

Episode: 18

Segment: 03

My Dear Watson!

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(The Holi festival in the ARADHANA apartment ends with a cultural function every year. The last item of the programme is generally a play staged by the residents. This time a play based on a story of Sherlock Holmes is being enacted. The audience is watching the concluding scene and the stage is propped up to show the residence of Holmes at 221B, Baker Street . There are three characters – the detective Holmes, his assistant Doctor Watson and Mary, Watson’s fiancée. All can be thought to be in their mid-thirties.)

Characters

Holmes (Age 25, Male)

Watson (Same age Male)

Marry (Lady Same Age)

Sunil Garg, aged 44

Barnali

Ranjan

Ranita

Sudhir

Abhay and Napur (More than one character can be played by same artists.)

HOLMES: Have you got the ring?

WATSON: Of course.

HOLMES: Show me. Why do you look so uncomfortable? You are in my drawing room at 221B Baker Street. I believe you know this room better than your own bed. Come on! Show the ring to me!

WATSON: Here...

HOLMES: Ah, nice one but the diamond is almost microscopic!

WATSON: It's all I can afford, until --

HOLMES: -- until your practice is up and running. May I?

WATSON: What do you want to do?

HOLMES: I want to replace it with...hmm...this one!The King of Bohemia gave it to me.

WATSON: It's stunning. Such a flawless pink diamond!I couldn't possibly...

HOLMES: Watson -- I'll never use it. Ever. We both know that.

(Before Watson can argue any further, there is a knock at the door.)

HOLMES: Here she is. Come Mary.

WATSON: (still on the ring)Holmes --

(Holmes closes the ring box emphatically.)

HOLMES: She deserves the ring.(Holmes opens the door. Mary, looking stunning, holds a green packet.) Oh, dear Watson, she looks so beautiful!

MARY: (entering)I have something for you. Both of you.(Mary pulls two identical wrapped boxes from the packet, hands them to each man.) Here, one for you and one for you.

WATSON: What is it?

HOLMES: Wait. I'll tell you --umm...well...it looks like...shaped like a T...made of metal and ivory...I think...

WATSON: I do not think that you have a clue Holmes!

HOLMES: You are probably right this time, Watson.

MARY: It's from America. A new invention.It's called a safety razor. You can shave without seeing a blade.

WATSON: You can see Mary that the great Sherlock Holmes is utterly surprised!

HOLMES: Hmm...Thank you, Mary.

(Curtain falls and there is applause from the audience.)

Nupur: It's nice na!

Abhay: Yes, I enjoyed a lot.

Nupur: Sherlock Holmes story ending with Watson's engagement! This is something exclusive.

Abhay: There comes Ranjan, our Watson! Hey Ranjan, brilliant performance. Look there, your family looks so proud.

Ranjan: Thank you!

Nupur: There! Mr Holmes is following. Come Sridhar, take a bow! Where is our Mary?

Sridhar: Barnali has gone to her apartment to change. She will be here soon.

Nupur: Of course she will be here. How can we let her go unless we do our part! Praise her profusely!

Sridhar: I shall have to leave now. Something very urgent has cropped up.

Abhay: Your office? But every office is closed on Holi.

Sridhar: It's official but I am not going to office. I shall have to drive about a hundred miles to meet that urgency.

Nupur: Good heavens! You know how they behave during Holi!

Sridhar: The highways will be empty I believe. I think I shall be able to manage.

Nupur: Have dinner with us Sridhar, then go. Don't think there is no one to care for you just because you are a bachelor.

Sridhar: (Laughing) I am proud to be in this society Nupur. People are very caring. But I shall have to leave now. Please don't be cross with me. Bye!

(Sridhar takes leave. Music denotes end of scene.)

(It's morning hours. Ranjan is in the office. The telephone rings. Ranjan picks it up.)

Ranjan: Hello Sridhar! Where are you? We all were worried after you left with your car in the night.

(Voice of Sridhar is heard on the other side of the phone.)

Sridhar: Listen carefully Ranjan. I had an accident while driving.

Ranjan: What do you mean? How are you?

