

THE FIRST INCLUSIVE JOB CENTER: ESTABLISHING A DISABILITY INCLUSIVE RMG LABOUR MARKET

ENDEAVOUR

NAZIBA BASHER

PHOTO COURTESY: GIZ BD



Urmila Akter has hearing and speech problem. She got training from IJC as sewing machine operator. Now she is working in Tosuka as sewing operator along side her other two sibling. All of her sibling has the same disability problem. IJC helped them all to get training and job on the RMG.

On August 2015 of last year, an MoU was signed in Mirpur among the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP), Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). The MoU was to establish a first of its kind Inclusive Job Center. Since 2014, 174 factories have come on board to help disabled workers find jobs.

The initiative is taken by Promotion of Social and Environmental Standards of the Industry (PSES), and a joint project of the governments of Bangladesh and Germany. PSES is implemented by GIZ on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

"We officially began in October 2015, and by December we were fully-functioning. We have already placed around 108 disabled workers 54 45 factories for various jobs," says Sarwat Ahmad, Senior Advisor, PSES. Promotion of Social and Environmental Standard, PSES, GIZ.

The aim of the Inclusive Job Centre is to hold skills training and increase employment and career opportunities in the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) industry for persons with disabilities. The main roles of the centre consists of operating as a platform for advisory services, information sharing, capacity building, and job search based on individual needs and capabilities, and also to establish a referral network. GIZ takes the responsibility for the initial coordination and capacity building of all the actors involved, while there is a team of professionals lead by the manager of the job center. They are in charge of rehabilitation services, quality vocational

training, advisory services for garments factories, career counseling, job placement, on-the-job coaching, and reasonable workplace adjustments.

These activities are backed by the proficiency of experts from NGO partners in the field of disability inclusion. The main objectives to institute establish the inclusive job centre are to recognise and appoint people with disabilities for skills training, to link them with referral network, to improve disability inclusiveness in factories, and to promote inclusive workforce in the RMG sector.

"The process is a lengthy but fruitful one. We go from community to community with the support of the Disabled Peoples' Organisations to identify persons with disabilities. It is a little difficult, as many families see a person with disability as a curse in rural areas and do not want to expose them to the public. This is precisely why we hold counseling sessions with the community members to sensitise them about the issue. Next, once we have selected our candidates, they go through an

inclusive skills development and training. Meanwhile, we try to give them assistive devices based on the kind of disability they have, for example hearing-aids, artificial limbs, crutch etc. We also go for frequent factory visits to not only see what kind of demands the factory owners have, but also to sensitise them on the matter of disability. Centre for Disability in Development, another Non-Governmental Organisation partner of the Project PSES, is doing a commendable job in this regard with us, as they are going from factory to factory, not only spreading awareness, and capacity building, but also making the environment friendlier for those with disabilities," says Sarwat "Once the workers are placed, there is regular job retention counseling support for the workers. There are many instances when the workers feel shy to express certain complaints, this counseling sessions are arranged to help them relax in their work environment and do their jobs with ease."

So far, the responses from the workers have been great. They have worked with

sincerity, since, for most of them, to be able to work at all was a dream.

By engaging its members, BGMEA can make a significant change in the dynamics of the workforce through this Inclusive Job Centre. The garment's industry bears the shortage of a skilled workforce; BGMEA has been supporting the inclusive job centre in the process of skills development and job placement of persons with disabilities to meet the demands of the sector successfully. "The one thing we have achieved is that migration rates have decreased drastically. None of the workers we have placed wants to leave the job," says Sarwat. The Inclusive Job Centre uses the understandings and strong network of CRP in the RMG sector and with other stakeholders in establishing a disability inclusive RMG Labour Market.

The Inclusive Job Centre considers the public private partnership towards an inclusive RMG workforce by creating links between skills training and employment opportunities for an untapped workforce of persons with disabilities.

