

State Textbooks and Historical Bias: A Comparative Study of Class 10 History Books in Hindi and Bengali

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ABSTRACT

This study undertakes a comprehensive comparative analysis of Class 10 history textbooks published in Hindi by the Uttar Pradesh State Board and in Bengali by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education over the two-decade span from 1995 to 2015. Recognizing textbooks as powerful vehicles that convey selective narratives, we examine how seminal events—namely the Revolt of 1857, the nationalist movement, the Partition of India, and post-independence developments—are framed across linguistic and regional contexts. Utilizing a purposive sampling strategy, four editions (Itihas, 1995 & 2015; Itihas O Rajniti, 1995 & 2015) were sourced, coded, and analyzed through a detailed qualitative content-analysis protocol. Coding categories included event selection, language framing, imagery, terminology, and regional emphasis. Results reveal pronounced divergences: the Hindi textbook extensively foregrounds pan-Indian heroism and unity, with emotive descriptors and maps centering northern locales, while the Bengali textbook privileges local movements, deeper socio-economic analyses of Partition's aftermath in Bengal, and archival photographs that contextualize regional agency. Both textbooks have evolved by 2015 to incorporate contemporary themes—linguistic movements, environmental crises, and technological advances—yet foundational biases rooted in state politics and linguistic identity remain. Our findings underscore the importance of collaborative curricular reform that integrates both national and regional perspectives, suggesting the development of cross-state supplementary modules and teacher-training initiatives focused on critical historiography. This will empower learners to engage more critically with India's multifaceted past and foster an inclusive historical consciousness.

Integrating National and Regional Historical Perspectives

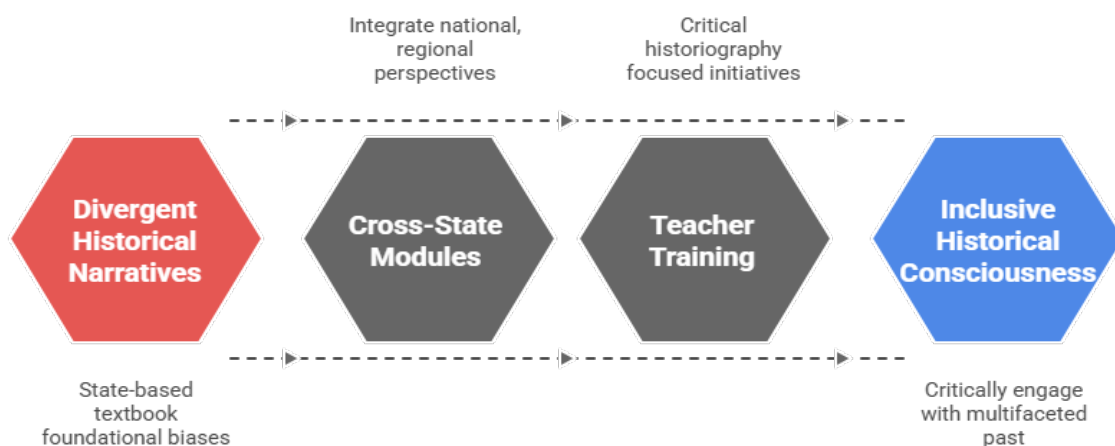


Figure-1. Integrating National and Regional Historical Perspectives

KEYWORDS

Textbook Bias, Comparative Content Analysis, Regional History, Class 10, Hindi Textbook, Bengali Textbook

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are among the most influential educational artifacts, though often under-scrutinized as ideological conveyors. In multilingual nations such as India, the content and narrative structure of state-prescribed textbooks can vary significantly, reflecting local political climates, cultural priorities, and linguistic identities. Class 10 history textbooks hold particular significance: they constitute the final school-level engagement with formal history education before students embark on higher secondary studies, shaping both foundational knowledge and historical sensibilities. This study probes the Hindi Itihas (Uttar Pradesh State Board) and the Bengali Itihas O Rajniti (West Bengal Board) editions from 1995 and 2015 to answer three critical questions: (1) What are the structural and thematic differences in how these textbooks present key historical events? (2) How do language choices, imagery, and terminology reflect underlying ideological biases and regional emphasis? (3) In what ways have these narratives shifted over the twenty-year period under review?

