversation.

Dominates Ep 03; haunts all.

D — THE DISSOLUTION

Visionary. Escalates: preview (01) → temple-induced (02) → controlled meditation (03) → full break (04) → release (05).

E — PARTITION, 1947

Leiah → truck → border → the kite left in a tree → the order not to look.

Partial in 01; rises in 02; completes morally in 04; resolved in 05.

F — BEFORE

Pre-border world: bazaar, grandmother's Saturday temple, intact kite.

Beauty as the thing history will charge interest on.

RULE OF THE BRAID (True Detective craft)

Time does not "flash back." Time INTRUDES when the present becomes too thin to hold the soul. The cut is motivated by object, word, breath, or pain:

string → kite → 1947; empty chair → Radha; "don't look" → truck; water glass → vow.

VII. CHARACTERS & SEASON ARCS

RAM CHUGH — 74 — The Poet

Born Jain family, pre-Partition Punjab. Refugee at ten. Painted damaged cars in Bombay. Poet by need. Radha was muse and reason. Without her, finished — or so he believes.

WANT: To die awake and reach Radha.
NEED: To finish the work she named — which includes the children and the telling of the truck — not only the romantic reunion.
ARC: From private grief dressed as pure vow → to a vow that includes the living → to release that is love without possession.
MORAL RISK: Using Santhara as escape while calling it dharma.
(The series takes this risk seriously; equanimity must be earned, not claimed.)
VO SIGNATURE: Prayer-questions; short lines; nature metaphors; her name as home.

SNEHIT CHUGH — 34 — The Son

Fifteen when Radha died. Chose salary, schedule, safety. Child on the way.
WANT: To keep his father alive (control as love).
NEED: To grieve his mother finally, and to learn love is not only grip (Radha's kite lesson).
ARC: Anger → legal/medical warfare → moral cruelty → collapse → presence.

EP KEYSTONES:

01 Fight at table; "I'll fight you every day"
02 Blocks then rides to temple; refuses forgiveness terms
03 Weaponizes memory of mother; almost leaves the house
04 Breaks during dissolution; holds Ram's hand through water stage
05 Sits vigil; says a version of micchami dukka^{ma}; becomes father in the leaving

SANNAH CHUGH — 26 — The Daughter

Artist in LA. Seven at the pyre; remembers almost only his hand.
WANT: To understand / to paint the truth without flattering it.
NEED: To bless the road without abandoning her own life — and to forgive herself for being the "easy" child.
ARC: Silence → witness → active midwife of the vow → blessing.
CANVAS: Portrait of Ram with Radha as light behind him. Completed in Ep 05 and placed where the empty chair can "see" it.

MAYA — 32 — Snehit's wife, pregnant

Moral adult in the room. Lost her own father to a long undignified decline.
WANT: A living grandfather for her child; a husband who can feel.
NEED: To hold both truths: don't go / I see you.
FUNCTION: Chorus with agency; the series' secular wisdom without cynicism.
ARC: Translator → advocate for dignity → co-witness at the end.

RADHA — (memory / presence) — The Gravity

Died ~19 years before present. Not a ghost story — a love story that refuses to end on the calendar's terms.
FUNCTION: Muse, ethicist, unfinished interlocutor.
KEY LINE (series): "Finish your work. Then come. Not before."
KEY LINE (kite): "Love is not only grip. Love is also chase."
In Ep 05 she may appear as light, voice, or simply as Ram's last look — the show must not cheapen her into a CGI reunion unless the image earns myth.

YOUNG RAM — 10 — Partition

The wound. The looker who was told not to look.
His courage (looking) and his guilt (surviving / leaving) feed the old man's vow.

FATHER (1947) / GRANDMOTHER

Father: protection as blindness ("Don't look back").
Grandmother: spiritual continuity (Saturday temple; beads; "pride is weight").
Ep 02–04: Ram must forgive the father for the order that saved and maimed him.

DR. ELLIS / PANDIT-SAINT / AUNTIE SHARDA (Artesia)

Secular medicine, religious authority, community opinion — three courts

Ram does not fully obey. He listens. Then he decides.

VIII. MOTIF & PLANT / PAYOFF MAP

(Breaking Bad / True Detective discipline: every motif pays twice — once as object, once as meaning.)

