



# REVIEW OF RESEARCH

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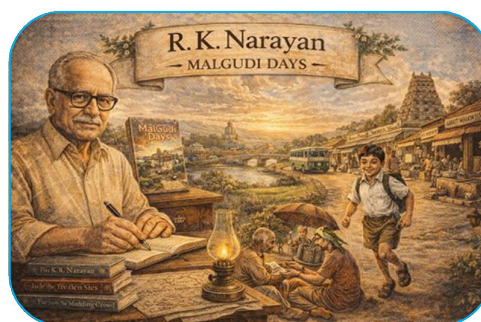
## "HUMOUR AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN R. K. NARAYAN'S MALGUDI STORIES"

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### ABSTRACT:

*R. K. Narayan is one of the most accessible and widely read Indian writers in English. His fictional town of Malgudi offers a small but rich world where ordinary people face family problems, social expectations, misunderstandings, financial difficulties, professional worries, and unexpected changes. This research article studies humour and everyday life in selected Malgudi stories. The discussion refers mainly to stories such as "An Astrologer's Day," "The Missing Mail," "The Doctor's Word," "Engine Trouble," and other familiar Malgudi situations. The study follows a theoretical, descriptive, and textual method. It argues that Narayan's humour is gentle rather than harsh. He often creates comedy through irony, coincidence, character habits, misunderstanding, and the difference between what people expect and what actually happens. At the same time, his humour does not make ordinary life meaningless. It helps the reader understand human weakness with sympathy. Malgudi becomes a representative Indian town because its people are neither heroes nor villains; they are shopkeepers, officials, teachers, workers, family members, and neighbours trying to manage daily life. The article concludes that Narayan's simple style, balanced humour, and close observation of ordinary people make his fiction especially suitable for students of English literature.*



**KEYWORDS:** R. K. Narayan, Malgudi, Humour, Everyday Life, Irony, Indian English Fiction, Simple Style.

### INTRODUCTION:

R. K. Narayan holds an important place in Indian English literature because he created fiction that is simple in language but rich in observation. His imaginary town, Malgudi, is one of the best-known settings in Indian writing in English. It contains streets, schools, shops, offices, houses, temples, public spaces, and ordinary people. Through this small town, Narayan presents a wide range of human behaviour.

One of the most attractive qualities of Narayan's fiction is humour. His humour is rarely loud or cruel. He does not usually laugh at people from a position of superiority. Instead, he notices their habits, hopes, fears, mistakes, pride, and confusion. The reader smiles because the situations are familiar and the characters often take themselves more seriously than the situations require.

The present article studies the relationship between humour and everyday life in selected Malgudi stories. It is theoretical and descriptive. The purpose is not to collect data from readers but to examine how Narayan's narrative method creates gentle comedy and human sympathy.

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

1. To study the role of humour in R. K. Narayan's Malgudi stories.
2. To examine how ordinary daily situations become literary subjects.
3. To identify simple techniques such as irony, coincidence, misunderstanding, and character contrast.
4. To understand the relationship between humour and sympathy in Narayan's fiction.
5. To explain why Narayan's style is accessible to students of English literature.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The article uses a qualitative, theoretical, and descriptive method. Selected Malgudi stories are read closely to identify situations of humour, irony, social observation, and everyday conflict. The study does not use questionnaires, experiments, or statistical analysis. Primary fictional texts are supported by standard critical works on Indian English literature and R. K. Narayan.

### **MALGUDI AS A WORLD OF ORDINARY LIFE**

Malgudi is fictional, but it feels realistic because Narayan fills it with ordinary details. People travel to work, worry about money, wait for letters, visit doctors, run shops, attend school, make promises, argue with relatives, and try to improve their social position. The town is small enough for characters to meet by chance, yet large enough to contain many different social types.

Narayan's choice of everyday life is important. He does not depend on kings, wars, or extraordinary adventures. A small misunderstanding can become a complete story. A delayed message, a professional mistake, a strange customer, or an unexpected mechanical problem can reveal character. This focus makes Malgudi easy for readers to enter. The local setting is Indian, but the emotions are widely understandable. Anxiety, pride, kindness, fear, embarrassment, greed, loyalty, and hope are common human experiences. Narayan turns these experiences into literature without making them artificially grand.

