

15th October 2017

A Confluence of Food Alternatives!

4 days of dialogue and activities on food alternatives: politics, culture, diversity, justice, ecology, and much else! That kind of sums up the 2nd National Food Vikalp Sangam (Alternatives Confluence) held at Bajju, near Bikaner (Rajasthan, India), at the campus of URMUL, which co-organised it with Banyan Roots and Kalpavriksh (partly sponsored by Misereor) on 6-9th October 2017. Considering where we were, quite a bit of the Sangam focused on the traditional foods and food cultures of the Rajasthan desert area, the transformations caused by the Indira Gandhi canal, commercialisation, and govt promotion of Green Revolution packages, and attempts at revival of diversity and organic production in the new context. Experiences of problems and alternatives from Nagaland, Manipur, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Odisha, Ladakh, Madhya Pradesh, Goa, elsewhere in Rajasthan, were also shared. Several farmers from surrounding areas brought in a very local flavour, enhanced by visits to three rural areas that URMUL works in, and livened by some incredible local cuisine that was testimony to the magic of URMUL's kitchen staff. Adivasis / indigenous peoples from Maharashtra (Gonds in Gadchiroli), Odisha (Kondhs in Niyamgiri area), Manipur and Nagaland also recounted experience with forest foods, shifting cultivation and pastoralism (there was some great sharing between them and Rajasthan farmers, as most were unaware of each others' ecological, political and cultural contexts). Women's experience with farming and home gardens were described, including from Uttara Kannada in Karnataka. Unfortunately fishers and pastoralists (other than from Rajasthan) were missing (some dropped out last minute), though the former's experience was brought in by a participant working earlier with the International Collective in Support of Fishworkers. Interestingly people from various communities and areas brought up the problems caused by the current 'politics of the cow', including how this has significantly enhanced stray cattle numbers which are damaging crops, and caused loss of livelihoods for those dependent on livestock trade. There was also some frank sharing of the weaknesses and contradictions within the working of our own organisations.

For reports/articles on the 1st National Food Vikalp Sangam and related local Sangams, see:

[First Food Vikalp Sangam, Muniguda, Sept 2016](#)

[\[http://www.vikalpsangam.org/static/media/uploads/Resources/foodsangamreportrevised.pdf\]](http://www.vikalpsangam.org/static/media/uploads/Resources/foodsangamreportrevised.pdf)

[Sarmoli \(Uttarakhand\) food festival, May 2017](#) [\[http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/celebrating-food-in-sarmoli/\]](http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/celebrating-food-in-sarmoli/)

[Organic farming Sangam in Hemis Shukpachan, Ladakh, April 2016](#) [\[http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/vikalp-sangam-report-hemis-shukpachan/#.WeMVx7Fh1E4\]](http://www.vikalpsangam.org/article/vikalp-sangam-report-hemis-shukpachan/#.WeMVx7Fh1E4)

And some images:



[https://2.bp.blogspot.com/-9UttFmTCP_Y/WeMWnHswRI/AAAAAAAAAJLY/EJocG-dHVxEI5c8faKDUXR90rTjkJtm-wCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B3%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25282%2Bof%2B5%2529.jpg]



[https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-OMsBGhzVCis/WeMW2jH1gEI/AAAAAAAAJLo/mzMUCNsKB_g4wXsmG_eVpSSQZlwc9-c5QCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B1%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25281%2Bof%2B1%2529.jpg]

Villagers that URMUL works with livened the Sangam with art and music, and the wisdom of experience



[<https://3.bp.blogspot.com/-3UggAcC8qUw/WeMW0ZLCV1I/AAAAAAAAJLg/LyCGWUmQuK8WojWT9-vNjN7LslOeeiNgCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B1%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25281%2Bof%2B7%2529.jpg>]

Vanastree from Karnataka put up a stall with their agrobiodiversity & products



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Kalpavriksh's books on display



[https://2.bp.blogspot.com/-8r4Nt63r5vM/WeMW3x_6msI/AAAAAAAAJLs/dQvKpUTauCISFvVpEyAAq5EWoWY5BrngCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpik%2B1%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25283%2Bof%2B7%2529.jpg