KITE / STRING

Plant 01: Broken kite in tamarind; Leiah kite; Radha's lesson to Snehit.

Pay 02: 1947 kite left in border tree; Ram almost frees present kite.

Pay 04: String as sushumna / life-thread in dissolution.

Pay 05: Kite falls or is freed — audience interpretation open; emotional closure required either way.

EMPTY CHAIR

Plant 01: Dining chair never used.

Pay 02: Ram sets a place in forgiveness ritual for the dead.

Pay 03: Radha "sits" in memory at table during marriage years.

Pay 05: Chair remains empty OR receives Sannah's finished portrait leaning against it — presence without body.

PHOTOGRAPH IN SHIRT POCKET

Plant 01: Always near the heart.

Pay 02: Shown to saint; asked to bless the road not the despair.

Pay 05: Placed on Ram's chest in final meditation; last object released or last object held — choose in draft based on equanimity test (transgression of *sallekhana*: clinging to affection). Dramatic tension: Jain ideal vs human love. The series' final moral image lives here.

"DON'T LOOK BACK" / LOOKING

Plant 01: Father on truck; Ram's philosophy of looking.

Pay 02: Ram looks at full border memory and names what he saw.

Pay 04: Snehit forced to look at mother's death without armor.

Pay 05: Family looks at Ram leaving without looking away.

MICCHAMI DUKKA■A■

Plant 01: Ram offers; Sannah echoes imperfectly; Snehit refuses.

Pay 02: Formal forgiveness circuit at temple and home.

Pay 05: Snehit finally speaks it — not as permission to die, as release of debt.

WATER

Plant 01: Tea, sip after fall.

Pay 03–04: From solid food → milk/whey logic → water → none (Ratnakaranda procedure dramatized humanely, not as spectacle of suffering).

Pay 05: Last drop refused or last drop shared with Sannah's wet cloth — research-respectful: no torture porn; interior epic.

SHIVA NATARAJA TAPESTRY

Plant 01: House god of dissolution/becoming.

Pay 04–05: Dance image rhymes with Kali in neon and with body letting go.

BOMBAY PAINT / HANDS

Plant 01: Grease, poems on receipts.

Pay 03: Hands that made cars and children and lines of verse —

Sannah paints those hands.

THE COAST ROAD

Plant 01 tease / Pay 02 main / Pay 05 return if body can travel —
or the road comes to him as sound.

IX. EPISODE ARCHITECTURE (WRITE-THIS-WEEK GRID)

Global rule: Each hour has

- COLD OPEN (image thesis, 2–4 min)
- PRESENT SPINE (ritual + family)
- **MEMORY INTRUSION (C/E/F)**
- DISSOLUTION TOUCH (D) escalating
- HARD BUTTON (image + moral question)

[illegible]

EP 01 — DECLARATION — "A Decision, Spoken Aloud"

STATUS: PILOT DRAFT COMPLETE

Cold open: Garden / kite / Leah flash / "Where do You live?"

Present: Diagnosis $\rightarrow$ table declaration $\rightarrow$ fracture $\rightarrow$ kite fall $\rightarrow$ first spiral

Memory: Radha bedroom; pyre hand; wedding flash

Button: Vow set; temple tomorrow; "Finish. Then come."

Emotional exit: Decision without peace.

[illegible]

EP 02 — FORGIVENESS — "Old Accounts"

STATUS: FULL SCRIPT IN THIS PACKAGE

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Cold open: Coast road at dawn; 8mm wedding on windshield; heart as drum.

Present: Drive to cliffside temple (Snehit passenger-fighter; Sannah follows); forgiveness circuit; saint receives intention; "return when ready."

Memory: 1947 rises — truck, checkpoint, kite in border tree, Father's order;

Ram forgives Father / cannot yet forgive himself for looking.

B-story: Maya ultrasound — life insisting; Snehit signs up for war with hospice vs vow; Auntie Sharda phone condemnation.

Dissolution touch: Temple tone pulls brief neon; Kali as accountant of debts.

Button (HARD): Ram asks Snehit's forgiveness for the half-father years.

Snehit: "I'll forgive you when you choose to stay."

Ram: "Then you are asking me to die as your child, not as your father."

