

Episode 38

Lest Someone Eavesdrops

Research and Script: Srinivas Oli
Concept and coordination: Dr. B.K. Tyagi

Anchor: Welcome to today's episode of the radio serial based on Artificial Intelligence. There is no question that AI has eased many issues of our daily existence but it has also compromised our privacy to a large extent. Of course there are legal provisions that safeguard our right to privacy but the law has been outpaced by the swift developments in technology. Many companies have taken advantage of this and used the personal data of their customers for their own profit but kept the people in the dark. This episode will explore if Artificial Intelligence is a magical eye that places our private lives under surveillance. If this is so, the price to pay will be great.

Characters

Vijay: (Police Inspector. 55 years)
Suhani: (His wife. 50 years)
Komal: (Daughter. Engineering student. 22 years)
Pankaj: (Employee at AI firm. 35 years)
Arzu: (Vijay's lawyer. 35 years)
Mohit: (Lawyer for AI company. 40 years)
Justice Nikhil: (Judge 55 years)
D.I.G. (not mentioned in script but has a speaking voice)

Scene 1

Opening Music

**Sunday Morning. Vijay and his family members are sitting in the balcony having tea.
Old movie song is playing on the radio in the background.**

Komal: Papaji! The song is playing so loudly...why don't you turn down the volume a little? I think there is nothing better than the chirping of birds in the morning.

Radio sound fades. Sounds of birds chirping.

Vijay: Komal, a policeman on duty hardly finds free time to relax...but to tell you the truth, I like to hear birds chirp too. The fresh breeze and early mornings remind me of my childhood days in the village.

Sounds of cutlery and crockery in the background.

Suhani: It has been over three decades that you moved from the village to the city and yet you keep talking about the village. (**Laughs lightly and speaks in an amused tone**) Well, here is a cup of tea made with milk from the village.

Komal: Rightly said, Mummy. **(Phone rings)** It is Pankaj calling. **(Answers the phone)**. Namaste Pankaj ji...Yes, yes we are at home. Oh! You are on your way ...sure...sure...welcome...please come.

Suhani: Who is Pankaj?

Komal: I told you about him yesterday, remember! He works for the company that is our Internet service provider. It seems the company is giving us some gifts...he is coming to deliver those.

Suhani: Gifts? To us? Why? Did you buy a new machine or something?

Komal: No Mummy, we did not buy anything new. We have been subscribers for a long time. The company is rewarding us for our loyalty.

Vijay: Why look a gift horse in the mouth....so, what are they gifting us? Any idea?

Komal: Papaji, The Internet service provider is diversifying into other businesses including the manufacture of AI-based digital assistance devices. Pankaj ji told me over the phone that we will be gifted one such device.

Suhani: Digital assistance device! Never heard of such a thing. Whatever is that?

Komal: Don't worry Mummy **(Slight laughter)** Just think that our family has acquired a new member. I had instructed Pankaj ji to arrive as early as possible this morning. He is on his way.

Vijay: I think all these things are superfluous...unnecessary. The companies manufacture them and of course peddle these for their profit.

Suhani: **(somewhat annoyed tone):** You are so lenient with our daughter that she has transformed her room into a lab. Look...there is a smart TV on the wall...a fridge that can follow commands...lights that have auto switch on/off functions...I am fed up with all these strange gadgets...I mean why depend on automation to do everything when you have fully functional limbs!

Komal: Aww....come on Mummy. Who knows but you may absolutely love the gift we are about to receive. **(Doorbell)** I'll answer the door...I think Pankaj ji is here. **(Footsteps)**.

(Sound of door opening) Come in, Come in Pamkaj ji...we have been waiting for you.

Pankaj: Namaste Komal ji. I hope I am on time...not too late.

Komal: No, no ...not late at all. You are right on time. Please sit.

Pankaj: Thank you. **(Sound of a packet being opened)** Here is your gift.

Komal: Oh! It is so cute...just like a small ball. I love its colour. Pink is my favourite colour.

Suhani: Komal, you raised such a hue and cry about the gift, but this looks like a toy of some kind. You made a mountain out of a mole-hill.

Pankaj: Auntji. It is not an insignificant mole of the mole-hill but the King of the forest. You will be amazed if I told you about all that it can do.

Vijay: What does the mole of the mole-hillI mean the Lion do?

All laugh

Pankaj: I'll tell you...look at it...can you see the 'eye' on the top? It has an LED which lights up when the device is switched on. It is powered by a battery. Let me switch it on. **(Long beep)**. Ah! It is now ready to assist you. But first you have to give it a name...a name so that it can respond to your commands. I will switch on its microphone. Please give it a name.

