Engine Trouble by R.K. Narayan

5 OCT 2017 DERMOT [R.K. NARAYAN](http://sittingbee.com/short-stories-r-k-narayan/) [CITE POST](http://sittingbee.com/engine-trouble-r-k-narayan/)

In Engine Trouble by R.K Narayan we have the theme of practicality, hope, luck, responsibility and authority. Taken from his Malgudi Days collection the story is narrated in the first person by an unnamed narrator and after reading the story the reader realises that Narayan may be exploring the theme of practicality. The narrator has no use for a road engine and all the narrator can do is hope that somebody will either buy the road engine off him or that he might be able to give it away to somebody. It serves no practical purpose and is costing the narrator money in rent. Similarly the narrator’s marriage is beginning to suffer because of the problems that the road engine is bringing the narrator. To make matters worse those in authority (Municipal Chief) want the road engine moved which causes further headaches for the narrator. He has to hire an elephant and fifty men but while attempting to move the road engine, the road engine hits a wall. If anything there are traces of irony in the story. At first the narrator felt lucky to have won the road engine and in many ways personalised the engine. However as mentioned the road engine has caused the narrator nothing but problems. Which may be the point that Narayan is attempting to make. He may be suggesting that luck can be a double edged sword and the reality may be that rather than being lucky an individual like the narrator may experience nothing but bad luck.

The fact that the narrator personalises the road engine may also be important as by doing so he may be filling a void in his own life. It may be a case that the road engine represents a shift (upwards) in class for the narrator or at least he hopes it might. He has an object that is unique however nobody is interested in owning it. The road engine is simply not practical. So problematic is ownership of the road engine that the narrator advises his wife to contact her father to take her back to her village. While the narrator himself hopes to run away from his troubles. Which is not necessarily the most responsible of actions. Where once the narrator had huge admiration for the road engine. This is no longer the case. It is also ironic that the road engine, which is meant to move, does very little moving in the story. This may be because nobody knows how to drive the road engine.

The narrator’s second piece of luck comes through the Swami. However due to the restrictions imposed on the Swami by the magistrate things do not work out as planned for the narrator. For the second time the narrator has been frustrated by those in authority. Which may be Narayan’s way of highlighting to the reader that those in authority may have too much power or influence over people. There’s no disputing that the narrator’s life would be a lot easier if those in authority did not interfere with his plans. It is those in authority who are dictating the law though they may not necessarily have valid reasons for their directives. Which again may be the point that Narayan is attempting to make. Rather than blind adherence to authority it is possible that Narayan is suggesting that at times those in authority need to be questioned. As the Swami attempts to do to the police inspector. Though he doesn’t actually get anywhere with the police inspector.

The end of the story is also interesting as Narayan continues to explore the theme of luck and it is as though the phrase ‘third time lucky’ rings true for the narrator. Due to the earthquake the narrator’s problems with the road engine have been resolved. To help matters the narrator has also been paid for any losses he may have incurred while trying to move or get rid of the road engine. Through good fortune (earthquake) the narrator has found someone that actually wants the road engine. It is stuck at the bottom of a well which suits the man who owns the well. Though the road engine never served the purpose it was meant to serve it is still serving some purpose to somebody. Which may be important as Narayan could be suggesting that everything has its purpose for somebody. It may not necessarily be the purpose something was built for but nonetheless it has a purpose. It is also noticeable that the worry that the narrator showed throughout the story while he was trying to get rid of the road engine is gone. At the end of the story the narrator is a happy man who is able to ‘heave a sigh of great relief.’ It may also be a case that what man cannot fix. The narrator and the road engine. Nature will remedy. On this occasion in the form of an earthquake. The narrator can live his life again without the concerns that were brought upon him by his winning of the road engine. Life can return to normal for the narrator.

***M****algudi Days* fits neatly into [R.K Narayan](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2011/11/r-k-narayan-s-essay-writers-nightmare.html)'s literary evolution. According to the author himself, each of his stories displays a greater simplicity of plot and language, even as they develop a greater complexity of meaning to exhibit the domain of India. By the time [Narayan](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2013/02/life-and-contribution-of-rk-narayan-of.html) wrote *Malgudi Days* the crowded action of his early fantasies was replaced by introspections of [Indianness](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2012/10/redefining-goals-of-general-indian.html)   stripped to its essence and resonant with meaning.