### **GENTLE HUMOUR AND IRONY**

Narayan's humour often comes from irony. Irony appears when there is a gap between appearance and reality, intention and result, or confidence and actual knowledge. His characters may believe that they control a situation, but events move in another direction. This humour is gentle because the writer does not condemn the character outright. A person may be foolish in one moment and sympathetic in another. Narayan understands that human beings are mixed. We can be proud, frightened, kind, selfish, and generous at different times. The narrator's tone is also important. Narayan usually avoids heavy explanation. He lets the situation reveal its own comedy. The calm style makes the humour stronger because unusual events are described as if they are part of normal life.

Irony also gives the stories a realistic quality. Real life often does not move according to plans. People make careful arrangements and then face accidental changes. Narayan uses this simple truth as a source of both humour and insight.

### **"AN ASTROLOGER'S DAY": HUMOUR, SUSPENSE AND SURVIVAL**

"An Astrologer's Day" is a good example of Narayan's ability to mix humour with seriousness. The astrologer earns money by reading people's faces and giving advice. His professional appearance creates an impression of special knowledge, but much of his success comes from observing common

human worries. The situation becomes serious when a stranger from the astrologer's past appears. The reader gradually comes to understand that the astrologer has a hidden history and that the meeting may expose him. The story therefore moves from light social observation to suspense.

Humour is present in the difference between the astrologer's public role and his private reality. He appears to know the future through special powers, but he survives mainly through quick thinking and practical understanding of people. The final turn of the story reveals that chance and past actions have shaped his life more than professional astrology has.

Narayan does not present the astrologer only as a cheat. He is also a man trying to survive. This balance between irony and sympathy is typical of Narayan. The reader can see the character's weakness without losing interest in his humanity.

### **"THE MISSING MAIL": DUTY, KINDNESS AND COMIC TENSION**

"The Missing Mail" is based on a simple social situation. A postman becomes involved in the lives of the people to whom he delivers letters. His official duty requires him to deliver mail, but his human sympathy creates a conflict when a message may disturb an important family event. The story produces tension because the postman must decide what to do. The situation also contains gentle humour because an ordinary government employee becomes an unofficial adviser and participant in family matters. His role grows beyond the formal limits of his job.

Narayan shows that everyday institutions are operated by human beings, not machines. Rules exist, but people also respond to emotion and circumstance. The humour comes from this gap between official duty and personal involvement. At the same time, the story is warm rather than cynical. Narayan is interested in kindness and social connection. Malgudi works as a community because people know one another and become part of one another's problems. The comedy therefore supports a larger idea of human relationships.

### **"THE DOCTOR'S WORD": SERIOUSNESS WITH A HUMAN TOUCH**

"The Doctor's Word" is more serious in tone, yet it still belongs to Narayan's world of ordinary relationships. A doctor who is known for speaking honestly faces a difficult emotional problem when a close friend becomes seriously ill. Professional truth and personal hope come into conflict. The story shows Narayan's interest in moral situations that arise in daily life. The doctor is not a heroic figure in an epic setting. He is a professional man dealing with friendship, responsibility, and uncertainty. The emotional power comes from the ordinary closeness of the relationship.

Narayan's humour in such stories is restrained. He understands that everyday life contains both comedy and pain. A writer who only makes fun of characters would make Malgudi shallow. Narayan's achievement lies in balance. Because readers have already seen ordinary foolishness and comic behaviour in Malgudi, serious moments also feel natural and believable. This mixture of lightness and seriousness makes his fiction humane. It suggests that life cannot be divided neatly into comedy and tragedy. People often move between them in a single day.

### **"ENGINE TROUBLE" AND THE COMEDY OF UNEXPECTED BURDENS**

"Engine Trouble" develops humour from an unexpected problem. A man receives a large road engine as a prize, but the prize becomes a burden because he does not have the practical means to move, use, or dispose of it. What appears to be good luck creates repeated difficulty.