Suhani: Since we got it as a gift and did not pay anything for it...let's name it Phoket.

Vijay and Komal: Yes, that's a nice name. **(They repeat it a few times, more loudly)** Phoket. Phoket.

(A few beeping sounds as Pankaj activates switches)

Pankaj: Yeah OK. Now the name has been fed into the device. Thanks to AI it will be able to recognize your voices and assist you.

Vijay's phone rings

Vijay: Good morning Sir. Yes Sir. Sure Sir. I will reach immediately Sir. **(Disconnects)**. Komal, I have to leave for the Police station immediately. There is an urgent meeting. I am going to get dressed...you two get familiarized with how Phoket works, OK?

Suhani: **(Raised voice)** Will you be back by lunch?

Vijay: **(Voice fading into the distance):** I will try to be back by lunch. Bye.

Footsteps

Door opening and closing

Suhani: Pankaj ji, you said this device would assist us. How can it do so?

Pankaj: It can change the channels on the TV for you. It can call someone on the phone if you need it to. At your command it will play your favourite songs.

Suhani: OK.

Pankaj: You can ask it any question you like. It will access the information using your internet connection and tell you the answers. You may think of it as your virtual friend. Not only will it understand all you say but if the need arises it can counsel you too.

Komal: Mummy I will give you a demonstration on how to operate it.

Pankaj: **(Paper rustling as he removes something from a packet):** Komal ji, this is the User manual. You will get all the information in this. If you face a problem, please feel free to call me....I must leave now. Namaste.

Komal: Thank you, Pankaj ji.

Footsteps

Door opening and closing

Suhani: **(Enthusiastically):** This is great. If I get bored during the day, I can always chat with Phoket.

Komal: That's fine Mummy but do bear in mind that these devices...I mean Phoket also record the conversation. The device that is exposed to the most conversations and data also respond the best.

Suhani: **(somewhat perplexed)** Oh! OK.

Komal: Yes Mummy. This device has a memory that captures everything...the way we speak, our likes and dislikes...everything is registered. It uses artificial intelligence to process the data to successfully complete the tasks we set it. Just bear in mind that if Phoket is switched on, it is hearing everything and seeing everything.

Suhani: **(amused tone):** Ah...so it is like a private eye keeping us under surveillance. Better to switch it off now, I think.

Komal: Ok Mummy. **(In slightly worried tones)** I wonder what urgent business came up. Poor Papa cannot relax even on a Sunday!

Scene 2

Scene transition music. Police Headquarters. Meeting. Vijay is in attendance

DIG: Look, we have to remain vigilant about the law and order situation...we cannot relax our grip on the situation but remain committed to muzzling criminals. All officers will share the main issues of today's discussion with their subordinates so that everyone can work together as a team. Any questions?

Chorus: No Sir.

DIG: OK then, the meeting is over for today. Oh, Inspector Vijay, just stay back for a bit...the others can leave.

Chorus: Thank you Sir.

Sounds of people filing out. Conversations fade

DIG: **(In low but serious tone):** Inspector Vijay, We have entrusted you with a lot of responsibilities under Operation Leopard. We have to nab this mafia leader red-handed. You have to make sure that details of the operation remain confidential. The information must remain restricted to you, me and the three other members of the team. Till we achieve success do not even mention this to anyone; not even your family members.

Vijay: Sir, I assure you the culprit will not escape us this time. We are ready.

DIG: Ok just remember the success or failure of this operation is a reflection of our abilities; it is a test of our capability. Go, prepare for it. Best of luck.

Vijay: Thank you, Sir.

Scene 3

Scene transition music

Courtroom. Inspector Vijay has been charged with aiding and abetting the criminal. The Defence and Prosecution lawyers are present. Komal is present. Sounds of muted conversations.

Justice Nikhil: Order. Order.

Sounds of hammer. Sounds in the courtroom cease. Silence descends.

Arzu: Inspector Vijay, you claim that you did not divulge any detail about Operation Leopard to anyone. And that you have been wrongfully suspended. You further claim that you had no role to play in the escape of the criminal.

Vijay: Absolutely. I have never mentioned anything to anyone about the operation apart from my Team members that is.

Arzu: In order to substantiate the claims of Inspector Vijay, I seek permission to introduce Miss Komal as a witness.

Justice Nikhil: Permission granted.

Sounds of steps as Komal enters the witness box

Arzu: What do you say in response to the allegations against your father?

Komal: The allegations against my father Inspector Vijay are baseless and false. Actually on the day that the responsibility of nabbing the criminal, that is Operation Leopard, was launched we had received a digital assistance device at home.