*Engine Trouble* by [R.K Narayan](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2011/11/r-k-narayan-s-essay-writers-nightmare.html) is truly an Indian story of unlucky draw. The meaning is developed through the characters, especially the narrator, who may be Narayan's own unflattering self-portrait. Like [Narayan](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2013/02/life-and-contribution-of-rk-narayan-of.html), the narrator is a middle class man struggling to rise above his origins. Although the narrator wants to adapt to the dominant middle class culture, he remains profoundly attached to his own family sentiment.

[Narayan](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2011/11/r-k-narayan-s-essay-writers-nightmare.html) has a love for describing carnivals, fairs, and the expo. Story after story we find in his [Malgudi Days](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2011/09/indianness-in-man-eater-of-malgudi-1961.html) being set in such an environment if not then we at least has a market scene. *Engine Trouble* starts at a fair with the protagonist winning an engine;*Emden* goes through the hustle and bustle of a market place for his evening walk. *An*Astrologer’s Day is set in a bazaar and so is the *Trail of the Green Blazer* which is set in a bazaar. It seems [Narayan](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2011/11/r-k-narayan-s-essay-writers-nightmare.html) situated most of the *Malgudi stories* on Malgudi’s public landmarks.

*Engine Trouble* is beautifully written, but in a way that rarely calls attention to itself.*Engine Trouble* starts with a line of breezy description of past Malgudi which continues to carry the story forward. Narayan never dresses up the narrative of his characters. While perfectly natural, the narrative manages to convey the character's attitudes with remarkable authenticity, such as the narrator's cheeky insecurity or   pettiness.

This subtle precision is a major concern of [Narayan](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2011/11/r-k-narayan-s-essay-writers-nightmare.html), who likens it to the craftsmanship valued by his workingman ancestors. Just as the carpenter notices a wall that is a fraction of an inch out of plumb, the literary craftsman is sensitive to the slightest misuse of language, although in either case no one else might realize there is anything wrong.

[](https://2.bp.blogspot.com/-6g_Eb8DESZo/VjuGeedpt3I/AAAAAAAAHUs/j6JS6ZoCoMk/s1600/road_engine.jpg)

This is a story by [Narayan](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2011/11/r-k-narayan-s-essay-writers-nightmare.html) which begins on an ironic note of how a prize won by a man proves to be an expensive headache. A showman comes to Malgudi and brings with him his Gaiety land. The Gymkhana grounds are used for the festivities and the whole town pours in to see the show. Our protagonist wins a road engine at a show, people gather around him looking at him as if he is some curious animal. Now the problem that rises is how to take the prize back home. The driver of the engine is an expensive one and the suggestion of bringing in the municipality is not a good idea. Its decided that the engine can stay on the Gymkhana grounds till the end of the season but the cost of maintaining it on those grounds prove to be expensive for our protagonist.

A cattle show comes to town and he is given 24 hours’ time to remove it, so a temple elephant and 50 coolies are hired to take it to a nearby field owned by a friend. Joseph, a dismissed bus driver comes in to help steer the engine. Hell breaks loose resulting in undue expenditures.

[Narayan](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2011/11/r-k-narayan-s-essay-writers-nightmare.html) introduces a Swamiji who performs various impossible feats and insists on having a road engine run over his chest. The municipality does not know how to arrange for one. Our protagonist becomes the hero of the hour by lending his engine for the feat. And in return it would be driven wherever he wanted it to. It is Narayan’s ability to bring forth the comic elements present in the most grave situations which is commendable the figure of Swamiji who wants to spread his master’s word through his feat is brought under the light of humour to show how such things are still rampant in our country and how people’s psyche is taken advantage of by such people.

Unfortunately in the story, the law comes in between and the feat cannot be performed, through the figure of a police inspector, the legality of doing such acts has been brought forward by [Narayan](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2013/02/life-and-contribution-of-rk-narayan-of.html) where the inspector says that Swamiji can do anything except have potassium cyanide or have a rail engine run over him.