Cut to: Young Ram on the truck, LOOKING, seeing something he will not

speaking until Ep 04 — a silhouette that might be Grandmother left behind.

Present: Ram writes a list of names to forgive. Last name: RAM CHUGH.

Sannah sees the list. Snehit sees only the road home.

Final image: empty chair with a second cup poured and left steaming — for the dead. Steam dies. Bell.

EP 03 — THE MUSE — "The Reason to Live"

WRITE TARGET: Day 3–4 of production week

[illegible]

Ritual: Solid food surrendered (public, quiet, not spectacle).

Meditation on Self begins under tamarind.

Present: Snehit escalates — lawyer consult / adult protective services threat

[illegible]

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stayed. In the child who fights. In the daughter who paints.
In the wife who waits without hurrying me."
He goes.
Aftermath (8–10 min — crucial, Leftovers-grade):
Body / rites handled with cultural care (consult).
Time jump: weeks. Baby born or near. Sannah's show or gift of portrait.
Snehit under tamarind — kite gone or repaired by him (his choice = arc).
Final image MUST hit hard and pure:
OPTION LOCKED FOR BIBLE:
Snehit teaches his child (or Maya's belly, if not yet born — hand)
to hold a string in the garden. "Not so tight." His mother's words
in his mouth. Above: sky. No VO. Only wind.
Cut to black.
Temple tone resolves for one second — then silence.
Title: SANTHARA
End card quote (from Ram's notebook):
"What remains, what is achieved — it is love."

X. ACT BREAK PATTERN (1-HOUR PRESTIGE)

Teaser: Image thesis + unanswered question
Act 1: Present pressure → choice that costs
Act 2: Memory intrusion complicates the morality of the choice
Act 3: Confrontation (family or vision) — worst fear named
Act 4: Ritual advance + irreversible emotional move
Button: Image that recontextualizes teaser

Commercial act breaks optional; streaming can use "chapter breaths" instead.
Write with four pressure crests regardless.

XI. CHARACTER RELATIONSHIP MAP (EPISODIC PRESSURE)

Ram ↔ Snehit: Primary dialectic (faith vs family). Every episode they must have one scene that could end the relationship — and doesn't.

Ram ↔ Sannah: Primary tenderness. She is the apostle who doubts out loud.
Risk: becoming only caregiver. Give her art and anger too (Ep 03–04).

Snehit ↔ Sannah: Sibling war over narrative ownership of the father.
Reconcile through shared memory of mother's hands (Ep 04).

Maya ↔ All: Ethics without cruelty. She can veto spectacle.

Ram ↔ Radha: Love story across death. Never reduce her to prize.

Ram ↔ 1947 Father: Second dialectic (protection vs truth).

XII. RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS (DRAMATURGY, NOT FOOTNOTES)

SALLEKHANA / SANTHARA

- Thinning passions and body; voluntary; when death near / body unfit for dharma
- Gradual: solids → liquids → water → none (Ratnakaranda **■r■vak■c■ra** tradition)
- Not suicide in Jain thought: absence of passion; no weapons/poison; calm
- Transgressions include: desire to die quickly, clinging to friends' affection, longing for future pleasures — USE AS DRAMATIC TEMPTATIONS for Ram
- Public declaration; guidance of ascetic/saint; community witness
- Legal controversy (India) may be referenced lightly via Auntie/news — not the show's thesis

PARTITION 1947

- Punjab violence; refugee columns; trains/trucks; "don't look" as trauma script
- Child POV: implication over gore; moral injury over spectacle
- Place name Leiah/Layyah region as lost world (F)

DIASPORA HOUSE

- Lower-middle-class Santa Maria; California Central Coast geography supports cliffside temple without leaving state production logic
- Jain + broader Indic household texture (Shiva tapestry possible in syncretic diaspora home — Ram is poet, not purist; authenticity via specificity of practice when it counts)

CONSULTS REQUIRED BEFORE PRODUCTION

- Jain scholar / practitioner on ritual depiction
- Partition historian / survivor archives for 1947 texture
- South Asian cultural accuracy on language (Punjabi/Hindi mix, honorifics)
- Medical advisor on heart failure / VSED-adjacent depiction ethics
- Sensitivity: fasting death onscreen — dignity, no voyeurism

XIII. PRODUCTION NOTES (AMBITIOUS BUT CONTAINED)

Present-day: house, car, temple, hospital — controllable.
Scale lives in memory: 1947 and dissolution are the swings.
Dissolution: hybrid VFX + rotoscope partner (signature selling art).
Casting: career-defining South Asian lead (Ram); supporting that can go the distance of grief without melodrama collapse.