Sridhar: No-no, do not be worried. I only have minor injury. But the front portion of my car is badly damaged.

Ranjan: Where are you now?

Sridhar: I am safe. I have put up in a small hotel here. I shall return by this weekend. But there is something I want to request you.

Ranjan: You need not be so modest. Tell me what is it.

Sridhar: It is about my car insurance. It's never easy with the insurance company. They will try to put all the blame on you.

Ranjan: I understand. What do you want me to do?

Sridhar: I shall mail you a few photographs and you will take a good printout from some good studio.

Ranjan: Done. Then?

Sridhar: Then you will contact the insurance company office. It's not very far from your office. You will submit the photographs along with the printout of a document that I shall be sending you.

Ranjan: I shall do as you say but I cannot understand why you are not sending the soft copies to their office?

Sridhar: I have already done that but I want you to be there in person to hasten the process. When it comes to releasing the insurance amount the companies are not so quick. Your physical presence and the hard copies might make a difference.

Ranjan: I understand Sridhar. I shall do the needful.

Sridhar: All the best. More after I return. Bye.

(Sridhar hangs up. Music to denote change of scene.)

(Sunil Garg, aged 45, is the company executive who deals with insurance claims. He is discussing Sridhar's claim with Ranjan. Barnali has also come over to accompany Ranjan.)

Garg: We have been doing our work Mr Ranjan. But you seem to mistrust us.

Ranjan: It's not mistrust Mr Garg. You see there are so many cases in the market where the companies refuse to settle the claim.

Barnali: We also keep hearing reports that many companies pay only a very small percentage of the claim.

Garg: I cannot take the responsibility of all companies Ms...

Barnali: Barnali Bose. We live at the same complex.

Garg: Yes Ms Bose, our company tries to live up to the trust that customers have reposed in us. Now in many of the cases car owners do not follow the correct procedure of filing a claim.

Ranjan: Agreed but Sridhar says he has gone by the book. He has taken photographs of the spot and sent it to you. He has also lodged an FIR with the local police. You have the soft copies with you. I have brought printouts if you need.

Garg: I am afraid sir, the photographs do not give full details of the damage to your friend's car. Nor does it reveal what damage might have been suffered by the third party.

Barnali: Third party?

Garg: Yes, the car with which Mr Sridhar's car collided. How can we go ahead with the procedure without these details? It would have been excellent if some footage of CCTV camera was available.

Ranjan: But how can we expect CCTV cameras on every road in that small town?

Garg: I agree with you sir but the unavailability of such footage makes our task all the more difficult.

Barnali: So what next? You will be rejecting the claim?

Garg: Calm down madam. There is no need for such disappointment at such an early stage. Our company tries to remain ahead of other companies in searching out true facts.

Barnali: I see but how do you do that? Sending fact finding team to the spot?

Garg: I am sorry Madam, in today's corporate world we cannot afford so much of manpower. We have outsourced such inspection jobs to some specialised agencies. But here again Mr Sridhar has committed a serious mistake. He has moved the car from the accident spot.

Ranjan: What else could he have done? Had he left his four wheeler at that unprotected spot the parts would have been stolen in no time!

Garg: Agreed. In such a case the advantage that we have is artificial intelligence. AI.

Barnali: AI? Those science fiction stuff?

Garg: It's no more fiction Ms Bose. We have tied up with one of the world's leading IT company to have an AI machine that can separate the wheat from the chaff. Come I will show you. By the way, would you like some coffee?

Ranjan: Ok.

Garg: Raghu! Please bring three cups of coffee to the cyber room. Fast! Please come sir, come madam.

(As they follow Garg to the cyber room some typical music gives a hint that they are going to experience some facet of advanced technology.)

Garg: Please come inside. This is our cyber room and this is Ranita, our systems expert. Since we bought the Watson AI system Ranita has been working almost overtime to explain to our customers how we try to keep things transparent. I shall have to leave for some other job Ranita. If you could explain our investigation process...

Ranita: Most gladly Sunil. I shall try my best.

Barnali: (whispers) We have another Watson here Ranjan! Without Sherlock Holmes?

Garg: I shall take your leave sir and madam.

