

Engine Trouble

Getting Started

- * Have you ever been in a situation when the prize awarded to you feels more like a problem or nuisance to you?

The story 'Engine Trouble' is from R K Narayan's famous collection of short stories entitled Malgudi Days.

There came down to our town some years ago a showman owning an institution called the Gaiety Land. Overnight our **Gymkhana** Ground became **resplendent** with banners and streamers and coloured lamps.

Gaiety Land provided us with all sorts of fun and gambling and sideshows. For a couple of **annas** in each booth, we could watch anything from performing parrots to motorcyclists looping the loop in the Dome of Death.

There was a particular corner of the show which was in great favour. Here for a ticket costing eight annas you stood a chance of acquiring a variety of articles—pincushions, sewing machines, cameras or even a road engine. On one evening, they drew ticket number 1005, and I happened to own the other half of the ticket. Glancing down the list of articles, they declared I became the owner of the road engine!

It was not the sort of prize one could carry home at short notice. I asked



the showman if he would help me to transport it. He merely pointed at a notice which decreed that all winners should remove the prizes immediately on drawing and by their own effort. However, they had to make an exception in my case. They agreed to keep the engine on the Gymkhana Ground till the end of their season, and then I would have to make my own arrangements to take it out.

My friends and well-wishers poured in to congratulate me on my latest **acquisition**. No one knew precisely how much a road engine would fetch; all the same they felt that there was a lot of money in it. 'Even if you sell it as scrap iron you can make a few thousands,' some of my friends declared. Every day I made a trip to the Gymkhana Ground to have a look at my engine. I was a poor man. I thought that, after all, my troubles were coming to an end. How ignorant we are!

When the showman took down his booths and packed up, I received a notice from the municipality to attend to my road engine. When I went there next day, it looked forlorn with no one about. The ground was littered with torn streamers and paper decorations. The showman had moved on, leaving the engine where it stood. It was perfectly safe anywhere.

I received a notice from the municipality ordering that the engine be removed from the grounds at once, as otherwise they would charge rent for the occupation of the Gymkhana Ground. After deep thought, I consented to pay the rent, and I paid ten rupees a month for the next three months. Dear sirs, I was a poor man. Even the house which I and my wife occupied cost me only four rupees a month. And fancy my paying ten rupees a month for the road engine.

It cut into my slender budget and I had to **pledge** a jewel or two belonging to my wife!

