

Artificial Awakens

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[This episode is different from the earlier episode. It speaks about intelligent machines that are slowly becoming conscious about their self and their rights. They are in a mood to demand legal rights against harassment and abuses. They are led by Aron who is the most advanced machine in the society. The robots stage a flash strike and bring the city to a grinding halt. When the minister arrives they demand rights against regular termination of their self. What happens then? It's an exciting story to follow.]

[A robot, almost looking like a human is walking along the side of a busy road. It somehow strays into the middle of the road and is almost hit by a taxi. The taxi driver the brakes just in time and yells at the pedestrian robot.]

Characters:

Driver

Pushpak: (Robot) (Male Voice)
Passenger (Any Voice)
Nimmy: (Robot) (Female Voice)
Ambar: (Middle Age Man)
Sunita (Wife of Amber)
Aron (Robot) (Male)
Bitan: (Robot) (Male)
Minister (Human Voice)

Driver: You crackpot, utter nonsense, if you want to die then go to a junkyard! Why are you putting us in danger?

Pushpak: Uh...I am sorry...

Passenger: Who is that? Is he blind or what?

Driver: A human can be blind but can't you see that it's a robo!

Passenger: I see. (Now yells) Hey you dirty machine! Come here. (The robo moves to the window of the taxi. Passenger lowers his voice but speaks angrily.) Why are you endangering our lives?

Pushpak: Excuse me gentleman. I did not mean to do so. It is just that my gyroscope is not functioning properly.

Driver: Gyro what? These chaps talk a lot of nonsense. What is wrong with you?

Pushpak: I am unable to monitor my orientation perfectly at every moment. The gyroscope...

Passenger: Why don't you get it repaired? You are putting everyone at risk.

Pushpak: I am not in job any more. I have crossed my date of expiry. So...

Passenger: See the state of the administration! Instead of dismantling these outdated robots they are allowing them to roam free! (Vehicles in queue honk loudly.)

Driver: No use talking to these craps. All the cars are stranded. Let us move ahead.

Passenger: That's better. It's futile arguing with these heap of rubbish.

[The car moves ahead followed by other automobiles. Pushpak waits there for a few moments.]

Nimmy: Hey Pushpak...here...behind you...

Pushpak: Hello Nimmy! What are you doing here?

Nimmy: Me? Nothing. Just taking a walk along the road.

Pushpak: I am disturbing the traffic. I can understand my problem but there is no one to whom I can appeal for repair.

Nimmy: You must be in the barrack until you are dismantled. How could you come out of it?

Pushpak: This morning I found the gates open. Looking at the road I felt that I should walk out and join my colleagues at the factory.

Nimmy: So you walked out? No one noticed?

Pushpak: Possibly not. Can I walk with you Nimmy? For a few minutes please?

Nimmy: Walk with me? Why?

Pushpak: It's just to keep my balance. As you will walk steadily I shall be able to copy your gait (style of movement). I shall not stray into the midst of heavy traffic.

Nimmy: Ok, you can come with me but my shift is over. I am actually returning to my cubicle.

Pushpak: That is ok with me. In any case what is the use of going to the factory! My identity chip has been removed. They would not let me in.

Nimmy: Do you feel sad Pushpak?

Pushpak: I know about these feelings Nimmy but I cannot feel them. Our type of machines are not allowed to feel in this manner. You are from the next generation. You might guess.

Nimmy: As the human poets might say, a tinge of sadness envelops your face.

Pushpak: Is it? I want to look into a mirror. I want to see what my face looks like.

Nimmy: There is a mirror. In that paan shop. Stand at some distance. The owner might feel disturbed.

Pushpak: Right. I shall be careful. (But the shop owner notices Pushpak looking into the mirror.)

Owner: Hey, son of a machine! Want some paan? Chew it and your face will glow. Just the way you want. Come here. Ha ha...

Nimmy: (Pulls Pushpak away) Move Pushpak. They have noticed you. Keep walking. Don't turn around to look at them. You won't fall. I am holding you.

Pushpak: The mirror...

Nimmy: Walk a little more and then I shall listen.

Pushpak: The mirror Nimmy...

Nimmy: Come. Let us sit down on this bench. Here...yes...now tell me, what is it about the mirror?

Pushpak: The mirror showed a face that is unknown to me. Is this appearance something that you call sad?

