

Case study 5: Theme: Human rights

Media reporting on the Dadri lynching case and elements of disinformation

This case study details the narrative building that happened after the murder of Muhammed Akhlaq in 2015. Akhlaq was a Muslim man who lived in the Dadri village of Uttar Pradesh. He was 52 years old when he was killed brutally by a mob with sticks and bricks, accusing him of stealing and slaughtering a cow calf¹. This case is popularly referred to as the Dadri lynching case. Even though whether somebody consumed meat or not should not have any role in deciding whether a murder was right, the debates over the mob lynching of Akhlaq accused of consuming beef focused on this particular narrative. Even though there are several strains of misinformation around this lynching, this case will be particularly focusing on the misinformation that the sample collected to determine whether he consumed beef was taken from his home from his fridge. Even though there is no mention of where the sample was collected from, in the report, several news media reported that the meat was collected from the fridge in his home. While in the FIR and preliminary reports, it is mentioned that meat was found at the crime scene, it does not mention from where the samples were recovered. It leaves a possibility that this could have been planted as evidence by the same mob. However, the narrative that it was found in his house created a portrayal that Akhlaq was guilty of cow slaughtering to insinuate communal polarisation further².

The context

Twenty Indian states have varying degrees of regulations on the sale, purchase and slaughter of cows. Some states have a full ban on the consumption of beef, and some other states have a partial ban. According to a news report from 2020, the state of Uttar Pradesh had invoked National Security Act in 76 cases of cow slaughter in the same

¹ <https://cjp.org.in/mohammed-akhlaq-lynching-case-timeline/>

² <https://www.newslandry.com/2016/06/01/dadri-lynching-did-the-media-get-it-wrong>

year³. The accusations of cow slaughter have been used in India to gain votes and to frame the minorities as the ‘disrespectful other’ and thus deserving of punishments judicially as well as extra judicially.

Actors

In 2015, when Akhlaq was murdered, along with the FIRs on murder, an FIR on accusing the victim and his family of violating the UP Cow Protection Act 1955⁴. A forensic report was made available by the Forensic Investigation Laboratory of the Uttar Pradesh University of Veterinary and Animal Husbandary Mathura. The report concluded that the sample belongs to a cow or it’s progeny⁵. A series of media reports and social media posts claimed that the meat sample taken from the fridge of the victim's house was beef, despite the fact that, at that moment, neither were there any conclusive remarks on whether it was a cow or from where the sample was collected. Some of the new agencies that propagated this misinformation are: India Today, Economic Times, DNA, Times of India, Hindustan Times, the Hindu, Zee news and ABP, all popular news channels with wide viewership and readership⁶. A photo of the forensic report is given below, followed by screenshots of some of these news reports.

³ <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/in-uttar-pradesh-more-than-half-of-nsa-arrests-this-year-were-for-cow-slaughter-6591315/>

⁴ <https://thewire.in/rights/court-orders-fir-against-mohammed-akhlaqs-family-for-cow-slaughter#:~:text=Jul%2014%2C%202016-.Court%20Orders%20FIR%20Against%20Mohammed%20Akhlaq's%20Family%20for%20Cow%20Slaughter,on%20suspicion%20of%20eating%20beef.&text=A%20court%20in%20Surajpur%2C%20Greater,Mohammed%20Akhlaq%20for%20cow%20slaughter.>

⁵ <https://www.newslaundry.com/2016/06/01/dadri-lynching-did-the-media-get-it-wrong>

⁶ *ibid*

Office the Joint Director Forensic Investigation
Laboratory U.P. University of Veterinary Science &
Animal Husbandry, Mathura - 1

Forensic - MDL

Regd. No. 4200

Date - 9.10.15

The Dy. C.V.O
Veterinary Hospital
Babri

Distt.
Western Bultha Nagar

Sir,
In reference to your Letter No. 18/2015.16)
meat examination dated - 29.9.15 Please find
enclosure here with the testing Pat & meat
sent by you.

CASE No. 241/15

Office the Joint Director Forensic Investigation
Laboratory U.P. University of Veterinary Science
& Animal Husbandry, Mathura - 1

