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## English in Bihar Board: A Problem Language after Matriculation

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### Abstract

Language is not the ancestral property of anyone. It belongs to the person who uses it. If a person gains mastery over a language, it becomes his personal asset. Nobody can snatch it from him. Moreover, a person can learn as many languages as he wishes to learn altogether. Simultaneously, no two languages hinder the path of learning of each-other. But people in Bihar think, if they learn English it may rule over their mother tongue and can deprive them of their so-called National Language. It is quite hilarious to hear but the fact is that English is the most neglected language in Bihar. It is in a word a problem language in Bihar. The students of Bihar have an amaranthine energy for incessant endeavor, a sharp brain to contemplate and comprehend, and an undaunting dare to strive against fiasco but they succumb succinctly before the demonic tongue which they want to learn but avoid like the forbidden fruit of the Garden of Eden. The present article is an effort to find out the reasons behind the dilapidation of English in Bihar and an attempt to focus on its present status. It is a first-hand observation which seeks attention of researchers in the field until the language in question regains its lost import in the deprived state.

**Keywords:** RPC Test, Sheikh Din Muhammad, Rajendra Prasad, SRSMT, BSEB

English is neither the first language, the second language, nor the third language in Bihar. It is a problem language in Bihar. It is the stepdaughter of the Bihar Education System which has deprived the future of the students of Bihar more than it has been deprived of its existence by the politicians, policy makers and social architects of Bihar. The first and official language of Bihar is Hindi. The second language of Bihar is Urdu which also enjoys the status of the additional Second Language of the State.

The third language of the State was Sanskrit for a long time but since the inclusion of Maithili in the Eighth Schedule it is struggling with its own siblings for its existence. Besides there are several languages and dialects of Bihar which stand robust against the meek stepdaughter English, which illuminates the surroundings but remains at darkness like the bottom of a candle.

Every State has the language of its own but Bihar has none. Assam has Assamese Language, Maharashtra has Marathi Language, Gujarat has Gujarati, Punjab has Punjabi and so on but Bihar has no language of its own. There is no language called Bihari Language in Bihar. Here language changes its taste as frequently as the taste of water. According to a popular saying it is said:

*“Kos-kos par paanibadle,  
Au badle Char kos pe vaani”*

It means that water changes its taste on every mile while language changes its dialects on every four miles. Hindi is not the language of Bihar. It is used only in the offices and mostly in writings. The officials prefer to communicate in local languages and dialects like Maithili, Bhojpuri, Bajjika, Angika, Magahi etc. in off hours. Some people of course speak Hindi but that is also pathetically intervened by their local tongue and tone. Hence Hindi is also not used in its standard and unitary form throughout the State. Extending the ultimate and penultimate vowels and unnecessarily accenting the consonants is a trend

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among most of the speakers of this language. However, still there are a great number of speakers, undoubtedly, who speak as fluent and standard Hindi as any speaker from any part of the country.

It is a pity that English is so biasedly overlooked in the State which was the first to produce a book in English. The first book in English was neither written by a South Indian, nor a Punjabi, nor a Gujarati, nor anyone by a scholar of the North-East; it was written by a Bihari. It was Sheikh Din Muhammad (Sake Din Mahomed) of Patna who published his book “*The Travels of Dean Mahomet*” in 1784 in English at the mere age of twenty-five.

**English in Academics:** English was studied as a major subject in Bihar till late nineteen sixties and the Biharis were weighed among mainstream learned erudite of the Country. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Dr. Sachchidanand Sinha, Dr. Anugrah Narayan Singh, Sri Krishna Singh, Ray Bahadur Shyam Nandan Sahay etc. are some of the names from Bihar who demonstrated their extended knowledge of English. Dr. Rajendra Prasad had acquired an in-depth knowledge of English, Hindi, Urdu, Persian and Bhojpuri before his Matriculation. He was one such non-English Graduate who had become a Professor of English in Langat Singh College (L.S. College), Muzaffarpur, Bihar. All what made these great scholars successful was based on the foundation laid before they matriculated and English was, undoubtedly and inevitably, a dominating ingredient of this foundation. But since English was discontinued as a major subject in Matriculation and since it was spewed from the education system of Bihar, the condition of Bihar education has never seen the expected heights achieved before.

It was in the latter half of the 1960s, when the Education Ministry and the Government of Bihar decided to teach students through indigenous languages and local dialects. They suddenly reduced

the importance of English in the Government Schools of Bihar and gave way to the private schools to thrive with English. It was then when English received its relegation in the school education of Bihar. This Government was the proud performer as the first non-Congress Socialist Government in Bihar. It is said that in order to obtain mass popularity, the then Education Minister had abolished the study of English in Bihar and had proposed the system popularly termed as ‘Pass Without English’ (PWE). According to this system, English was brought on the margin and lost its importance as a main subject in Matriculation. If a student so desired to study English was allowed to sit in the examination but its marks did not affect the result of the examinee. It was due to this reason that students began ignoring English, while other languages were already contemptuously disdained on the account of one-another.