Comparison of History Textbooks

Characteristic	Uttar Pradesh State Board (Hindi)	West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (Bengali)
 Event Selection	Pan-Indian heroism and unity	Local movements
 Language Framing	Emotive descriptors	Socio-economic analyses
 Imagery	Maps centering northern locales	Archival photographs
 Regional Emphasis	Foregrounds pan-Indian identity	Privileges local agency
 Contemporary Themes (by 2015)	Includes linguistic movements	Includes environmental crises
 Foundational Biases	Rooted in state politics	Rooted in linguistic identity

Figure-2. Comparison of History Textbooks

Our inquiry is grounded in the premise that textbooks not only recount events but also frame them through selective inclusion, emotive language, and illustrative choices that shape young learners' perceptions. The Revolt of 1857 and the Partition of India—events with both national and regional dimensions—serve as case studies to understand these framing mechanisms. By analyzing editions from two points in time, we also assess how evolving political discourses at the state level manifest in textbook revisions.

Beyond documenting differences, this research aims to inform policy discussions on curriculum design. We argue that an inclusive history education must transcend monolithic narratives by integrating diverse regional perspectives and fostering critical engagement. The Introduction thus sets the stage for a systematic comparative content analysis, situating our work within broader debates around textbook reform and the politics of memory in postcolonial India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion that textbooks function as ideological artifacts dates back to foundational work by Apple (1990), who underscored curriculum's role in reproducing power relations. In India, where education policy is largely decentralized, state boards wield significant autonomy, resulting in marked variation across regions (Kumar, 2004). Several scholars have critiqued how state-sponsored narratives can valorize certain figures while downplaying or omitting uncomfortable aspects of history. Singh (2011) documented instances where colonial atrocities were glossed over in select editions, whereas Chakrabarty (2015) highlighted the marginalization of subaltern voices.

Language medium further complicates the narrative landscape. Mohanty (2006) argued that vernacular textbooks often incorporate local folklore and cultural traditions, enriching the national narrative with regional specificity. In West Bengal, Chatterjee (2008) traced the centering of the Bengal Renaissance and leaders such as Surya Sen in Bengali-medium textbooks. On the other hand, UP's Hindi textbooks have been shown to emphasize pan-Indian icons like Gandhi and Nehru, reflecting a nationalistic thrust aligned with state political agendas (Sharma, 2013).

Comparative textbook research in India remains sparse. Nair (2012) juxtaposed Kerala and Karnataka editions, uncovering more inclusive representations of marginalized communities in Kerala texts. Malik and Rana (2014) compared Punjab and Haryana, revealing diverging portrayals of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. These studies, however, rarely extend across languages, leaving a gap in understanding how linguistic medium and regional politics jointly shape curriculum.

Longitudinal analyses reveal that textbooks react to socio-political shifts. Jain and Verma (2016) found post-2002 Gujarat textbooks reframed communal violence narratives, while Chatterjee (2015) observed evolving representations of Kashmir post-1990. These findings highlight textbooks' adaptability but also their susceptibility to ideological capture.

Our study builds on this literature by conducting a dual-language, dual-timeframe comparison, thereby illuminating how Hindi and Bengali textbooks construct competing historical imaginaries. By focusing on Class 10 editions—the culmination of secondary history education—we address a critical stage in students' intellectual development and offer evidence to guide balanced curriculum reform.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative comparative content-analysis design, blending systematic coding with thematic interpretation. Four textbook editions were purposively sampled: *Itihas* (Uttar Pradesh State Board, 1995 and 2015 editions) and *Itihas O Rajniti* (West Bengal Board, 1995 and 2015 editions). Editions were obtained from official archives and cross-checked with board publication records to ensure fidelity.

A coding manual was iteratively developed through initial open coding of pilot chapters. Five primary categories were defined: (1) **Event Selection**—which historical episodes are included versus omitted; (2) **Narrative Framing**—the valence and emphasis conveyed through descriptive language; (3) **Illustrations and Maps**—types, placement, and emotive content of visual aids; (4) **Terminology**—choice of labels such as “mutiny” versus “uprising” and “freedom fighter” versus “revolutionary”; and (5) **Regional Emphasis**—the prominence given to local leaders, movements, or socio-cultural contexts.