Forensic - MDL

Regd. No. 4200

Date Recd - 28.9.15

The Dy. C.V.O

Case No - 241/15

Veterinary Hospital, Babri

Subd VIS Roperwas

Distt. Western Bultha Nagar

(Primal Case)
Police Station PLS

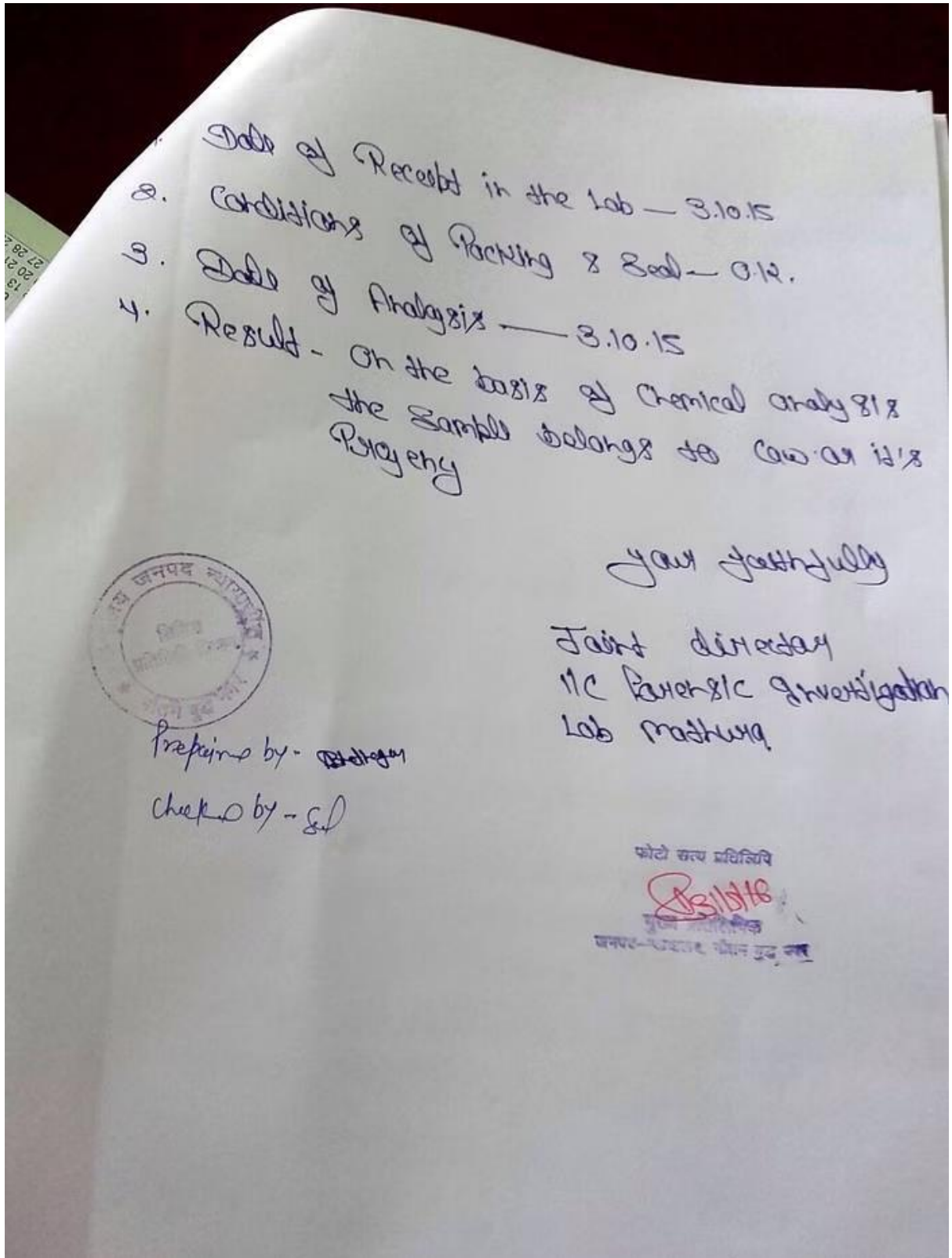
Distt.

Jajaha

Distt.

Western Bultha Nagar





Yours faithfully

Joint Director
IIC Forensic Investigation
Lab Mathura

Prepared by - [signature]

Checked by - [signature]

फोटो कक्ष प्रविष्टि
[Red Signature]
जनपद - मथुरा

Image credit: News Laundry

News / India / Delhi / Dadri lynching: Fresh forensic report says meat in Akhlaq's freezer was beef, not mutton

Dadri lynching: Fresh forensic report says meat in Akhlaq's freezer was beef, not mutton

The report, prepared by the Uttar Pradesh University of Veterinary Sciences and Animal Husbandry, says the sample belongs to a cow or its progeny.

Screenshot from India Today dated May 31, 2016, claiming that the meat was collected from his freezer

ENGLISH | தமிழ் | বাংলা | മലയാളം | हिन्दी | मराठी

Newsletters

The Indian EXPRESS
JOURNALISM OF COURAGE

Political Pulse India Cities Opinion Entertainment Lifestyle Videos Sports Audio Education World Business Technology

TRENDING UPSC Key Health Specials Jio 5G by Diwali Artemis 1 Launch Movie Reviews Follow Authors Cricket

Discover growth opportunities with Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp

Watch Now

Meta

Home / India / India News / Dadri lynching: It was mutton, not beef in Akhlaq's house, says Veterinary Department

Premium

Dadri lynching: It was mutton, not beef in Akhlaq's house, says Veterinary Department

A veterinary officer in his report says "prima facie it seems that meat found in Akhlaq's house belongs to goat progeny"

Screenshots from The Indian Express dated 29, December 2015 implying that the sample was collected from the victim's house

Dadri lynching: Meat found in Akhlaq's fridge was beef, confirms forensic lab

Akhlaq was beaten to death by a 200-strong mob which barged into their house in Greater Noida's Dadri following rumours that the family had consumed beef.



