

# WHERE DO CLOTHES COME FROM?

Where do clothes come from?, is a small step in reimagining traceability and supply chains in the fashion industry. By inviting consumers to look beyond garments as mere commodities and instead see them as collaborators in a living system, it strives to bridge the gap between wearers and their clothes.

The project envisions a world where the stories of the makers, the land, and the non-human beings that cared for the garment in its making are brought to light. Through play, it brings the garment to life as a character and invites us to question the roles we play in its story.

At its heart, the project seeks to create a place-based, intentional, values-driven, and rooted system within the fashion industry, one that pays homage to the land that provides our garments. It teaches us to move at its pace, and not the other way around.



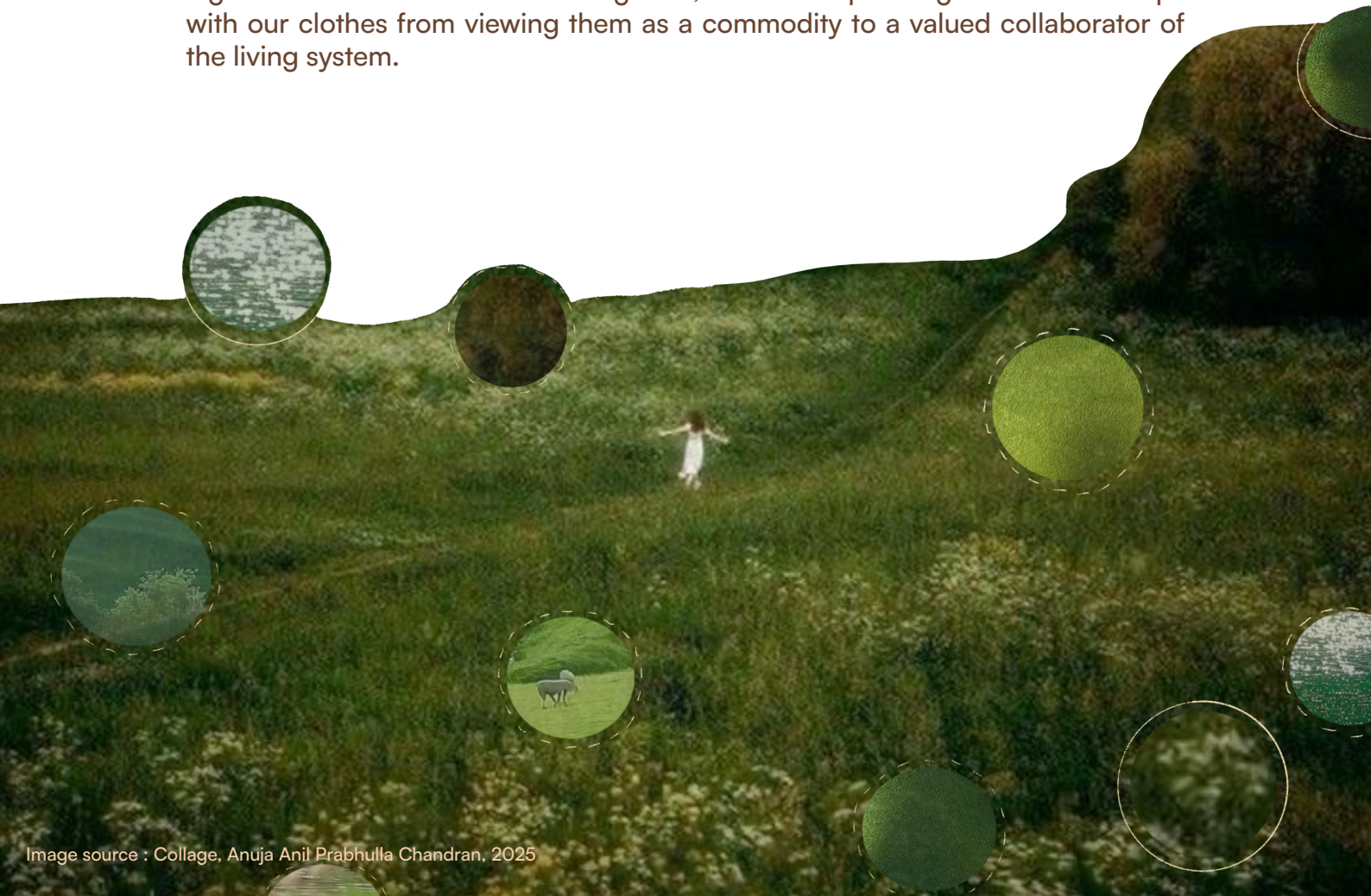
# SO, WHERE DO CLOTHES COME FROM?

