

# A SOCIAL BUSINESS BOND

She had the regular busy bee outlook of an aspiring Japanese young lady. But she held off her years of career planning and ambitions, and coped with the challenge of living 3000 miles away from her home and family. Akari Yuki did all that because she fell in love with Bangladesh, its people, and most of all, the idea of helping people through social business. Many people from around the world live or work in Bangladesh because they have to. But Akari is someone who actually chose to.

Grameen Uniqlo, the organisation Akari works for in Bangladesh, is a CSR venture of Uniqlo - a reputed name alongside top marques like GAP. As a social business company, Grameen Uniqlo goes beyond job creation or poverty alleviation. It goes down the line on issues like public health, education, gender discrimination and

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environment. To be part of the haul, Akari has been in Bangladesh since 2012 as the Director of Merchandising and Planning, of the company.

Kyushu, where Akari comes from, is one of the four islands of Japan. After

## HOW A KYUSHU GIRL FINDS DESTINY IN BANGLADESH

MOHAMMAD POLASH KHAN



Akari Yuki

PHOTO: COURTESY

graduating from an esteemed university, she started her career in 2010 with Uniqlo, Japan. That was a smooth start for someone envisioning a career in the casual-wear industry. Just twenty years old at the time, Akari was working hard to move her career upward en route the most promising path.

"I learned Chinese for a year" she giggled. "I was thoroughly determined after an exciting career in China. A career in the booming economy came up bold on my radar screen". But career prospects came second to following her heart as things took a drastic turn when she went to Nepal in 2012 as part of her company's relief project with UNHCR.

She came to meet a few Bangladeshis there and also got to read up on the country. It wasn't the first orientation, though. She actually visited Bangladesh in 2009 during a vacation. What won her heart then was the pure kindness of the people. She felt an unexplainable bond and affinity for this country and its inhabitants.

This is her third year in Bangladesh and her amity with it is still strong. Back home, she has her parents and three siblings. "I miss my family, home town and most of all - sushi (the traditional Japanese dish). But a trip to Kyushu twice a year, and the taste of Hilsa fish make up for it, I guess" she says.

She is also working on her Bangla which sounds really pleasantly interesting as she tries to get her tongue round 'tumi kemon acho' or 'ekhon kota baaje' under the influence of a Japanese accent. But the bright side of Akari's story is that, with the chemistry of its heritage of hospitality and abundance of genius culminating into brilliant concepts like social business, Bangladesh has a lot to offer and appeal to the world despite the plethora of anomalies or political bedlam the world knows it for. ■

| EXPERIENCE |

| HERITAGE |

## THE LOST KINGDOM OF JAINTIA

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

PHOTOS: MD SHAHRIAR KHAN NAYAN

Some 40 kilometres away from Sylhet city, lies the small charming town of Jaintapur. Located in the foothills of cloud covered Jaintia hills, the town consists of several Khasi villages, pine apple and clementine orchards and a few bazaars. However, this small town has a long history of civilisation and warfare.

In the beginning of the 15th century, the present Jaintapur town was the capital of Jaintia Kingdom founded by the Pnar people. Their royal palace was situated at Jaintapur whose ruins can be seen scattered within a large area of the town. Legends of this once mighty kingdom and stories of their struggle with the Muslim conquerors are still remembered by the townspeople.

The massive gateway covered with orchids and algae at the town-centre marks



Nuru Pagla (inset) shows the position in which the subjects lay right before the sacrifice.

the entrance to the royal palace and the court, which are mostly destroyed. Once infamous for human sacrifice, the place is still feared by the inhabitants of Jaintapur.

The entire palace precinct is surrounded by a decorated brick wall. Megalithic structures around the wall represent the ancient culture of the Pnar people. At the centre of the precinct, was situated the royal throne and the royal court (the throne is preserved in a building built on the ancient foundation of the palace) where the queen mother used to sit to address the public meetings and judgements.



There is a large circular pedestal in front of the throne. According to legend, the pedestal called "Chandir Thal" was used for human sacrifice. During the annual worship of Jainteshwari, the guarding goddess of the kingdom, the queen mother used to celebrate the festival by sacrificing a male human being. The sacrificial man used to be selected from the prisoners of war or imprisoned criminals or abducted from other neighbouring tribes.

After decapitating the man with a single chop, the blood and head of the victim were collected and offered to the goddesses' statue at the Jainteshwari temple. The headless body of the victim was thrown into the nearby well which is still there beside the pedestal. After witnessing the sacrifice, the queen mother, with her courtiers, used to go to a bathing house just behind the court and take a ritual milk bath. The ruins of the bathing house can still be seen behind the court.