It is a natural calamity that comes as a stroke of luck for our protagonist and solves all his problems. Again [Narayan](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2013/02/life-and-contribution-of-rk-narayan-of.html) shows the irony of how a calamity that claimed several towns bears good tidings for the owner of the engine. Read this story to find out how that calamity proves fortunate for the protagonist. An interesting comparison can be drawn with another story *Lawley Road* where the protagonist comes to own a British general’s statue and the troubles he has to go through to move the statue. In both the stories one sees Narayan commentary on the plight of his heroes is neither comic nor tragic when his heroes sink to despair. It is probably [Narayan](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2011/11/r-k-narayan-s-essay-writers-nightmare.html)’s answer to how to go about with your life when you live in India.

*Malgudi Days* shows Narayan learning one of an author's most valuable and difficult lessons: what he can get by without saying. By every measure, the story is a giant step beyond the relative expanse to Indian atmosphere. The best example of [Narayan](http://ardhendude.blogspot.in/2011/11/r-k-narayan-s-essay-writers-nightmare.html)'s success is his ability to combine simple language and a few neutral things—feathers and dust, a noise in the attic—to generate the tense, fairyland atmosphere that dominates*Engine Trouble*.

### Malgudi Days: Engine Trouble

1. 1. Engine TroubleA Story by: R.K. Narayan A PowerPoint presentation by: Mrinal Ghosh PGT (English)
2. [2.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-2-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble R. K. Narayan (10  October  1906  –  13  May  2001),  full  name Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami,  was an Indian writer known for his works set in the fictional  South Indian town of Malgudi.  He was a leading author of  early Indian Liturature in English                   along with Mulk Raj Anand                                                   and Raja Rao.
3. [3.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-3-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble R.K Narayan’s collection of stories, Malgudi Days were telecasted in Doordarshan allover India.
4. [4.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-4-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble Engine Trouble was a masterpiece of him....
5. [5.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-5-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble When does a prize become a headache?  For  the  narrator  of  our  story,  'Engine  Trouble,'  almost  immediately!
6. [6.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-6-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble • The narrator of the story gives a description of the trouble that an engine caused to him. • An event-organizer called ‘Gaiety Land’ visited the town of the narrator. • It showed some wonderful feats.
7. [7.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-7-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble • The visitors could watch anything from performing parrots to crack motorcyclists looping loop in the Dome of Death. • There was a lottery show too....
8. [8.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-8-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble • On one evening, they declared that the narrator had become the owner of a Road Engine. • The trouble began when the showman left the place. • Narrator was notified by the municipality to shift the engine very soon or to pay the monthly rent of Rs. 10.
9. [9.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-9-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble • He paid Rs. 30 for next three months and tried his best to sell it. • By that time, the municipality was pressing the narrator to take it away. • He approached everybody for help, but without result. • At last, the priest of the local temple offered the narrator the service of his temple elephant.
10. [10.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-10-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble • He engaged 50 coolies to push the engine from behind.
11. [11.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-11-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble • He also hired a Joseph, a dismissed bus driver, to drive. • But the result was disappointing. • The elephant dragged it and the hired coolies pushed whimsically, resulting in breaking a brick wall, diverting its possible route. The police came and arrested the narrator.
12. [12.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-12-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble
13. [13.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-13-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble • When the narrator was released from lockup, he had to face a kind of mess. • He came to know that he would have to spend expenditure to repair the damaged wall, to pay the coolies and Joseph etc. • The narrator was at a loss what to do. • At this point a swamiji appeared there to show yogic feats.
14. [14.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-14-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble • Swamiji offered to have a road-engine driven over his chest. It was decided that after using the engine, the assistant of the Swamiji would take it to the field of the narrator’s friend. • But an order from the magistrate stopped Swamiji’s performance. Narrator was hopeless.
15. [15.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-15-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble • Then an earthquake came to his rescue. • His engine fell into a deserted well nearby, with its back up.
16. [16.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-16-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble • He feared that he might have to clear the well. But the owner of the well thanked him. The municipality had sent him a notice to close it for its dirty water. • The road engine fitted like a cork and served the well- owner’s purpose. • In return, the owner of the well promised to withdraw all the complaints against him and pay all his expenses.
17. [17.](https://image.slidesharecdn.com/enginetrouble-mrinal-180811055013/95/malgudi-days-engine-trouble-17-638.jpg?cb=1533966733)Engine Trouble Now, prepare these questions at home: • Describe the Gaiety land in your own words. • How did the engine become a trouble to the narrator? • How did the narrator try to sell the road engine? • How did the nature rescue the narrator? • Justify the title “Engine Trouble”.