Share:
Updated:
Jun 01, 2016, 00:53 AM IST

Noida: Months after Dadri resident Mohammed Akhlaq was lynched on rumours of beef eating, a forensic lab test report has confirmed that the meat found from the deceased Muslim man was from a "cow or its progeny," a report said on Tuesday. According to 'Hindustan Times' report, the forensic investigation lab in Mathura confirmed that on the basis of chemical analysis the meat sample collected from Akhlaq's residence in Dadri belonged to cow or its progeny.

The report is expected to create huge embarrassment for Samajwadi Party government as the UP government's chief veterinary officer's report had earlier said that the meat piece found in Akhlaq's refrigerator was mutton, not beef.

Screenshot from the Zee News dated 1, June 2016 stating that the sample was collected from the fridge.

A day after the forensic report came, the present Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister who was a BJP MP back then, gave a statement that action should be taken against Muhammed Akhlaq's family for eating beef and that compensation given to the family should be taken back⁷.

⁷ <https://www.firstpost.com/india/dadri-lynching-take-action-against-akhlaqs-kin-for-eating-beef-says-adityanath-2811776.html>

← **Tweet**

 **ANI UP/Uttarakhand** ✓
@ANINewsUP

As per Mathura forensic lab report the meat sample recovered from Dadri incident victim's house, belongs to cow or it's progeny.

4:49 pm · 31 May 2016 · Twitter Web Client

192 Retweets 79 Likes

 **Aravindan U**   @aravindan_u87 · 31 May 2016
Replying to @ANINewsUP
But does that give right to kill someone?

A tweet from the popular news agency Asia News International states that the sample was recovered from the victim's house.

← **Tweet**

 **News18** ✓
@CNNnews18

All benefits given to Akhlaq's family should be withdrawn & they should be charged for keeping beef:
Yogi Adityanath



12:53 pm · 1 Jun 2016 · Twitter Web Client

32 Retweets 29 Likes

A screenshot of News 18's tweet states that the meat was found in Akhlaq's home

The main actor, in this case, is not an individual but prominent news media. Media houses like Asia News International have been accused of having owners showing allegiance to the Union government formed by the Bharatiya Janata Party⁸. However, the misinformation was also reported by news channels which has over the years taken a neutral or critical stand against the government and are perceived as neutral media. There is a lack of transparency in the reporting because none of these reports actually included a copy of the lab report at the time of the report. This shows the lack of critical engagement with the incident and certain biases of these media houses themselves.

Content

Even though some parts of the reporting are verifiable, a particular aspect, that the sample was found in the victim's house, has no factual proof. The content also created and contributed to a narrative that diverts the attention from a hate crime to victim blaming. The language of the reporting is neutral; in a preliminary scan, one would not be able to identify the problems with these titles, but the content manipulates the audience to believe the accusations of the cow vigilante mob.

Degree, the target audience of this news is people with certain biases against the minority. The news is not micro-targeting specific audiences through tailored content, but is targeting a national audience. The coverage in English Media also ensured that the news manipulated the approaches of the educated audiences as well.

Effect

Cow vigilantism by extremist groups claiming to be *Gau Rakshaks* (protector of cows) started gaining popularity ever since the Dadri lynching. A truck in Udampur was attacked on 9 October 2015 for allegedly carrying dead cows, and the truck driver Zahid Ahmad was killed. Another truck was attacked in the Saharanpur district of Himachal Pradesh for allegedly smuggling cows. The truck driver was killed in this case, too, by

⁸ <https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/ani-reports-government-version-truth>

a mob. In the Khirkiya railway station of Madhya Pradesh, a Muslim couple was attacked in January 2016 by a vigilante group who accused them of carrying beef. Two Muslim cattle traders were hanged to death in Jharkhand in March 2016. A Muslim man was shot dead in Haryana by the cow vigilante groups in April 2016. A dalit family was attacked in Karnataka for allegedly carrying beef⁹. According to a report, between 2016 and 2020 alone, there were 50 fatalities of cow vigilante lynching¹⁰.

Diagnosis

The inclusion of misinformation that the sample of meat tested was collected from the victim's house was spread not by individuals but by big news agencies. This was also supplemented by the statements of MPs. The content is verifiably deceptive because the reports on the lab testing clearly show that there is no mention of the samples being collected from the victim's house. This clearly falls under the category of disinformation. However, since the actors included both biased media who already side with the bigoted elements as well media that are generally perceived as neutral, it is not easy to prove whether it was an influence operation with intentional coordination.

⁹ <https://www.firstpost.com/india/una-alwar-and-delhi-cow-vigilantism-a-list-of-gau-rakshak-attacks-since-2015-dadri-lynching-3401302.html>

¹⁰ <https://acleddata.com/2021/05/03/cow-protection-legislation-and-vigilante-violence-in-india/>