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North East Network brought millets, job's tears and other diversity from Nagaland



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2nd Food Vikalp Sangam participants including local farmers



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[FNx8avRSft0/WeRRFBUGjgl/AAAAAAAAJQJ/jeDjdAyuDA4-](https://4.bp.blogspot.com/-FNx8avRSft0/WeRRFBUGjgl/AAAAAAAAJQJ/jeDjdAyuDA4-9wq9mpx_YMKGN7DsljUgCEwYBhgL/s1600/Food%2BSangam%2Bparticipants%2Bwith%2BURMUL%2Bstaff%2B%2540%2BAshish%2BKothari%252C%2B%2Blow%2Bres.jpg)

[9wq9mpx_YMKGN7DsljUgCEwYBhgL/s1600/Food%2BSangam%2Bparticipants%2Bwith%2BURMUL%2Bstaff%2B%2540%2BAshish%2BKothari%252C%2B%2Blow%2Bres.jpg](https://4.bp.blogspot.com/-FNx8avRSft0/WeRRFBUGjgl/AAAAAAAAJQJ/jeDjdAyuDA4-9wq9mpx_YMKGN7DsljUgCEwYBhgL/s1600/Food%2BSangam%2Bparticipants%2Bwith%2BURMUL%2Bstaff%2B%2540%2BAshish%2BKothari%252C%2B%2Blow%2Bres.jpg)

2nd Food Vikalp Sangam participants including URMUL campus staff



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[2zHirwCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%2Bparticipants%2Bwith%2BURMUL%2Bstaff%2B%2540%2BAshish%2BKothari%252C%2B%2Blow%2Bres.jpg](https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-FNx8avRSft0/WeRRFBUGjgl/AAAAAAAAJOM/jYS6L-FTLWceX_JyjrQvrw3zH-2zHirwCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%2Bparticipants%2Bwith%2BURMUL%2Bstaff%2B%2540%2BAshish%2BKothari%252C%2B%2Blow%2Bres.jpg)



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[G7_x8cOGFDcltNnTwCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B2%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25282%2Bof%2B5%2529.jpg](https://3.bp.blogspot.com/-G7_x8cOGFDcltNnTwCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B2%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25282%2Bof%2B5%2529.jpg)

Maangibai from a neighbouring village blew our minds and hearts with some absolutely incredible singing of Rajasthani folk songs, including her own improvisations



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[NvnCr8x1dVQ/WeMW8HxGrWI/AAAAAAAAJL4/DkLIV3uTwdQhRmRNdw3B2W1vny4eFkCQACLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B1%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25287%2Bof%2B7%2529.jpg](https://4.bp.blogspot.com/-NvnCr8x1dVQ/WeMW8HxGrWI/AAAAAAAAJL4/DkLIV3uTwdQhRmRNdw3B2W1vny4eFkCQACLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B1%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25287%2Bof%2B7%2529.jpg)

A typical meal at the Sangam: this one with bajra roti, ker-sangri vegetable (from the sacred Khejri tree and Capparis bush), a raita/chhaas liquid with seeds of the wild bush phog, a hot lasan chutney, and dal



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LHhIhn_MnxQpoCVeqy6P63KhQK3kQwCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B1%252C%2Blo

w%2Bres%2B%25286%2Bof%2B7%2529.jpg]

Intense dialogues on food politics, culture, cuisines, diversity, & much else!



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ScyD6S28ti4/WeMW6s7Aexl/AAAAAAAAJLw/NCRvhorJ3cwbxeSg84YxLRPAybAxdspIQCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam

%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B1%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25284%2Bof%2B7%2529.jpg]

Diversity from the villages URMUL works in



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HKR6DOnyBEk/WeMILauYORI/AAAAAAAAJM0/z3oyZ9MiAwsRDnow0AxBJB393E5dCfX2ACLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BVS%

2Bmore%2Bpix%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25281%2Bof%2B2%2529.jpg]

Matira, the local watermelon, was breakfast on one day!