"We have been working with the Government and the NSDC secretariat has shown interest in replicating our job centre and establishing one in each district. What we are currently trying to do is coming up with a sustainability plan for the future. Our first phase ends in June 2017, and by then we're hoping to create an immense amount of awareness. The factories and disabled workers have shown a lot of interest in carrying this forward. The one thing we require is more sewing schools for skills training, and since the government has always been supportive of working with the disabled, we are really hoping for their further assistance. With such support, I'm sure we can all, together, carry the nation forward leaving no one behind," concludes Sarwat.

HERITAGE

FROM RAGS TO 'KANTHA'

FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA

PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

A *kantha* is a great example of how you can upcycle your old clothes into something beautiful and functional. A handmade quilt, *kantha* is a long piece of cloth made of old rags - mostly old sarrees - stitched together, carrying with it the essence of nostalgia and an old world charm.

In Sanskrit, the word *kantha* simply means 'rag', but the word has no confirmed etymological root. For centuries, rural women of Bengal stitched together discarded pieces of cloth, gossiping about all, and sundry as their hands were deftly and rhythmically engaged in the sewing process. Interestingly, the legendary *kantha dorokha* (two-sided quilt), which is considered as a priceless art form today, was what kept the poorest families warm during the cold months of winter.

For those living abroad, homemade *kathas* are a symbol of love, reminiscent of the beloved land and people left behind, carrying the scent of one's mother, the refuge that is hard to find anywhere else. Thus, it is interesting to note that the earliest known mention of a *kantha* can be found in Krishnadas Kaviraj's *Sri Sri Chaitanya Charitamrita*, a 500-year old manuscript, where he refers



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

to the handmade quilt lovingly stitched and sent to him by his mother. A woman's artistic expressions, mostly hidden and suppressed by society, found their way in these handwoven quilts.

Eventually, a more elaborate tradition of creating *nakshi kantha* developed. *Nakshi kanthas* were originally made by women, who were not literate but wove stories into their quilts that would often take years to complete. A single *kantha* would be stitched by a generation of mothers, daughters and granddaughters; the motifs reflected the culture and traditions of yore, their legends and myths, upholding the essence of their womanhood while also asserting their untold desires of happiness, love, marriage, and fertility. The quilts would then be autographed by the needlewomen, as they either signed their names or indicated their relationship with the person for whom the quilt was created.