Episode directors: one visionary for whole limited OR Malick-like DP continuity across two directors max. Visual grammar must not drift.

XIV. SERIES EPISODE ONE-PAGERS (QUICK CARD)

01 DECLARATION

He says it. The room breaks. The spiral opens. The vow is set.

02 FORGIVENESS

He drives to the edge of the land and settles accounts — except the one his son will not close. 1947 looks back.

03 THE MUSE

Food falls away. Radha fills the hour. Snehit learns his fight is grief.
Ram learns his vow must include the living.

04 DISSOLUTION

Water and vision. Partition and pyre collide. The secret of looking is spoken.
The family stops arguing with death and starts accompanying it.

05 RELEASE

The soul lets go. The kite / the chair / the string pay off.
A father leaves awake. A son learns mercy. A daughter blesses the road.
Love remains — not as answer, as practice.

XV. WRITING WEEK PLAN (FULL SERIES DRAFTABLE)

Already in hand: Ep 01 pilot + this bible + Ep 02 full script.

Day 1: Lock bible decisions (ending option locked above). Polish Ep 01/02 voice match.

Day 2: Ep 03 outline → pages (Radha episode — write from love scenes outward).

Day 3: Finish Ep 03. Start Ep 04 dissolution map (shot-list in prose).

Day 4: Ep 04 full draft (longest; protect sleep).

Day 5: Ep 05 draft (short present, long breath, hard aftermath).

Day 6: Continuity pass — motifs, names, medical timeline (~5 weeks), food/water stages.

Day 7: Read-aloud pass; cut 10% sentimentality; sharpen buttons; update bible if breaks.

Non-negotiable in every draft pass:

- Does this episode advance the ritual?
- Does this episode force a character to change cost?
- Does the final image rewrite an earlier image?
- Would Malick hold this shot? Would Gilligan plant this prop? Would Fukunaga light this fear? Would Lindelof let the silence finish the line?

XVI. WHAT THIS SHOW IS NOT

- Not poverty porn or trauma porn of Partition
- Not a courtroom debate hour about religion (debate happens in kitchens)
- Not a miracle procedural
- Not "Eat Pray Love" with better cinematography
- Not a story that punishes the son for grieving or the father for faith
- Not unclear: Ram will die. The suspense is how the living survive his truth.

XVII. FINAL STATEMENT

Every family carries a silence.

This family carries a border — a night in 1947 when a child was loaded onto a truck and told not to look back. That child grew into a poet. The poet became a question: what do we do with a body that has finished its work,

and a love that hasn't?

SANTHARA answers not with doctrine, but with five hours of looking.

Look. Then let go. Then love what remains.

— Tan

Writer & Creator

XVIII. FASTED-STATE / DISSOLUTION (THE WILD ARC)

The Dissolution is not a decorative "trip sequence."

It is the physiological-spiritual engine of the series.

As solids then liquids leave, and the heart fails toward certainty, the body opens a gate often described in contemporary language as an endogenous DMT-like release: time loses its corridor; memory arrives as weather; the life is seized as one field rather than a polite album of years.

Escalation across episodes:

01 — First spiral (fall opens the seam)

02 — Temple touch (ankles in the tide)

03 — Controlled bloom (meditation invites soft phosphenes + Radha standard)

04 — Full ocean + second wave (water stage; life as one animal; Biji named)

05 — Final crossing (fireworks spent; clear light; rope to the living never cut)

Rules for writing/directing Dissolution:

- Chronology dies; pressure-order lives (soul's filing system, not calendar)
- Implication over gore in 1947
- Faces reuse (Sannah/Radha/Biji) as recognition, not cheap morph
- Namokar fully phonetic on the page for performance
- Return always costs breath; never a free psychedelic vacation
- Esoteric images serve human debt: looking, rope, love, forgiveness

END OF SERIES BIBLE