Mohit: Objection, my Lord. The witness is intentionally trying to mislead the court.

Justice Nikhil: Allow the witness to complete her statement, Advocate Mohit. You will be allowed ample opportunity to represent the AI company.

Komal: We have learnt from the data collected by the digital assistance device that it was recording every conversation in the room even when no specific command to do so had been issued. That day when my father returned after the meeting at the Police Headquarters there was no one else present in his room. Except the digital assistance device that is!

Mohit: Objection your honour. The witness is holding the device made by my company responsible. **(Taunting tone)** Komal ji are you insinuating that our company spies on people?

Laughter in the courtroom

Justice Nikhil: Order. Order. Advocate Mohit. Please allow the witness to complete her statement. Go on, Komal ji.

Komal: When my father was speaking on the phone with his Team members about the Operation to nab the criminal, it was recorded by the device. This was leaked from the company's server and the information reached the mafia mastermind. He caught a whiff of the police's plans to catch him. This was enough for the criminal to go underground. It was not my father's fault. He is innocent although the blame is being laid at his door.

Arzu: I would like to question the lawyer representing the A.I company. Does the company record its customer's conversations or not? Enlighten us Advocate Mohit.

Mohit: **(Somewhat uncomfortable):** Hmm...actually...we ...do ...not ...make any such recordings that...

Arzu: I seek the Court's permission to present some papers..**(Sounds of papers)**. Your honour, the company has admitted that its Research Team listens to recordings of people's conversations...all under the guise of providing better service.

Mohit: That is only done so that we can understand how the device reacted to specific commands. And anyway when customers start using our device, they do so after accepting our Privacy Policy. In the Privacy Policy it is clearly written that the company may use its audio, video, phone-call data, photo, data storage etc. I am sure your client is aware about this.

Arzu: Absolutely! However, availing your services does not mean that you can use customer data whichever way you wish. (**Aggressively**). In this particular case, the phonecall data of Inspector Vijay has been leaked from your servers. That is why it follows that the case should be filed against you, not Inspector Vijay. The failure of Operation Leopard is a direct consequence of this and the blame lies squarely at your company's door.

Mohit: It is true that we do record client's data...but only to provide better service. However, it is also true that on the day that the police launched their operation, there was a massive attack by hackers on our servers. The information must have been leaked during the attack.

Arzu: If that is so, how is it that Inspector Vijay is being held responsible for the failure of the operation? Why has he been suspended? And to refer to the Privacy Policy that you are talking about----- these policies are drafted in such complex language that the common citizen finds it difficult to understand it. Even if a client understands the policy, there is no option to disagree...the only option that a customer has is to Agree.

Komal: I appeal to the Court to restrict the use of personal data by any company.

Murmurs in courtroom become louder

Justice Nikhil: Order. Order.

Silence in the courtroom

Justice Nikhil: Advocate Arzu, kindly clarify what is meant by the word DATA that is being used so often.

Arzu: Let me explain it in a simple manner. Generally speaking the term covers social media posts, messages, online shopping or online payment, search history etc, done over phone or internet. It means that the term data covers all the information related to a person's online activities. This collection of facts can be read and processed by a computer. It can be documents or pictures, or even audio-video clips. Software programs are also data.

Justice Nikhil: All right. Advocate Arzu, Do you have anything more to say?

Arzu: Your honour, as the lawyer representing Inspector Vijay, I would like to state that all the information accessed about a person can be used to create a virtual identity of that person. This may not be an authentic representation but definitely appears real enough in the virtual world. This virtual identity can be manipulated to harm the real person. (**Aggressively**) And in any case data is a big weapon in a land as large as India. However, who has the right to use this data? Can we be sure that no one is using this data unnecessarily or unethically?

Mohit: However, Advocate Arzu must not forget that in artificial intelligence has facilitated the better functioning of machines. The more data a machine has access to, the more will be the learning steps and the better will be the performance of the machine.

Arzu: Your honour, when surfing the net we often see advertisements popping up on our screens...these are usually about items we have been thinking about buying or perhaps stuff that our friends and family are using. These companies are using the power of AI to sniff out information about our likes and dislikes and our wishlists. This huge store of personal information is a way to maximize the company's profits.

Justice Nikhil: So what is wrong? If a company provides better service based on records collected about the choices of its clientbase with prior approval of the clients? We will get the items of our choice more easily.