The massive temple of goddess Jainteshwari, adjacent to the royal palace, has also been destroyed and is now being used as a garbage dump. The hey days of Jaintia kingdom came to an end after the Mughal conquest of Assam in the 16th century when their subjects converted to Islam in thousands. Later in the 18th century, the British colonialists drove out the last members of Jaintia royal families from Jaintapur and they took shelter in the hilly areas of Assam. From then on, the precinct of Jaintapur royal palace has been silenced forever. At present, without any preservation efforts, the ruins of Jaintapur palace and the temple lies completely abandoned. A native Khasia named Nura Pagla is the only human being who lives near the ruins and tells the stories of this ancient kingdom to tourists while working as a voluntary guide. If proper preservations of this remarkable archaeological site can be done, it can be a great attraction for tourists and history enthusiasts. ■

## PEARLS OF WISDOM

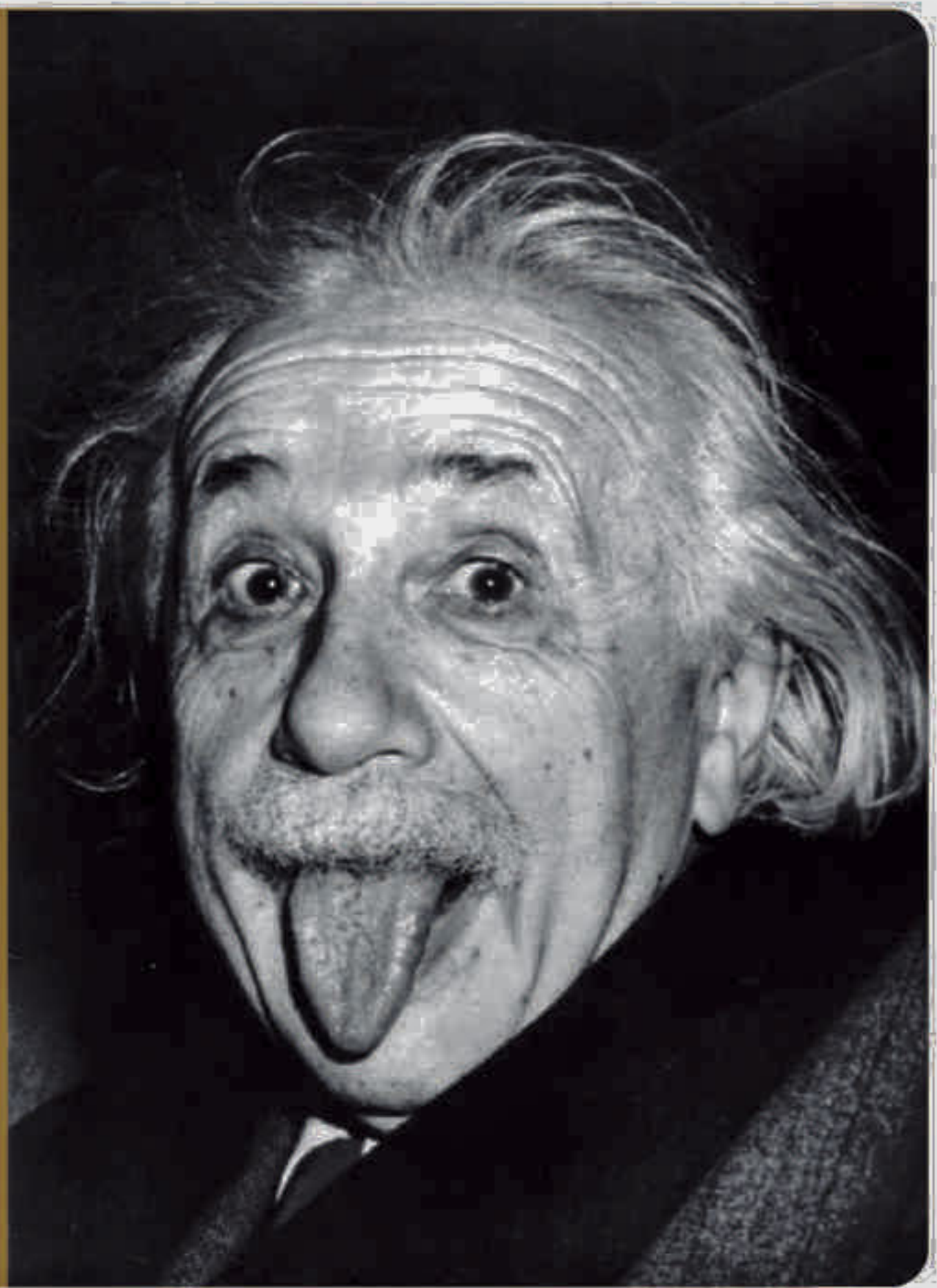


"REAL KNOWLEDGE IS TO KNOW THE EXTENT OF ONE'S IGNORANCE."  
CONFUCIUS  
Chinese scholar



"AN INVESTMENT IN KNOWLEDGE PAYS THE BEST INTEREST."  
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN  
A renowned polymath and one of the founding fathers of United States

"IMAGINATION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN KNOWLEDGE."  
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