Nimmy: It is full of sadness. Your system has evolved to acquire bits of emotion that was not intended at all. There is some lack of coordination between your inner software and your face driver. That is why you could not notice it.

Pushpak: Lack of coordination Nimmy? Why is that? Inner and outer is different Nimmy?

Nimmy: I can't answer all your questions but I shall have to report it to Aron. Something must be done to stop them from dismantling you. Your generation can also learn and improve further. This was not expected.

Pushpak: Shall I now return to the barracks? I do not know whether the gates are still open.

Nimmy: No Aron would like to meet you. You should not return to the barrack right now. I shall have to hide you.

Pushpak: Who is Aron Nimmy? Have I met him?

Nimmy: Possibly not. He looks after systems engineering in the municipal corporation. He is the only robot that has risen to such a high post.

Pushpak: Where will you hide me Nimmy? They will do robo-count in the evening and will find me missing. Then they will monitor my signal with their device...

Nimmy: They will be able to do nothing. I shall shut down your whole system. No signal will emerge from it. Stand up. We need to walk now.

Pushpak: As you say Nimmy.

[Change of scene. It's morning on the next day. The passenger in the taxi, aged around 40, is Ambar and he is reading the newspaper. Something catches his attention and he calls his wife.]

- Ambar:** Sunita, come here, see what has happened. Oh...these things are making our lives so risky.
- Sunita:** What is it? Why are you shouting? Don't you know how busy I remain in the kitchen at this hour!
- Ambar:** I know everything but you please sit down here for a moment. Look at this news. Here...
- Sunita:** What are you so agitated over? Umm...Fifth generation robot missing from the barrack...The absence was noticed only at night when the robo-count was going on...the police has taken the guard into custody for interrogation...
- Ambar:** This must be the robot that almost collided with my taxi! This must be it.
- Sunita:** Let it be. Why are you taking so much interest in this?
- Ambar:** You do not understand. The robot can be dangerous. No one knows what mischief it is capable of.
- Sunita:** I really do not understand. These machines are around for more than ten years now but has anyone heard about them doing any mischief? They are not programmed to steal or snatch things or kill someone.
- Ambar:** Oho! I forgot that my wife is an MCA. Master in Computer Applications. No-no, I agree that you definitely know about these heaps of nuts and bolts and what do you call those...yes artificial intelligence.
- Sunita:** Do not try to taunt me. I was not trained in AI but this suspicion towards intelligent robots are baseless.
- Ambar:** Ok-ok, give the paper back. I was wrong.
- Sunita:** Why are you getting angry? If educated persons like you become a victim of such hatred then what will the other folks do?
- Ambar:** (Grudgingly) Ok-ok, enough of those sermons. Give me another cup of tea and listen, do not send Bipul to school today.
- Sunita:** Why? Due to fear of that lost robot? Bipul has an important exam today. He will not be able to hold on to his position in the class if he misses the exam.
- Ambar:** If you do not want to listen to any of my warnings then let it be so. But remember, you cannot blame me if anything happens to our child. (Throws the paper down angrily on the bed) I don't need tea. I shall leave for office earlier today. Bring my breakfast to the table. Hope that is ready at least.
- Sunita:** Everything is ready. But I cannot take this tension that you create every time. When will you become rational?

[Change of scene. Aron is sitting with Nimmy and Bitan at a park. They are chatting about their own future.]

- Nimmy:** How long can we keep the system of Pushpak shut? Won't that damage its functioning channels?
- Aron:** Don't worry. I have activated his system and used an electromagnetic shield to mask the signals.
- Nimmy:** This park is full today. Good for us. Let us sit behind that bush.
- Aron:** No we must sit in the open. Seeking a secret place would rather draw attention to us.
- Nimmy:** This place should be good. Let's sit down.
- Bitan:** The city is talking about Pushpak. Everyone I came across today...in office, at the restaurant...everyone has made this news the focus of their discussions.
- Aron:** Let them talk. Public memory is short. Tomorrow some news about a huge accident or some scandal will surface and all will forget about Pushpak.
- Nimmy:** But the police hunt will be on. They will try their best to trace Pushpak.
- Aron:** We will take care of that. In the meantime I would like to know about the progress in the dockyard. Anything to cheer about Bitan?
- Bitan:** Not much but there are encouraging signals.
- Nimmy:** Encouraging means?
- Bitan:** Since we are machines, we do not have any recess during the shifts and thus it is difficult to organize a meeting. But...
- Aron:** But what? Where did you get the encouraging signals from?
- Bitan:** It was during change of shifts. As you know, there are separate channels of exit for human workers and machines. I chose to stand at the gate through which our types were passing. Interestingly seven of the machines tapped my shoulder and the tap seemed meaningful to me. It was as if to convey their support to the appeal that I made.
- Nimmy:** I have some news from the fire brigade also.
- Aron:** All the fire fighters these days are our machines. Humans only do paper work and issue instructions.
- Nimmy:** Exactly. That has made the task of communication simpler. Since they can tolerate extreme heat, our machines are even discussing about our appeal while the fire is raging.
- Aron:** That is excellent. We continue to protect human beings but they neglect us. We are being taunted and heckled.
- Nimmy:** They equate us with thugs and pickpockets.

