



After  
 all that  
 rain

Pictures from left up: 1- harvesting lodged paddy, 2- cattle and straw bales, 3- threshing on dry floor, 4- lodged (flattened) paddy close up.

Monsoon was very abundant this year, which is of course great and very much needed to replenish the water tables. But you cannot make a farmer easily happy... as probably mentioned before; in farming the moment of rain is often more determining the crop results than the quantity of rain coming down.

Last year the summer rains failed completely, which crippled our green manure crop which is important to feed the following paddy crop. The late monsoon rains at the end of December and the first half of January interfered with the flowering of the rice. Rice needs dry sunny weather for good pollination.

The one big shower we had on the night of February 20-21 flattened a lot of the ripening crop and made it impossible to do machine harvest on part of the matured crop. We had to harvest paddy by hand, transport it off the fields and thresh it on the drying floor. Fields which had been harvested by combine harvester which had straw drying on them, got inundated and straw had to be re-dried manually. This took a lot of extra labor and much more time (postponing other work planned) which drives up the cost considerably.

All this not to complain, but more to sketch a picture of our reality and emphasize the seriousness of unseasonal rains. A few showers can make a lot of difference.

We need to look at how we make ourselves more resilient in the future because weather might become more and more challenging. I am thinking for instance of an artificial grain dryer to be able to dry wet grain fast in rainy times, moving away from long straw paddy varieties to avoid lodging (crop falling over). The old long straw varieties are interesting because they give us more fodder, are often less vulnerable for pest and diseases and respond well to organic manuring. They are also less sensitive in water stressed times.

Mechanization like a tractor-driven straw-turning machine will speed up the process of drying and the straw can be baled and brought into the barn faster. It will save labor costs as well. When processes take too long the chance one gets caught in bad weather increases a lot.

While reality changes we will have to be innovative, alive to the moment and progressively move forward.

**We will soon launch Annapurna website**



In December the new banana plantation started to yield the first bunches. The bananas are wonderful and many people are appreciating the quality of the fruits. We have planted predominantly the variety "Karpuravalli" which is a very sweet banana, can be kept several days in a ripe stage and has a light yellow color with an ash grey coating. In Auroville it is known as the Sri Aurobindo banana. Sri Aurobindo liked this one as well it seems :-)

# BANANANAS



Picture: Malathi with a bunch of harvested bananas

The plantation has yielded around 2,500 kg since December and we expect it to yield another 2,500 kg in the coming 3-4 months. After this the plants need to recover and the young suckers will grow to maturity. After harvest the banana mother plant dies and is cut down. A new plant (sucker) will grow up and make a new bunch. During cultivation many new suckers will be produced by the mother plant. We keep cutting back all young suckers until the mother plant starts to flower after which we let one sucker develop. While the bunch is maturing (which takes around 3 months) this sucker grows along the mother plant and at the time of harvest this youngster will already be nicely developed and will take over the task of producing bananas in the next season. In commercial cultivation 1 or 2 life cycles are being cultivated after which the plantation is terminated and a new crop is planted. We hope to be able to let the plantation produce longer than that. Over time the banana size will decrease and yields will come down and diseases might develop. In our pilot plot where

we tested the cultivation, we still had nice fruits after 4 cycles.

Next season the new plantation will mature while the old one will be in its second season and we will have more bananas than this year and marketing might become a real bottleneck. Bananas tend to come in gluts depending on weather conditions. In the commercial world bananas are harvested in an unripe stage and artificially ripened and therefore can be somewhat regulated in the market. We work totally naturally; when the first fruit starts to ripen we harvest the

bunch and the rest of the fruits ripen naturally in storage. In this way we have wonderful sweet fruits but the amounts can be overwhelming on some days. Our focus is very much on PTDC and Foodlink and good communication is indispensable so that outside purchase can be adjusted when needed.

I had to smile when one of the boys working at Foodlink asked me the other day if we cannot bring daily a certain amount of bananas to make their work easier. It very much reflects a mindset which is common in today's world where we have turned things around and want nature to adjust to our convenience and fancy instead of flowing with what nature offers us. And of course agriculture is in itself a way of making nature do what we want, but it is the art not to forget nature's role/limits and our responsibility within there. Ah consciousness is back in the conversation...

# SOLAR INSTALLATIONS

Not far into the pandemic Varuna announced they would cut back on the subsidized electricity bills. Every bill over 500 units (500 kw used over a period of 2 months) would get a subsidy of Rs. 1,000.- and the rest of the bill had to be paid by the user.

Before this Varuna used to cover all electricity bills in Auroville irrespective of the amount of energy used.

Suddenly the farm was presented with serious electricity bills for the grain milling/workshop activities and the cool room which is used for dairy and fruit processing products. Since we did not feel very inspired to pay electricity bills in the future, we felt this was the right moment to look into the possibilities of solar. After a conversation with Sunlit Future (an Auroville solar unit) we decided to set up two solar roof installations; one for the cool room and one for the grain processing/workshop area.

Way back Annapurna farm was started with the aim to work with sustainable energy sources but after realizing that only alternative energy would limit our production enormously, we decided to be pragmatic and use the grid and add green energy whenever possible at a later stage.

The new solar has a total capacity of producing 6.68Kw of power. Right now, it only offsets the energy which is used at the very moment the equipment is running, but we have applied with TNEB for a bi-directional electricity meter which will feed back energy into the grid. The schemes are not very favourable for the green energy producer in the sense that imported energy from the grid is more than double the rate then what we will get credited for the solar energy we generate and export into the grid.

The whole installation including equipment and installation work came to Rs. 5,35,000.- of which we got donations worth Rs. 3,16,000.- and an interest free loan of Rs. 2,18,000.- from a friendly supporter which we will have to pay back in the time to come.