[<https://2.bp.blogspot.com/-oe945U5jLww/WeMmpv4YfDI/AAAAAAAAJNQ/KSGHKOcMVRMmMmLTgFTa0IPkNloASuOLgCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSa ngam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B3%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25281%2Bof%2B4%2529.jpg>]

Participants gorging on matira, the local watermelon that grows magically in hot desert sand!



[https://4.bp.blogspot.com/-PG_h3Ge8DOQ/WeMILLqoDol/AAAAAAAAJMs/aQRJ82THZclh6E7KWiyETilcTYRuW7uACLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BVS%2 Bmore%2Bpix%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25281%2Bof%2B8%2529.jpg]

Bajra rotlas being made in URMUL kitchen



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URMUL kitchen staff hard at work to feed participants



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The fantastic URMUL kitchen staff because of which participants are likely to have each added a few kilos!



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[QcjGJDR3K5c/WeMIQ2nz4BI/AAAAAAAAJM8/uYPFm71t-yY8cyogJsLbylcCGI5SN-](https://3.bp.blogspot.com/-QcjGJDR3K5c/WeMIQ2nz4BI/AAAAAAAAJM8/uYPFm71t-yY8cyogJsLbylcCGI5SN-)

[rLQCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BVS%2Bmore%2Bpix%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25285%2Bof%2B8%2529.jpg\]](#)

Phog bush seeds, used as a coolant in raita / chhaas



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[Zv8LPJBIC_0/WeMIQyOe2kl/AAAAAAAJNA/3WR8uvRqy_EjJDVUvGD0a6bOM6SMXHglgCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BVS%2Bmore%2Bpix%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25286%2Bof%2B8%2529.jpg\]](#)

Participant looking at Kalpavriksh's poster exhibition on alternatives



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[RtClS_rhewBB_MEhD7Su2jKnW7bWtQlqCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BVS%2Bmore%2Bpix%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25288%2Bof%2B8%2529.jpg\]](#)

If you can look past the oil, that's vegetable made from aloe vera!



[\[https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-znV44XjU2Nc/WeMn6iiUXXI/AAAAAAAAAJNY/4icgr4QD6vgNhEAaqtWwmO6O91mOEEInwCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B3%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25282%2Bof%2B2%2529.jpg\]](https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-znV44XjU2Nc/WeMn6iiUXXI/AAAAAAAAAJNY/4icgr4QD6vgNhEAaqtWwmO6O91mOEEInwCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B3%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25282%2Bof%2B2%2529.jpg)
Traditional mud and thatch huts, which could apparently last 30-40 years; very cool inside in summer, warm in winter



[\[https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-CRdsRDozN_g/WeMXArXvQul/AAAAAAAAAJME/NwtKIBSvUDMNH3UQ25nSMNol5rapeNSywCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B2%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25283%2Bof%2B5%2529.jpg\]](https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-CRdsRDozN_g/WeMXArXvQul/AAAAAAAAAJME/NwtKIBSvUDMNH3UQ25nSMNol5rapeNSywCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B2%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25283%2Bof%2B5%2529.jpg)
Participants enjoying a performance of Rajasthani (especially desert) songs by Maangibai and Nathukhan Bagadia



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JHiVwCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B2%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25284%2Bof%2B5%2529.jpg]

Rajasthani song performance by Nathukhan Bagadia and Maangibai, at URMUL campus



[https://2.bp.blogspot.com/-1wxnCuU1c8w/WeMXDZPoZzl/AAAAAAAAJMM/HletrQX_fHlj-47lWeXbwggQhZal0lpQCLcBGAs/s1600/Food%2BSangam%252C%2BBikaner%2Bpix%2B2%252C%2Blow%2Bres%2B%25285%2Bof%2B5%2529.jpg]

Nathukhan Bagadia and Maangibai regaling participants with some mindblowing singing

Posted 15th October 2017 by [Ashish Kothari](#)

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2 View comments



Arun Dixit 15 October 2017 at 05:00

Congratulations for organizing this Sangam on food..! very topical in the present context.

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Ashish Kothari 16 October 2017 at 02:17

Thanks!

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