The first thing that pops into our heads might be a fashion retail brand or a factory in the Global South. The actual origin of clothes is from the land, or, in the case of synthetic fibres like polyester, from the seabed. But very rarely do we associate the origin of clothes with the land.

This is not our fault.

The fashion industry detaches clothes from their origins, and labels are oversimplified and conceal the actual story of the garment. Garments are treated as commodities, often with little to no value to their history and the beings behind its making. Fashion and textiles have to be reimagined through the lenses of care and interdependencies, while keeping the planet at the center of the design process.

By making real the underacknowledged processes of making our clothes, bringing the land and fashion closer together, we can help change our relationships with our clothes from viewing them as a commodity to a valued collaborator of the living system.



# INDIA, COTTON, AND CARE

India is the second largest producer of cotton worldwide, with almost 21% of the global total. At the same time, it is widely known that cotton farming requires a lot of water and land usage. But the indigenous, desi cotton variety of cotton is largely rain-fed and drought-resistant. Many grassroots organisations like Kaskom in India are working with farmers at the ground level to revive these indigenous cotton varieties, place-based crops that are better for the planet and the farming communities.

Cultivated keeping in mind the health of the soil, the planet, and the farmers, these farming practices work with the Earth as a collaborator, practising care at every step of the way towards sustaining living systems.

Yet, care does not exist largely in the fashion landscape today. Care can change the way we relate to fashion and textiles. Much like the indigenous cotton farming practices, we could grow, nurture, and heal our garments rather than just buying and discarding them.



KASKOM



# THE COTTON FIELD

The cotton field is an illustration digitally printed on canvas and adding surface embroidery that invites people to find their garment characters within the scene. The artwork showcases the various characters and elements of a regenerative cotton field and encouraging visitors to recognise the care and effort woven into creating their garments.

Each character represent the beings involved in the process of garment production at the farm level. By searching for these characters, people interact with the garment in ways that honours their stories and the life of the garment itself. It gently asks: What role would you take up in the story of this garment?

Incorporating playful interactions is a small step in transforming garments from mere commodities to a living entity with layers of meaning. It creates an active dialogue between the wearer and the garment, one that fosters awareness and connection.

While this approach begins at the farm level, it can be integrated across the fashion supply chain, building a foundation for a transparent, regenerative, and place-based fashion future.



# CHARACTER GUIDE

Find these characters in the Cotton field illustration



## THE GARMENT

Inspired by the land of Tamil Nadu, Madras Checks woven using 100% Desi Cotton

## RAIN CLOUDS

Rain is a vital presence in the indigenous cotton farm, providing the land with the much needed water for sustenance. Desi Cotton is largely rain-fed and thus depend a lot on the monsoon rains for yield where it requires over 800mm of rainfall for ideal growth. It leads to a conversation between the land and the sky, a dialogue that is held through patience and trust. Fashion begins in the space where the bond between the land, water, and sky exists.



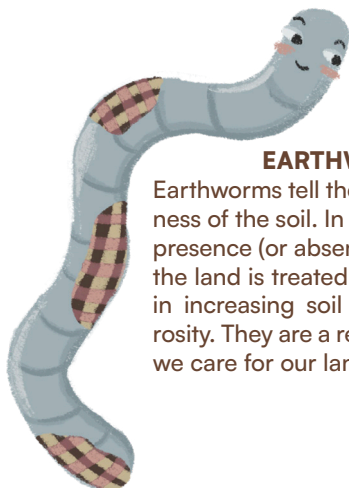
## COWS

The cotton field is alive with a lot more characters beyond the cotton plant. Cows roam around the land offering dung that is used as a natural fertiliser, giving nutrients back to the earth. Every being comes together to form a system that is rooted in reciprocity and care. The farm thus acts as not just a land which is barren but rather a place with relationships



## MICROORGANISMS

Beneath the soil exists a thriving world of unseen microorganisms that work quietly yet tirelessly to help our cotton grow. These tiny creatures improve soil health by helping it retain water and nutrients. They also build the soil's natural defenses against pests and diseases.