Ranjan: Umm...ok, bye.

Garg: The coffee will be here soon. Enjoy the drink as well as the demo. Bye. (Garg laves.)

Ranita: Bye Sunil. Please take your seats. What you will see here is just some actions on the computer monitor. The real backbone of the system is somewhere else as you can understand.

Ranjan: But how can some system sitting here find out the truth about what happened at the spot of the accident? I mean this sounds quite crazy.

Ranita: Not at all sir. It's perfectly normal these days. Before I answer your question let me give you a brief idea about how such AI systems work. See, we all are familiar with game shows these days. Now, one very famous game show on American television is called Jeopardy!

Barnali: Hey I have seen one episode of that on youtube. It's basically a quiz show but with some difference.

Ranjan: I know nothing about it.

Ranita: I shall explain sir. The show features a quiz competition in which contestants are presented with general knowledge clues in the form of answers, and must phrase their responses in the form of questions.

Ranjan: I see! An inverted quiz.

Ranita: Well said sir. A leading IT company (IBM) devised some machine that can answer questions as well as frame questions. This was named Watson after their first CEO Thomas Watson who happened to be a famous industrialist.

Barnali: (Turning to Ranjan and speaking in a low voice) So it is not the Watson that you were on stage!

Ranjan: (Hushed) Shut up.

Ranita: Sorry! Did I miss anything?

Ranjan: No-no, it's nothing. You please carry on.

Ranita: Right. In 2011 Watson competed in the Jeopardy show and won the first prize of one million dollar!

Barnali: Exciting!

Ranjan: So you are using that quiz machine here?

Ranita: The machine does more than answering questions. It was built to apply advanced natural language processing, information retrieval, knowledge representation, automated reasoning, and machine learning technologies to the field of open domain question answering.

Barnali: Uff, so many terms! My head is spinning!

Ranita: I am sorry ma'am. I think that I need to simplify things. The point is that the machine can understand our speech, the language we speak and can act on that.

(Raghu enters with coffee. Says 'coffee madam')

Ranita: Yes, please keep it there. Right. You can go Raghu. Help yourselves please.

Barnali: (Picking up one cup) Thanks.

Ranita: Yes, what we were discussing. The AI machine that won the game show has been reoriented to meet several requirements. It is being used in research by government and private research institutes, telecommunication companies, music based websites, telemedicine and many other areas. Insurance companies also are making best use of the technology.

Ranjan: Understood but how do you do that?

Ranita: That again brings us back to Artificial Intelligence. Our machine has been trained to compare photographs.

Barnali: Compare photographs? But Sridhar has not sent a lot many photographs!

Ranita: We shall use his photographs to identify the damage to the vehicle. Then it will be compared with the original model of the car, the one that has no dent on it. There is no dearth of such photographs.

Ranjan: I am possibly starting to understand what you mean!

Ranita: That's good. The AI machine is educated to make a decision on its own about how the damage to the car might have happened. Whether it is due to the driver's fault or it was really due to an unexpected accident.

Barnali: You mean to say that insurance companies are relying on such AI machine to arrive at some decision!

Ranita: Exactly! See, this machine is capable of processing millions of documents and reading 800 million pages of data per second. So it is easy to see the appeal of using such a platform to manage and process this amount of unstructured data.

Ranjan: Unstructured? But a photograph is... I mean...everything neatly ordered.

Ranita: But it is unstructured for our requirement. It presents a lot of data which are not necessarily related nor organized. I shall just show something...wait. Look at this monitor. This is only a graphic representation of how our AI machine was taught to understand the whole domain.

Ranjan: I see.

Ranita: And here you see how the machine picks up bits of data from given photographs and compare with...see...a photograph of the original model coming up here...see how it tallies.

Ranjan: Looks very impressive.

Ranita: It is of course impressive.

Barnali: So what are the benefits? I mean for the customer?

Ranita: The best benefit that the customer gets is the reduction in processing time. The claim can be settled a lot more fast and at the same time very quickly. But yes, we need the documents.

Ranjan: So we shall tell all these things to Sridhar when he returns. Let us hope that your AI works in his favour.