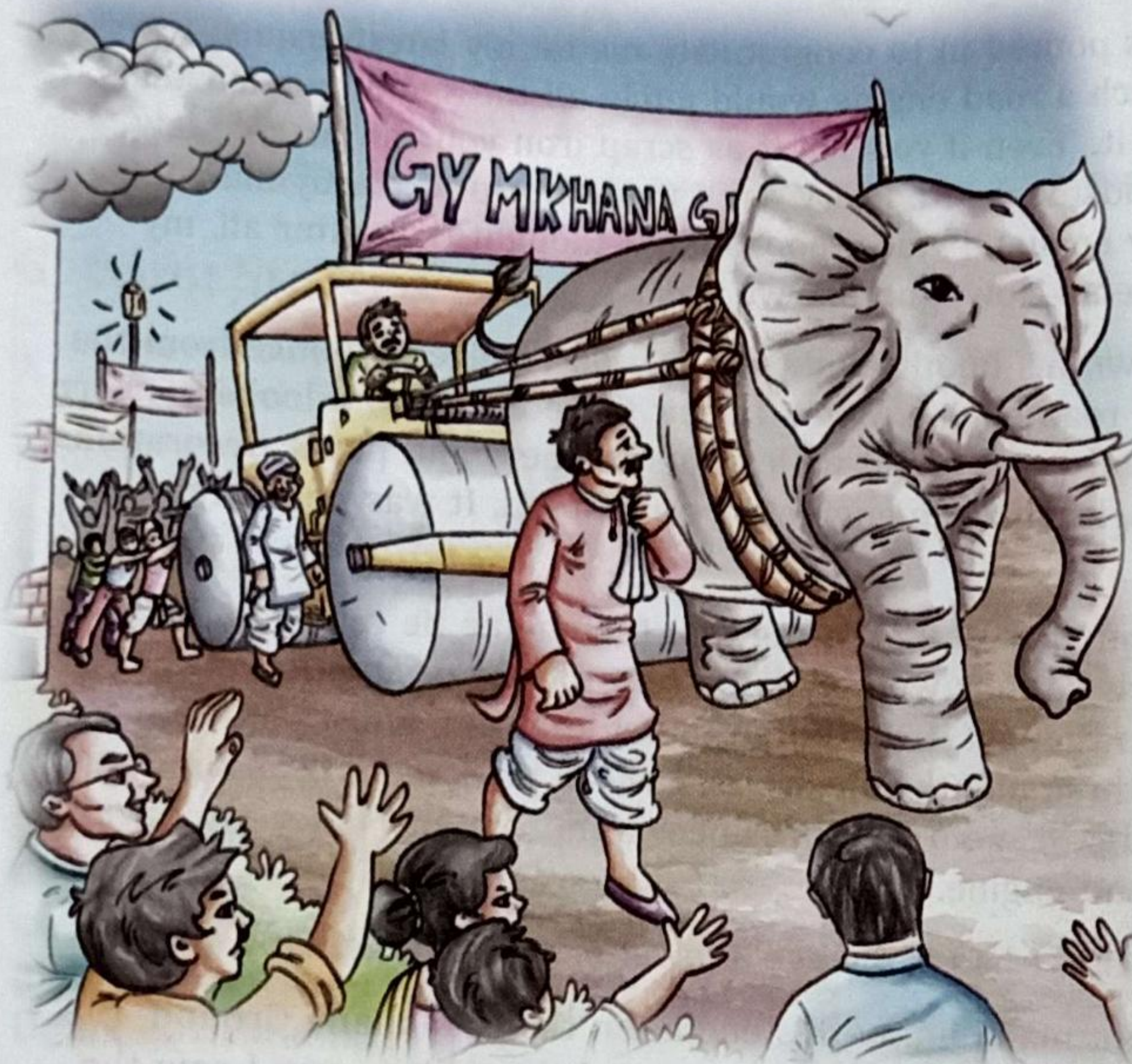
I was making myself a **bankrupt** maintaining this engine in the Gymkhana Ground. Meanwhile, the municipality was pressing me to clear out. I thought it over. I saw the priest of the local temple and managed to gain his sympathy. He offered me the services of his temple elephant. I also engaged fifty coolies to push the engine from behind. You may be sure this drained all my resources.

The coolies wanted eight annas per head, and the temple elephant cost me seven rupees a day and I had to give it one feed. My plan was to take the engine out of the Gymkhana and then down the road to a field half a furlong off. The field was owned by a friend. He would not mind if I kept the engine there for a couple of months, when I could go to Madras and find a customer for it.

I also took into service one Joseph, a dismissed bus-driver who said that although he knew nothing of road rollers he could nevertheless steer one if it was somehow kept in motion.

It was a fine sight: the temple elephant **yoked** to the engine by means of stout ropes, with fifty determined men pushing it from behind, and my friend Joseph sitting in the driving seat. A huge crowd stood around and watched in great glee. The engine began

to move. When it came out of the Gymkhana and reached the road, it showed a tendency to move in a strange manner. Instead of going straight down the road, it showed a tendency to move zigzag. The elephant dragged it one way, Joseph turned the wheel for all he was worth without any idea of where he was going, and fifty men behind it clung to it in every possible manner and pushed it just where they liked. As a result of all this confused dragging, the engine ran straight into the opposite compound wall and reduced a good length of it to powder. At this the crowd let out a joyous yell. The elephant, disliking the behaviour of the crowd, trumpeted loudly, strained and snapped its ropes and kicked down a further length of the wall. The fifty men fled in panic, the crowd created a



pandemonium. Someone slapped me in the face—it was the owner of the compound wall. The police came on the scene and marched me off.