This situation is comic because it reverses normal expectations. A prize should make life better, but here it produces worry and expense. Narayan uses the engine as a simple example of how possessions can control the owner. The story also shows how ordinary people become trapped by systems, rules, and practical limitations. The main character tries different solutions, but each effort

creates another problem. The humour grows through repetition and frustration. Yet the story remains light because Narayan does not turn the man's problem into a complete disaster. The reader recognises the universal experience of receiving something that is more difficult to manage than expected. The comedy comes from exaggerated inconvenience built on a very ordinary truth.

### **CHARACTER, MISUNDERSTANDING AND COINCIDENCE**

Narayan's humour depends strongly on character. A proud person may be placed in an embarrassing situation. A confident person may discover that he knows very little. A cautious person may be forced into sudden action. These contrasts create comedy without complicated language. Misunderstanding is another common device. Characters make decisions based on incomplete information. The reader may know more than the character, which creates dramatic irony. At other times, both reader and character discover the truth together.

Coincidence is also important in Malgudi. Because the town is presented as a close social space, unexpected meetings seem natural within the fictional world. Narayan uses coincidence to bring the past into the present, to connect characters, or to suddenly resolve a problem. These devices are easy for students to identify. They show that literary humour can be created through structure and situation, not only through jokes.

### **SIMPLE LANGUAGE AND NARRATIVE STYLE**

Narayan's English is generally clear and controlled. He does not overload the story with difficult description. His sentences often move directly, and the narrative voice allows the reader to focus on character and event. This simplicity is an artistic strength. The language fits the ordinary world of Malgudi. A highly decorative style might create distance from the everyday people who form the centre of the stories. Narayan instead gives them dignity through calm attention. His style also supports humour. A comic event described in a serious, controlled tone can be more effective than one announced as a joke. The narrator rarely forces the reader to laugh. He presents the situation and allows the humour to emerge naturally.

For learners of English literature, this style is useful because it allows attention to theme, character, irony, and plot without excessive linguistic difficulty. Students can therefore study literary technique while still enjoying the story.

### **HUMOUR AS A FORM OF SYMPATHY**

The most important quality of Narayan's humour is sympathy. He sees human weakness but does not treat ordinary people with contempt. His characters often fail, worry, pretend, exaggerate, or make mistakes. Still, they remain recognisably human. Humour creates distance from suffering, but it can also create understanding. When readers smile at a character, they may also recognise something of themselves. Narayan's comedy therefore has a democratic quality. No one in Malgudi is completely above foolishness. This approach also protects the stories from harsh moral judgment. Narayan does not usually divide people into perfect and evil categories. He prefers mixed characters who respond to changing situations. This makes Malgudi believable and gives the stories lasting appeal.

### **MAJOR FINDINGS**

The study finds that Narayan's humour depends mainly on ordinary situations rather than on complicated verbal jokes. Irony, coincidence, misunderstanding, professional habits, social expectations, and unexpected reversals create most of the comic effect. A second finding is that Narayan's humour remains closely connected with sympathy. His characters may behave foolishly, but the narrator rarely humiliates them. Third, Malgudi succeeds as a setting because small details of work,

family, money, duty, and neighbourhood life create a believable social world. Fourth, the stories often place serious emotions beside comic situations, showing that daily life contains both. Finally, Narayan's direct English style makes literary devices easy to observe. These features explain why his Malgudi fiction is useful for students who need an accessible introduction to Indian English fiction, irony, characterisation, and narrative technique.

### **CONCLUSION**

R. K. Narayan's Malgudi stories show that ordinary life can provide rich material for literature. His humour grows from irony, coincidence, misunderstanding, character habits, and the difference between expectation and reality. Stories such as "An Astrologer's Day," "The Missing Mail," "The Doctor's Word," and "Engine Trouble" present common people facing practical and emotional problems.

Narayan's humour is gentle because it is joined with sympathy. He observes weakness without cruelty and seriousness without unnecessary heaviness. Malgudi becomes memorable because its people are ordinary, yet their experiences reveal universal human qualities. The simplicity of Narayan's English is another major strength. His clear style allows students to understand plot and character while also studying literary devices. For this reason, his fiction remains especially suitable for theoretical study in English literature. It proves that comedy does not require complicated language or extraordinary events; careful observation of everyday life is enough.

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