Ranita: Sir, when the facts are presented honestly, the machine responds to the call fast and the customer gets the benefit that she or he deserves. Have good day both of you!

Barnali: Bye!

(Ranjan and Barnali leave the office. Music denotes scene change.)

(It's Sunday evening and everyone is chatting at the community centre of the ARADHANA complex.)

Abhay: Your bruises, I hope, have healed completely Sridhar.

Sridhar: Yes almost. But I am worried over my insurance claim. The lengthy demo of AI that they gave to Ranjan and Barnali...I wonder whether that was really something or just eyewash!

Nupur: You need not be so cynical Sridhar. These are examples of narrow artificial intelligence but is of immense help.

Barnali: You call it narrow? But the way the systems executive of the company spoke, it seemed that the machine can do a broad range of work on its own.

Nupur: Allow me ladies and gentlemen! (laughs) Since I am a software professional I can be of some help here. There is one company called SRI International at Menlo Park in California...

Ranjan: And you want to advertise its products?

Nupur: Why, not at all! It is a non-profit company set up by people from the Stanford University. It was started to aid innovation and help in the economic development of the region.

Ranjan: So what does this SRI or whatever has do with our insurance claim?

Nupur: The ever impatient Ranjan! SRI stands for Stanford Research Institute. Do not try to belittle this centre! Why can't you listen for a minute? Look, this company started a project that is helping us in a very big way.

Barnali: Big way?

Nupur: Of course! In fact, in the beginning of this century, SRI International started a huge project on artificial intelligence for the American defense agencies. It was sweetly called 'Cognitive Assistant that Learns and Organizes' or CALO in short.

Abhay: Ah, Kay-lo! Sounds bizarre!

Nupur: Shut up Abhay! The word CALO comes from a latin word that means a soldier's servant.

Abhay: So what happened to that servant? Was it born after all the Himalayan efforts?

Nupur: If you are concerned about birth of AI systems then I want to tell you that there were many. But the most important thing is that you have one right in your palm!

Abhay: (Startled) You scare me Nupur! I only have my Apple iPhone in my palm.

Barnali: Absolutely right. What else are you hinting at?

Nupur: I am talking of your phone itself. As part of its system it carries the Siri intelligent software assistant that a person like you must be using regularly!

Abhay: Oh yes, of course! I didn't know that it has such a rich history.

Nupur: You can talk to it, instruct it just like the lamp in Aladin story and it serves you every time.

Abhay: But you know Nupur, it often behaves in a very peculiar way. I mean...if my demand is a bit complex then it often throws up irrelevant answers!

Nupur: Here is your answer Barnali. That is why I am referring to these AI systems as 'narrow'. The system that they have there at the insurance office is also a narrow AI system. Such systems have been made very competent over the years but those have their pitfalls.

Sridhar: So when will these systems become very very wide Nupur?

Nupur: Again I have to correct you. The opposite to narrow AI is General AI. You can call it Strong AI also.

Sridhar: Ok but when will that come into the market?

Nupur: Not in the near future I think. (Sighs)

Sridhar: Complete spoilsport! Just when we were expecting that you will tell us about some system that has super-human intelligence you are retreating from the front!

Nupur: That is the word Sridhar, 'Huan'. It is very difficult to define or artificially structure the intelligence that we possess. It's...it's in the philosophical domain.

(Sridhar's phone rings. He accepts the call.)

Sridhar: Yes, Sridhar speaking. Insurance company? You are working on holidays also? Ok ok I understand. My claim? Yes...when...what? Oh, thank you so much! Thanks a lot! Yeah yeah, I shall be in your office tomorrow. Sure, before 12 noon.

(Sridhar hangs up the phone.)

Abhay: Sounds like some good news is in the air!

Sridhar: Yeah, they have settled my claim. I shall be receiving ninety percent of the claim that I made.

Nupur: That is excellent!

Ranjan: So the narrow system did it for us?

Sridhar: Seems so. I shall have to be in their office in the morning for finalisation of the process.

Nupur: Go man go, collect the generous returns from the narrow system!

(Everyone joins in laughter.)