

## **Culture, Gastronomy and the Politics of Beef in Digital India**

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This study aims to enquire how beef is used as a tool in the hands of current ruling political dispensation to divide and polarise on religious lines. It also aims to understand the cultural ecology of India's sacred cattle and how religious symbols are deployed to dictate behaviour. The study will focus on the use of media messages in India to bolster the beef ban project.

In June, 2015, a video clip surfaced on social media and soon went viral in the Indian Sub-continent. The video clip of Bajrang Dal activists brutally assaulting an alleged “cow murderer” intensified communal tension in various parts of Uttar Pradesh. A warning accompanied the video, “This man was killing cows near the mandi (market). He is a cow murderer. Listen to what we have to say. If anyone else is caught slaughtering cows, this is what we will do to them.” (Ranal, 2015)

Meanwhile, draconian anti-slaughter laws were introduced in various states of India. The law in certain states were in limbo for about two decades and was resuscitated only after the BharatiyaJanata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014. The India media ritualistically covered the rise of Hindutva politics and culinary tyranny. The beef ban soon became a predominant national discourse in India.