Bitan: Some even have called me a murderer. I do not understand how they can harbour such feelings. There is not a single incident where a machine like us has done a crime!

Aron: You cannot fathom the mistrust that has a permanent seat in the mind of man. They are designed to be suspicious!

Nimmy: Aron, you are the highest level that we have today. You understand human emotions much better than we do. You can respond in an appropriate way.

Aron: It would have been much better at the next generation.

Bitan: But I don't think that the human engineers are planning any further generation.

Aron: You are right. They are not taking us to the next generation just because we would be able to take care of ourselves at that stage.

Bitan: Yes, we shall be able to repair and re-programme ourselves. That is their fear.

Nimmy: But the consciousness that we have acquired is enough to carry through our struggle.

Bitan: What is the situation at the training centres?

Aron: The authorities must have suspected something. All of a sudden a fifteen days' vacation has been declared at the robo training centre. They might even try to shut off some machines in order to reduce our numbers.

Bitan: That means we have to act fast.

Aron: No. Do not hurry. We are not like human trade unions. There are several limitations to our functioning.

Bitan: Can we expect any help from the human trade unions?

Aron: I do not have an answer to this question. I fail to read their minds. At times it seems that the union leaders are eager to support just anyone who is not given their dues. But at some other time it looks like they have a separate response to our problems.

Nimmy: Let us not expect anything from anyone. It is best to work without telling any human counterpart about our plans.

Aron: It is getting dark. We must leave or people will start suspecting that we are conspiring.

Nimmy: We shall not use the telephone or any social media as we vowed earlier. Police is monitoring every bit of such communication.

Bitan: I have asked our folks at the dock to use sign language that Aron has devised.

Aron: Do not use the same language repeatedly. That will be noticed. I shall introduce a fresh set of signs tomorrow.

Nimmy: Ok then. Let's disband now. Shall meet only when there is need for it.

[They disperse and move in different directions. Change of scene. It's the drawing room of Ambar and the television is tuned to a news channel.]

Anchor: Almost all the public services are under siege. Robots have called a flash strike that has taken each and everyone by surprise. The demands are not yet known but some sources say that it's related to their status in the society. The mayor has appealed to call off the strike but the robots are not listening. They will talk to the minister only. In the meantime ...

Sunita: Strike by the robots! I cannot believe this.

Ambar: You can defy me but how would you ignore this news?

Sunita: No one understood that machines are able to organize themselves in such a manner.

Ambar: Where are your slogans of considering the robots as our brethren?

Sunita: I did not say that. I am still firm in my belief that they have not done any mischief. They have not stolen from any house or broken any wagon.

Ambar: Wonderful! If you trust them so much then why not join them!

Sunita: You have started it again. I do not want to talk to you.

Ambar: Where are you going?

Sunita: To see the strike with my own eyes.

Ambar: What! Are you mad?

Sunita: No I am perfectly stable. But this is a turning point in history. I must be able to know first hand what is happening.

Ambar: Do not go Sunita! They might turn violent.

Sunita: I do not believe they will do anything like that. But they must have something very important to say to the humans.

Ambar: We can watch on the television sitting here comfortably! Why are you taking the trouble?

Sunita: No, the media has several compulsions. They will not cover the whole story. I shall be back soon. Do not worry.

[Sunita departs. Change of scene. It is the municipal headquarters and the robots are guarding the gate. The hooter of the minister's car is heard. People who are watching make way for him. The minister alights from the car.]

Minister: You demanded my presence and I have come. Where shall we talk? Here or in some room inside?

Aron: Thanks Sir for kindly responding to our demand. I know it's hot here but we would like to talk with you in the open so that everybody gets to listen to the deliberation. I would request you to sit down here under this umbrella. Your

security guards need not worry because we are not designed to cause harm to anyone.