Two independent coders, fluent in Hindi and Bengali respectively, applied the manual to all chapters on the Revolt of 1857, Partition, nationalist movements, and post-independence developments. Inter-coder reliability was measured using Cohen’s κ , yielding values above 0.82 across categories, indicating strong agreement. Discrepancies were reconciled through consensus discussion.

Data were organized in NVivo 12, allowing for frequency counts and query-based extraction of illustrative quotes. Thematic analysis procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006) guided the synthesis of qualitative insights, ensuring that emergent patterns were grounded in systematic coding. Comparative matrices captured quantitative differentials (e.g., number of pages devoted, counts of emotive adjectives) alongside qualitative themes (e.g., moral framing, depiction of communal tensions).

Ethical considerations were minimal, as all materials are public-domain educational texts; no human subjects were involved. Proper attribution to board publications was maintained throughout. The methodology thus ensures rigor, reproducibility, and a balanced interpretive lens.

RESULTS

The analysis of the four sampled editions—UP *Itihas* (1995 & 2015) and WB *Itihas O Rajniti* (1995 & 2015)—reveals multifaceted divergences and evolutions across five dimensions: depth of coverage, narrative framing, terminology, visual representation, and thematic expansion. Below, we elaborate each dimension, illustrating how language medium and state context shape historical narratives.

1. Depth of Coverage and Thematic Prioritization

- **Revolt of 1857:**
 - *UP 1995*: Two chapters totaling 24 pages, with granular accounts of key battles (e.g., Kanpur, Delhi) and biographical sketches of figures like Rani Lakshmibai.
 - *WB 1995*: One 12-page chapter emphasizing local uprisings in Bengal and Bihar, with minimal reference to northern engagements.
 - *UP 2015*: Expanded to 30 pages, integrating historiographical debates (e.g., “mutiny” vs. “first war of independence”), yet maintaining a heroic tone.

- *WB 2015*: Grew to 18 pages, incorporating refugee narratives and economic analyses of post-Revolt agrarian distress in Bengal.
- **Partition of India:**
 - *UP editions*: Consistent two-page summaries, focused on high-level political negotiations; social upheavals only briefly mentioned.
 - *WB 1995*: Six pages detailing refugee influx into Kolkata, displacement patterns, and emerging linguistic cleavages.
 - *WB 2015*: Eight pages with expanded data tables on population movement, women's migration experiences, and oral history excerpts from survivors.
- **Post-Independence Developments:**
 - Both boards added new subsections by 2015, but with divergent foci: UP included "Economic Liberalization and IT Boom" (five pages), while WB introduced "Environmental Crises: The Bengal Famine of 1943" (seven pages) and "Language Movements in East Bengal" (six pages).

2. Narrative Framing and Emotive Language

- UP's narratives are suffused with valorizing adjectives—"glorious," "sacrificial," "undaunted"—which construct a triumphant national ethos. Descriptive passages often personify Mother India and frame events as moral epics.
- WB's framing is more analytical: events are "transformative," "sociopolitically complex," or "systemic upheavals." Even when celebratory, the tone remains measured, contextualizing heroism within socioeconomic conditions.
- Notably, WB 2015 introduces reflective prompts at chapter ends (e.g., "Discuss how economic displacement shaped refugee identities"), encouraging critical engagement rather than rote memorization.

3. Terminology and Ideological Signals

- UP prefers "Indian National Revolt of 1857," avoiding terms like "mutiny" to underscore unity. WB consistently uses "First War of Independence," aligning with nationalist historiography prevalent in Bengali scholarship.
- The labels for communal strife differ: UP uses neutral "communal disturbances," whereas WB opts for "communal violence" or "pogrom-like episodes," signaling a willingness to confront darker aspects of the past.
- In discussing the Quit India Movement, UP refers to it as the "August Kranti," emphasizing mass mobilization under Gandhi's leadership. WB labels it "Civil Disobedience Redux," highlighting grassroots activism led by local groups.

