



IN RINKU'S NAME

THE GRIEVING SACHDEV FAMILY FINDS COMFORT IN THE FOUNDATION THEY PLAN TO SET UP IN MEMORY OF THEIR DAUGHTER MURDERED BY HER TECHIE HUSBAND

On her wedding day, Rinku Sachdev's brother-in-law Ankush Mahindra and cousins hid groom Amit Budhiraja's slippers, a customary ritual in any Hindu marriage. But this playful tradition didn't go down well at all with Amit, who refused to get off his horse for almost 45 minutes. Ankush, married to Rinku's elder sister Saloni for six years now, recalls that embarrassing moment. "After arguing with us, Amit finally called Rinku on her cell phone while seated on the horse and said he would leave the mandap if we did not give his slippers back to

him." The slippers were returned, but that was not good enough for Amit. "He said to me, 'Put them back from where [they] were taken [indicating his feet].' But I wasn't going to take any of that and I flung them at him from a distance," says an emotional Ankush, adding, "I am hoping that he remembers that in his grave even today."

Looking back on what ought to have been an auspicious day, Ankush Mahindra and the Sachdev family can feel only pain. Because according to the family, this was among the first signs of trouble that Rinku, 28, was to endure in her year-old marriage

to Infosys techie Amit, 30. On March 23, soon after she informed her parents Harish and Binu that she intended to separate from Amit, Rinku was found dead in her apartment in Koramangala, Bangalore. Amit had smothered her to death with a pillow and then taken his own life by hanging himself. In an email interview from Chicago, U.S.A, four months after Rinku's death, Ankush writes, "There were many troubling signs in Rinku's marriage and that is probably one of the reasons why it was necessary for the two to go their separate ways. However there was no way for us to identify that

that a***h*** would have killed her for it."

The family will never come to terms with Rinku's loss or the way she died. But to honour her memory, and to assist other women who might be in a similar predicament, the Sachdevs have decided to set up a foundation in India. Ankush, who Harish describes as "more than a son" to him, says they arrived at this decision out of the "sheer frustration of having to accept that Rinku's life was over". "Rinku would have never kept quiet if such a heinous act was to happen to someone dear to her," says Ankush, adding that Saloni and Rinku's mami Minu Rekhi, a social worker, felt this was a good way for the family to channelise their emotions into something positive. "Working with this foundation will heal the wounds of mom and dad [Binu and Harish] who are now close to retirement. Immersing themselves in this cause will provide solace to their hearts."

“Working with this foundation will heal the wounds of mom and dad”

- ANKUSH MAHINDRA

Harish, an engineer, says he was angered and shaken at the media coverage following Rinku's death. [Media reports quoting Amit's suicide note said he killed Rinku because she was having an affair. The police later concluded that Amit's allegations were baseless.] "My daughter went through so much misery after marriage and then she died at the hands of this monster. On top of that, her name was maligned by reporters who did not bother to check the facts, basing their stories on the suicide note of an insane person. People who did not know her were judging her based

on those reports. That got me thinking something had to be done for our lovely daughter. If this foundation can help women in similar situations and if we can come to their rescue in time, I think it will be the biggest tribute to her."

The foundation will work towards providing women in troubled marriages legal and medical aid and assist them in their attempts to support their families. On a policy level, the foundation will partner with NGOs campaigning to review and change laws pertaining to domestic violence, sexual harassment and dowry.

The foundation, tentatively titled Rinku Sachdev Foundation, will be run by Harish and Binu, a homemaker, and funded by Rinku's savings and contributions from friends and family at the outset. Ankush says they are still figuring out how to collect funds from outside agencies/ individuals. The Sachdevs intend to invite suggestions from relatives, friends and



Rinku's maternal grandmother, elder sister Saloni, mother Binu and nephew Ishaan browse through family albums on a visit to Mumbai in June. Ankush says Rinku hoped to spend time with Ishaan. "She [left, with Ishaan a year ago] was hoping to hug and play with him for the last one year."

HAPPY TIMES



Rinku's energy and enthusiasm is what friends (above) and family loved about her the most. Father Harish says, "She was full of life and she just loved to dance." (Top left, with dad at Saloni's wedding in 2001.) Brother-in-law Ankush says, "She had spirit and zest." Lively by nature, Rinku (right, in green, with Saloni, centre, and a friend) had a blast when in company. She loved to play match-maker and got a couple of friends married.

professional organisations to fine-tune the scope of the foundation, which will also focus on fundraising for children in need ("Rinku loved children") as well as educate people about false superstitions. Harish says, "We do not believe in kundalis, but Rinku [born Nov. 16, 1979] was a mangalik and that is the reason she married [Amit] who too was mangalik. But what was the result?" (Rinku met Amit on a matrimonial website and married him six months later.)

On March 23, Ankush, Saloni and their two-year-old son Ishaan had returned from Holi celebrations at a local mandir in Chicago. "It was 1.15 AM but we were still awake as we had friends over when the phone rang. I never pick up the phone at home, usually letting it go to voicemail, but something made me answer it," says Ankush. It was Rinku's friend Urmila, informing Ankush that Rinku was no more. "It took me a while to register what she had said and I think I wobbled. Saloni overheard me, con-

firmed with Urmila, and that did not go well." Thirty minutes later, a composed Ankush called Harish in Muscat, where he and Binu have been living for two years, and told them what happened.

Harish says they wished Rinku a happy Holi on March 22. "We never knew that it would be the last time we would be talking to her," he says sadly, recalling that she had visited them just a fortnight earlier and confessed that she had decided to leave Amit. "She [Rinku] said that the marriage was not working out despite her best efforts. She looked quite disturbed and sad and wished she had given more thought before marrying." Ankush says Rinku had informed them that she intended to ask Amit to move out. "They had been to a marriage counsellor and Rinku mentioned that those sessions were not going well. She said he [Amit] was getting aggressive in his tone at these visits."

The Sachdevs are not in touch

with Amit's family and do not intend to make them a part of anything in Rinku's memory. Ankush did send a note to Arvind, Rinku's friend, but did not get any response from him. (Initial media reports, which greatly hurt the family, named Arvind as Rinku's alleged boyfriend.) "We as a family are indebted to him for life for being there for Rinku as her friend in her time of need. May he have a fruitful life," says Ankush.

The family will never be able to forgive Amit. "I think Dad, mom and Saloni have shown immense courage to move on with their lives after this tragedy," says Ankush, adding, "It's commendable how they have handled themselves after losing Rinku. But I can't forgive that a***h*** for what he did." Harish says they are taking each day as it comes. "It will never be the same as it was when Rinku was around. She will always be there in our memory."

The PEOPLE Team