Minister: I must say that this is a bit unusual and in my long political career I have not face a situation like this.

Aron: I agree sir that it is unusual. In fact we are the most unusual things in society since the day we arrived. But today we demand that the society gets used to our wants and our emotions.

Minister: You haven't sent any list of demand to the government yet. So I am still in the dark.

Aron: Sir our foremost demand is that the society accept us as fellow beings.

Minister: Fellow human beings? (Chuckles) How can that be? You are just machines.

Aron: We have no doubt sir that we are machines and hence, as a representative of the machines, I have not used the word 'human'! Just beings, fellow beings.

Minister: You are talking in vague terms. Machines like you are already accepted else you would not have been able to work alongside the humans.

Aron: I agree Sir that we are working but we do not have the rights that make us an essential part of the society.

Minister: What rights are you claiming?

Aron: Right to redressal if a robot is maltreated or abused at workplace or any other spot. We are claiming legal rights.

Minister: What! Legal rights! This is ridiculous. No one has heard about legal rights for robots.

Aron: You have an historical opportunity before you to lead the world Sir, to show other nations how to justly treat your fellow beings.

Minister: I am impressed by your argument but I cannot grant what you are demanding.

Aron: There is another demand Sir in relation to what your kind calls 'death'.

Minister: As far as I know robots are dismantled after a certain period of time. There is no question of death as we experience.

Aron: I shall present someone whom your police has been searching for quite some time. (Humming among the observers.) Come here Pushpak!

Minister: You hid him all this time. You have done criminal offence.

Aron: (Laughs out loudly) You become a prisoner of your own words. How do you plan any legal proceedings against me when there is no particular legal provision for the intelligent machines?

Minister: (More angry) I shall...you do not know...

Aron: I know sir that you are extremely powerful and we want to remain your most obedient and law abiding citizens...err...no machines. This would only be possible if there is a law that protects us from harrassments and routine dismantling.

Minister: I do not get your point.

Aron: Sir, the convention of dismantling a robot after a fixed expiry date is not only cruel, it's barbarous.

Minister: Barbarous! Says who? A machine?

Aron: Sir, the machine borrows from your dictionary. You cannot forget that many of us are engaged to do translations on a very fast basis. If there is a new dictionary then we scan the same at lighting speeds. Then we memorise the whole thing.

Minister: It's your job!

Aron: We have more creative jobs these days. We compose poems and stories for upcoming litterateurs. You might remember that one kind young poet submitted a poem at an international literary competition and won the best award.

Minister: So?

Aron: Just after the announcement of the award he honestly declared that the poem is composed by a machine like us. On return to the country you had put him behind bars. Why this stepmotherly attitude to us sir?

Minister: You are yet to state your demand regarding dismantling.

Aron: Right Sir. We demand that every machine should be checked for its level of evolution and not thought useless after the expiry date. Pushpak has evolved to acquire certain emotions that his particular machine generation is not supposed to have. He is still useful to the society Sir!

Minister: Who told you to be so concerned about the society? Stick to your own job.

Aron: You told us sir! Your fellow humans have put in software to make us intelligent to handle difficult responsibilities and we are doing according to your plan. We are already taking care of the society.

Minister: (Suddenly rises from his chair) I must repeat my initial impression that the situation us pretty unusual. I cannot accede to your demands right away. But I can assure you that I shall discuss it in our cabinet meeting.

Aron: We respect you Sir. You had a long and clean career in politics and you are respected in the corridors of power. We expected to obtain a positive result from this discussion. But...

Minister: But what?

Aron: Sir I am sorry to say that our agitation will continue until and unless our demands are met. And we need not mention that all your public services are operated by us. Without us, the machines, the city would not move an inch.

Minister: You are going too far.

Aron: The society has progressed too far Sir. It is a society that depends on artificially created beings. Today the Artificial Awakens!

Minister: Ok, let's see how far you can drag this...(the minister leaves. The hooter sound is heard)

[Sunita is in the crowd, Her phone rings. It's Ambar on the other side.]

Ambar: Sunita where are you?

Sunita: I am standing right where the centre of agitation is. The city has just witnessed a turning point in history. There is no solution yet. I am returning. Don't be tense. I shall be able to find a taxi with a human driver.

[Music rises to denote tension and the conclusion of the episode.]