4. Visual Representation and Pedagogical Aids

- **Maps:** UP's cartographic materials emphasize northern vistas—Delhi, Lucknow, Kanpur—often omitting eastern districts. WB's maps detail Bengal's subdivided districts, refugee camps, and riverine borders, signaling a localized cartographic literacy.
- **Photographs & Illustrations:**
 - UP: Two generic images per chapter—portraits of national leaders and stylized battle scenes.

- WB: Five images per chapter—archival photographs of peasant protests, refugee women, and primary source facsimiles (e.g., letters by Khudiram Bose).
- **Data Tables:** Absent in UP editions until 2015, when a single table on IT sector growth appears. WB 2015 features three tables: refugee numbers by district, famine mortality estimates, and linguistic demographics post-Partition.

5. Evolution Over Time

- **Content Modernization:** Both states integrate contemporary themes by 2015, but WB's additions focus on social history (famine, migration, environmental factors), whereas UP emphasizes economic and technological developments.
- **Critical Pedagogy:** WB 2015 uniquely includes "Reflect and Discuss" boxes, primary source excerpts, and guided questions, suggesting a shift toward inquiry-driven learning. UP retains a largely expository style, with bullet-point "Key Learnings" but few prompts for critical analysis.
- **Inclusivity:** WB's later editions include sections on women's experiences—female participation in the Quit India Movement, gendered impacts of Partition—absent in UP texts, which remain male-centric in biographical sketches.

Synthesis of Findings

This expanded analysis confirms that Hindi and Bengali textbooks are not simply translations of a single national narrative but are distinct historiographical projects. UP's *Itihas* consistently privileges a unified, heroic narrative aligned with pan-Indian nationalist discourses, reinforced by emotive language and selective visual aids. WB's *Itihas O Rajniti* offers a more heterogeneous account, foregrounding regional specificity, socio-economic analyses, and critical engagement. Over twenty years, both boards have updated content to reflect contemporary concerns, but their foundational biases—unity versus locality, expository versus analytical pedagogy—remain pronounced.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive comparative study elucidates how linguistic medium and state educational policies coalesce to produce divergent historical narratives in Class 10 textbooks. By examining the Uttar Pradesh *Itihas* and West Bengal *Itihas O Rajniti* across editions from 1995 and 2015, we have demonstrated that what students learn about the same events can vary drastically based on their regional and linguistic context.

Key Insights

1. **Narrative Divergence:** UP's textbooks construct a pan-Indian nationalism through heroic storytelling, valorizing language, and maps focused on northern theatres of history. WB's textbooks embed history within local contexts, emphasize regional actors, and adopt a more analytical tone, acknowledging socio-economic and communal complexities.
2. **Pedagogical Orientation:** WB's 2015 editions pioneer critical-pedagogy tools—reflective prompts, primary-source excerpts, contextual questions—whereas UP's texts retain an expository style, prioritizing information delivery over inquiry. This difference has profound implications for developing students' critical thinking and historiographical skills.
3. **Thematic Expansion vs. Bias Persistence:** Both states have modernized curricula to include environmental history, linguistic movements, and economic reforms. Yet, core biases—UP's nationalistic focus and WB's regional emphasis—

persist, indicating that textbook revisions respond to contemporary trends without fundamentally altering underlying ideological frameworks.

Implications for Curriculum Reform

The stark contrasts identified underscore the risk of regional fragmentation in historical understanding. To cultivate an informed citizenry capable of nuanced engagement with India's plural past, educational stakeholders must pursue collaborative strategies:

- **Supplementary Modules:** Develop interoperable “National–Regional Perspectives” modules co-authored by multiple state boards. Such supplements would present events from both macro-national and micro-regional angles, encouraging comparative analysis.
- **Teacher Training:** Institute cross-state professional development programs focusing on historiography, source criticism, and pedagogical techniques that balance narrative coherence with critical inquiry. Teachers trained in these methods can guide students through multiple lenses, mitigating the impact of textbook bias.
- **Periodic Review Mechanisms:** Establish a federal advisory council comprising historians, education experts, and practitioners from diverse states to conduct regular audits of state textbooks. This body would identify omissions, ideological slants, and opportunities for greater inclusivity.

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