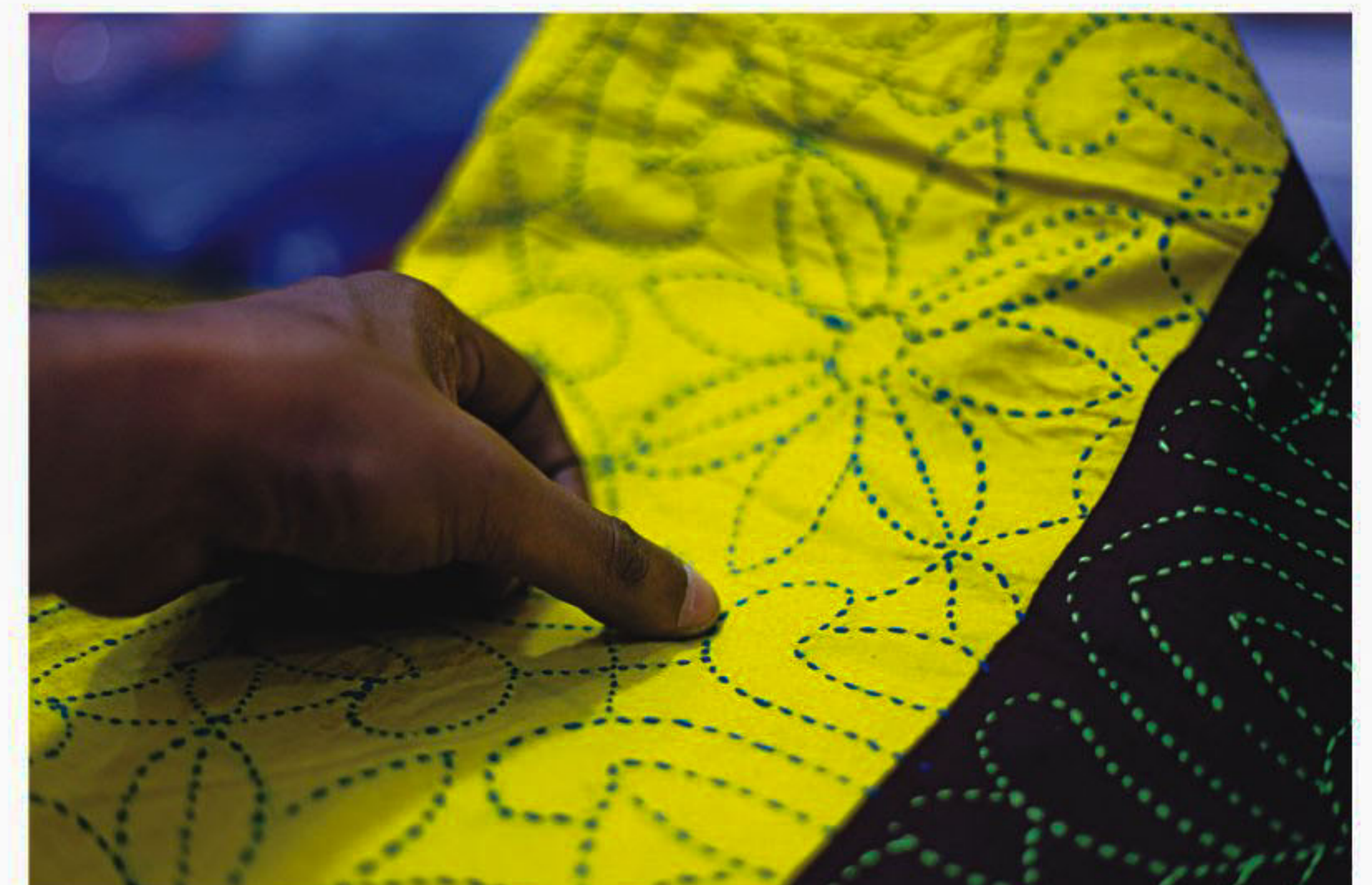
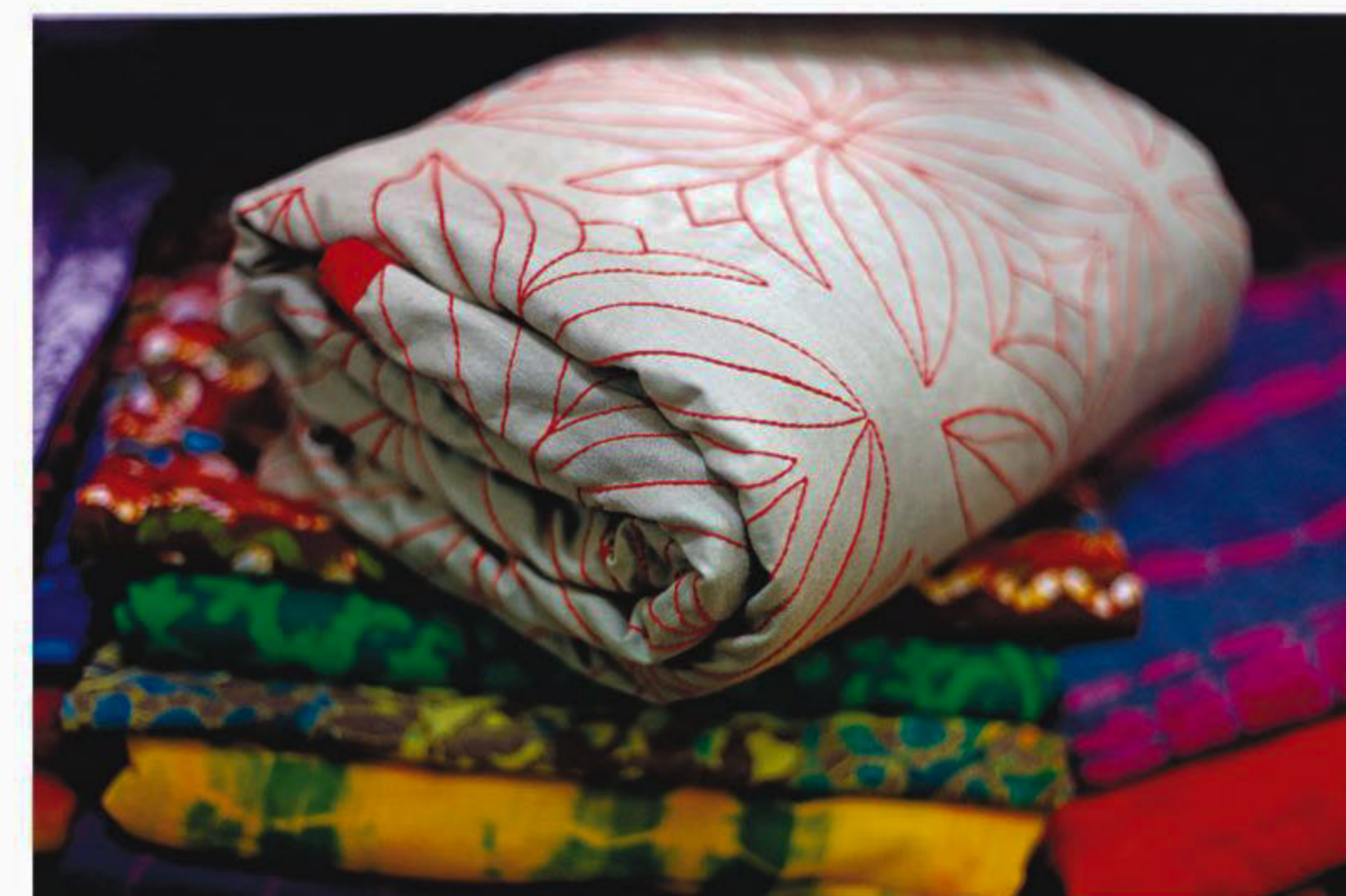
There is no particular grammar or