Arzu: Rightly observed, your honour. If the matter remains limited to purchase of items, then YES...the matter does not seem to be so grave. (Aggressively) However, the companies are able to unduly exercise this knowledge to manipulate your taste and thinking...so much so that they can even cause the government to be overthrown. If for example a situation arises where public opinion is being built up either for or against a government decision ...the situation does not remain simple any more. The customers Must Have the liberty to decide what personal information they wish to share with their service providers and what information they seek to with hold. However, this becomes irrelevant when faced with a company commanding a monopolistic position.

Justice Nikhil: Your words are correct, Advocate Arzu.

Arzu: Your honour we can include the cases involving some highly-used social websites and Chatting apps. If you do not agree to their terms and conditions then you are unable to enjoy a very important amenity. If you wish to use their services you have to mandatorily grant them access to your contact list, chats, memory card, photos-videos and internet-usage-data....so that they can keep it under surveillance.

Justice Nikhil: This is indeed a cause to worry. However, it is that nothing has been done about such cases?

Arzu: Some steps have been taken, Your honour. According to the provisions of the Information Technology Act, 2000 unethical disclosure of information is punishable by both fine and prison sentence.

Komal: I would like permission to say something.

Justice Nikhil: Permission granted.

Komal: In July 2017 a 10-member committee was constituted under the Chairmanship of Justice B. N. Shrikrishna to scrutinize the safety of personal information in a digital-business environment. Currently, the central governance recognizes the 2019 Personal Data Protection Bill. So we can now hope that in India personal data will be handled with greater security.....In my opinion, the system must be created holistically keeping in view ethical and technical parameters.

Arzu: Your honour, I seek to draw the attention of the court to an important point.

Mohit: But what connection do these arguments have with Inspector Vijay?

Arzu: There is a connection, your honour...a very deep connection indeed. Globally, or let us confine ourselves to India...well, the legal system has not kept pace with the rapid changes in technology. The rules and laws become outdated and fall out of use. The AI companies take advantage of this lacuna and thus escape liabilities. The need to ascribe responsibility is a necessity and a huge challenge.

Justice Nikhil: Advocate Mohit, would you like to make a statement on behalf of the company you represent?

Mohit: Your honour, the primary concern of my Company is to protect the security of our client's personal data. We are doing our best to guarantee this.

Conversation breaks out in Court

Sounds of the Judge's hammer on the table

Justice Nikhil: Order. Order.

Silence in the courtroom

Justice Nikhil: Based on the evidence presented and statement of the witness the Court pronounces that Inspector Vijay is Not Guilty he is innocent and discharged as such. He did not leak any information pertaining to policework.

Sounds of clapping/Loud whisperings

Justice Nikhil: Order. Order.

Silence in the courtroom

Justice Nikhil: The Court advises the company making the digital assistance device that it should be programmed in such a manner that before recording any data it should inform the customer about how the data will be used and where! Additionally, if the data is being collected for a specific purpose, it cannot be used for a different purpose. Finally and most importantly, once the data has been used for the reason it was collected it must be deleted permanently.

Sounds of clapping/Loud whisperings

Justice Nikhil: Order. Order.

Silence in the courtroom

Justice Nikhil: In this case, the company deceitfully sent the collected information about Inspector Vijay to its server and that is the place from where the information was leaked. The mafia criminal took advantage of the leaked information and escaped the police-net. Thus, the court finds Inspector Vijay to be innocent and dismisses all charges against him. The AI company is ordered to pay Rs 10 lakhs as compensation to Inspector Vijay. The Court orders that Inspector Vijay be reinstated in service without prejudice. Case dismissed.

Sounds of clapping/Loud whisperings/Sounds of chairs and tables being moved as people file out of the room.

Komal: Congratulations Papa. Justice has been delivered. An honest officer has been recognized.

Vijay: Thank you Komal. All this happened because of the hard work that you and Arzu put in. Of course, Truth always wins.

Arzu, Komal and Vijay walk ...sounds of footsteps. They reach the road. Traffic sounds.

Arzu: Sir, this case will be milestone for the future. Hopefully the Internet and AI companies will think twice about misusing personal data so casually.

Sound of a car door opening.

Komal: Come on Papa, get into the car. Mummy must be waiting for us. Arzu didi, hope you have not forgotten that you are invited to lunch today.

Car door shuts. Car honks. Engine starts.

Arzu: Of course, I remember.

Komal: Papa, please tune on to some music on the radio ...after the win in court I feel like listening to some music.

Vijay: Sure. Why not?

FM radio tune

The song is Dhirey dhirey bol koi sun na le

Arzu: **(light heartedly):** Sir...the song iss ending you a message. Take care in the future.

All laugh

Song fades

Traffic sounds fade