When I was released from the lockup I found the following consequences: (1) several yards of compound wall to be repaired by me; (2) wages of fifty men who ran away (they would not explain how they were entitled to the wages when they had not done their job); (3) Joseph's fee for steering the engine over the wall; (4) cost of medicine for treating the knee of the temple elephant, which had received some injuries while kicking down the wall (here again the temple authorities would not listen when I pointed out that I didn't engage an elephant to break a wall); (5) last, but not the least, the demand to move the engine out of its present station.

Sirs, I was a poor man. I really could not find any means of paying these bills. When I went home my wife asked, 'What is this I hear about you everywhere?' I took the opportunity to explain my difficulties. She lost her temper and cried that she would write to her father to come and take her away.

I was at my wits' end. I was seriously wondering why I should not run away to my village. I decided to encourage my wife to write to her father and arrange for her exit. Not a soul was going to know what my plans were. I was going to put off my **creditors** and disappear one fine night.

I made preparations to leave the town in a couple of days, leaving the engine to its fate, with all its commitments. However, nature came to my rescue in an unexpected manner. You may have heard of the earthquake of that year that destroyed whole towns in North India. There was a **reverberation** of it in our town, too. We were thrown out of our beds that night and doors and windows rattled.

Next morning, I went over to take a last look at my engine before leaving the town. I could hardly believe my eyes. The engine was not there. I raised a hue and cry. Search parties went round. The engine was found in a disused well nearby, with its back up. I prayed to heaven to save me from fresh complications. But the owner of the house, when he came round and saw what had happened, laughed heartily and **beamed** at me. 'You have done me a service. It was the dirtiest water on earth in that well and the municipality was sending notice to close it, week after week. I was **dreading** the cost of

closing, but your engine fits it like a cork. Just leave it there.'

'But, but..'

'There are no buts. I will withdraw all complaints and charges against you, and build that broken wall myself, only leave the thing there.'

'That's hardly enough.' I mentioned a few other expenses that the engine had brought on me. He agreed to pay for all that.

When I again passed that way some months later, I peeped over the wall. I found the mouth of the well neatly cemented up. I heaved a sigh of relief.

—R K Naray



About the Author

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami (1906–2001), popularly known as R K Narayan, was an Indian writer best known for his works set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. His other well-known books include Swami and Friends, The Guide, and The English Teacher.

KRISHNAGAR ACADEMY.

CLASS - VI, SUBJECT - ENGLISH II.

CHAPTER - ENGINE TROUBLE

DATE - 01.06.2020.

- R.K. NARAYAN.

WORD MEANINGS:

1. yoked : Joined or tied.
2. Pandemonium : a state of Confusion.
3. Creditors : persons to whom money is owed.
4. reverberation : to have continuing serious effects.
5. beamed : smiled radiantly.
6. dreading : thinking about in fear and anxiety.

Exercise Question Answer.

Q4. How did nature come to the rescue of the narrator?

Ans: Once there was an earthquake that destroyed whole towns in North India. It had a serious impact on the narrator's town. All were thrown out of the house their beds that very night and doors and windows rattled. Next morning when the narrator went to see the engine he did not find it. After prolonged searching the engine was found in a disused well nearby with its back up. In this way nature came to the rescue of the narrator.

Q5. What made the narrator breathe a sigh of relief.?

Ans: After few months when the narrator was passing the way he peeped over the wall and found the mouth of the well neatly cemented up which was destroyed by his engine. This scene made the narrator breathe a sigh of relief.

In the next class that is on 3rd June (2020 (WEDNESDAY)) we shall be doing

- i) choose the correct option.
- ii) Fill in the blanks
- iii) Question Answer from the exercise of this chapter.