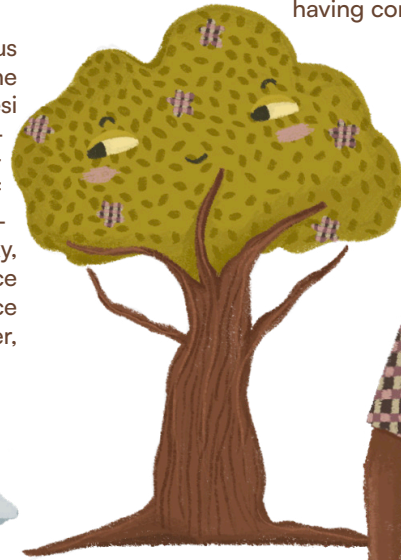


## EARTHWORMS

Earthworms tell the story of the wellness of the soil. In cotton fields, their presence (or absence) indicates how the land is treated. Earthworms help in increasing soil aeration and porosity. They are a reminder that when we care for our land, it cares back.

## TREES

Natural pesticides are created with Neem leaves of which is used on the cotton plant mindfully, only when they ask for help. Growing Tecoma trees around the farm also help prevent aphids from destroying the cotton crop by attracting the insects to its bright yellow flowers instead. This way of growing with the land is centered on building relationships rather than having control.



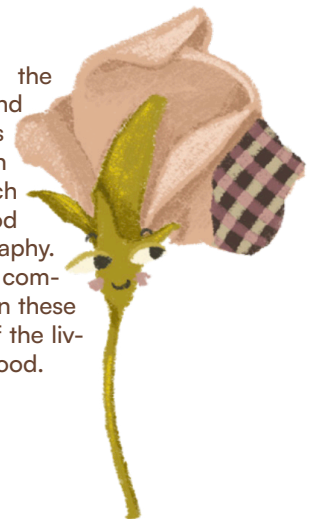
## FARMERS

The facilitator mediating the conversations between the various characters of the cotton farm, the farmer is key to the function of a regenerative cotton farm. From sowing the first seeds and preparing the manure to harvesting the cotton and renewing the earth through crop rotation, their hands guide every function. To honour the garments that we buy every day, it is necessary to create spaces for these women to have a say in the production and be seen as co-authors in the fashion cycle. Fashion begins here, in the hands of farmers.



## PEA FLOWER

Between cotton harvests, the land is given time to heal and breathe. Desi/Indigenous cotton has a 7-8 month growing cycle, after which the soil is left to grow food crops, which vary by geography. Cotton is often seen as a commodity, but when grown in these cycles, it becomes part of the living system, tying fiber to food.



## COTTON PLANT

Karuganni cotton exists amidst the shifting landscapes of the fashion industry right now. It is rainfed and rooted in its place, making it indigenous to South India. It is grown alongside food crops, making not just a fiber but a collaborator in the living system. By bringing these varieties into the forefront, we are honouring the stories of hope and resilience.



# FUTURE SCOPE

Where do clothes come from?, is a small step for creating a future where fashion stands as a role model for industries rooted in localism and transparency. By incorporating playful opportunities for consumers to actively involve in the making of their garments we create stronger, healthier wearer-clothing relationships.

This can extend beyond physical artworks to creating digital games, platforms and third spaces, empowering consumers to build resilience, community and care for the planet through their everyday connections with garments.

Ultimately these approaches could lead to a slower fashion cycle that works in harmony with the land rather than exploiting the planet and its communities. The future of fashion lies in the interconnectedness between beings and honouring them and the processes of making our clothes.