**English as a Problem Language:** English is a problem language for the students and the teachers in higher education in Bihar. It is a great difficulty teaching English to students in the Government Degree Colleges of the State. The students approach to the college from various Boards. They join Intermediate having passed Matriculation from CBSE, ICSE, BBOSE etc. besides passing from Bihar Board (BSEB). It constitutes a Multi-linguistic and Multi-Board Classroom which becomes a challenge rather than a problem for the teacher of English because when he teaches in English it becomes a torture for the Bihar Board students and when he teaches in Hindi it becomes a compromise for the CBSE.

Most of the CBSE students who cannot afford the high fees of the private schools, switch to the Government Degree Colleges for Intermediate, while the State Board Matriculate feel it their blissful promotion to a more neglected level than before which assures comparatively more freedom to dawdle than ever before. The problems faced by the

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students and teachers are acute in Intermediate as far as English as a subject is concerned. The researcher conducted a minor RPC Test to test the Reading, Pronunciation and Comprehension (RPC) of the students but the result was shockingly astonishing.

**Sampling and Methodology of the Test:** Twenty numbers of students – ten male and ten female students – were selected using Stratified Random Sampling Method Technique (SRSMT). Out of which five male and five female students were from Bihar Board (BSEB – Bihar School Examination Board) and five male and five female students were from the CBSE Board (Central Board of Secondary Education) background. The selection was based on their Class Ten Marks of English and also on their attendance and interest in attending English classes. From among the enthusiastic regular students only those candidates were selected to participate whose score was higher than others in their Matriculation Examination.

**Limitation of the Test:** The test was limited to the students of Lalit Narayan Tirhut College, a constituent unit of B. R. Ambedkar Bihar University, Muzaffarpur, Bihar. It was also limited only to Reading, Pronunciation and Comprehension (RPC) Skills. Other skills like Listening, Speaking, and Writing were kept under control for further study.

**Implication of the Test and its Results:** The test was, nevertheless, limited to a particular college, it was assumed that the same conditions prevail in other colleges as well and the result was also expected more or less to be the same from other academic institutions.

**The Procedure of the Test:** Ten simple English motivational short stories of High School level were selected carefully from the academic blogs website. All the ten stories were printed in three copies. All the twenty students were first divided into two groups. The first group comprised of ten students of Bihar Board while the other group contained ten students from CBSE Board. Each group was further divided into two sub-groups including five male and five female participants. All the stories were kept at three corners of a large study table upturned in a room. Both the groups were asked to sit in two separate rooms and at the ring of a bell one student each was invited to read the story alternatively. No story was repeated for another member of the group. It repeated only for the counterpart of the other group. While the students read the story the researcher analyzed the Reading, Pronunciation and Comprehension (RPC) skills of the students.

**Discussion and Result of the Test:** The students of CBSE Board were all able to read and comprehend the text. They could also pronounce the words almost acceptably accurately. But the students of the State Board performed pathetically poorly. They could not pronounce the words even acceptably and failed to read the sentences properly. Only one third of them (three out of ten), who claimed to have studied grammar at their own before joining the College demonstrated the comprehension of the text partially if not completely.

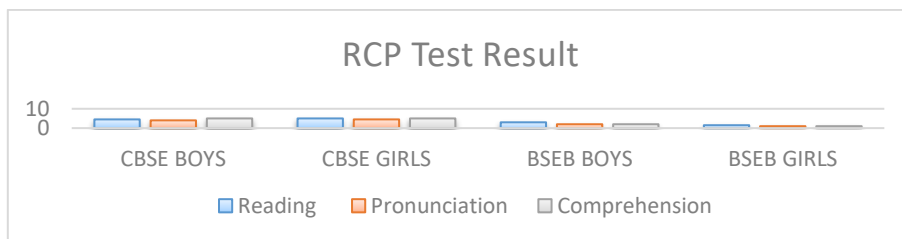
**Table: 1**

Group of Participating Students	Total No. of Participants	Total Marks	Reading Skill (R)	Pronunciation Skill (P)	Comprehension Skill (C)
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CBSE Boys	05	05	4.5/5	4/5	5/5
CBSE Girls	05	05	5/5	4.5/5	5/5
BSEB Boys	05	05	3/5	2/5	2/5
BSEB Girls	05	05	1.5/5	1/5	1/5

**Graphical Presentation of the data**



**The Demonic Barrier:** The worst things faced in the course of language teaching and learning in the Colleges of Bihar are Pronunciation and Grammar. Many students are unable to pronounce even disyllabic and tri-syllabic words correctly. Not only at the stage of entry in the college but also the

passing graduates succumb before this demonic barrier and consequently entire knowledge weighs lighter on the balance poised against pronunciation. A list of words (minimum two) which the students mostly faced difficulty at pronouncing is given in the following table:

**Table: 2**

<i>Name of the Story</i>	<i>Words pronounced with difficulty</i>	<i>Name of the Story</i>	<i>Words pronounced with difficulty</i>
A Gift of Love	Nestled	My mom had only one eye	Reunion
	Appearance		Embarrassment
Don't hope...Decide	Unexpectedly	The last cab ride	Knickknack
	Contentment		Convalescent
Let go of your stresses	Psychologist	Hospital window	Broadened
	Paralyzed		Involvement
Give time to our family	Anniversary	Determination and Persistence	Spectacular
	Restaurant		Communication

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Temper control	Weathered	A glass of milk	Immediately
	Occasionally		Specialists

It was imminent that Ms. Ruby Rai, the 2016 BSEB Topper, was caught merely because she couldn't pronounce the name of her subjects correctly. When the Media-persons asked her the names of her subject she abruptly pronounced 'Prodicol Science' instead of 'Political Science' and it was the utterance of her doom.

**The Sour Grapes:** The naive learners, whose foundation is laid poorly in English, dread piling further walls above and develop an engendered aversion for English throughout their academic career. Very few cases are there where students from Bihar Board, who come from a poor academic English background, accept English as a challenge and improve their skills to excel in their life. But in general, the majority live in the dilemma as to whether it is good to start learning and improving English or keep on hating it and manage the existence Englishlessly. The former path is full of troubles. Without proper basing in English language at school level when abruptly English is imbued to them at Intermediate and Graduation levels they sneak bewailing and refuse to tread on the second path. They end up giving excuses that "English is a foreign language" and that "By speaking English they cannot degrade their mother tongue". They say, "The English left the country and the slaves are still carrying their load." It is just like calling the grapes sour when it is out of reach. There is a tempted reverence for the fairy tongue but the helpless creatures, who cannot make their access to it begin looking down upon it and call it by low names. All the world is an 'English Stage' and 'all the men and women are involved in English conversation' but Bihar cannot pick it up because they think it is the language of the foreigners. Notwithstanding, they

ignore the fact that language is nobody's ancestral property. It belongs to that person who sways his command over it. Anyone who can speak, read, write and can understand a language properly is the master of that language.

Biharis drink tea, play cricket, wear shirt-pant, coat-tie and shoes; use smart-phones and cover their ears with earphones; cut cake and celebrate birthdays and marriage anniversaries; eat breakfast, lunch and dinner; use English for messaging on social networking sites; dream in isolation to be speaking English fluently in public places. But in reality, most of them treat it as a 'sour grape', because its height outreaches the stretch of the debilitated gamin, deprived of any proper prop at the base level of foundation at the level of school.

**The Political Puppet:** English in Bihar is a mere puppet in the hands of the politicians and the social engineers. They sway it according to their own sweet will for their personal and political benefits. All the politicians, statesmen, officials, social contractors and wealthy citizens send their wards to private schools and encourage them to learn English. No well-heeled denizens send their ward to government schools. In private schools, there is CBSE Board and English medium, as far as possible (because many English medium schools also do not use English seriously) while in State Board Government Schools, indeed, there is no medium at all. In government schools only those children enroll who want to avail a *thaali* of *midday meal*. English is a cry in the wilderness in the government schools in Bihar. The teachers of English are on the verge of forgetting the language in the process of making the government schemes successful. It is a pity that the poor children

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are happy with their stomach full and empty mind. All the politicians talk about the welfare of the poor people and call themselves the messiah of the deprived but in real terms they are such messiah who wants to proclaim the acclaims by providing a bucket full of water to the needy but never showing the address of the river.

The politicians, statesmen and other social architects always deliver speeches against English but in their personal and family life they are always found using English. The poor citizens are like innocent sheep who believe on what they hear without using their mind. And consequently, avoid English and embrace failure. Government after government has changed in Bihar since the first socialist regime but no government has ever dared to bring back the lost importance of English in its schools. The main reason behind this is that the hatred against English is delved so deep beneath the bosom of the pristine burgher that they prefer to let the dead rest in the grave with peace to rake it up as a bone of contention. Talking in English in Bihar is a bone of contention but someone needs to bell the cat. Someone needs to accept the challenge and *make English compulsory* in government schools for the common good of the common people.

**Conclusion:** English is not yet extinct in Bihar. It is only invisible in government schools, but this ghostlike appearance of the language is an enormous obstacle in the way of success of the poor students of the State. The need of the hour is to wake the restful academicians and statesmen to realize the importance of English and bring it back to schools and colleges so that students and teachers scale the heights of success by perusing the posts printed in the coveted language called English.

**Suggestions:** English must be made compulsory in the schools of Bihar Board since Primary and Pre-primary levels itself. In Primary Level, students must

be oriented rigorously to the four skills of language learning i.e., LSRW Skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing Skills). Before entering Middle School Level, a student must be made capable to speak and write in English. At Secondary Level, the students must be made able to express themselves properly. They must be able to expose their thinking in the form of creative writing and public speaking. English must be made compulsory to pass Senior School. No student must be allowed to proceed to further class unless they acquire adequate knowledge in English. At Senior Secondary Level, every student must be able to compete with any student of any Board and must be capable to interact with the students of the world.

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