symmetry to a *nakshi kantha*, but a finely embroidered *nakshi kantha* will always have a focal point. The central motif could be a lotus, or a reclining female figure, or animals, and surrounding them would be images of flowers and vines or saree border motifs. Because each of them presents a distinctive story of the *kantha* makers, no two *nakshi kanthas* are ever the same.

A variety of needle work, including pattern darning (*chatai*) and bending stitch (*katiya*) is used while making *kanthas* but the most pre-dominant of them is the running or *kantha* stitch. The stitches used in modern-day *kantha* are the Kashmiri stitch and the arrowhead stitch. Stitches like the herringbone stitch, satin stitch, backstitch and cross-stitch are occasionally used.

Each of these stitches creates a distinctive style and statement. Whether we use them as bed pallets or as light wraps, *kanthas* are a must-have for a Bangladeshi or a Bengali household.



ABOUT TOWN



DANCE DRAMA
"BHANUSHINGHER PADABOLI"
BHABNA'S PRODUCTION
Date & Time: November 19, 2016
from 7 pm to 8.30 pm
Venue: Jatio Natyashala, Bangladesh
Shilpakala Academy, 1000 Dhaka
Hosted by: Bhabna
For Query and Tickets, visit:
<https://www.facebook.com/events/181394262321517/>



BENGAL CLASSICAL
MUSIC FESTIVAL - BANGLADESH
2016
Date and Time: November 24-28, 2016
from 7 pm to 5 am
Venue: Bangladesh Army Stadium, Banani,
Dhaka Cantonment, 1213 Dhaka
Hosted by: Bengal Classical Music Festival -
Bangladesh 2016
For more information, visit:
<https://www.facebook.com/events/1073899226040770/>



PAAP PUNNER KOTHA
GHAASHPHORING LIVE AT JATRA
BIROTI
Date & Time: November 18, 2016
from 7 pm to 10 pm
Venue: Jatra Biroti, 60 Kemal
Ataturk Ave, 1213 Dhaka
Hosted by: Ghaashphoring
Choir and Armeen Musa
For more information, visit:
<https://www.facebook.com/events/698115393677290/>