



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

# Ghotok's Day Out

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*In a society where getting married is considered as necessary as getting an education and having a career, ghotoks are sought after by many parents longing to find a match for their children who, in many cases, have no desire to get married and settle down. Many of these young people, fresh out of university (and in some cases, still in university), find their dreams to explore life shattered because of these ghotok-arranged marriages. But how does a day in the life of a ghotok who pleases parents and terrifies young people go?*

## MORNING

Chewing *paan*, the ghotok checks his phone to find the appointments he has committed to for the day. He has to go to a house in Narinda and then to one in Tikatuli. He goes through the list of young men and young women he has compiled. After all, ghotoks are running a market where the demand and supply controls everything. The appointer will demand a person, mentioning the required complexion, height and educational qualification and our ghotok will supply a person from his collection. To him, people are nothing but commodities.

The ghotok smiles gleefully thinking of the fame he has achieved. The fact that many of the marriages he fixed led to bitter divorces matters little to him. For him, the earned money and fame managed to make up for the guilt that should have accumulated in his heart. At times, thinking of these unfortunate events, he puckers his eyebrows but then shakes the feeling off. What else does our dear old ghotok need except material comfort (and *paan*)?

## AFTERNOON

At 1.30 PM, the ghotok makes his way to the house in Narinda in a shiny car that was bought with what he earned from

the ten marriages he fixed last winter (six of them have already turned bitter, but hey, he got the car). The house in Narinda is lavishly decorated but lacks something: taste. The ghotok has been appointed by the father of the prospective groom. The bride-in-prospect's family arrives and the young man and the young woman sit in silence as objects of display, their degrees and education amounting to nothing today. Our ghotok keeps chewing one *paan* after another and keeps talking to the family elders, paying no attention to the two people whose lives he is going to change. The marriage is fixed and the young man's father ends up politely demanding furniture from the bride's parents. Dowry might have been outlawed, but according to our ghotok, furniture and cars do not count.

The ghotok is treated to lunch and then promised a hefty sum. "*Biye te ashte hobe kintu apnake*," he is told. The two people whose lives a whimsical *paan*-chewing person changed betray no emotions.

It is only 4 PM. The ghotok has to go to Tikatuli for his next appointment at six and he decides to waste a couple of hours sitting in a noisy restaurant, downing cups of tea and receiving phone calls.

"Ghotok, shuno," someone says from the other side as he receives the call, "My son just finished his bachelor's degree and I want him to get married. I want someone fair, educated, but not willing to work..."

The absurdity of the requirements does not bother our *paan*-chewing fixer of lives. His job is to supply life partners. "I will get back to you in a few days," they say and then mention the sum they want.

## EVENING

He reaches the house in Tikatuli at 6.15 PM and apologises for being late upon finding both families in the living room. They all sit down, feasting on snacks and discussing the lives of the two young people who look lost in the whirlwind their parents and a stranger have created for them. "Look, look, I have found somebody fair enough, educated enough" the ghotok says at the end of their discussion. The two sets of parents nod their heads but then, out of the blue, the two young people protest. They say out loud that they have no desire to have their marriage fixed in this way by a stranger; they say they don't know each other. They refuse to be treated as commodities subject to demand and supply. When a quarrel ensues, the two young people stick to their principles. "We never wanted you to advertise us in the newspapers to

begin with," they say fiercely.

At last, the two sets of parents, looking furious and defeated, give in. "These modern children—the western media is ruining them. They don't even listen to their elders," the ghotok is told. They apologise to the fixer-of-lives who smiles and, showing his crimsoning teeth, says it's okay while internally seething with rage.

## NIGHT

The ghotok finally stops chewing *paan*. He is about to fall asleep. Before sleeping, he reflects on the events of the day. He smiles thinking of the sum he will be paid for the marriage he managed to fix. The very next moment, however, he is reminded of his failed attempt in Tikatuli and curses the two young people and the influence of western media. Then, however, he receives a text: "Ghotok bhai, I want my son to be married to someone who [insert requirements]..."

He smiles thinking his business of supplying people is safe and will not go bankrupt anytime soon.

*When he is not dealing with mood swings, Shounak Reza devours books and tea and longs for eras he has never lived in. You can contact him at [www.facebook.com/shounakreza](http://www.facebook.com/shounakreza)*