

## Exploring Cultural Assertion in R.K.Narayan's "An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories"

**Ch. Vennela**

Lecturer in English, Pithapur Rajah's Government College(A), Kakinada & Research Scholar,  
Department of English, Andhra University.

### **Abstract**

Literature has served as a powerful medium for cultural assertion, enabling societies to articulate their values, traditions, and collective identities. In the Indian context, R.K. Narayan's short stories stand as exemplary works that capture the essence of everyday life asserting cultural distinctiveness. His short story collection "An Astrologer's Day and other stories" reflects the interplay between tradition and modernity, the presence of indigenous belief systems and the local customs amidst colonial and postcolonial transitions. R.K.Narayan's characters are ordinary individuals such as astrologers, shopkeepers, and villagers who represent the common man of South India.

R.K.Narayan with his simple and profound story telling asserts the legitimacy of Indian cultural experiences, countering the Western literary tradition. His use of local idioms, setting like Malgudi, and themes rooted in morality, fate, and social relations highlight literature's role in preserving and projecting cultural identity. R.K.Narayan's stories function as cultural documents that portray indigenous perspectives.

This paper explores how R.K.Narayan's short stories function as tools of cultural assertion. It focuses on how storytelling preserves culture, strengthens identity, and balances tradition with modernity.

**Keywords:** Cultural assertion, Indian literature, Tradition and Modernity, Social Structure, Indigenous life

### **Introduction**

Literature often functions as a mirror of cultural identity, reflecting the values, beliefs, and the experiences of a community. In Indian English writing, R.K. Narayan occupies a distinctive place for his ability to depict indigenous life without blind imitation of Western narrative style. His short story collection *An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories* (1947) portrays the social reality of Indian life.

R.K.Narayan's stories are set in the imagined town of Malgudi which represents a world shaped by local customs, and shared belief systems. R.K.Narayan does not explicitly argue for cultural preservation. He does not criticize the western narrative. The uniqueness of R.K.Narayan lies in portraying Indian culture through character interaction, setting, and incident. This paper examines how selected stories such as *An Astrologer's Day*, *The Missing Mail*, and *The Doctor's word* reflect and affirm Indian cultural identity in a colonial and postcolonial literary context.

### **Malgudi as a Representation of Indian Society**

R.K.Narayan created a fictional town "Malgudi" and all his stories are set in this town. Malgudi functions as a symbolic space where the essence of Indian social life is concentrated. It is neither idealized nor exaggerated. The mindset of the common middle class Indian is portrayed without any idealization. In "An Astrologer's Day", the crowded street,

informal gathering spaces, and the astrologer's roadside presence in the busy market place portray the economic and social life of a small town. In the short story, *Missing Mail* collective involvement in an individual's predicament reveals that community relationships are interconnected.

R.K.Narayan by using Malgudi and the people like Talkative man constructs a social landscape where personal and social identities constantly interact. The town becomes a narrative device through which the emotions and experiences of a normal middle class Indian is clearly depicted.

### **Tradition, Belief, and the Idea of Fate**

A recurring element in R.K.Narayan's fiction is the presence of traditional belief systems that influence human behaviour. In "*An Astrologer's Day*", astrology is not treated as irrationality but as an accepted way through which people interpret their life. The astrologer survives by understanding this kind of belief system.

This belief system on astrology forms the crux of the story and it also reflects the Indian way of life. R.K.Narayan in a subtle way explained how people in India believe in fate. This story also highlights the ironic tension between appearance and reality. The astrologer despite his deceptive practices unexpectedly confronts truth in his own life. The astrologer ran away from home after trying to kill Gurnayak, thereby losing his village and his identity. Many years, he continued to feel guilty of his past actions. Finally when he realizes that Gurnayak is alive he becomes free from his guilt. This reflects the Indian perspective where fate and moral consequence are interconnected and the person has to face the consequences of his mistakes.

### **Ethical Choices and Social Responsibility**

R.K.Narayan's characters often face moral dilemmas shaped by social expectations. In the short story "*The Missing Mail*", the postman Thanappa chooses to postpone delivering distressing news so that a wedding ceremony can proceed without disruption. In India, if a wedding is postponed or interrupted it is considered as inauspicious and the bride will be considered as unlucky and she would never get prospective proposals. So, Thanappa has decided to postpone the delivery of the letter. While his action may seem ethically questionable, it reflects a cultural tendency to maintain emotional balance and communal harmony.

"I was unhappy to see it....But what has happened has happened, I said to myself and kept it away fearing that it might interfere with the wedding". (P-13, *The Missing Mail*)

In the short story *The Doctor's Word*, Dr.Raman knew that his friend Gopal's condition is serious and he may not survive but he informs Gopal that his condition is stable and he will recover quickly from his illness. That single word of certainty from Dr.Raman's mouth helped Gopal to recover quickly. Dr.Raman's misinformation to a patient may be debatable but a single word of assurance helped a person to survive.

"Don't worry about the will now. You are going to live. Do you say so? If it comes from your lips it must be true..." (P-18, *The Doctor's word*)

Such episodes reveal that ethical decision-making in R.K.Narayan's world is closely tied to social context. In India, people value emotions and responsibilities. Duty is not rigidly defined but is instead influenced by empathy, relationships, and collective sensibility.

### **Language, Style, and Cultural Voice**

Even though R.K.Narayan writes in English, his narrative style is deeply rooted in Indian linguistic patterns. His sentences are simple yet expressive, often mirroring the spoken local

conversations. The dialogue in “An Astrologer’s Day and other stories” reflects indirectness, courtesy, and cultural nuance typical of Indian communication styles.

By adapting English to fit Indian contexts, R.K.Narayan transforms the language into a medium for cultural expression rather than colonial imitation. R.K.Narayan’s usage of language becomes a space for cultural assertion.

“Most of your troubles are due to your nature. How can you be otherwise with Saturn where he is?” (P-4, An Astrologer’s Day)

This sentence is an apt example of Indian mindset. R.K.Narayan uses English as a medium to express Indian way of life.

In India, Family is considered as the focal point in any individual’s life. R.K.Narayan in his short stories tries to portray the crucial role of the family in shaping the narrative. In “The Missing Mail”, the preparation for a wedding becomes a collective social activity, highlighting the importance of ritual and family reputation in community life. Such events reinforce the idea that individual lives are deeply embedded within social frameworks.

### **Use of Humor and Irony**

One of R.K.Narayan’s most effective narrative tools is his usage of humor. It allows him to present social contradictions without overt criticism. In “An Astrologer’s Day”, R.K.Narayan employs irony when a man who pretends to foresee others’ future but he himself does not know his future.

“He was as much a stranger to the stars as were his innocent customers. Yet he said things which pleased and astonished everyone. He had a working analysis of mankind’s troubles: marriage, money and the tangles of human ties.” (P-4, An Astrologer’s Day)

This gentle irony exposes human flaws and societal contradictions in Indian society. R.K.Narayan does not bring extraordinary events to bring authenticity of Indian culture. He presents everyday interactions to portray the indigenous culture.

### **Conclusion**

R.K. Narayan’s “An Astrologer’s Day and Other Stories” presents a deeply rooted portrayal of Indian culture. R.K.Narayan constructs a literary world that reflects the indigenous life through the setting of Malgudi, depiction of close knit family structure and involvement of community in the individual’s life, moral dilemmas, humour and irony. He draws attention to everyday activities such as conversations, small decisions, and routine interactions. R.K.Narayan through his short stories portrays that cultural identity can be expressed in authentic way by focusing on everyday events and interactions. R.K.Narayan’s stories stand as representations of Indian identity.

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